

Distance Learning Task Force Report

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Meetings and Charge

The task force met on August 6 and October 8, 2013, to determine whether or not policies governing credit-bearing distance-learning courses needed updating. Distance-learning courses currently are offered for credit at UNC-Chapel Hill through the Friday Center for Continuing Education, Semester Online, and Summer School. The current policies became effective on July 1, 2008, for all new and transfer students who matriculated into the College of Arts and Sciences as full-time and part-time degree-seeking students in fall 2008.

Task force members were provided with a copy of a January 11, 2008, memorandum from then-Dean Holden Thorp to the Educational Policy Committee establishing the policies subsequently adopted in the College of Arts and Sciences; a description of the policies published in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*; University Policy Memorandum #23—Distance Education, Courses and Registration; and a compendium of relevant policies governing degree programs, majors and minors, distance-learning courses, the pass/fail option, transfer credit, and the restoration of academic eligibility. These documents are appended to this report.

Discussion

Task force members applauded the commitment in the College of Arts and Sciences to a traditional undergraduate education, in which faculty members and students can learn from one another in classes that enable face-to-face interactions. At the same time, members acknowledged that technology is making possible an increasing number of opportunities for teaching and learning through the Internet, via e-mail and course management systems including Sakai, through massive open online courses (MOOCs), and by means of other platforms.

The current policies were developed when distance-learning courses were rarer, offered principally as Self-Paced courses, formerly called correspondence courses. Self-Paced courses are now available online as well as on paper; only undergraduates who matriculated as degree-seeking students prior to fall 2008 can count them toward their degree. Carolina Courses Online (CCO), courses developed and approved by departments and curricula in the College and offered primarily at the 100 and 200 level, are increasing in number, and Summer School offers online courses as well. Semester Online provides for-credit undergraduate courses through a consortium of prominent universities.

The task force affirmed the principle that each credit-bearing online course must have appropriate methods for assignments, grading, examinations, and course evaluations. These elements must be consistent with best practices for online instruction while also keeping the online course equivalent to an appropriate on-campus counterpart. The number of assignments may vary, as may their value in computing final grades. The task force also discussed the number of credit hours that students majoring or minoring in the College of Arts and Sciences might be permitted to count toward the degree and when in their academic career it might be advantageous to enroll in such courses.

Policy Recommendations

The task force recommends that the Administrative Boards of the General College and College of Arts and Sciences approve the following policies, effective July 1, 2014. The regulations would apply to all new and continuing full-time and part-time degree-seeking students, and they refer to CCO, Summer School, Semester Online, and other for-credit UNC-Chapel Hill courses offered completely via similar modalities. Given the pace at which instructional technology develops, the task force advises that these policies be reviewed in the 2016-2017 academic year.

1. The maximum number of credit hours, all of which must be designated UNC-Chapel Hill or Semester Online, that can be counted toward an undergraduate degree in the College of Arts and Sciences is 24. There can be no exceptions to this upper limit.
2. First-semester, first-year students may not enroll in for-credit online courses unless unusual circumstances prevail, nor may first-year students take an online course in the summer prior to matriculation.
3. Full-time undergraduate students may enroll in a maximum of one for-credit online course (currently CCO or Semester Online) per regular semester (after the first semester, if they are a first-year student) and a maximum of two for-credit online courses per summer.
4. Degree-seeking students who are not enrolled may take a maximum of two for-credit online courses in a regular semester or summer.
5. No more than two for-credit online courses in any one department, curriculum, or professional school may count toward a major or minor in the College of Arts and Sciences.
6. Self-Paced courses cannot count toward a degree in the College of Arts and Sciences, other than in exceptional circumstances.
7. It is the responsibility of the Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, in consultation with the Associate Dean and Director of the Academic Advising Program, to determine whether students in unusual circumstances warrant an exception to these policies.