Report to Faculty Senate
From
Joint Committee on Online and Distance Learning
May 7, 2015

Over the past year, the Joint Committee on Online and Distance Learning continued to focus on improving Sakai, our LMS which is used by thousands of students and faculty and supporting faculty who teach blended and online courses.

SAKAI
1) The committee asked the Sakai team to make it possible for faculty to upload grades directly from Sakai to eCampus. We asked that the process be controlled by the faculty, i.e. not automatic, and that there be an easy way for faculty to adjust grades before they are submitted. The Sakai team created a method whereby faculty can choose to download their grades to an Excel spreadsheet, make any changes necessary, and then upload them to eCampus. Faculty who keep their grades in Excel can also use this method. Faculty can upload midterm grades using this method as well. Instructions are here: web.uri.edu/faculty/exporting-grades-from-sakai-to-ecampus

2) Much of the year was devoted to writing an RFP to hire a vendor to host and support Sakai for URI and then reviewing the proposals that came in. Two companies responded, Asahi.net and Longsight. Both were invited to campus to make presentations. The committee is meeting on April 15th to make a final recommendation to state purchasing.

Faculty Support
1) In response to NEASC's standard 6 in its Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Learning, which requires that the "faculty responsible for delivering online learning…are appropriately qualified and effectively supported," the Joint Committee on Online and Distance Learning passed the attached recommendation. The policy is designed to ensure that all faculty assigned to teach online courses are qualified to do so either through training or review of their existing course using Quality Matters peer review process.

2) The Office of Online Education has revised its training program. It now offers a self-paced Sakai course that takes less than an hour to complete, and two online pedagogy courses. Online Pedagogy 1, which focuses on best practices teaching online, is offered as a three-week asynchronous online course enabling faculty to experience the role of an online student. Online Pedagogy 2, which focuses on course design, is a self-paced course that takes anywhere from 4 to 12 hours to complete. The office also designed and made available a self-paced course on Universal Design and a self-paced orientation to online learning for students that faculty can incorporate into their courses. Links to faculty professional development courses can be found here: http://web.uri.edu/teachingonline/professional-development/

3) The Office for Online Education also paid for 4 faculty to be certified as Quality Matters peer reviewers so they can review courses for instructors who would like feedback on how well their course meets national best practices standards. The Teaching Online website also contains a link http://web.uri.edu/teachingonline/quality-matters/ to a Quality Matters self-check so faculty can examine their own courses for excellence in course design and the ability to meet the standards of a QM peer review.

Recommendation re Faculty Qualifications for Teaching Online Courses
Joint Committee on Online and Distance Learning

NEASC's *Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning)[1]* outline the standards by which institutions that offer distance learning will be evaluated. These standards are also now part of the requirements of the State Authorization Reciprocal Agreement designed to ease the burden of serving students who do not live in Rhode Island. These guidelines apply to institutions offering online courses as well as online degree programs.

Standard 6 applies to faculty training and preparation.

> *Faculty responsible for delivering the on-line learning curricula and evaluating the students' success in achieving the on-line learning goals are appropriately qualified and effectively supported.*
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> *Examples of evidence:*
> *a. On-line learning faculties are carefully selected, appropriately trained, frequently evaluated, and are marked by an acceptable level of turnover.*
> *b. The institution's training program for on-line learning faculty is periodic, incorporates tested good practices in on-line learning pedagogy, and ensures competency with the range of software products used by the institution.*
> *c. Faculty are proficient and effectively supported in using the course management system.* (P. 4)

After lengthy discussions, the Joint Committee on Online and Distance Education recommends the implementation of an online teaching policy centered on faculty qualification, i.e. one that ensures all faculty who teach online are appropriately trained or experienced.

The policy below is designed to ensure that all faculty assigned to teach online courses are "qualified" to do so.

"Qualified" means that the faculty has had the appropriate training and/or experience to teach online. This includes any one of the following:

- Completion of URI's Online Teaching Fellows (pre fall 2013)
- Completion of URI's Online Teaching Competency Courses
- Certificate of training in online teaching from a national organization such as Sloan-C or the University of Wisconsin's Professional Certificate in Online Education, and demonstrated competency in URI's learning management system (e.g. completion of the Basic Sakai Training Course (http://web.uri.edu/teachingonline/sakai-training/)*.*
- Certificate of training in online teaching from another regionally accredited higher education institution, and demonstrated competency in URI's learning management system (e.g. completion of the Basic Sakai Training Course)

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[1]https://cihe.neasc.org//sites/cihe.neasc.org/downloads/POLICIES/Pp90_Guidelines_for_the_Evaluation_of_Distance_Education__On-line_Learning_.pdf

- Faculty can demonstrate "experience" by submitting one of their courses to the Office of Online Education where it will be put through an in house Quality Matters peer review https://www.qualitymatters.org//

Faculty, including per-course faculty, who are deemed "qualified" through these means, can be assigned to teach any online course. Faculty need to be re-qualified every five years through any of the above methods.

The committee understands that the implementation of this qualification process will take time, therefore an 18-month grace period, beginning January 2015 and ending August 2016, is recommended. Faculty who have not yet been qualified may still teach online courses during this grace period while they go through one of the qualification processes mentioned above. After August 2016, however, faculty who have not received qualification cannot be assigned an online course until they receive it. The committee feels that 18-months is a generous allowance considering completion of the Online Teaching Fellows Program, both parts 1 and 2, takes less than 3 months.

Each year, the Joint Committee on Online and Distance Education will review the methods of ensuring that faculty are "qualified" and will add or remove methods as appropriate. These methods will be posted on the Online Office website.

The Office of Online Education will maintain a list of all faculty who are "qualified" on its website and work with enrollment services to add such a designation to People Soft.

Rationale:
As URI continues to mature its online courses and expand to offering certificates and programs, it is increasingly important to ensure that faculty have the training and pedagogical skills to teach online. Most current faculty have not had experiences as a student in a significant number of online courses, nor have they had training in best practices in teaching online. Training or demonstrated experience through the peer review process will help ensure that faculty understand and use best practices in teaching online. This requirement also puts URI in step with the practices of Colleges and Universities that have built high quality, well-recognized online programs such as the Southern New Hampshire, University of Central Florida, University of Maryland University College, and Penn State World Campus.