

SALISBURY STATE UNIVERSITY

FACULTY SENATE

Forum Position Statement on Distance Education
Passed by the Salisbury State University Forum May 1996

Endorsed by the Faculty Senate and accepted by the University administration
in 1997.

After broad and extensive deliberations we have come to conclude that
telecommunicated course work can be a beneficial enhancement of SSU
programs in the following contexts:

- (1) Certain professionally oriented course work designed specifically for
licensing certification or career-related purposes.
- (2) Specialized courses offered by other universities that cannot be offered by
SSU faculty and are not likely to be offered in the future by new SSU faculty.
- (3) Team teaching possibilities involving faculty from SSU and faculty from
another institution.
- (4) Occasional use for guest lectures.
- (5) International enrichment opportunities.

We do not believe however that distance education should be encouraged as
an alternative to traditional university life here nor should interactive
telecommunicated courses become common practice at SSU. In this we are in
substantial agreement with the recently formulated Proclamation of the
Maryland Higher Education Commission Student Advisory Council notably the
principle that distance education "should be reserved for enhancement of the
educational process not as a replacement mechanism for faculty and
community" and that "at no time should a student be limited to distance
education in his/her class selections."

The Forum position statement therefore articulates concerns and
recommends controls regarding the utilization of distance learning at SSU and
should not be construed as discouraging innovative technology both in the
classroom and out by faculty and students alike. We do believe however that
with reference to innovations in distance education -- specifically two-way
interactive telecommunications course work -- a number of interrelated

arguments compelling in the aggregate militate against an unqualified endorsement and adoption of distance education.

First questions of education quality and appeal should be considered:

- The interactive telecommunications medium and its extraneous concerns (greetings/goodbyes interaction with facilitators camera manipulation breakdowns the use of other interactive equipment evaluation of the medium) can represent up to a 15 loss in time engaged on subject matter.
- Russell's review of over two hundred comparative studies conducted over the past two decades reveals no statistically significant difference in objective measures of learning from one means of course delivery to another. No recent technological innovations including interactive telecommunications have improved upon results achieved by traditional classroom instruction or even by correspondence courses.
- University students both before and after experimental involvement with these new technologies repeatedly and consistently express their preference for the traditional live classroom experience.

Second issues of cost weigh heavily in this assessment:

- The cost of interactive telecommunicated courses relative to low technology alternatives also available is prohibitive and a serious drain on financial resources already in short supply.
- The number of new students in our local broadcast range living more than an hour's commute from SSU and comparably qualified to those already admitted to our school is likely to be quite small and readily served by other distance education suppliers. Nor do we possess the resources to compete successfully for such a market in the long term against those institutions willing and able to commit huge sums to telecommunications programs.

Thirdly we are concerned over issues of our own institutional autonomy and self determination:

- MHEC has already begun (as of spring 1996 to assert its authority to determine the programmatic focus of telecommunicated course offerings at all state institutions in keeping with its determination of each institution's mission.
- SSU's supervision and control of distance education faculty and quality control of course delivery will be threatened or at least diminished we believe by structural changes inherent in the implementation of telecommunications networking within the University of Maryland system.

Finally philosophical issues are also at stake:

- The values of personal convenience and broader individual access to self-improvement opportunities underlying much of the logic for use of telecommunicated course work in university planning ignore or undermine the equally essential cultural political and ethical values of the traditional university way of life in a communal setting.

- Democratic diversity of thought represented in part by the presence of multiple communities of scholars on the various campuses of higher learning in Maryland may be undermined by an aggressive statewide distance education program with its associated possibilities for consolidation of programs at one university and reduction of faculty positions at other institutions.

- Unrestrained commitment to distance education will alter the focus of the SSU mission and long range plan to educate the "whole person" in a "community of scholars" through the on-site immersion of students with one another and their teachers in small groups with practitioner/apprentice relationships operating in the classroom laboratory or studio and in appropriate supplementary opportunities to interact in personal social cultural and political ways.

The Forum Position Statement on Distance Education articulates the institution's view of the appropriate uses for telecommunications courses and lectures at Salisbury State University. It should therefore be understood as setting the guidelines within which the policies of the Provost's Distance Education Task Force Report will be implemented.

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