Distance Learning Steering Committee
Minutes of the Meeting
3/19/2004

Members Present: Kathy Kral, Carol Goodson, Mary O’Neill, Matthew Clay, Paul Smith, Brian McCrary, Tom Padgett, Melanie Clay, Christy Talley, and Stacey Rowland

This meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM in the Carriage House

1. Melanie Clay handed out a copy of the 2003-2004 Effectiveness Evaluation of Distance & Distributed Learning for an annual review by the Distance Learning Steering Committee for discussion of improvements and actions as needed.

   a. First topic of discussion was Departmental Goals. Are the departmental goals meeting our mission? Carol Goodson stated that we need to include advocating for faculty and academic freedom, and making certain that distance programs are faculty driven. A discussion was held and the conclusion was we should include as part of one our goals “while maintaining the core values of higher education.”

   b. Second topic of discussion was Departmental Statement of Outcomes. Melanie mentioned that the DL student evaluations are about where they were last year. However, the student retention rates for distance students have gone down for the first time ever (dropped about 3 percent from last year) but went up for non-distance students. Speculation as to the cause of the drop are:

      i. Traditional courses are closed and students enroll in distance courses because they can’t get in anything else
      ii. Possibly that the students did not realize the type of commitment and self motivation involved in taking a distance course and then dropped out.

The committee agreed that the 3% drop was not enough to worry about but that we need to keep a close eye and if the trend continues then a study will need to be done to see what’s causing the problem. Also the following suggestions were made to help prevent a further decrease in retention:

      i. The DDEC staff will need to make sure faculty know how to advise the distance students by making departmental visits and explaining the situation
      ii. The DDEC staff will need to participate in student orientations by having a table at orientation
      iii. Publicize the distance orientations more
      iv. The DDEC needs to come up with a plan on how to ensure that the student online readiness tool tutorial and quiz are installed in every distance course. Options are sending the text file for the quiz to the distance professors or having the DDEC install the quiz in each course.
      v. Ask Michael Crafton to cover distance learning in the UWG 101 course that is offered for freshmen students. Christy could create an Impaticized version of the UWG 101 with added distance components.

2. Next topic of discussion was WebCT VISTA. Melanie stated that she understands why the BOR wants to streamline operations so that all Georgia higher ed students could go to one place online. However, the recent experiences with the trial rollout of WebCT Vista as managed by the BOR, rather than our campus services, has been troublesome and disappointing. The BOR/ALT did not anticipate huge jumps in enrollment and in class usage. There was not enough hardware and software to take the user impact. In the Spring, there was a big jump in the number of users for which was not planned. The plan was that by having one centralized server, it would save money because of less replication but they are ending up hiring more people and buying more hardware and software to support the number of users. Essentially, the dollar amount just shifted to one central location instead of over many individualized institutions as it was before centralized VISTA and is ending up costing the same. The committee decided that we will continue to take a wait-and-see approach before we adopt VISTA. Also, there was discussion about someone developing a USG
Distance Faculty Listserv so that faculty could discuss these concerns and others with faculty members at other system institutions

3. Final topic of discussion is having a lunch for faculty who has taught Distance classes over the year. Melanie mentioned that the DDEC had a Teach at the Beach day for the past two years but that it has played out. She asked for suggestions for a different type faculty luncheon, ideas for fun, the date, where to have it, etc.

a. Melanie stated that it could be called Distance Learning Day
b. The committee agreed that the best time to have it would be Friday, April 30th at 12:00 Noon and that the President’s Dining Room or the Hubbard Dining Room are two good possibilities
c. Some suggestions were offered for activities:

i. Food
ii. Certificates of appreciation
iii. Game Show with prizes
iv. Funny Impatica demonstration
v. Prizes to give away like Impatica software license
vi. Gag awards