

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee,

Good Morning!

For the record my name is Jeff Dense. I am a Professor of Political Science at Eastern Oregon University, immediate past president of the EOU Faculty Senate, and am currently serving as President-Elect of the Oregon University System Interinstitutional Faculty Senate (IFS). Representative Dembrow has asked us to address a range of issues surrounding the future of online education. I have taught online for over a decade, have presented and conducted workshops at national conferences on this important topic, and recently engaged my IFS colleagues in robust discussions on online education.

A three-prong approach which utilizes the lenses of students, the institution and the “system” is warranted to best understand the relationship between quality control and online education. While I have recently engaged students in focus groups and personal interviews on the topic of online education, I can’t hope to capture the full range of issues they may see as relevant in the limited time we have today.

However, two student-centered issues came to the forefront during this dialogue. A majority of on-campus students do not appreciate being *forced* to take online courses as part of their academic requirements desirable. Eschewing face-to-face interaction with teaching faculty, and more importantly, their classmates, has left a number of campus-based students with a bad taste in their mouth. Students crave the attention that regular, not part-time adjunct, faculty provide in these classes, as these faculty members serve an important mentoring role for students. I would urge the Committee to gather a group of students to provide their insights into best practices in distance education, and am sure you would find their perspective enlightening.

A second perspective on quality control centers on the institution’s role in online education. At EOU approximately half of our student credit hours (SCH) are linked to online courses. Yet, my experience as Assessment Coordinator and Chair of the Faculty Personnel Committee tells me that the higher education community is not doing a good job overall of evaluating the performance of online teaching faculty. I recently was entrusted with the task of revising EOU’s Tenure and Promotion Handbook. While we made significant inroads with regard to protecting the best

interest of future generations of faculty, one issue we couldn't get our arms around was the evaluation of online teaching. There are a wide range of pedagogical and technological challenges surrounding distance education that make evaluation of teaching performance in this modality challenging. Admittedly, there are some exceptions to this corundum. Cal State Chico has developed a [Rubric of Online Instruction](#) that while not a perfect fit for all institutions, provides a sound and widely tested instrument for evaluating online teaching performance. Assessment of online academic programs must be rooted in regular evaluation of the performance of online faculty members.

The 'big ticket' issue that confronts you, and the future of higher education in Oregon, centers on how 'The System', will ensure the quality of online education in Oregon. The Sloan Consortium, one of the leading players in the online education debate, has created [The 5 Pillars of quality online education](#). They are (1) Learning Effectiveness, (2) Scale (e.g. Cost Effectiveness and Commitment), (3) Access, (4) Faculty Satisfaction, and (5) Student Satisfaction. Ignoring any of these pillars in the development and subsequent assessment of online academic programs will invariably lead to problems down the road. Sloan has also created "[A Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Education](#)". Underscoring the multifaceted nature of the debate over online education, the scorecard assesses **70** different quality indicators, broken down into 9 categories¹. Of the nine categories, Sloan weighs "Student Support" the most heavily. Whether it is advising before starting an online program, technological support during the course or attempts to engage the distant student with the campus proper via library and information services, the quality of online education is highly correlated with the amount of support available to students. Quality online education programs require a significant level of investment in student services that may be difficult to isolate during these economically challenging times.

I teach in an interdisciplinary program at EOU, Philosophy, Politics and Economics, or as we call it PPE. This was one of the first fully deliverable online programs in the State of Oregon. We pride ourselves that our online students receive as close as possible to the same educational experience as their on-campus

¹ The 9 factors addressed in the Sloan scorecard are: (1) Institutional Support; (2) Technological Support; (3) Course Development and Instructional Design; (4) Course Structure; (5) Teaching and Learning; (6) Social and Student Engagement; (7) Faculty Support; (8) Student Support; and (9) Evaluation and Assessment.

cohorts. This is made possible by the fact that, with very rare exceptions, these courses are taught by the same faculty in both online and on-campus modalities. As online education expands in Oregon public universities, given workload issues, curricular expansion and the specter of accreditation, one must wonder whether the same quality of education will be available to the online student as their on-campus classmate. While ‘hybrid’ courses holds some promise, a number of challenges (f.e., synchronous vs. asynchronous learning) may provide a significant impediment to quality control of online education in Oregon.

During our IFS meeting last weekend in La Grande, my colleagues raised issues concerning the differential costs of online versus on-campus classes. In order to fund the technological initiatives and faculty support that serve as the bedrock of effective online education, students have, in several instances, been forced to shoulder a significant financial burden as an institution ramps up its online presence. Although there is some limited external funding to be pursued, I wonder whether Oregon’s public universities may be losing their comparative cost advantage to for-profit institutions, MOOCs and public institutions in other states. While I am keenly aware of the financial challenges confronting the future of higher education in Oregon, IFS would like for you to contemplate whether having our online students burdened with additional debt in the name of ‘access’ make sense.

Additionally, IFS would like to highlight the vast potential for collaboration between public universities in Oregon in the online educational arena. Whether it is team teaching with a faculty colleague across the state, having a faculty member at another institution teach a virtual course at a ‘campus’ across the state, peer assessment of course design, or forming a consortium of online education providers at public universities, IFS urges the legislature, to consider the vast potential for collaboration in online education as a key facet of the future of education in Oregon.

In conclusion, IFS wants to reiterate its position that faculty should be engaged in the future governance of higher education in Oregon. We are ready to serve on whatever committees, task forces, and the like, that will enable us to protect the best interest of our most valuable resource: our students. Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to working with you in the future.