

Accelerated Online Education Focus Group Report

May 7, 2019

Introduction

In March 2019, the Teaching Effectiveness and Enhancement Committee (TEEC) held a series of focus groups aimed at gaining insight into the experiences of faculty teaching accelerated online (AO) courses. Based on lists provided by department chairs, TEEC invited 69 AO faculty members to participate in the focus groups. Of the twelve respondents who initially signed up, eight actually took part in one of three hour-long interview sessions. The meetings were recorded and transcribed, after which the members of TEEC performed a qualitative analysis of the transcriptions. TEEC drew out three primary themes, as well as a number of related topics. Recommendations follow.

Theme 1: Equity

- **Create policies, procedures pertaining to overall AO experience**
 - **Recommendations:**
 - In the interests of student success, it is recommended the university consider limiting the number of accelerated courses students can take in any 5/7-week period and/or semester.
 - Consider limiting the total number of credit hours students may take while enrolled in an accelerated course
- **Develop, formalize, & communicate university’s commitment to integrity**
 - Rigor
 - **Recommendations:**
 - Consider policies, procedures aimed at strengthening consistency of course offerings, university-wide
 - When possible, comparisons of AO, traditional online, and F2F courses are needed
 - Academic Dishonesty
 - **Recommendations:**
 - Formalize requirements, university-wide, that online assessments take place in a secure environment
 - A statement/video could be provided to students discussing testing policies
 - Involve SGA
- **Develop policies, procedures to address course size, courseload determinations**
 - **Recommendations:**
 - A review of current procedures pertaining to AO course size, courseload determinations should be conducted at the department levels
 - College-, then possibly university-level committees should be established to review the information and consider equitable policies, procedures
- **Increase procedural attention aimed at recognizing diversity of AO participants**
 - **Recommendations:**
 - Examine systems impacted by AO transition, consider adaptive responses
 - Reconcile AP/IC approaches with best practices in respective academic domains
- **Improve overall communication procedures**

Theme 2: Faculty Wellness

- **Assess & reevaluate faculty expectations**
- **Evaluate opportunities, provide resources for instructional assistance**
- **Faculty evaluations must be handled more comprehensively**
 - **Observations/Recommendations:**
 - The parameters for/expectations associated with teaching in the accelerated online format raise serious concerns about professional burnout
 - Attention must be paid to course size, courseload considerations (see above)
 - The evaluation of teaching at NKU must be multidimensional and based upon all the available evidence as delineated in the statements in the Faculty Handbook regarding teaching effectiveness
 - Maintain commitment to hiring staff in line with program preferences (e.g., adjunct versus coaches)
 - Some accrediting bodies mandate core-to-adjunct faculty ratios
 - Consider establishing a faculty (tenure track/adjunct)-to-coach ratio
 - Establish learning community of online education faculty
 - Increase presence of support staff (e.g., tech desk, librarians)
 - Create AO education tip sheet/checklist
 - *I've been trying to put something together because I'm passing my course off to another instructor. He's been TAing for me the past few semesters. He's been in the course, seen how it's run. He hasn't gotten the e-mails, hasn't run the Zoom. There are things he won't recognize when he gets in there and thinks it's all ready to go. I've been trying to put it all together because, when the time comes for me to take over the course again, I'm going to forget all these things. I'm trying to put something together from what I've seen.*

Theme 3: Student Experience

- **Workload**
- **Performance**
- **Recommendations**
 - Explore overall AO student experience, suggestions for improvements
 - Focus groups
 - Surveys
 - Establish orientation modules (including videos) aimed at familiarizing students with demands of online courses
 - Director videos: Welcome to/expectations of the program
 - Instructor videos: Discussing each course
 - Student videos?: Speaking to pace, workload
 - Current students, recent grads, SGA?
 - Consider providing students with “course packets” upon enrollment
 - Syllabi and other pertinent class information should be provided