

SENATE COMMITTEE ON OUTREACH

Responses to the Survey of Lead Faculty and/or Department Heads
Regarding the Staffing of Online Courses

(Informational Report)

PURPOSE

With the proliferation of online courses and/or degrees at Penn State, there is a need to better understand how academic units at Penn State hire, integrate into the University community, and evaluate the faculty who teach their online courses through the Penn State World Campus. Some courses are taught by residential, full time Penn State faculty, while others are taught by instructors who are hired to teach only in the online environment. When the latter occurs, there have been several possible areas for concern raised by members of the faculty community. For example, what process does the lead faculty member or department chair follow when it comes to hiring non-PSU instructors to teach in online courses and/or programs? Furthermore, when online instructors are hired from outside Penn State, what, if any, steps are taken to acclimate the instructor to the Penn State environment and to evaluate the quality of their teaching? These are questions that the Committee sought to answer by way of a Web-based survey of lead faculty or department chairs, coupled with field interviews of a selected subset of this population who have the responsibility for managing the online teaching and learning environment within their programs.

DEFINITIONS

Lead faculty member is a term used by the World Campus and the partnering academic unit to describe the faculty member who serves as a coordinator for the online initiative. This individual has the responsibility to serve as the liaison between the program faculty group and the World Campus staff when it comes to issues such as developing a schedule of courses, staffing online courses, tracking enrollments in the program, advising, and marketing the online program.

For the purposes of this report, *respondents* are individuals who serve as lead faculty or department heads for programs and courses that are offered through the World Campus. Some academic units of Penn State develop and offer online “Web” courses through resident instruction and/or the e-Learning Cooperative without utilizing the World Campus as a delivery unit. The bulk of online programming at Penn State, however, is offered through the World Campus as required by University policy AD55 (<http://guru.psu.edu/policies/AD55.html>); thus, an effort was made to explore the issues addressed here with that group of lead faculty members or department heads.

Instructor is a term used here to indicate the individual(s) who teach a course, whether in residence or face-to-face. The term is not meant to indicate faculty rank.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Across AY 2008/2009, the Committee developed a questionnaire that would be used to survey lead faculty or department heads in those units where online courses are offered through the World Campus (Part I). Part II of the study was designed to gather in-depth information via interviews with individuals who have extensive experience with staffing and managing online programs through the World Campus.

The Principal Investigators for the study, Barbara Sims and Ann Taylor (Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, respectively), submitted a Human Subjects Review application through Penn State’s Office of Research Protections that was approved in Spring 2009. The request for participation in Part I of the study was sent via e-mail to 76 lead faculty or department heads in July 2009. After two requests for participation, 32 individuals completed the online survey for a response rate of 42%. Field interviews associated with Part II of the study were completed across Summer and Fall 2009 and Spring 2010. A total of seven interviews were completed.

FINDINGS

Quantitative Data

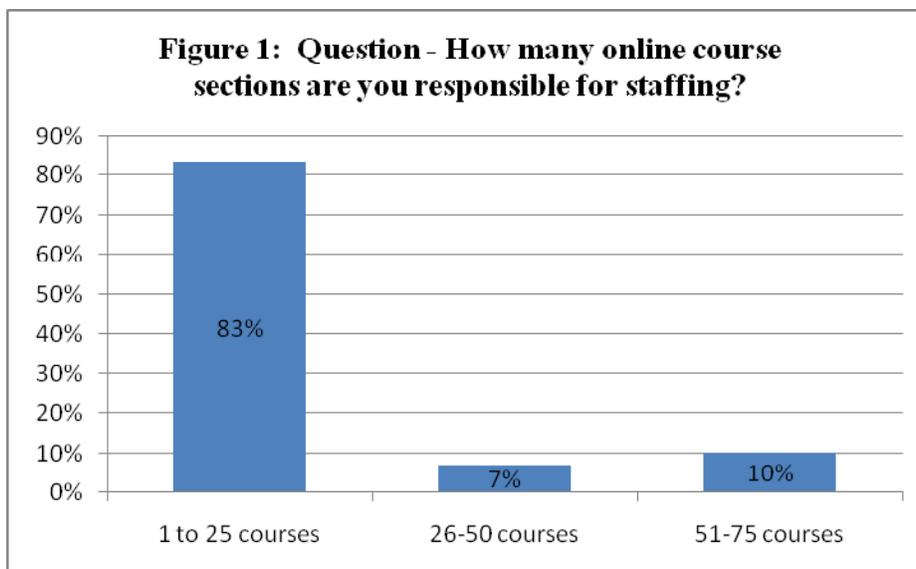
As shown in Table 1, about 4 out of 10 survey respondents reported their position as department or unit head with 38% saying that they serve as the lead faculty member for online programming within their unit. The six individuals who reported “other” to that question listed such responses as “program administrative coordinator,” “associate head/lead faculty,” “school director,” or “program manager.”

Table 1: Respondents’ Position Within Their Unit

	Number	Percent
Department/unit head	12	41
Lead faculty for online program	11	38
Other	6	21

When asked to identify the academic college with which they are affiliated, 14 colleges were identified: College of Agricultural Sciences (3), College of Arts and Architecture (1), College of Earth and Mineral Sciences (1), College of Education (3), College of Engineering (1), College of Health and Human Development (4), College of the Liberal Arts (6), The Eberly College of Science (2), The Graduate School (1), Penn State Erie (1), Penn State Great Valley (1), Penn State Harrisburg (4), Penn State Lehigh Valley (1), and the School of Nursing (1).

When asked to report the number of online courses they are responsible for staffing, well over a majority reported 1-25 courses (83% of respondents); 7% reported staffing 26-50 courses and 10% said that they are responsible for staffing between 51 and 75 online courses (See Figure 1).



The next question in the survey asked respondents, “Who teaches online courses for your department/unit/program?” As shown in Table 2, almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents said they utilize a combination of the same faculty who teach their residential courses and additional instructors who are hired to teach online courses. Only two respondents said that they solely hire additional instructors whose primary responsible is to teach online courses. The one “other” response indicated, “The same faculty plus some graduate students teach our online courses.”

Table 2: Who Teaches Online Courses in Respondents’ Unit?

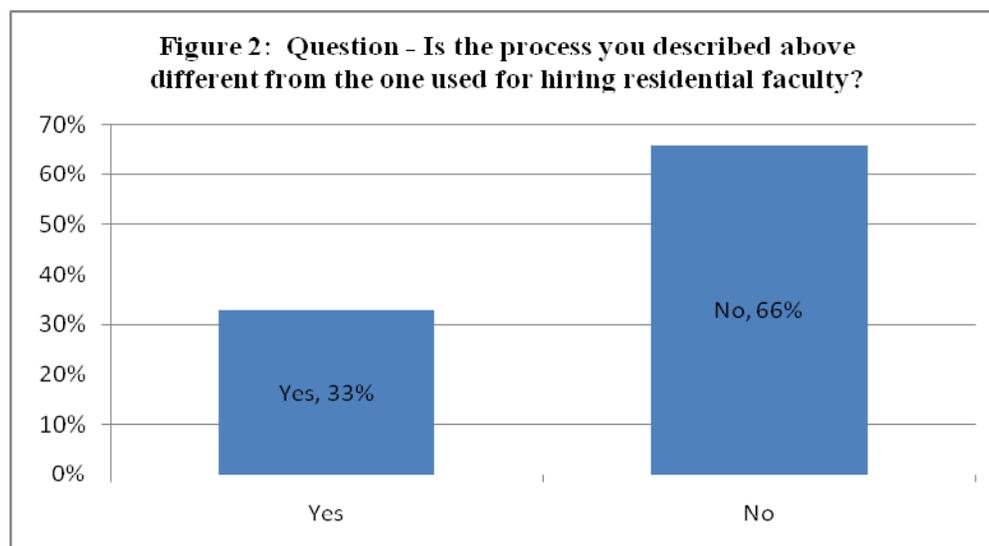
	Number	Percent
The same faculty who teach residential courses	8	27
Additional instructors are hired to teach online courses	2	7
A combination of both	19	63
Other	1	3

A follow up question next asked those respondents who answered “a combination of both” to the question addressed in Table 2, “What percentage of the individuals who teach your online courses also teach your residential courses?” This was an open ended question and the results are best summarized as: four respondents stated about 10-25%; three respondents stated between 40-50%; and 12 respondents reported that as being 60% or higher.

The next set of questions was directed only to those respondents who said that they hire additional instructors whose primary responsibility it is to teach online courses. The first question in this section of the questionnaire asked about the hiring process for these online instructors. Forty-four percent of respondents said that “the department head makes these hiring decisions on his/her own.” One respondent stated that a search committee is formed comprised solely of members of the department’s residential faculty; two respondents said that a search committee is formed comprised of both residential and online instructors; and seven respondents gave a variety of responses to that question such as:

- Associate department head with consultation;
- Department head in consultation with the lead faculty member;
- Program Director; and,
- Lead faculty member conducts the search.

When asked whether the process for hiring online instructors is the same as that used for hiring residential faculty, and as shown in Figure 2, 66% of respondents said “no.”



When asked to briefly explain how the process for hiring online instructors differs from that used for hiring residential faculty, the following comments were forthcoming:

“Fixed term faculty members are hired as needed primarily from graduating graduate students who wish to stay in the area while waiting for a job or for a spouse to graduate. The department head decides who to hire and without a very formal process. Hiring online instructors works in a similar fashion, except for the tenure track faculty who volunteer to make the online course part of their teaching load. We provide this option to all faculty willing to do the training.”

“For resident faculty on the tenure track, a formal search process is followed with advertising. No advertising is done for online courses and no search committee is formed.”

“Unlike the more formal search for residential faculty, the lead faculty member identifies and hires online faculty in consultation with the department head.”

“Because so few are needed, this is done informally.”

When asked, “When hiring individuals to teach your online courses, do you consider geographically-distributed faculty for those positions (e.g. faculty who will not be expected to relocate to a Penn State campus),” about two-thirds (65%) of respondents said “yes.”

As might be expected, online courses staffed by instructors with primary responsibility for that venue are filled by a mixture of FT I, FT II, and Supplementary I appointments (see Table 3).

Table 3: Type of University Appointment Assigned to Instructors Hired to Teach Only Online

	Number	Percent
FT – multi-year	1	7
FT I – yearly contract	3	20
FT II	5	33
Supplementary I	3	20
Other	3	20

The three “other” responses to this question included comments such as, “On load, FT I, FT II, and Supplemental I and II”; “World Campus calls them independent contractors.”; and, “Both FT1 and FT2.”

Evaluating Online Instructors

To better understand how online teaching effectiveness is evaluated, respondents were asked to consider common strategies used to evaluate effective teaching (e.g. PSU’s SRTE system, peer review of teaching, and the use of teaching portfolios). As shown in Table 4, 72% of respondents report using the SRTE to evaluate online instructors, while 28% said that they do not use the SRTE. Most stated, however, that they use the end-of-course evaluations that are used by the World Campus to evaluate students’ overall satisfaction with courses taught through that platform. Most respondents (72%) stated that they do not make use of teaching portfolios to evaluate online instructors.

Table 4: Strategies Used to Evaluate Online Instructors

	Yes	No
Regular review of SRTEs	13 (72%)	5 (28%)
Regular review of World Campus end-of-course evaluations	15 (83%)	3 (17%)
Peer review of online teaching	7 (39%)	11 (61%)
Periodic review of teaching portfolios	5 (39%)	13 (72%)

When asked about other techniques that they might use to evaluate online teaching, respondents named such measures as: being included in online courses as a guest member in order to observe instructor/student interactions; approving course content in advance by the lead faculty member as means of quality control; and, paying attention to student complaints.

Strategies Used to Integrate Online Instructors Into the Unit

A set of questions were included in the study to measure the extent to which respondents make use of typical strategies often put into place to better integrate a new faculty member into the larger faculty group and/or unit. The data in Table 5 suggest that lead faculty or department heads use a variety of the listed strategies. For example, all of them say that they provide sample syllabi to online instructors; 89% that they introduce the new instructor to full time faculty members; and, 72% say that they include the online instructor in communications sent out to faculty. In addition, two-thirds of respondents report that they “help the individual to gain knowledge of the history, philosophy, and goals of the institution as a whole,” and that they ensure that the individual is included in PSU communications. Exactly half of the respondents say that they include the individual in department meetings and involve him/her in curricular decisions. Almost two-thirds (61%) say that they provide the new instructor with a job description. Only a small number of respondents, however, report that they inform the online instructor about possible service opportunities available to faculty at Penn State.

Table 5: Strategies Used to Integrate Online Instructors into the Unit

	Yes	No
Provide a job description?	11 (61%)	6 (33%)
Help the individual to gain knowledge of the history, philosophy, goals of the institution as a whole?	12 (67%)	6 (33%)
Provide introductions to current faculty members?	16 (89%)	2 (11%)
Provide example syllabi?	18 (100%)	0
Include the individual in communications to faculty?	13 (72%)	4 (22%)
Ensure that the individual is included in PSU communications from outside the department?	12 (66%)	6 (33%)
Include the individual in department/unit meetings?	9 (50%)	9 (50%)
Involve the individual in curricular decisions?	9 (50%)	9 (50%)
Provide information about University service opportunities for faculty?	3 (17%)	15 (83%)

An open-ended question allowed respondents to comment on other strategies that they use with new online instructors. Those comments are summarized here:

- Hold weekly brown bag meetings with all non-tenure line instructors;
- Make use of Breeze [Adobe Connect] to hold discussions about the technology available to them, etc.
- Distribute electronic newsletters to all FT II faculty with reminders and news items;
- Provide the University's handbook for part-time instructors; and,
- Appoint some of these individuals to advisory councils.

Of the five professional development opportunities shown in Table 6, three of them were used more so than others with online instructors: assistance with both developing and teaching effective online courses and with providing technical assistance for technology-related problems. Fifty-five percent of respondents said that they hold new faculty orientations for online instructors. Finally, most respondents said that professional travel funds are not made available for online instructors.

Table 6: Professional Development Opportunities Provided Online Instructors

	Yes	No
A new faculty orientation session?	10 (56%)	8 (44%)
Instructional assistance related to designing effective online courses?	14 (78%)	3 (17%)
Instructional assistance related to teaching effective online courses?	15 (83%)	2 (11%)
Technical assistance with technology-related problems in online courses?	15 (83%)	3 (17%)
Travel funds for conferences and training?	6 (33%)	12 (67%)

Additional Comments Contributed by Respondents

A final question of the online survey asked respondents to identify any challenges and/or concerns that they have experienced when it comes to the offering of online courses through their departments. The comments from respondents indicate the following areas of concern:

- High turnover with online instructors who leave for better professional opportunities;
- Balancing teaching loads so that teaching online does not have to be in an overload situation;
- Reluctance among some residential faculty members to teach online;
- Finding instructors who are qualified to effectively teach online courses;
- Predicting enrollments and staffing needs is always a challenge; and,
- Planning for growth and deciding whether to hire strictly online instructors or to cap admissions into the major.

Qualitative Data

As previously noted, seven face-to-face interviews were completed as part of this study. Representatives were from the World Campus, three academic units with large World Campus courses and/or programs, and three e-Learning support groups that are situated within academic units. A summary of the findings from those interviews is presented here.

World Campus

A senior representative from the World Campus was interviewed for this study to learn more about the role that the World Campus plays in the hiring, integrating, and evaluation of instructors for online courses.

Findings:

Question 1 – “What is the process used for identifying faculty to teach [online] courses [delivered through the World Campus]?”

- Regardless of the gross revenue sharing model¹, academic units/partners are responsible for setting the curriculum and for selecting course authors and instructors. In the case of GRS-1², the World Campus provides the funds to hire the course author/instructor. Some academic partners under GRS-1 are open to having the World Campus suggest instructors, while other units prefer to identify prospective instructors without assistance.
- Course instructors can be tenure-line faculty, full-time non-tenure faculty, fixed term, independent contractors, etc. Instructors do not need to be physically located at a Penn State campus location.

Question 2 - “What professional development opportunities, if any, are made available by the World Campus to instructors? Are any of these required?”

- All new online faculty are invited to participate in the World Campus’ professional development offerings, including OL2000, a 10-hour, online, introductory course for new instructors that is offered over a three-week period beginning about five weeks prior to each semester. All instructors teaching via the World Campus are invited to other professional development activities offered by World Campus online throughout the academic year.

Question 3 – “What strategies, if any, does the World Campus use to involve online faculty in the University community?”

- Since faculty teaching World Campus courses are hired by academic units, how those units integrate their faculty into the department/University community varies. World Campus does, however, issue an online newsletter twice a semester and also forwards all official announcements that the University distributes, such as the 2009 announcements about H1N1.

Question 4 – “What strategies, if any, does the World Campus use to evaluate online teaching effectiveness?”

- Every course offered through the World Campus has an end-of-course evaluation. The evaluation instrument and its distribution are modeled directly after the SRTE. The World Campus has participated now in the online SRTE pilot and will transition to the online SRTE in 2010-11. If an academic unit wants to also conduct a peer review of a course and instructor, the World Campus can facilitate access to the course environment.

¹ There are four Gross Revenue Sharing Models used to determine how course revenues are shared between academic units and the World Campus.

² With GRS-1, the World Campus assumes all financial risk and guarantees recovery of College costs; the College receives 10% of gross revenue.

Academic Unit #1

The first interview was with the head of an academic unit that offers 10 very large enrolling, online general education courses.

Findings:

- Online course offerings enroll both residential and World Campus students.
- Each course has a lead instructor who is a traditional face-to-face faculty member. Additional instructors are hired, however, to handle the grading and daily course interactions. These individuals work under the supervision of the lead instructor. As stated by the interviewee, “These individuals are typically folks who have a background and/or interest in the course content, have taken the course previously, got an ‘A,’ and demonstrated a strong writing background.”
- Online instructors manage 75-120 students per section; “...most teach 1-2 sections on top of a day job and all are hired in fixed-term positions.”
- In addition to the individual section instructors, the department has a "Course Manager" who oversees all of their online courses: training new online instructors; conducting quality checks; and troubleshooting. This individual helps with course development and teaches the course the first time it is offered online (to debug).
- When it comes integrating these instructors into the larger faculty community, the interviewee stated, “Department faculty don’t know about these instructors and really aren’t interested. Since instructors are more like graders than traditional instructors, regular departmental faculty don’t see them as competition.”
- In terms of evaluating online teaching effectiveness, the unit reports that the lead instructor and course manager "watch like hawks" and analyze grades across sections.
- Professional development is provided primarily by the course manager, who gives instructors coaching and initial training in course delivery and policies. Instructors are also told about additional professional development opportunities at Penn State.

Academic Unit #2

The next interviewee is the chair of a program that offers its residential undergraduate program online and entirely through the World Campus.

Findings:

- This program has developed 11 courses for online delivery, including all of the core courses for the major and four upper level electives. For supporting courses, students in the major (now approaching a head count of 260) can enroll in upper level courses offered online by other disciplines.
- All courses were developed and are being taught by residential, full time instructors (six tenure track and one FT I instructor).

- Most courses are capped at 35 with the exception being the two writing intensive courses, one of which is the senior seminar. Those two courses are capped at 25.
- All faculty members had extensive assistance from World Campus staff, including instructional designers and technical support from the Outreach HelpDesk.
- The program as a whole benefits greatly from the marketing efforts through the World Campus and assistance with advising by World Campus staff, whom they view as highly trained and professional.
- Since the same faculty who teach residential courses teach online courses, the questions about how faculty are hired, integrated into the faculty group, and evaluated does not apply to this particular program.

Academic Unit #3

The next academic unit to be interviewed offers an online graduate certificate program through the World Campus (specifically designed for non-residential adult learners; all courses at the 500-level) and recently added an online masters degree that includes the courses developed for the certificate program.

Findings:

- Courses have a 25 student cap, but multiple sections of required courses are offered each semester. Enrollment in the certificate program has been growing between 25-50% per year.
- Students are typically adult learners who are working for a small company that doesn't provide a lot of in-house support/training, so they are seeking these online courses/programs to meeting their training needs.
- Typically the same individual who teaches the residential version of a given course serves as the lead faculty member for the development of the online version and also teaches the online course the first time it is offered.
- Instruction of the online courses is coordinated with residential offerings. Whenever possible, the individual who is teaching the course in residence also teaches the online course that same semester. That provides an incentive to keep course requirements, pacing, and quality in sync.
- As the number of online course sections needed grows, it is becoming harder to utilize the same faculty to teach both in residence and online offerings. Therefore, the department is building a team of instructors by seeking individuals who have taken the courses while a PhD student in the residential program. This ensures that all instructors have a sense of the Penn State brand, know the department, and have already had graduate-level teaching experience as teaching assistants.
- Instructors are given a "master" copy of an online course to teach, but have the flexibility to revise the materials to suit their needs and/or teaching style. Personalizing a course is important to both the instructor and to the students. Students occasionally request even more of a personal instructional presence in a course, such as video, live chat, etc. Customizing courses does present a challenge – the department wants to keep the sections from growing too far apart, while at the same time sharing best practices among instructors/sections.

- New instructors are advised to take the World Campus' OL 2000—a web-based, 3-week introduction to teaching online. The department has also conducted a couple of technology-mediated training sessions to introduce instructors to new teaching technologies and strategies. In addition, the instructional designer for the courses continues to send instructors new ideas, best practices, etc. via e-mail. The formal sessions worked well in terms of building a sense of community, so the department is considering having similar sessions once a month with an agenda that focuses on sharing “what’s working and what isn’t?”
- Program courses currently utilize the World Campus' End of Course survey. The evaluation, and its distribution, is modeled directly after the SRTE. Peer review of online courses has not been standard, but the department hopes to formalize that process, too.
- Faculty burnout is a concern. The department feels strongly that faculty should not take on more than 20% overtime. That applies even if a course instructor holds a full-time job elsewhere. For individuals who already hold a full-time job, that typically means teaching no more than one course section online. The department does not want any faculty who teach solely online. They believe that course instructors who are already Penn State employees should teach in residence, as well.
- As the department's online masters degree gains momentum, academic advising will be a concern. The certificate program has had a single academic advising point person. That model will not likely scale for the online masters degree.

e-Learning Support Group #1

Three interviewees are the directors of College-level “e-Learning Support Groups.” The first is situated within a large college that has a substantial number of online courses as part of the World Campus General Undergraduate Portfolio (GUP).

Findings:

- The College's online faculty are identified by individual academic departments. Departments prefer to integrate online teaching responsibilities into a FT I faculty member's teaching load. Other practices include limited supplemental compensation for FT I faculty, use of FT II faculty, and limited hiring of graduate students (mostly in the summer).
- The College prefers to hire instructors whom they know. About 50% of the College's online teaching faculty also teach face-to-face courses for the College. Instructors, especially graduate students, are generally eager to teach online courses as a way to gain experience in distance education.
- The profile of instructors for the College's online courses closely mirrors the profile of instructors for their face-to-face courses. Gen Ed courses are often taught by TAs in both realms, while upper level courses are taught by more senior faculty, whether online or face-to-face.
- Minimum qualifications for teaching lower division courses online almost always include a masters degree. Online teaching experience is also sought. “New” candidates should be prepared to share teaching evaluations and letters of reference that speak to the individual's ability to teach.

- New hires are expected to take the World Campus OL2000 course and it is expected that each department will take the responsibility for mentoring and monitoring online faculty. Some departments offer their own online teaching training program.
- The departments rely on the World Campus end-of-course evaluations but will be moving to the use of the online SRTEs in the near future. The College would also like to develop a peer review process for their online courses.

e-Learning Support Group #2

The second e-Learning Support Group to be interviewed is situated in a well-established institute in a research-oriented college.

Findings:

- One in four undergraduate credit hours generated by the College are associated with a “web” class. One in five college graduate students are enrolled in a World Campus program.
- The Institute is responsible for facilitating the growth of online programs for the College. Part of that role is to offer assistance to departments in designing, planning, building and sustaining online programs. The institute is increasingly entrusted by academic departments to explore potential candidates on the departments’ behalf. Ultimately, of course, each department makes final hiring decisions and is responsible for evaluations of performance and quality assurance.
- There are two primary reasons why new instructors for online course offerings may be hired: 1) The College has no excess instructional capacity, and 2) the instructional skill set and disposition needed is different than what is needed for residential instruction.
- Relatively few of all instructors who teach online for the College also teach in residence.
- The College has a huge base of accomplished and loyal alumni who are reportedly thrilled at the prospect of teaching part time for Penn State. Some work full-time elsewhere, some are retired, and some work elsewhere at Penn State (e.g., as a research associate) but teach online part-time for the College.
- The general College community is reportedly not aware of the community of instructors who teach their online students. There has been a lot of misunderstanding, suspicion, and mistrust from traditional faculty. Some departments in the College do make an effort to include online faculty in departmental functions through media like Adobe Connect or MediaSite Live and by including online faculty in departmental web site faculty listings. The institute feels that the effort needs to come from both directions, however. To be recognized and respected by their resident peers, online faculty need to make the effort to attend faculty meetings and departmental functions, too.
- The College finds it hard to learn about professional development opportunities that are available related to teaching at a distance, some of the resources that might seem applicable, such as the handbook for part-time faculty are often disappointing, as they do not address the

unique needs of geographically dispersed faculty who teach online. The institute feels that there needs to be better recognition by the University that we are growing our faculty and that the faculty is becoming more diversified. Professional development resources and experiences need to adapt to that diversity.

- The College routinely conducts end-of-course surveys through the World Campus. In the future, the new online SRTE will be utilized, as well.
- The Institute has developed a peer review process for College online courses that is currently being used for graduate faculty members. It is hoped that the peer review process will expand in the future so that it is as common as the SRTE. One academic department has agreed to require all resident faculty to conduct peer reviews of online teaching. This agreement has great potential for bridging the gap between mainstream faculty and their dispersed colleagues who teach online and at a distance.

e-Learning Support Group #3

The final e-Learning Support Group to be interviewed resides in a college that currently offers approximately 22 course sections online through the World Campus, with the largest section enrolling 100 students. The majority are General Education courses. They also offer sections of the same courses through resident instruction and the e-Learning Cooperative.

Findings:

- The College's World Campus courses are GRS level 3³. Revenue supports the e-Learning group, as well as the academic departments.
- The e-Learning support group funds 8-9 faculty "fellows." Some are funded to develop courses, other to maintain/revise courses. Funding is negotiated with the faculty and the sponsoring academic unit.
- Faculty are identified to teach World Campus courses in varying ways across departments. Some rely heavily on adjuncts that are department graduates. Others are TAs, working under the guidance of a faculty member. Typically the faculty member teaches the resident instruction section of the course, while the TA teaches the online section.
- Most adjuncts and TAs who teach online also teach face-to-face for the College. However, the College has also occasionally hired faculty to teach online who are not physically located near a Penn State campus.
- The e-Learning support group typically works with department heads to identify instructor candidates. Funding comes from both the e-Learning support group and the academic department, based on a negotiated percentage. Hiring decisions have traditionally been made collaboratively by the e-Learning support group, the department head, the College finance office, and the Dean. In some departments, faculty have recently begun to be included in the process, as well.

³ With GRS-3, the College funds instructional costs and delivers to the World Campus well-formed courses that meets the published standards of the e-Learning Steering Committee; College receives 66% of gross revenue.

- Adjuncts report that they don't feel closely aligned with the academic unit. They don't feel that their voices are "heard" by their departments and that their expertise isn't as highly regarded as their tenure-track peers. Working with the e-Learning support group and other faculty who teach online for the College gives these individuals a way to be more integrated into the College community.
- The e-Learning support group hosts a event twice a year that provides faculty with the opportunity to learn about one of their online courses from the author/instructor. Faculty fellows also receive funding to present on their online course work at a conference. Faculty are also encouraged to participate in Penn State events such as the Teaching and Learning with Technology (TLT) Symposium.
- Because the online SRTE hasn't been available until recently, and because they feel that many of the questions on the SRTE don't pertain to an online environment, the e-Learning support group has negotiated with the World Campus to administer the World Campus end-of-course survey in all of their online courses, even those delivered through resident instruction and/or the e-Learning Cooperative.
- Administrative issues (enrollment management, help desk, advising, etc.) will pose the biggest challenge to the college in the future, particularly as the College begins to move from offering "stand alone" online General Education courses to higher-level courses and degree programs.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Hiring Practices

The findings from this study indicate that there has been a proliferation of online course development and offerings at Penn State and through the World Campus. Overwhelmingly, both the quantitative and the qualitative findings reveal that a majority of programs staff those courses by pulling both from existing faculty resources and by hiring additional instructors to teach online courses. Further, it appears that academic units control the hiring and training of online instructors when those instructors are hired from outside the already-existing faculty group. When the World Campus engages in the recruitment of online instructors, findings here suggest that is with the approval of the academic unit and even then, the final decision about who is hired rests with the academic lead faculty member or unit head.

Faculty Integration

Not all academic units, however, follow the same path when it comes to integrating online instructors who are not part of the larger faculty group into that group. Nor is there consistent use of practices associated with the offering of professional development opportunities. This is somewhat expected, since not all units are consistent in these two regards when it comes to their residential faculty.

There appears to be a great deal of leeway when it comes to how units are managing the delivery of online programming. This is apparent in the findings from the field interviews. Not all units are engaging in online teaching and learning in the same way. Various models are in place and based on the findings reported here, the larger faculty group associated with the particular

colleges appear to be satisfied with those models. Definitive conclusions, however, about how faculty view practices within their College cannot be reached because the study did not survey or interview individual faculty members.

Evaluation

One interviewee stated “Online courses should be evaluated in the same manner as resident instruction courses by using the SRTE, to gauge student satisfaction, and a peer review process, to evaluate teaching effectiveness. “ Findings show that academic units do appear to use an end-of-course survey in their online courses that is administered by the World Campus and is modeled, both in content and distribution policies, on the SRTEs. Departments report that they will switch to the online SRTE once that tool is fully available. Concerns exist, however, about the nature of the SRTE question bank. Many of the items in that bank may not be worded appropriately for distance-delivered courses and there may be additional questions needed to address aspects of course delivery that are unique to the online environment.

With regard to a peer review process, only one interviewee reported utilizing a formal peer review process for their College’s online courses. Other units did express an interest in beginning such a peer review process in the future.

Future Challenges

Both survey respondents and interviewees shared concerns focused on predicting future growth and having the resources necessary to sustain that growth. There seems to be a desire among unit heads and/or lead faculty members not to have full time faculty teaching online courses in an overload situation, but rather to have online teaching become part of the faculty member’s regular, established teaching load.

Finally, one comment from an interviewee seems especially important given the almost exponential growth in online programming at Penn State and so it bears repeating here: “There needs to be better recognition by the University that we are growing our faculty and that the faculty is becoming more diversified. Professional development resources and experiences need to adapt to that diversity.”

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Staffing of Online Courses at Penn State

Senate Committee on Outreach: Informational Report

Online Programming Through the World Campus

- ▶ 43 online programs;
- ▶ Just under 32,000 enrollments for the current academic year;
- ▶ 71% are undergraduate students; and,
- ▶ 29% are graduate students.



Major research questions...

- ▶ What process does the lead faculty member/department head follow when it comes to staffing online courses?
- ▶ What steps are taken to integrate new online instructors to the Penn State environment when those instructors are hired from outside the institution?
- ▶ How are online instructors evaluated?

The Study....

Phase I: Utilized a web-based survey that was administered to 76 lead faculty/department heads in July 2009.

Yielded 32 completed questionnaires for a response rate of 42%, representing 14 Colleges within PSU.

Phase II: 7 Field interviews with lead faculty/department heads, e-learning institute directors, and a World Campus representative conducted across Summer/Fall 2009.

Summary of Findings

- ▶ 83% responsible for staffing 1–25 online courses; 7% for staffing 26–50 online courses; and 10% for staffing over 50 online courses.
- ▶ 27% reported that the same faculty who teach residential courses teach online courses.
- ▶ 7% said that additional instructors are hired to teach online.
- ▶ Almost two-thirds (63%) reported that their unit uses a combination of regular faculty and instructors hired specifically to teach online.

Continued.....with only those respondents who said that they hire additional instructors

What is the hiring process for these instructors?

- 44% – the department head makes these decisions on his/her own
- Other – search committee of residential faculty; search committee of residential AND online instructors
- “Is this process the same as that used for hiring residential faculty?”
 - 33% – yes
 - 66% – no

“Regardless of the gross revenue sharing model, academic units/partners are responsible for setting the curriculum and for selecting course authors and instructors.”

How are online instructors evaluated?

- ▶ Review of SRTes - 72%
- ▶ End-of-course evaluations - 83%
- ▶ Peer review of online teaching - 39%
- ▶ Periodic review of teaching portfolios - 39%

Strategies used to integrate online instructors into the PSU Unit...

- ▶ All report supplying instructors with example syllabi;
- ▶ 89% provide introductions to current faculty members;
- ▶ 72% include the individual in communications to faculty; and,
- ▶ Other: ensure the individual is included in PSU communications to faculty; provide a job description to the individual; and help the instructor to become acquainted with the overall goals, etc. of the institution as a whole.

Provision of professional development opportunities for online instructors...

- ▶ Most report that they provide instructional assistance related to designing and/or teaching online courses and to technology;
- ▶ A little over half say that they provide a new faculty orientation session for online instructors; and,
- ▶ About one-third provide travel funds for conferences and training for these instructors.

Qualitative Findings: Some Best Practices

- ▶ Utilize traditional face-to-face faculty as lead instructor, but hire additional instructors to handle grading and daily course interactions
- ▶ Draw new faculty from alumni pool ("star" students who have taken the course before and demonstrated strong communication skills)
- ▶ Assign a "course manager" to oversee all online courses: train new instructors, conduct quality checks, troubleshoot, etc.
- ▶ Utilize professional development programming offered by the World Campus, such as "OL 2000"
- ▶ Keep online course section in sync with residential section by having the same instructor teach both at the same time
- ▶ Provide instructors with a "master" copy of the online course that s/he can customize and personalize
- ▶ Don't burn out faculty - no more than 20% overload, even if the individual's "day job" is outside of Penn State
- ▶ Formalize a peer review process for online courses and require all resident faculty to conduct peer reviews of online teaching

Challenges

- ▶ Concern about the SRTE question bank – wording and question focus not always appropriate to address unique aspects of online teaching and learning
- ▶ Hard to predict future growth and staffing needs
- ▶ Desire to avoid overload teaching situations by having online teaching become part of the regular, established teaching load
- ▶ Lack of recognition that our faculty is becoming more diversified –
“Professional development resources and experiences need to adapt to that diversity.”

Questions?

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