

Senate Online Review Committee

By Brian Peterson, Interim Chair of the Online Review Committee

February 28, 2013

The Online Review Committee met today with Dean Elam to discuss all of the recent developments.

She said that FIU was deeply committed to offering online degree programs in Spanish and Portuguese. She thinks that FIU will attract more students with courses in those languages than if we tried to teach the students English and then a whole degree program.

We shall see. I think that it might be better to team up with an online company that teaches the students English and then we could teach them business or whatever.

It seems ridiculous to translate course materials into Spanish and Portuguese when we hear that some advanced science courses in Latin American universities already use books in English.

*

Dean Elam confirmed that in 2011 FIU dropped the coaches from our contract with Academic Partnerships and then started a new contract for coaches with another company owned by Randy Best. This information was not shared with the Online Review Committee when the change occurred.

As far as I am concerned, we were misled into thinking that the coaches had been dropped entirely and that all that was left with Randy Best was recruitment. I regard that as deceitful behavior on the part of the FIU administration.

*

I asked about whether political pressure was applied to get FIU to contract with Academic Partnerships for the Corporate MBA. Dean Elam said that such decisions were made at a higher level.

MER says that political pressure was obviously a factor. Jeb Bush has great influence with Republicans in the Florida Legislature. If he let it be

known that FIU was not cooperative with public-private partnerships, this could hurt FIU's funding.

Furthermore, Jeb's political career is not yet necessarily over. He could be able to help FIU in the future if we are friendly to him now.

Academic Partnerships could keep coming back for more and more of the FIU budget. Political pressure will exist until we have the courage to say no.

*

FIU currently has 700 students enrolled in our first five MOOCs. One of them lives in Romania, but this student is planning to move to Miami. Most of the students in our MOOCs live in South Florida.

FIU is giving serious consideration to offering one Core Curriculum course as a MOOC which can then be turned into a for-credit course upon taking an examination and paying FIU for the testing and possibly also for giving credit for the course.

*

Elam said that FIU Online has not gathered statistics concerning the differences in performance of students in online and classroom courses because almost no students at FIU are doing fully online degrees.

She said that they did compare student performance on an exit exam in Business in terms of the percentage of classes taken online, but that no big differences emerged.

MER says that we could give students pretests and post-tests and control for variables and see how different groups of students perform in online and classroom courses.

However, if FIU Online does not wish to do this, we can instead just assume that FIU students fit national norms.

This means that low-income, low-scoring students do very poorly in online courses. Such students need at least some classroom component in their courses.

That means that FIU should be doing far more hybrid courses.

Dean Elam said that FIU has not emphasized hybrid courses because these did not carry with them the supplementary fees that online courses have.

This year the supplementary fee for online is \$174 per three-credit course – which will fall to \$160 next year.

FIU could run hybrid classes where students attend class for an average of 30 minutes per week, and this will qualify according to the state rules defining a fully-online course.

Such courses could have a half an hour of class each week or an hour every two weeks. Even that small amount of classroom interaction would probably greatly increase the pass rate of these courses.

Furthermore, FIU should also explore hybrid classes which meet for an hour a week and do not include the supplementary fee. Hybrid classes of any sort helps to eliminate shortages in classroom space and parking. And hybrid classes are associated with higher levels of student success in courses.

*

Next year, all new FIU faculty members will be required to take an eight-week course in how to teach classroom courses. This will be taught by the Center for the Advancement of Teaching.

Faculty members teaching online classes for the first time will also have to take a course in how to run such classes.

I am very happy that these new requirements will be in place. Ways should also be found to improve the teaching in both online and classroom courses of veteran FIU professors – although it would not be good simply to require all professors to take such courses.

*

FIU once considered hiring Colloquy to help us with online courses instead of Academic Partnerships. Colloquy is owned by the Washington Post company through their Kaplan. They charge about the same as Academic Partnerships.

<http://www.colloquy360.com/Who-we-are/Default.aspx>

*

Dean Elam agreed that tighter integration is needed between Academic Affairs and FIU Online. Online education needs to become a more central activity for FIU and not something off to the side.

*

FIU Online has hired an Associate Dean for Quality who will start later in 2013. They will pay more attention to evaluating the work of faculty members in online courses.

FIU is studying how other universities handle online operations and will seek to learn from the national experience.

*

MY SUGGESTIONS TO THE ONLINE REVIEW COMMITTEE FOR RESOLUTIONS WHICH WE COULD DISCUSS AT OUR NEXT MEETING

1. WE SHOULD OPPOSE THE FIU GLOBAL CONTRACT WITH ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS.

GIVING 45% OF REVENUES JUST FOR RECRUITING STUDENTS IS TOO MUCH.

20% MIGHT BE REASONABLE.

ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS DID A POOR JOB RECRUITING STUDENTS FOR THE CORPORATE MBA.

*

2. FAR TOO MANY LOW-SCORING FIU STUDENTS ARE TAKING ONLINE CLASSES AND FAILING OR DROPPING OUT.

FIU SHOULD BE ADVISING LOW-SCORING STUDENTS WHO ARE YOUNGER THAN 21 NOT TO TAKE FULLY ONLINE COURSES.

WE SHOULD NOT ALLOW SUCH STUDENTS TO TAKE ONLINE CLASSES – AT LEAST NOT WITHOUT SPECIAL PERMISSION.

*

3. FIU IS MISSING THE BOAT BY NOT USING HYBRID CLASSES MORE.

SOME HYBRIDS COULD CARRY THE SUPPLEMENTARY FEE AND SOME COULD GET ALONG WITHOUT THIS.

LOW-SCORING STUDENTS ARE FAR BETTER OFF IN HYBRIDS THAN IN FULLY ONLINE COURSES.

FIU IS PAYING TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO ONLINE FEES AND NOT ENOUGH ATTENTION TO STUDENT SUCCESS.

THE FACULTY SENATE SHOULD URGE THE ADMINISTRATION TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF SCHEDULING FAR MORE HYBRID COURSES – ESPECIALLY HYBRID CLASSES IN COURSE BLOCKS WHERE THE COURSES THAT LARGE GROUPS OF STUDENTS NEED TO TAKE IN A GIVEN SEMESTER ARE SCHEDULED IN ADJOINING TIME BLOCKS.

*

4. FIU WILL PROBABLY MAKE A BIG MISTAKE BY OFFERING ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMS IN SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE.

WE SHOULD BE TEACHING LATIN AMERICAN STUDENTS TO SPEAK, READ AND WRITE ENGLISH AND THEN TO EARN THE BACCALAUREATE WITH COURSES IN ENGLISH.

WE SHOULD URGE THE ADMINISTRATION TO EXPLORE A PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE OPEN ENGLISH COMPANY WHICH IS A MIAMI-BASED FIRM WITH 50,000 STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH IN LATIN AMERICA.

THEY COULD TEACH THE STUDENTS ENGLISH, AND WE COULD PROVIDE THE REST OF THE BACCALAUREATE CURRICULUM