Ferris State University

SPARC
January 18, 2011
3:00pm, WCCC
Meeting Summary

In Attendance:
Cathy Archer
Dan Burcham
Bob Eastley
David Eisler
Fritz Erickson
Don Green
Kim Hancock
Doug Haneline
Leonard Johnson
Michelle Johnston
Barbara Ciaramitaro for Jim Jones
Kristen Motz
David Pilgrim
Matt Pinter
Miles Postema
Kristen Salomonson
Jerry Scoby
Mischele Stone
Morgan Toms
Nate Tymes
John Urbanick
Robert von der Osten
John Willey
Helen Woodman
Leroy Wright

Guests:
Stacy Anderson, Ann Breitenwischer, Cheryl Cluchey, Teresa Cook, Julie Coon, Mitzi Day,
Don Flickinger, Bea Griffith-Cooper, Meegan Lillis, Dave Nicol, Theresa Raglin, Larry Schult,
Robbie Teahen, Spencer Tower, Greg Zimmerman

Introductions

Action:
1. November Meeting Summary
   SPARC members approved the December 14, 2010 meeting summary.

Topic: “Online Teaching and Learning” (Goal 1, Initiative 6)

2. Online Learning at Ferris: An Overview (handout)
   Robbie Teahen, chair of the E-Learning Management Advisory Team (E-MAT), reported
   that there is good progress being made regarding online learning at Ferris. A handout
   was distributed listing progress areas, impediments faced and plans for Spring 2011.
   Included in the plans are to conduct a series of meetings and a survey to gather
   university-wide input on the future of online learning, produce a next plan for online
   learning that addresses the key concerns, implement the new Content Management
   System, expand the implementation of Quality Matters, utilize the survey data, and
   continue to encourage college leaders to address low-performing online classes.
Some SPARC members shared that:

- The discussion should include on-line enrollment capacity for Ferris; i.e. should it be an ideal, pre-determined “ceiling” or should Ferris use demand as the primary driver? Is it different for every college? A specific ceiling would help IT to prepare for support planning as the support system for online must be maintained.

- Online courses must be developed; faculty are busy with face to face classes, so who takes time to identify programs and resources, and develops the online presence?

- If we are not taking courses on online, other universities will. We need to plan to be competitive. Students at Ferris are taking courses from other universities because they couldn’t get what they want here. For example, Student Government President Toms shared that a friend left Ferris to take online courses through CMU for an entire semester; she is still living in Big Rapids, but couldn’t get online courses that she wanted through Ferris. When asked, she believed that some of the courses were available here, but she wanted online.

Chair Johnson stated that the series of meetings set by E-MAT start on January 19 and asked the SPARC members to discuss the preliminary questions to be addressed at the “Proposed Online Forums for Education and Input” meetings (handout). A suggestion was made that the forums be available virtually for those who cannot physically attend. Students are needed in the audience for their voices to be heard. There was a suggestion to hold sessions in Student Government meetings. It will also be important to capture comments from current online students to understand their praises and concerns.

A survey has been launched on FerrisConnect; another could be started to gather specific comments on skills needed for Internet courses.

3. **Student Capabilities**

Cheryl Cluchey will facilitate these sessions on January 19th and 21st in IRC 156.

**Questions:**

- What skills do all students need to be effective in the online environment?
- Should an orientation be required? If required, how should it be incorporated (within first course; at program enrollment, etc.)
- How should students demonstrate that they have the capability to be an effective online learner?
- At what level should these “requirement” decisions be made? Course, Program, College, University?

**Discussion:**

There was discussion of the types of skills that students need prior to online learning. According to those in attendance, many faculty members believe basic computer skills are necessary and would strongly recommend a face-to-face orientation, but that depends on the location of the students. It would be important to distinguish between students in an online program (greater need for skills; an orientation should be a prerequisite) or an Internet class (a possible one-time situation). Some faculty want to limit the number of students in each Internet class because it takes a great deal of time to help each student learn FerrisConnect. Should a computer orientation be part of FSUS as an online preparedness orientation? Not all students struggle with online
courses. In HVAC orientation sessions students are typically 30-50 years old and have less computer skills; the orientation is very important.

Students need to have a workable computer and sufficient access when taking classes from home. It was suggested that there is a need for someone available by phone or chat for IT issues 24/7 – we can't pre-predict problems. This might be a support issue and not a capacity issue. Students tell Student Government that support for Internet courses needs to be addressed; they feel that FerrisConnect is “always” down. Many times it is equipment driven – their laptop or PC is slower or the connection is slower than on-campus and the assumption is made that the "system" is down. The students need immediate assistance through a support center. It is possible to tell students that they are responsible for specific skills prior to taking the class – if they are not comfortable, they can be directed to an IT support center. (“If you can't learn the technology, you may fail the course.” They will learn in a hurry.)

Many students are very adept at social media; if they can master all the options and apps on those sites, they should be able to master FerrisConnect. If not, we have a FerrisConnect problem. If it is an instructional design issue, we need student feedback on redesign. On the other hand, we have a percentage of students who are not computer savvy, and we cannot forget their needs.

This is a matter of rights and responsibilities – “Here’s what you can expect at Ferris…” As part of that expectation, we need to make sure students understand the time commitment and time-sensitive nature of Internet courses. Some students take online courses erroneously expecting less work because they don’t attend a face-to-face class. Again, this could be in a policy statement of Ferris expectations along with listing minimal skills required. Then the concern moves to who will act as oversight regarding skill sets. If the student has completed a computer course, they could check a box to move onto registration of the Internet class.

Another “skill” area that could be addressed in a Ferris expectations/policy concerns on using Internet sources for course work. Some professors allow You Tube and other resources, some may not. We need to be consistent and teach students how to appropriately document sources.

Overview: We cannot tell if the problems identified are anecdotal evidence or problems of significant scale. We need data from our students with Internet course experience to correctly identify the issues. We can assume what the problem is, but need to know for sure. Is there a pattern? Is it prevalent? What are the actual challenges? An EMAT survey for students who attend online courses could be used to gather data for analysis.

4. Faculty Capabilities
   Teresa Cook will facilitate these sessions on January 26th and 28th in IRC 156.
   Questions:
   • What skills do faculty need to teach online effectively?
   • How should the University determine which faculty can teach online?
   • How should online faculty be evaluated?
   • What assistance should be provided for online faculty?
   • What indicators should be reviewed to evaluate the quality of online instruction?
**Discussion:**
The Faculty Center has been responsible to provide FerrisConnect block training; they have documented what’s available for faculty and what’s built into the training. The quality portion was developed by EMAT and faculty have provided feedback.

At what point do we tell faculty “this is what you need to do to teach online?” If we start an application process, do we force a minimum requirement? What about those who are already teaching online? Not all faculty members want to teach Internet courses. Some members shared that with online, the class never ends; i.e., online teaching doesn’t have any boundaries. A face-to-face class meets at a certain time and there are specific office hours.

It can be difficult to find faculty to teach online, so it will be important to find ways to encourage the Faculty Center training. FerrisConnect training incorporates best practices and provides online instructor certification. We need to insist that faculty take the training. This is the way to cultivate better online teaching.

How do we build support to expand capability? Step 1: faculty must at least post grades! We need to build a long-term plan to cultivate online teaching talent. It may be possible through the UCC to build in medium of instruction as part of program criteria.

**Contract issues must be discussed:**
- How far does academic freedom apply? There are some legal responsibilities; i.e. linking to content and videos from You Tube and Harvard lectures for class content and information.
- Should all or a percentage of Internet courses be evaluated the same as face-to-face courses? It is easier to maintain anonymity for face-to-face; the Faculty Center may need to be involved to keep online SAI responses anonymous.
- Attendance and identification of students in Internet classes is becoming a larger issue. Contact and interactivity between the faculty and student is critical and can be measured. How do you know that the person is actually the one doing the work? Student identification options will need to be reviewed, such as, use a personal question as well as password, Webcam, ID card presented to camera, thumbprint, etc.

Faculty rights and responsibilities were discussed: what class load is acceptable for online courses, is advising acceptable online, which faculty may teach online and may they live somewhere else and teach for Ferris, how will they attend committees and what about other responsibilities? Some faculty members already teach MWF and are not here TR. Skype may be an option for faculty to participate from other locations. The move to more online courses and programs and technology changes is driving how we do things and the decisions that must be made. What about in-person office hours for students? We may be in danger of creating situations of empty hallways and diminished collegiality. It will continue to be important to speak and meet face-to-face – it is simply being an effective faculty member. Ferris must continue to move forward.

There should be a university-wide discussion of faculty expectations. Many faculty are aging and will be retiring; we need to be able to say consistently what we expect of new faculty regarding rights and responsibilities. Students complain that faculty don’t hold their office hours. Moving to more online may make office hours worse. Students share that they enjoy seeing professors in the hallway and available for conversations; they
prefer to keep the environment and the culture of the University. Office hour expectations need to be defined in writing for all faculty.

Should the online load be based at the program level since some programs are all online? Be sure that faculty all understand the policy. There should be a set of guidelines of which all faculty agree.

We need to continue to discuss the type of school we are going to be. We have an identity. We can be flexible, but need to keep focus on the vision and mission. Currently, Ferris is ahead of other institutions regarding online teaching and learning.

Overview:
We need a faculty online learning policy to address the faculty members’ rights and responsibilities. Some faculty who “fight” to teach online are not seen on-campus. The rest of the faculty pick up the slack. It is becoming a problem for some and should be addressed in an online policy. Also in the policy should be faculty expectations regarding office hours, advising, meeting participation, and guidelines for online load.

5. Course Quality and Learning Effectiveness
Spencer Tower will facilitate these sessions on February 2nd and 4th in IRC 156. Defer to next meeting; if you have specific comments, please share with E-MAT members before February 2.

Closing / Next meeting date:
Chair Johnson thanked members and guests for the excellent discussion and requested that they review the forum topics and questions in preparation for the February meeting. The next meeting will be February 15, 2011, 3-5pm in WCCC.

Adjourned 4:45pm
Submitted by Elaine R. Kamptner