

Report about on-line Teaching and Learning at CSUSM

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Introduction

As more and more courses are taught on-line in our campus, it was imperative to understand the current state of this mode of instruction in order to determine weaknesses and strengths, effectiveness and areas for improvement. At the end of this report – and based on my findings- I will be providing some recommendations for consideration. Therefore my primary task this year as a Faculty Fellow for Teaching and Learning has been to research on-line instruction at Cal State San Marcos. I have used several ways to conduct my research:

- 1) Meetings with faculty members across ranks, disciplines and Colleges to gather their input. Although I gave them prompts, I encouraged faculty to share any information, experiences, concerns, etc. that they may have had with on-line instruction;
- 2) Meetings with the Deans from all Colleges, Extended Learning and the Library. I used the same method as for faculty (prompts and personal insight on any topic related with on-line instruction);
- 3) Student's surveys. I have included with this rapport the data that was gathered on the survey.

In addition, I have gathered some data from Institutional Planning and Analysis about the number of on-line courses taught during the AY 13-14. I have included charts with information for each College for Fall 2013, Spring 2014 and Summer 2014.

I have also attended several LATAAC meetings and I have been in regular contact with Dr. Ed Price (Chair of LATAAC) to obtain pertinent updates about on-line instruction.

Finally, I have researched other CSU's on-line policies and best practices to help with my recommendations, and to compare with CSUSM.

Courses taught on-line

Fall 2013

College	Courses	Enrollments
COBA	2	53
CSM	10	206
EHHS	19	349
CHABSS	46	1528
TOTAL	77	2136

Hybrid courses: 44

Spring 14

College	Courses	Enrollments
CSM	23	459
EHHS	21	452
CHABSS	62	1918
COBA	0	0
TOTAL	106	2829

Hybrid courses: 31

Summer 14:

First Block: 41 on-line courses
Second Block: 26 on-line courses

One on one meetings with faculty and Deans

I met with 25 faculty members (Lecturers, Assistant, Associate and Full Prof.) and with the Deans, and I gave them the following prompts as a starting point:

- **Teaching load** → Is it acceptable to teach a full load on-line?
- **Workload** → Is it easier (less work) to teach on-line?
- **Evaluation of on-line courses** → Should we evaluate them like we do face-to-face courses?
- **Resources** → Are we satisfied with what we have?
- **Articulations** → How do we articulate on-line courses?
- **Quality of instruction** → Are you concerned about quality for on-line courses?
- **Student evaluations** → Are students' feedback and ratings lower, higher or the same as with face-to-face courses?

This is a summary of the answers I received from both faculty and administrators:

- **Teaching load** → The majority objected having all courses assigned taught on-line. The primary reason for this objection was a possible lack of presence on campus resulting in less involvement.
- **Workload** → The majority indicated that it is more work to teach on-line than face-to-face. The main reasons were the time to acquire new skills, new tools and getting familiar –and at ease– with the new mode of delivery. For many faculty members without direct experience with on-line instruction (not having taken a course taught that way) the lack of past experience or reference poses a challenge.
- **Evaluation of on-line courses** → The majority answered affirmatively: on-line courses should be evaluated the same as f2f. However since there is not a standard and consistent way of evaluating face-to-face courses, evaluating on-line classes may pose a problem.
- **Resources** → The majority stressed the need for more professional development opportunities, monetary incentives and training to develop on-line courses. As for technical resources, faculty seemed satisfied with the current tools.
- **Articulations** → Most everyone stated that articulations should be done the same way as with face-to-face courses, however there was some concern about articulating courses taught face-to-face that may change the mode of instruction without notice.
- **Quality of instruction** → The answers were split: some were not concerned about quality of on-line courses and some expressed concern as it is not clear how we assess quality since the evaluation of on-line courses is not defined by the same criteria across Colleges and disciplines.
- **Student evaluations** → The vast majority stated that student evaluations were rated lower in their on-line courses. These lower ratings could be due to the fact that it is easier to give lower ratings to an instructor with whom students have not established a more personal and direct relationship.

Student surveys about on-line instruction¹

Surveys were administered on-line after Spring Break. More than 350 students participated in the survey. (I have included the full summary report at the end of this document).

Survey was divided in 4 sections:

- 1) **Personal information** (Do you own a computer?; Are you a returning student?; Are you first generation?, etc.)
- 2) **Experience with on-line courses** (How many courses have you taken on-line?; In what College?, etc.)

¹ Dr. Matt Atherton, Faculty Fellow, helped me endless hours crafting the survey, formatting it into Survey Monkey and getting the final data. I am extremely grateful for his support and his kindness.

- 3) **On-line learning** (Students had to select what applied to them: “I learn best when the course is taught on-line”; “My grades are best in on-line courses”, “My questions are answered rapidly”, etc.)
- 4) **On-line teaching** (Students had to select the statement that best defined their experience: “My professors were well-prepared”; “My professors created a learning community that was engaging and participatory”; “Courses’ expectations were clearly stated”, etc.)

I will only highlight the results I found most compelling (please refer to the summary report to view all the results).

- 85.4% of the students surveyed have taken a course fully on-line or a hybrid course.
- 52% have taken a course fully on-line.
- 48.1% have taken the most courses on-line in the College of Ed, Health and Human Development.
- 80.1% said that they prefer to take face to face courses because they learn best that way.
- 75% like coming to campus to establish social connections/potential professional network
- Almost 80% learn best in face-to-face courses because they benefit from peers’ input.
- Almost 90% learn best in face-to-face because they get their questions answered immediately.
- 79% indicated that they would prefer a face-to-face course with their favorite professor over an on-line course.
- 40.8% indicated that they had to take a fully online course because all face-to-face sections they needed were full or not offered.
- 74% specified that not all courses should be taught on-line (depending on the discipline).
- 83% stated that the technology and course materials were easy to access.
- According to 66.4% of students, their grades are the same in face-to-face than in on-line courses.
- 69.4% evaluate their professor the same on-line as they do in face-to-face courses.
- 49.3% of the students surveyed study the same in on-line courses than in face-to-face courses, 28.4% study less and 22.4% more.

Summary of students’ comments and opinions to open-ended questions²

To the question “What do you like the most about on-line courses”, the majority of the students surveyed stated the following:

- Flexibility (with their schedules)
- Easy access (at any time)
- Not having to commute
- Being able to learn at their own pace

² The full version of students’ comments and opinions to open-ended questions is included with this rapport.

To the question “What do you like the least about on-line courses”, the majority of students surveyed indicated the following:

- Most on-line courses require busy work
- Having to wait for their questions to be answered versus having their queries answered right away
- Lack of interaction with peers and lack of personal contact with the Professors
- Group work (particularly when not everyone in the group is participating)

Recommendations

- Need for an “institutional model for quality of instruction”³: on-line and face-to-face as there is a sense that we are “operating without a structure”.
- Based on the current state of on-line teaching and learning in our campus (where we are today), a plan needs to be developed on the progress and the future of on-line instruction at CSUSM (“where we want to go”) to avoid “growing without a structure and a vision in mind”. Need to think about these important questions: “what would the impact be?”, “how can we serve our students better?” and “how is that going to matter?”
- Need for a curriculum map;
- Need to implement a course evaluation process that is consistent: courses need to be evaluated (by all levels of review -Department Chairs, PRCs, PTC, etc.) in a consistent manner as not all courses are evaluated the same way;
- Need for a policy for on-line and hybrid instruction;
- More professional development opportunities for faculty who want to develop and to offer on-line courses;
- More incentives (course releases or stipends) for faculty to get familiar with the new skills and tools needed to teach on-line. A “technology fee” for students has been suggested to help fund these incentives;
- Need to implement an “institutionalized mechanism” for faculty wanting to teach on-line: possibly mandatory training to assure quality of instruction. In addition faculty wanting to teach on-line “do not know where to go: Faculty Center? IDS? EL?”
- Need for a standardized review process for proposed new on-line courses.
- Need to determine faculty load: could a faculty member teach all courses on-line? Or “could we oblige a faculty member to teach on-line?”
- Student evaluations: it appears that faculty receives lower ratings in their on-line courses. Reviewers need to be aware of the fact that on-line response rate is lower (22.9%) than with

³ Quotes indicate that the wording is been used verbatim from the interviews.

face-to-face courses (64.3%). This is crucial particularly for Junior Faculty and Lecturers whose contract renewals may depend on student evaluations;

- Ownership of on-line materials and intellectual property needs to be very clear- this is particularly important to Lecturers;
- 24 hours IT services so that faculty and students who encounter technical difficulties during the week-end receive support 24/7;
- Student retention: have a program or a “support mechanism” in place for freshmen taking on-line courses as they may be more at risk to drop: such program could ensure that students are familiar with the technology, professors could meet periodically in person with them, more frequent performance checks, etc.;
- Students should have a choice between on-line and face-to-face courses to complete their degrees.

What is next?- AY 14-15 and 15-16

The State of California Assembly Bill 386, passed in 2013, requires the CSU to provide its students access to all fully online CSU courses across our 23 campuses by fall 2015. The CSU developed CourseMatch in fall 2013 and is currently offering 45 fully online courses to CSU students in spring 2014. The launching of CourseMatch serves as an opportunity to evaluate a range of processes to implement the requirements of AB 386.

The Chancellor’s Office, in partnership with the CSU Academic Senate, will fund a systemwide program to support and enhance the academic quality of fully online courses being offered by the campuses and/or included in CourseMatch. The CSU partnered with Quality Matters™ to assure a standardized quality of all on-line courses.

The Faculty Center at CSUSM submitted a proposal and received funding to participate in this program. The Faculty Center sent out a call on May 6th, 2014 for a *Faculty Fellow For Quality Online Teaching* and for *Faculty Associates For Quality Online Teaching* who will work together to assist in the good implementation of CourseMatch.

Resources about on-line instruction

I recommend the following resources as they contain important information about on-line instruction and could be used as a model and/or starting point for the recommendations that I have mentioned above⁴:

- Online Education White Paper, January 2012:
http://www.calstate.edu/AcadSen/Records/Reports/documents/Online_Education_White_Paper.pdf

⁴ Provided upon request.

- CSSA (California State Student Association)- Online Education White Paper, January 2014: <http://www.scvttv.com/pdf/cssa020514.pdf>
- CSU-Northridge : "Policies for the Assignment and Evaluation of Online Teaching." <http://www.csun.edu/humanities/policies-assignment-and-evaluation-online-teaching>
- CSU-East Bay: Policy on Online (and Hybrid) Instruction from 2006 <http://www20.csueastbay.edu/faculty/senate/files/documents/06-07/06-07%20BEC%205.Online-hybrid%20Instruction%20Policy.revised.pdf>
- CSU/CFA Bargaining Agreement (of special interest are part III-B, third item and Article 39 about intellectual property): (<http://www.calfac.org/resource/collective-bargaining-agreement-contract-2012-2014-0#article-39>)

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