

Faculty Load: online vs. live programs

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Abstract

A cursory literature review reveals a paucity of empirical data on these two questions: (1) does measurement of faculty load differ between online and live classes? (2) is there a cost difference between online and live courses? This research attempts to answer these questions by surveying institutions offering Engineering Management graduate programs online.

Introduction

As society became more urbanized and higher education became more necessary for advancement in the workplace, new delivery systems had to be developed¹. The history of distance learning can be traced back more than a century and a variety of delivery methods have been employed by institutions in distance learning, such as, broadcast and cable television, audio and video cassettes, computer- based materials, E-mail and Internet ²

Traditional public institutions of higher education are forced to compete for students and, at the same time, be more cost-effective. To accomplish these potentially conflicting objectives, institutions are using the new technologies such as the Internet¹. The Wall Street Journal in an article titled "Elite colleges finally embrace Online degree Courses" stated: "the university has recognized that after the initial cost such as computers, software and other associated cost in developing an online course could be more economical for the institution to offer the program than live programs"³. An article in Mechanical Engineers Jan 2001 states that "convenience and cost are two main reasons to take a distance learning course"⁴. Roger Schank in his article stated that "Typically, university administrations care about revenue, prestige and image, and being left behind"⁵.

The review of literature does not reveal any unified method of compensation for faculty who develop or teach online course. Furthermore, the important issue of who owns the online courses is also not clear. For example, in 2000 a New Jersey institution established a policy that faculty

have an ownership and receive pay to develop online courses⁶. Offering Internet courses, however, has a direct effect on faculty load and the cost of delivering instruction. Faculty load is a major issue in all academic institutions and is especially critical in a collective bargaining environment. The load issue must also be seen in the context of cost; institutions very often see online course offerings as a means of cutting cost.

Text

Eastern Michigan University (EMU) offers two programs including many online courses. The two graduate programs are the MS in Engineering Management and the MS in Quality, both housed in the College of Technology. The Engineering Management program has been offered totally online since 2000; the Quality program offers both online and face-to-face classes.

As an institutional policy, all off-campus courses and programs are offered through Continue Education (CE). CE is a financially autonomous unit within the Division of Academic Affairs. EMU faculty are represented by the American Association of University Professors in a collective bargaining agreement. Therefore, any course taught outside the main campus is considered as CE a course and must adhere to the conditions of the faculty contract.

The CE courses may be taught by regular tenure track faculty or, if regular faculty decline, by adjunct faculty. Regular faculty can teach a CE course as overload or part of the load. If faculty teach a CE course as overload, the faculty would be compensated currently \$1100 per credit. However, if faculty teach a CE course as part of regular load, the faculty is compensated according to the collective bargaining agreement that is based on his/her salary. Thus, the cost of a course taught as part of regular faculty load is 50% to 75% higher than adjunct. Therefore, it is the CE preference that all courses be taught by adjunct faculty to reduce cost.

The faculty are encouraged and rewarded by CE to develop online courses and, at EMU; the online courses are developed by tenure-track faculty. The monetary incentive to develop an online course is \$1000 per credit and subsequently every time another faculty uses the course a \$200 flat fee is given to the developer of the course.

The content of course is belongs to the faculty responsible for developing the course, but the specifics of future intellectual property rights is currently under negotiation.

To determine how other universities are dealing with the online courses, a questionnaire was developed and forwarded to 25 five higher education institutions. These institutions were randomly selected from pool of universities, which offer program in Engineering Management. The questionnaire is comprised of the following questions:

1. Do you teach online course(s)?
2. Are you member of a faculty union?
3. Is the online course(s) part of your regular load? If not explain.
4. If yes, for purpose of load, does the online course count the same as a live class?
5. If yes, is compensation the same as a live class? If not explain.

6. Is there any financial incentive for the faculty to develop online course(s)? If yes explain.
7. Who owns the online course (s)?

Analysis of Data

The major impediment to this survey was contacting the right person. Twenty-five institutions were contacted, and we were able to conduct nineteen interviews. Only fourteen interviews resulted in completed the telephone surveys. From the remaining five institutions, two did not teach any online courses and three were not able to answer all the questions. The results from the fourteen institutions that participated in this study are as follow:

1. Do you teach online course(s)?
71% Yes 29% No*
* These individuals did not teach online course themselves.
2. Are you member of a faculty union?
53% Yes 43% No
3. Is the online course(s) part of your regular load? If not explain.
71% Yes 29% No*
*Over load
4. If yes, for purpose of load, does the online course count the same as a live class?
100% Yes
5. If yes, is compensation the same as a live class? If not explain.
71% Yes 29% No*
* Receive graduate assistant help
6. Is there any financial incentive for the faculty to develop online course(s)? If yes explain.
57% Yes* 43% NO
*Receive financial incentive
7. Who owns the online course (s)?
Institution own the course 86%
Faculty 7%
If university pays course development fee it belongs to the university. If not it belongs to faculty 7%

Conclusion:

Based on the above data and conversations with the individuals who were interviewed, there is not a clear definition between an online course and a live course in regards to faculty teaching load or faculty compensation. However, everyone agreed that teaching and developing online courses takes more time and effort than with a live course. Another

unexpected issue that became apparent in our conversations with the interviewees was that the majority of participants were concerned about the integrity of the course and particularly about plagiarism and cheating.

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