Online Learning Campus Fellows[1]: Faculty Climate Report
UW Tacoma 2012-2013

The Online Learning Campus Fellows (OLCF) group was charged with beginning a conversation on the UW Tacoma campus that centers on issues related to the development, delivery, support, and evaluation of curriculum that leverages online tools[2]. This group approached online learning as an emergent topic within the academy that will increasingly demand local (UW Tacoma) policies to ensure that 1) online and/or hybrid instruction occurs with the same commitment to excellence that fully face-to-face instruction enjoys, 2) students are given the same opportunities to succeed in an online environment as they are given in a face-to-face environment, 3) faculty are adequately supported in their efforts to experiment with and develop online curriculum, 4) intellectual property (course material generated by faculty in the online environment) is recognized and protected. It is notable that this report is being written at a time on the UW Tacoma campus when nascent efforts to develop and deliver online curriculum have begun to gain purchase. There are, for instance, approximately twice the number of fully online courses being offered in the autumn 2013 (12 courses) and winter 2014 (16 courses) quarters than were offered during the autumn 2012 and winter 2013 quarters.[3] Colleen Carmean, of the Academic Technologies office, reports that these courses are now reaching approximately 10% of the total UW Tacoma student population. This is, in short, an excellent time to begin conceiving the policies and guidelines that will shape the future of the rapidly expanding online curriculum on the UW Tacoma campus.

To initiate a conversation about campus policy related to online learning, the OLCF collected data from faculty and students at UW Tacoma which were designed to gauge the 'campus climate' surrounding online learning efforts. In particular, the OLCF sought to broadly understand the motivations, apprehensions, and level of interest of faculty and students to participate (or not) in the online learning environment. Data were collected using surveys that were distributed to faculty and students during the

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[1] The Online Learning Campus Fellows is a group convened by the UW Tacoma Faculty Assembly. Members included Matthew Kelley (Urban Studies faculty), Jennifer Quinn (IAS faculty), Jeff Cohen (Social Work faculty), and Ruth Vanderpool (IAS faculty).

[2] Online tools, for the purposes of this report, include the hardware and software that are used to support fully online course delivery as well as hybrid online/face-to-face course delivery. Such tools typically include a variety of software applications such as message boards, drop boxes, and streaming video and require computing hardware such as computers, laptops, and Internet connections.

[3] The Fellows group does not have data related to the total number of hybrid course offerings at UW Tacoma. Were such data to exist it would most likely underrepresent hybrid courses that are not officially designated as such.

spring 2013 quarter. Prior to writing and distributing the survey instrument, informal and unstructured meetings were held with faculty to discuss online learning at UW Tacoma. These meetings were used, in part, to inform the questions that were included on the survey instruments. Existing debates within secondary sources such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*, and scholarly research from education-related fields were also exceedingly relevant to the design of the survey questions. Because the topic of online learning is a relatively recent addition to academia and because the topic is, we would argue, plagued by ambiguity, the majority of the questions that were included in the surveys sought a qualitative response from the participant. Results are, therefore, presented thematically – building, in essence, a semi-coherent map of the UW Tacoma campus climate surrounding online learning.

Before summarizing results from the OLCF work, two caveats are necessary. First, though there was reasonably strong faculty participation (n=60), participation among the student population was somewhat weaker (n=61). Following a preliminary analysis of both sets of data, it also became clear that though faculty participation was not restricted solely to those faculty who have had experience, or who have interest to deliver online content, the student sample was heavily biased toward students who have participated in at least one fully online course. The OLCF elected, therefore, to focus analysis on faculty data and to return to the student data at a later date. It is expected that a new student survey will be written, and that survey distribution will require a more focused effort to include a representative sample of the student population. The summary of results that follows, therefore, is a summary of UW Tacoma faculty responses to the OLCF survey.

Key characteristics of faculty sample (n=60):

- 5% do not use a learning management system in their courses.

- 40% have used Catalyst, 62% have used Canvas, and 33% have used Blackboard in their courses.

- 27% have <u>developed and taught</u> at least one fully online course.

- 7% have taught at least one fully online course that <u>was developed by someone else</u>.

- 37% have taught at least one <u>hybrid</u> course in which face-to-face meetings were replaced by online material.

- 57% have used online tools and material <u>outside of class</u> to augment face-to-face class meetings.

- 70% have used online material in face-to-face meetings to augment instruction.

- 7% use no technology to augment instruction.

- 72% would consider teaching fully online at UW Tacoma.

- 52% feel that fully online courses can be equivalent (in terms of quality) to face-to-face courses.

- 80% approve of UW Tacoma's efforts to increase its online course offerings.

- 42% approve of the process UW Tacoma is using to increase its online course offerings.

- 37% approve of fully online majors being offered at UW Tacoma.

Key themes from short/long response survey data:

- Faculty appear to be evenly split between those who support and those who do not support the expansion of online learning at UW Tacoma.

- Faculty also appear to be evenly split between those who think that UW Tacoma's commitment to provide excellence in education can be preserved in an online environment and those who disagree with this statement.

- In general, it is unclear to the faculty the rationale for expanding online learning at UW Tacoma – even among those who support the expansion. The lack of clarity is crystalizing skepticism about financial motivations to expand online curriculum while sacrificing commitments to excellence in education.

- There is considerable confusion regarding the methods/processes that are employed at UW Tacoma to propose, develop, and teach online courses.

- Faculty expressed more support for using online learning in lower division courses than in upper division courses.

- The topic of intellectual property is central to the conversation about online learning at UW Tacoma. By a two-to-one ratio faculty responded that they expect to retain the rights to course content that they create and place into an online course.

- As online learning is expanded at UW Tacoma, faculty expect that there will be an equivalent expansion of resources dedicated to supporting online learning. Resources most commonly mentioned were financial, pedagogical, and technical support for course developers and instructors.

- When asked to reflect on the equivalence of online and face-to-face courses, the topic of interaction among students as well as interaction between students and faculty was prevalent among nearly all respondents.

- o Faculty frequently stated that students in the online environment are likely to suffer from a lack of socialization – the inability to model other students' behavior, no opportunities to practice professional behavior, and no opportunities to practice nonverbal communication (body language).
  - o Faculty also suggested that interaction in an online environment can be successful, but that course developers and instructors must be adequately trained and prepared to encourage and motivate this interaction.

- To preserve excellence in teaching, the assessment of online curriculum likely requires assessment mechanisms that differ from face-to-face curriculum.

- Faculty generally believe that online curricula increase access to undergraduates at UW Tacoma, but there is a desire for the campus to collect data to determine if this is actually the case.

Motivations for teaching in an online environment, apprehensions about online learning, and reasons that faculty have chosen to stay offline.

Motivations
Short and long response data for those faculty who have taught or who are interested to teach in an online environment were analyzed and key themes were extracted. The following themes represent the more prominent reasons that faculty at UW Tacoma have chosen or would choose to teach online courses.

- **Flexibility**
  Teaching online provides instructors and students with greater scheduling flexibility.

- **Access**
  Online curriculum is accessible to students who could not otherwise participate in higher education.

- **General technological interest**
  Several faculty noted that teaching in the online environment is interesting and satisfying because they are technologically inclined.

- **Improving pedagogical practices**
  A small but notable number of faculty suggested that they teach online because they value the ways that online pedagogy can be used in their courses.

Apprehensions
Short and long response data for those faculty who have taught or who are interested to teach in an online environment were analyzed and key themes were extracted. The following themes represent the more prominent apprehensions that faculty at UW Tacoma have about online learning.

- **Interactions**
  Respondents were generally concerned that interactions in the online environment are constrained by technology and, because interactions are constrained, that courses are not as effective.

- **Online curriculum is not equivalent to face-to-face curriculum**

- **Online teaching is more time consuming**
  Among those who have taught and those who might teach online, there is recognition that online teaching demands more time from faculty than face-to-face teaching.

- **There is not enough pedagogical support**
  Faculty noted the existence of the recently established resource center, but see a need for additional pedagogical support.

- **There is not enough technical support**
  Technical support refers both to support for faculty who teach online as well as to support for students who participate in online courses. Faculty noted that much time is spent providing technical support to students because there are not adequate technical support channels on campus.

- **Outcomes of online courses are unclear**
  Faculty expressed concern that students might not leave an online course with the same skillset that they would acquire in a face-to-face course.

- **Motivation of students in online courses is not clear**
  Faculty questioned whether students enrolled in online courses might not be adequately prepared to complete courses that demand high levels of self-motivation.

- **Online learning may not be appropriate for 'my discipline'**
  Though online learning, in general, might be OK; it is only appropriate in specific disciplines.

- **Intellectual property**
  There is uncertainty about the ownership of course content once it has been uploaded to Canvas or Catalyst.

- **Online learning is market driven**
  There is concern that market forces, and not a commitment to excellence in higher education, is driving the expansion of online learning.

- **Academic dishonesty and cheating**
  Faculty expressed concerns about the inability to control for cheating in an online environment.

Reasons for staying offline

Short and long response data for those faculty who are uninterested to teach in an online environment were analyzed and key themes were extracted. The following themes represent the more prominent reasons that faculty at UW Tacoma have avoided teaching online.

- **Interactions**
  Respondents were generally concerned that interactions in the online environment are constrained by technology and, because interactions are constrained, that courses are not as effective.

- **Online learning may not be appropriate for 'my discipline'**
  Though online learning, in general, might be OK; it is only appropriate in specific disciplines.

- **Online learning is market driven**
  There is concern that market forces, and not a commitment to excellence in higher education, is driving the expansion of online learning.

- **Aversion to technology**
  Some faculty have opted out of online learning because they are not comfortable with the technological tools that are required to teach online.

Moving the discussion forward at UW Tacoma: campus policy priorities

Based on the results of research summarized above, the OLCF has identified several 'policy priorities' for the campus to consider as it moves forward with the expansion of online learning initiatives. The OLCF also emphasizes the near universal call among faculty for open and transparent activities related to online learning at UW Tacoma.

- **Guiding principles and rationale for expanding online curriculum at UW Tacoma**
  As the online curriculum grows, it is increasingly necessary to articulate a rationale and guiding principles for online learning at UW Tacoma. OLCF research suggests that many faculty apprehensions about online learning stem from a lack of information about this rationale.

- **Intellectual property**
  Policy is needed to protect faculty who produce content for online delivery.

- **Technology support infrastructure**
  Campus technological infrastructure – from support to lab space – should be expanded in conjunction with the expansion of the online curriculum.

- **Pedagogical support infrastructure**
  Resources to support and train faculty to develop and teach in the online environment should be expanded in conjunction with the expansion of the online curriculum.

- **Online course sizes**
  Policy is needed to articulate UW Tacoma's expectation for online course sizes. Faculty expressed concern that online course sections may, in the future, be expanded beyond current face-to-face course caps.

- **Faculty support**
  Faculty who teach online report that they commit more time to teaching than they would in face-to-face courses. Additional financial resources may be required to ensure that online courses meet the same expectations of excellence in teaching as the face-to-face curriculum.

- **Online course assessment**
  Student-survey style assessment methods may not be adequate to gauge the effectiveness of online curriculum. There is an opportunity to re-think online course assessment at UW Tacoma.