

Inter-Institutional Faculty Senate

Report by IFS Past President Ayers to
the State Board of Higher Education
Friday July 10, 2009

For the record, my name is Lee Ayers. I am an Associate Professor of Criminology & Criminal Justice at Southern Oregon University and I have the privilege of being the past President of IFS for 2008. I am here today filling in for Peter Gilkey, the current President of the Inter-institutional Faculty Senate 2009, as he is away performing research duties this summer. President Gilkey has set his own path for delivering IFS updates and in keeping with his “well received” approach I have prepared the following for the Board.

IFS did hold its regular quarterly meeting in June at the Oregon Health Science University campus. Believe it or not, there were other topics besides the budget! “...it’s the hottest, sexiest, most controversial issue in American higher education!” so what is Beverly Bower, Department of Educational Leadership, Florida State University talking about? Distance education. Colleges and universities are experiencing the dramatic effect of technology. Some refer to this time period as the biggest challenge to higher education. Yes, evening topping the budget woes for some campuses.

What is distance education? One might take the United States Supreme Court approach and say, “I know it when I see it.” But do we really? Separation of the student and the teacher is a fundamental characteristic of distance education; however, when basic questions were raised at the IFS June meeting most Senator’s could not respond to the practices of their own campus. For over a decade, distance education demand and offerings have been increasing. Through the development and delivery of distance education courses faculty roles are being redefine. For some faculty it is pushing their limits of pedagogy and technology skills. For others, it offers opportunity and growth in an emerging area.

“Is online education now a part of the mainstream of higher education?”

This question was the first and most fundamental one examined by the Sloan Consortium report (2005) on the state of online education in higher education. The answer the report gave was a clear “yes.” The report indicated that thousands of courses are being offered, and there are a large number of programs available online. The report *Growing by Degrees*, is available online at www.sloan-c.org/resources/growing_by_degrees.pdf. The Sloan Consortium report confirms the impact of online education. According to this report, 40% - 60% of schools with traditional courses also offer online courses and programs. One indication that online courses are a regular activity of institutions of high education is the role of core

faculty in online instruction. This is a switch from adjuncts often being recruited to develop and offer distance education courses.

Another important indicator of the growth of online education is the importance of the instructional approach to the long-term strategy of the institution. In 2005, 56% of the institutions indicated that online instruction was critical to their long-term plans, up from 49% in 2003. The only institutions that did not see online instruction as part of their long-term strategies were the smallest, nonprofit colleges. Enrollments in the online courses have increased to about 2.4 million from 2 million in 2003. Growth has been continuous, and has often exceeded the expectations of organizational planners.

The belief that online instruction takes more effort continues to be strong. Many leaders report that they felt that it takes more effort to teach online, that it is harder for students, and that it is more difficult to evaluate the quality of online courses. In spite of the belief that online education is more difficult, this approach is perceived favorably by most who responded to the Sloan survey. Just a note, the emerging literature about the effort required for online teaching and learning indicates that effective online education is not necessarily more time-consuming and difficult. It seems that there is a discrepancy between perception and fact or myth and reality. The keys to effective online education most noted in the literature are proper course design and appropriate instructional strategies. In spite of the phenomenal growth of distance education, as a system, the provided report indicates that the Oregon University System has some work to do to unify the system, campus, and faculty approach to distance education.

Respectfully submitted-

Lee Ellen Ayers

Past President (2008) Inter-Institutional Faculty Senate