

February 17, 2009

TO: Brian Dean, Chair, Long Range Academic Planning Committee
FROM: Michael O'Loughlin, President, Faculty Senate
RE: Distance Education Policy

Dear Brian,

During the course of the discussion over the strategic plan last fall, one of the issues that arose was the present status and future of distance education on the University's campus. Presently, the capability to offer online courses has grown and the trend line for on line courses is upward.

It is also clear that some faculty are excited about these prospects, while others less so. Debate continues on the question as to whether or not on-line courses are equal to traditional, face to face classes at this University in their educational quality and experience.

Yet, an additional question revolves around the future character of the institution. At this juncture, Salisbury University's reputation rests on the traditional model, relatively small classes with full time faculty teaching intense, face to face courses. However, given online course options, over time, will more and more faculty take up this mode of education and incrementally seriously change the character of the educational experience for students as well as faculty? If so, is this desirable? Or, instead, if we wish to retain the traditional teaching character, should we legislate a limit to the number of on line courses? Are other parameters worthy of consideration?

In the light of this latter question, I give your committee the following charge:

Charge:

The Faculty Senate requests that the Long Range Academic Planning Committee takes up a number of related questions: (1) What is the present profile of the teaching modalities at Salisbury University between traditional face to face classes and on line courses being offered across the campus? How many on line courses are presently offered? What is the ratio of on line courses to traditional face to face courses? What has been the pace of growth of on line courses for the past five years? In what fields and departments do we presently have on line courses? (2) What has been student reactions to these on line courses, on balance? (3) Should the University embrace a rule to limit the number of on line courses offered? If so, what might be a reasonable limit? The Senate requests that the Committee give a preliminary report on these matters at the Faculty Senate

at its meeting of April 21, 2009 with a final report due by mid-semester, fall, 2009.

If I can be of further assistance on this issue let me know.

O'Loughlin