Resolution on Concerns with e-Learning as Presented in the Draft Strategic Plan
Approved by the UNC Faculty Assembly
January 18, 2013

Whereas, the UNC Faculty Assembly has serious concerns with the understanding of e-learning in the January 16, 2013, draft of the UNC Strategic Plan; and

Whereas, it is faculty who are responsible for curricular content and its delivery;

Therefore, Be It Resolved That the Faculty Assembly requests that the final version of the 2013-2018 UNC Strategic Plan explicitly address the concerns listed below.

1. Concerns about effectiveness and efficiency of e-learning:

   We are concerned that the strategic plan be well-grounded in the extent evidence and research on the effectiveness of e-learning practices and the cost-effectiveness of those practices, as compared to traditional instructional delivery modes.

   Although course learning outcomes must be consistent regardless of delivery mechanism, measures of that learning must be tailored to course structure and delivery mechanism. The use of appropriate measures for determining desired learning outcomes is crucial to successful assessment of e-learning courses. These measures should produce robust evidence for assessing learning outcomes in comparable institutional and discipline-specific settings, disaggregated by e-learning, traditional, and (where appropriate) hybrid (or 'blended') modes of instructional delivery.

   It is essential to evaluate the time and financial costs, to both students and the University, of alternative instructional delivery methods. Such evaluations must employ appropriate, institution- and discipline-specific measures for assessing the cost effectiveness of alternative delivery methods.

2. Concerns about instructor qualifications:

   The quality of e-learning opportunities is primarily a function of instructor skills. Expertise in the substantive intellectual content of course material is essential. Support for training and use of instructional technologies can also be important for successful delivery of e-learning opportunities.

   Appointment to e-learning teaching positions requires demonstrated discipline-specific expertise and a capacity for effective management of instructional technologies. This expertise and instructional capacity must be assessed by appropriate disciplinary faculty using appropriate departmental policies.

3. Concerns about appropriate target groups:

   There is an extensive literature demonstrating that success and completion rates for e-learning opportunities vary widely by the demographic characteristics of student populations. Extant studies also suggest that targeting e-learning opportunities to populations of students who have limited resources for pursuing other educational alternatives can maximize the potential usefulness of e-learning arrangements.

   We recommend that e-learning opportunities be targeted primarily to student populations with demonstrated likelihood of success in an e-learning environment, and especially those in resource-limited situations.

4. Concerns about infrastructure cost and support:

   Instructional and information technology is in very early stages of development. Rapid hardware and software obsolescence is the rule, not the exception. Institutional investment in these goods can be very risky. A thoughtful investment strategy should, wherever possible, maximize adaptability, compatibility, and serviceability.

   We recommend the development of investment policy that can leverage system-wide expertise and efficiencies in software deployment and development (e.g., utilizing open source programs where appropriate), and which promotes hardware and platform compatibility.