

“A Position Statement on Online Education and Technology-Enhanced Instruction”

forwarded by the

Faculty Advisory Council to the Illinois Board of Higher Education

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SUMMARY

The Faculty Advisory endorses online delivery as well as technology enhanced and delivered instruction and useful as appropriate learning experiences for students with three caveats. First, the determination of appropriateness for each course and program should be made by faculty with appropriate qualifications and experience to do so. Second, learning outcomes should be constantly and regularly monitored by recognized and accepted certification agencies and external entities and the results made public. Third, the degree awarded should reflect the type of instructional experience and learning environment with a different nomenclature used to designate degrees earned by taking more than 80 percent of coursework online.

STATEMENT

While still limited and not yet able to assess long-term effectiveness and results, research findings have found that online education and technology-enhanced and technology delivered instruction can be used successfully to provide instruction in many higher education disciplines. For some courses, these delivery modes can be as effective, in some cases even more effective, than traditional instructional methods such as faculty lectures to students in a classroom with accompanying discussion and other faculty-student interaction.

Education and instruction are not synonymous. Instruction is the single most important part of education, but it is not the only part.

- Education involves the development and application of skills that require personal interaction. These include, for example, the ability to think and analyze critically, to test and apply perceptions and conclusions, and then to communicate, defend, and discuss them to and with others.
- Education involves having a commitment to expand one's experiences and horizons that will require moving past one's comfort zone. Doing so, for example, should result in being open to and tolerant of new ideas, concepts, principles and approaches.
- Education involves some amount of time immersed in an academic environment where through independent study, directed study, and guidance from faculty scholars the student develops a mastery of subject matter and disciplines. Through frequent and continuing interaction with others of diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, economic and political backgrounds and persuasions, the student should become appreciative, understanding and tolerant of the diversity of those in an ever more different and global world. This can occur by the student's physical presence, preferably as fulltime residential students for at least some time, in the company of other students.
- Education involves development, enrichment and enhancement of the student's abilities to work effectively, productively and meaningfully in teams and with others who have diverse opinions, orientations, values, principles and goals in both their personal and work lives. For example, development of appropriate social graces and skills can be achieved only when interacting with others. In class interaction is important, but only if the student is then able to successfully apply it and function outside the classroom.

When course content and information is delivered online in some courses and disciplines, research findings have shown that students can and do master concepts, values and principles taught in many courses and apply them successfully. Determination of courses and programs for which online instruction is best suited must be made deliberately and selectively. Rigorous standards should be used to assess learning outcomes, short term and long term. At least until long term success is known and proven, external entities, such as widely recognized and respected accrediting agencies, should regularly and constantly monitor the program and the institution offering it. The results must be made known publicly to current and potential students and employers and to those charged with oversight of higher education, including the institution's trustees and the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

The awarding of traditional bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees should be limited to those academic institutions that provide a broad and comprehensive educational experience that offers

- a wide variety of instructional techniques and approaches, including a variety of delivery modes across the curriculum,
- regular and frequent personal interaction between the student and the instructor and other students,
- services and facilities that promote development of the whole person including, but not limited to, the intellect.

Institutions that require that a significant percentage (i.e., more than 20 percent) of courses be taken in residence should award B.A., B.S., M.A, M.S., Ed.D., Ph.D., and related degrees. The degree awarded to a student whose program of study was less comprehensive and broad cannot be considered comparable. Thus, a different nomenclature should be used to distinguish such programs. This distinction can then be considered by employers and others in identifying and considering qualified candidates for employment or promotion based on the knowledge and skills required for the position.