Proposed pilot for developing summer online courses

Initiative: The Office of Academic Affairs proposes expanding the opportunities for innovation in course design by encouraging a pilot project that would allow our faculty the opportunity to develop a small number of online course offerings during our summer session.

Background: The background for this initiative is rooted in several places:

(1) Some faculty members have expressed interest in developing online courses;
(2) Some students have demonstrated interest in taking online courses during the summer (i.e., they currently take online summer courses, just not from us);
(3) There is a possibility of partnering with consortia schools so that their students might enroll in our summer courses and vice versa (this likely would be further down the road); and
(4) Experimenting with this type of innovation may help inform and improve how we teach our on-campus courses and use technology to improve student learning and student success.

Details: Our goal is to facilitate faculty developing **two to four online courses** as part of the pilot program. Our support for faculty would be mainly in the form of grant (PDF) money -- similar to the funds we've allocated for innovations in blended learning and community engagement. We would also work with ITS to create faculty development and training opportunities.

The pilot could begin as soon as Summer 2014, provided sufficient faculty interest. We would hope to offer no fewer than two and no more than four courses in its first iteration. Given that faculty and ITS might need the full month of June to work on finalizing courses, the courses could be offered in July 2014 (instead of the usual June summer session) if the faculty member prefers.

Rationale:

A number of faculty members have expressed interest in developing and piloting online courses. Typically (though not always) these are faculty members who've been using technology heavily in their classes, and are eager to take the class further in terms of technology. Other faculty who have expressed interest are faculty members whose fieldwork takes them away from campus or the Quad Cities during the summer; they can see the appeal of teaching a course that is not constrained by physical presence in the same location. From these faculty members' perspective, taking their existing course online is a logical possibility so that they can experiment with and use the technology most appropriate for their classes.

From the perspective of the Office of Academic Affairs, piloting a select number of online courses is something we endorse because it has the potential to address two things we see happening. First, our summer school enrollments have been declining in recent years, largely due to the fact that our students are necessarily engaged in other pursuits, such as working jobs (often with irregular hours) and/or taking paid and unpaid internships. Offering online courses might help students enroll in summer courses offered at Augustana. Second, while faculty will be developing these courses primarily to meet our own students' needs, we can envision the possibility of eventually opening up enrollment to students at our consortium schools (while continuing to cap the courses at 20 or below). Sharing resources in this way might open up more opportunities for our students --and the possibility of courses being more likely to

"make" for our own faculty.[1] For these reasons, "offsetting" some of the start-up costs for faculty developing a few of these courses makes sense, so that we can see if there is any potential here.

At the same time, we understand that many have misgivings about online learning and its place at a residential liberal arts college.

For this reason, we want to ensure that these courses will be as **congruent as possible with our liberal arts mission**. Specifically, these courses would be:

- **Small:** Capped at no more than 20 students, with the possibility of smaller classes depending on course goals and the pedagogical needs of the instructor
- **Highly interactive:** Ample opportunities for students to interact with the professor and with each other
- Designed to meet college-wide and departmental learning outcomes
- **Assessed** during their first and second iterations.

We have included the process for proposal submission and the full list of criteria for submitting possible courses below (Appendix 1).

Summer seems like a good idea for a pilot for several reasons – (1) As a pilot project, it won't have much impact on our traditional curriculum; (2) Summer courses present challenges for students who are working or interning and who can't meet during "traditional" class hours or whose schedules are erratic week to week; and (3) Should the consortium enrollment idea ever take off, this is the one place where our calendars would align.

Appendix 1: Process for Approval and Criteria for Evaluation

Step 1: Faculty interested in offering courses for the Summer 2014 pilot[2] are asked to submit an expression of interest by Dec. 2nd, with **full proposals due by Dec. 23rd**, 2013 using the criteria below. The Deans group, working with ITS, will do a "first pass" to determine if the course: (1) is likely to have sufficient student enrollment, given past or projected enrollment information; (2) has the potential to meet the level of interaction expected; and (3) is able to be reasonably offered given existing technology/instructional tools.

Step 2: Once the courses have passed this initial vetting, we will send them on to EPC and then Senate to be evaluated using the criteria below. The courses would need to be approved **through EPC by February 4th, 2013** in order to give instructors sufficient time to prepare their courses. If the pilot course is a completely new course, obviously we defer to EPC to utilize its usual criteria in addition to the online-specific criteria elaborated here. Faculty whose courses have been approved for the pilot will receive funding ($4000 for course development: $2000 initially and $2000 upon offering and assessment) from the Academic Affairs.

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[1] As some of you know, we belong to a consortium of schools like ours (MALLA) and a little while back the deans at those schools started talking about the possibility of allowing consortium school students to enroll in each other's online summer courses (totally hypothetical, since at that point no one in the consortium was offering anything online). But it's something that's being done in other consortia (such as Associated Colleges of the Midwest and Associated Colleges of the South… both of which are comprised of very traditional liberal arts schools like Davidson, Rhodes, Grinnell, Beloit, Carleton, etc.). Luther offered several online courses this past summer: Computer Science, Nutrition, Accounting, and a general education capstone course.

[2] If a faculty member wishes to pilot a course, but knows s/he won't be able to develop it for Summer 2014, the faculty member should still submit the course with an anticipated offer date.

Criteria[3]:

1. Appropriateness of course to online technology: What about this course lends itself readily to teaching and learning in an online platform? Which technologies might be most appropriate to deliver this course?

> Desired standard: Instructor clearly identifies the role the online environment will play in the student's experience in the course; course goals are well served by taking the course into an online format.

2. Interaction and collaboration: What are the expectations for student participation, interaction, and collaboration in this course? How will these be assessed and evaluated? How and how often will students receive feedback on their work from the professor? Will the course be largely asynchronous, synchronous, or mixed?

> Desired standard: Course offers ample opportunities for interaction and communication student-to-student, student-to-faculty, and faculty-to-student. Regular feedback about student performance is provided in a timely manner throughout the course.

3. Please discuss how the course meets college wide and department-specific learning outcomes. How will these outcomes be assessed in the course? Will you have data comparing your online version of the course with its traditional offering?

> Desired standard: Learning objectives, instructional and assessment activities are closely aligned.

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[3] To develop these criteria, the rubric for online instruction found here was consulted: http://www.csuchico.edu/roi/