

Plans to reorganize faculty in-load arrangements

Recently, I had an opportunity to discuss the 2009-2010 schedule with my Associate Dean and College Administrative Assistant. As a part of that discussion, we looked at plans to reorganize faculty in-load arrangements by combining low enrollment on-campus classes (less than 10 students) with an online sections in that term.

While I personally am not opposed to the concept, I feel that it is inappropriate for the administration to make such decisions without some input from those that are affected - i.e. the faculty.

The issue is far more extensive than just rearranging assignments. Of course we all acknowledge that our university is experiencing some very unusual economic issues. We can trace our history and point fingers at both past and current administrations - who are the responsible party in university finances - but that would accomplish little other than venting some frustrations.

During the past 80 years of this university, how many times have classes, particularly upper division ones been held with less than 10 students? We can scan past records and we will find that this is a characteristic of EOU and any other small university. We sell ourselves in part on the fact that we have "small classes", yet we now are being asked to ignore that important characteristic and create larger classes so that we are more cost effective. When did cost/benefit become the sole driving force of the university?

For those of you who have been here 20 or more years, you saw the birth of EOU's efforts to expand learning opportunities through distance learning. Initially, this was primarily an entrepreneurial venture for faculty interested in new teaching modalities and in earning additional income. Several EOU faculty have benefited greatly from this. As the distance program grew, several minors and majors became available, and now our student population taking distance and online classes exceeds that of the campus population. At the same time, many of our online classes are taught by adjunct faculty.

The main question I ask is whether it is appropriate for the administration to collapse enrollments together from on campus and online sections of a class perceived to have a low enrollment. As it now stands, a faculty member teaching an on campus class receives load for that class, while any online teaching is considered overload. How is it somehow OK to increase students' credit hour load within a class but call it equal? Why would any of us have been eager to increase our workloads by teaching online knowing that eventually we would have our supplemental pay reward cancelled?

I acknowledge as I did at the beginning that times are different. Our situation has changed - and while I usually embrace change as inevitable - something doesn't feel right about the way this change is being approached - without a shared opportunity for campus discussion.

EOU's current enrollment and its financial relationship situation should not come as a surprise. We have brought this upon ourselves. With each new additional option within a major, with each new extended residential campus, with each additional online offering, we have diluted our pool of candidates - because we haven't increased our students, only dispersed them among more options.

My only offering here is that I think before any of these proposed changes move forward that we have sufficient time as a faculty and a campus generally to discuss the short and long term implications for these shifts. The proposed 2009-10 schedule is due on February 15 - can't this be delayed to allow more discussion

- or better yet, can't we postpone this decision until the following academic year so that if they are implemented, those affected can have sufficient time to plan accordingly?

I know we won't have time to resolve this today, but I hope that we can schedule further discussions and eventually a logical and orderly plan that works for all of our faculty and university interests. If the senate is not willing to bring our concerns forward and discuss them and then challenge the administration (if necessary) about their proposed decisions, then we might as well not have a senate.