Report to the Faculty Senate by the Senate Curriculum Committee on Online Class Quality and Delivery

The initiative to develop an online Wintermester raised numerous questions from the university faculty and the Executive Council asked the committee to examine these questions. The members of the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee met with the University Registrar (Matthew Brunner) and with Charles Cosmato, director of the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning. These discussions convinced us that the university needs to develop a vision of what it seeks to achieve through development of these classes. The goal of this report and the accompanying motion is to foster intentional quality in these courses and in the choice of classes that best are suited to online delivery.

In our discussions we found that there are multiple issues that need to be considered if the university is to move forward responsibly in the area of online classes:
1. Availability of IT support;
2. Ensuring quality;
3. Development of an internal cadre of peer reviewers or a university-wide curriculum committee that reviews only online courses;
4. Availability of peer or CITL support and assistance in developing the classes;
5. Assessment of whether online delivery really saves money;
6. Evaluation of what types of courses are most appropriate for online delivery.

 The key is establishing how many courses should/can be offered,, in what areas of the curriculum online delivery would be beneficial, at what times during the academic year, and how to ensure quality courses and adequate faculty support.

 Of most concern are Wintermester and Maymester. Two issues arise here. First, although there will be IT staff on-call during the first week, students (and faculty) often experience technical difficulties during that time period in any online course. In other words, a great deal of technical support may be needed. Second, many courses might be competing for students' limited time and, as a result, some courses will likely have very low enrollments. This raises the question of whether Wintermester can be cost effective, especially when there are so many holidays (Christian and non-Christian) during the time period. Third, Maymester, along with Wintermester, raises the issue of time. Maymester classes require compressing a great deal of material into a short time frame while holding the students' attention. This is difficult enough when the class is face-to-face; the problem may be exacerbated in an online setting. Thus, we need to be very careful in choosing online classes for delivery during Maymester and/or Wintermester.

We recommend:
- Development of a **university task force** or **advisory committee** that would help establish such a vision, prevent abuse of faculty, set criteria for quality of instruction, assessment and development of on-line course offerings, and establish mechanisms for providing support and feedback to those developing online classes. The composition of this committee would include: (1) a representative of the Registrar's Office; (2) a representative of the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning; (3) a representative from Information Technology; (4) a member of the Faculty Senate; (5) a representative of the Office of Assessment; (6) a representative of the Dean's Council; and (7) three faculty members with experience in the development and delivery of online courses. This committee would submit a report containing a vision statement and a

strategic plan for implementation to the Provost and to the Faculty Senate Executive Council by February 15, 2013 in order to allow time for Senate discussion of the report by the end of the 2012-2013 academic year. We foresee this plan taking several years to implement. The Faculty Senate Executive Council would nominate the faculty members for the committee who would serve two-year staggered terms except during the first year when one faculty member would be nominated for a one-year term; one would be nominated for a two-year term, and one would serve a three-year term.

Areas to be addressed by the Task Force would include:
- o Discussion of the types of courses that are suited to online delivery and the terms into which those courses best fit.
- o Departmental self-studies to discuss and to develop criteria for online departmental offerings that will promote the university's vision concerning online classes and to develop criteria for giving transfer credit for online classes from other institutions.
- o Development of a university-wide mentoring group to act as consultants for departments and faculty who wish to create and offer an online class.
- o Establishing a plan to distribute revenue from online offerings to the relevant departments.
- o Establishment of a partnership between departments and the Registrar's Office to develop the best methods of ensuring that students understand the various course formats offered. (types of classes for which they may be registering—synchronous or asynchronous online, hybrid, etc.)
- o Development of a general implementation plan which allows for fluctuations with funding, staffing, and course offerings. This may include the formation of sub-committees and incorporation of various university resources.

We submit the following motion as a means of beginning a purposeful and intentional conversation about how best to fold online courses into the university's and the various colleges' strategic plans and mission statements.

WHEREAS: Radford University is moving to increase the number of online course offerings;

WHEREAS: Radford University wants to ensure the quality of its online offerings;

WHEREAS: Radford University currently lacks an overall vision of the place of online offerings within the total curriculum;

WHEREAS: Currently the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning and Academic Computing lack the resources to successfully support a major push to online course delivery;

RESOLVED: The Faculty Senate supports the establishment of a university-wide task force on online course delivery which would be responsible for the development of: (1) an overall vision of the place of online courses within Radford University's undergraduate and graduate curriculums; (2) a method to assist departments that are considering the development of online classes to undertake self-studies of what courses within the discipline effectively can be taught online; (3) a plan for providing the course development support and training in the development of quality online instruction needed to assist

faculty members who wish to develop online classes; (4) a method of assuring the quality of online course instruction, whether it be QUALITY MATTERS or some other quality assurance tool, development of a cadre of internal reviewers, or some other assessment tool; (5) a plan for providing technical support needed to make online course delivery successful; and (6) a method of working with the Registrar's Office and the Advising Centers on acceptance for Radford University credit of online courses taken at other institutions.

RATIONALE:

- At the moment the university's plan for delivering online course instruction lacks an overall vision of the place of online courses within a Radford University education
- Additional staff would need to be added to the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning and to Academic Computing to support the addition of any large number of online classes
- The university's faculty members wish to ensure that any classes developed for online delivery follow best practices for online courses.

Respectfully Submitted:

Julia Castleberry, Waldron College of Health and Human Services
Margaret Hrezo, College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences
Cathy Hudgins, College of Education and Human Development
Pamela Jackson, College of Humanities and Behavioral Science, Faculty Senate Executive Council
Alex Orlov, College of Business and Economics
Lauren Smith, Waldron College of Health and Human Services
Lynne Marie Taylor, Waldron College of Health and Human Services
Jonathon Tso, College of Science and Technology
Erin Webster-Garrett, College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences.