

Distance Delivery & Educational Technology Reporting Definition Workgroup
Meeting Minutes
May 22, 2007

Present:

Michael Earnest, Curt Madison, Ramona McAfee, Yvonne Maddux, Ian Olson, Gwen White,

Other Members:

Lora Volden, Christine Gehrett, Pat Moore, Jeffery Oliver, Mary Snyder

Estimates of DE Costs

The committee discussed the methodology used to compile the Historical Distance Education Delivery Cost Estimate that was prepared in response to a legislative audit request and provided to the BOR in March 2007.

Gwen clarified the method includes some personnel costs and some education technology costs. Departments that deliver DE courses and departments that provide educational technology were examined and a broad estimate of the DE costs was compiled. A one page explanation of the methodology was provided to the committee. This estimate was compiled at a high data level and as a result is not accurate for departments to use in their consideration of return on investment for DE.

The committee discussed what costs and level of detail would be useful to identify. There was concern that we distinguish between research technology and instructional technology. If return on investment is helpful to know, a percentage of DE costs applied to a department's total expenditures would not add value since it would place DE and traditional courses on the same par. If funds are uniquely allocated to DE it would make sense to have specific orgs to track the pools of money but in most cases DE costs are not easy to separate from general higher education campus activities. In 2000 UAF PAIR attempted to report on DE costs for UAF and found the data to be so integrated with traditional courses and other campus activities that a cohesive report was not possible.

Other approaches to capturing DE costs were discussed, including selecting a smaller set of data and making projections to the whole from that data. Many traditional classrooms use technology and it is hard to separate the use and cost of technology such as Blackboard. Students are also multi-faceted; some on-campus students take DE as well as traditional courses.

Although there may be enrollment management uses from the campus perspective of promoting DE, it was noted that the push to measure the cost of DE was in direct response to a legislative audit request and not a campus or administrative request. The cost per credit hour reported to the legislature in 2004 included an allocation of fixed costs to the department (e.g. library, student services) and the report showed the DE cost per credit hour was on par with traditional delivery cost per credit hour. Producing a similar DE cost analysis will be necessary in the future since the legislative audit request will recur and the BOR strategic plan includes language indicating

the university should use DE in its outreach to the community. However, it may not be possible to extract an analysis detailed enough to inform departmental planning.

There is no way at present that the UA system captures DE expenditures; it only captures DE SCH. We could isolate the faculty for a DE course, and maybe the cost for developing a course, then select typical or atypical DE departments and extrapolate a cost per course or credit for DE. However, any change in enrollment or student behavior as a result of DE investment may show up a year or two after the investments are made..

Conducting a case study of programs quantified as DE, such as UAF's Administration of Justice program that provides most courses online, compared with the Education Department that provides much of its curriculum in person traveling to rural sites could provide valuable comparative information. This would be an expensive and time consuming undertaking and it is not clear what such a case study would produce or whether the results could be extrapolated to UA as a whole.

Considering DE costs are not uniquely identifiable from traditional costs, it was agreed that DE should be considered simply another delivery method. It was agreed that it would be more useful to measure the outcomes of DE which can be more clearly identified rather than try to measure the costs which cannot. Measures might include time to degree, the relative impact of access to DE, the relative impact on quality and demographics of the DE student population. From a policy perspective, faculty should be surveyed to establish their use and comfort with the technology tools available and an assisting campus designation should be implemented to reward a facilitating campus that provides assistance to DE students.

Usefulness of certain DE courses

The committee discussed the success rate of correspondence courses based on the pass rates and whether correspondence was an appropriate vehicle for certain courses. Pass/fail rates for all courses are routinely examined for other reasons, such as establishing prerequisites, and it may be useful to examine the outcomes of correspondence courses.

Curt referred committee members to the website <http://www.nosignificantdifference.org> where authors claim delivery method makes no difference in the outcome of a course. They indicate that difference is based on course design and teaching method but not the delivery method.

Excess capacity of courses

Curt questioned how many DE courses with a synchronous component have low enrollments and suggested these courses be combined across MAUs. The course could be listed in each MAU's catalog and appear on the student's transcript as originating from their home campus but the DE portion of the course would be a shared resource. This would provide efficiencies in course usage for enrollment management. If we have unused opportunity for students we should find a way to motivate campuses to cross-list courses. Gwen noted that the course cap information on Banner is not accurate; therefore, assessing course capacity would be difficult.

It was agreed that DE is a means to the end of all other university goals and as such the committee should consider what can be measured or done differently to enhance DE. Some questions are already answered, such as “How many students take DE?” Others, such as “What are the roadblocks to DE?”, “Is it easier or harder to take a course DE?”, and “What do course evaluations for DE indicate?” could provide useful information in efforts to improve student access to DE and enhance their experience with DE at UA. Curt is gathering this type of information from CDE courses; however they are not compiled into a report. Anecdotally, he rarely sees negative course evaluations for DE courses. He noted there are reasons a program may require some DE courses, such as getting students familiar with technology or giving students experience with distributed work groups.

Action Item:

Yvonne will produce a synopsis of the committee effort to date so at the next meeting the committee can review the topics covered and begin outlining potential recommendations to the ETT.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for June 5, 2007 at 3 p.m.