

Dealing Patiently with Potentially Adverse Policies

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Background about UNC-Chapel Hill:

UNC-Chapel Hill, founded in 1789, is the flagship of the 16 campuses in the UNC System (all four year public colleges in NC)

The College of Arts & Sciences (A&S) enrolls about 85% of all undergraduates

Two distance education programs are offered – Carolina Courses Online (CCO) and Self-paced Courses (SPC) – through the Friday Center

CCO offers regular academic courses from the campus on a semester basis totally asynchronous; these are lower level undergraduate courses

SPC offers regular academic courses from eight of the 16 UNC universities with the Friday Center as the administrator; these courses can be started at any time and the student works one-on-one with the instructor; most SPC courses are traditional correspondence but some are online; these also are lower level undergraduate courses

Neither CCO nor SPC offers a degree although all courses are creditable towards a degree

Background about the Policies:

Campus committee on DE for system was the beginning with the Director of the Friday Center and the Interim Dean of A&S as members

Interim Dean had an attitude towards DE and “shared” this with our Director

A Committee of department chairs was appointed by this Dean to look at online courses and make recommendations

We met with this Committee and cleared up many incorrect perceptions

We presented data showing that among the 3,000 plus baccalaureate grads in spring 2006, only 9 had taken more than 6 CCO courses and all of them took only 7 courses

Draft of policies was prepared by the Committee but no report was ever produced outlining why new policies were needed or what problems had prompted the Committee or policies

Hard to react when no rhyme nor reason given

Policies slowly worked through University bureaucracy

Our boss, Asso. Provost, and the University Registrar reacted negatively to the proposed policies but to no avail

College of A&S Admin Bd passed the policies with modest changes but with no announcement on campus

The policy:

No DE by first year undergrads; 6 online courses can be taken by undergrads toward their degree; SPC courses are not to be counted towards a degree (copy of policies attached)

Appearances can be deceiving; policies not as bad as it seemed

Exceptions to everything are permitted with approval of advisor; such approval was already standard practice

Our reaction:

Sought clarification of policies and our role

Worked with Asso Dean on how to use/implement the policies

We are not policeman – we communicate policies, nothing more

Made sure A&S advisors knew how policies were viewed because nothing was sent out by the Dean's Office

Reinforced at every opportunity that these are regular courses in these two programs chosen by the departments to be offered through us and taught by instructors selected and appointed by the departments

The effect:

Little to no effect on enrollments as best we can tell; our enrollments continue to grow

A&S continues to suggest our two programs when students have problems with their schedules

Whole thing might go away in five years; this is the view of the faculty now

Current budget problems may even force the issue now

The lesson:

Basic information is needed; never assume someone knows/understands

Working together constructively is better than becoming adversaries

Sometimes the appearance of control/change is all that is needed

Summary comments:

Faculty in A&S were surprised/embarrassed by the recent SACS review when some questions arose about instructors of DE courses whom the department chairs had approved but who were not known within the faculty of the department

Some faculty reacted negatively to our radio ads which said that all DE courses were taught by UNC faculty

The department chairs realized that they had not been paying attention to how DE worked even though they had been approving the courses taught and the instructors who taught them

Some "action" by A&S seemed needed to show that the faculty had control over online courses, but exceptions are permitted to the policies so that the affect on DE and the students is minimal

The Arts & Sciences Policies

Distance-Learning Courses via the Friday Center for Continuing Education

A new and revised policy governing the use of distance learning courses via the Friday Center for Continuing Education became effective July 1, 2008, for all new and transfer students admitted to the College of Arts and Sciences as degree-seeking students (both full-time and part-time) in Fall 2008. (The new regulations do not apply to coursework taken prior to matriculation.) The Friday Center for Continuing Education offers two kinds of distance-learning courses: Self-Paced Courses (Internet or print-based) and Carolina Courses Online (Internet). The following policies apply to courses offered via either distance-learning option:

- Courses offered in this modality follow established University policy. Each online course must have appropriate methods for assignments, grading, examinations, and course evaluations appropriate to online instruction while at the same time keeping the course equivalent to that taught in the traditional format. The number of assignments may vary, as may their value.
- No more than six online courses or 18 credit hours (all of which must be designated UNC–Chapel Hill) can be counted toward a degree in the College of Arts and Sciences. Online courses required for a degree are not included in this total.
- First-year students may not take online courses in other than exceptional circumstances and must secure the permission of their academic dean in advance of enrolling in such courses.
- No more than two online courses in any one department or curriculum may count toward a major, minor, or degree in the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Self-paced courses cannot be counted towards a degree in the College of Arts and Sciences in other than exceptional circumstances. Students must secure the permission of their academic dean in advance of enrolling in such courses.