UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY
(Final; Action)

EP.20.172   Resolution On Online Graduate Programs

WHEREAS the Graduate College has conveyed its desire to secure expedited administrative approval for separate online versions of as-yet unidentified master's degree programs, all with identical course requirements as the already approved residential versions of the same programs, effective for the upcoming fall or spring semesters;

WHEREAS the Senate Executive Committee relayed this matter to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy, which responded by offering to remain in session as long as necessary to consider such requests and by providing, as an aid in the process, an appended list of questions it would request information about before considering any such proposals;

WHEREAS ambiguity exists over whether such proposals, which do not require Board of Trustees approval, require specific approval of the Senate;

WHEREAS administrative approvals are reported to the Senate, which may choose to assert jurisdiction over them, even though doing so in the case of a program that already has begun accepting students might create undue confusion, especially in a time of crisis over the COVID-19 situation;

WHEREAS at least one senator has objected to placing on the Senate's consent agenda a similar proposal that would add an online option to an existing master's degree program;

AND WHEREAS the Committee on Educational Policy does not wish to act on behalf of the Senate without a clear mandate to do so;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate affirms its support for the Committee on Educational Policy's long-standing practices for reviewing academic programs, including the implications of online options to degree programs, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Senate authorizes the Committee on Educational Policy to proceed as described in the appended memorandum provided that any such programs created in expedited fashion be limited to accept new enrollment for no longer that two years unless specifically reauthorized by the Senate.

Respectfully submitted,

Educational Policy

Eric Meyer, Chair	Nolan Miller	Michel Bellini, *ex officio*
Justin Aronoff	Linda Moorhouse	Suzanne Lee, *ex officio*
Maria Bonn	Jennifer Pahre	John Hart, *ex officio*
Isaac Cann	Hilary Pham	Daniel Mann, *ex officio*
Aaron Godwin	David Rivier	Kathy Martensen, *ex officio*
Richard Layton	Jim Shriner	
Steve Michael	Craig Zilles	

MEMORANDUM FROM SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY

The Senate Committee on Educational Policy recognizes and appreciates the uncertainty that COVID-19 has created and the resulting desire among some departments to convert existing graduate programs to online delivery as a means of managing this uncertainty.

Emergency measures taken this spring temporarily to transfer all classes at all levels to online delivery represent a herculean effort to continue education in the midst of crisis. However, these steps have been emergency measures only — remote teaching, not true online teaching. As our ongoing experience in remote education has indicated, instructors are learning that existing courses cannot always be moved online without substantial changes, and their acclimation to new delivery means is only beginning.

Even if the same courses are offered online as are offered in a face-to-face setting, converting to online delivery is a significant and complex process and, in many cases, requires structural changes. Many face-to-face activities are not feasible, not suitable, or cost-prohibitive online.

As a matter of general educational policy, the committee believes that before any temporary emergency measure involving remote delivery becomes institutionalized via expedited approval into an online degree program, several key questions must be addressed, as they often are in non-expedited proposals for online degree programs.

To expedite review by the Educational Policy Committee, the committee offers this partial list of topics that should be addressed in any such expedited proposals:

1. What steps are being taken and what commitments are being made to ensure that online delivery supplements rather than replaces face-to-face delivery?

2. Assessment can be one of the most challenging points of designing a course. How will assessment change from what is employed in face-to-face delivery? How will online courses measurably fulfill the designated learning outcomes of the same face-to-face courses?

3. Will online courses contain synchronous activities, asynchronous activities, or a combination? How might this differ from face-to-face courses? What are the pedagogical aims in making any activity changes? Do technological considerations limit the pedagogical choices?

4. Which faculty (tenure-stream, specialized, visiting, adjunct, emeriti, graduate assistants, etc.) will be involved in course design and ongoing instruction? If teaching assistants and other graders are employed, will sufficient numbers be available and will they be required to hold the degree for which they grade? Will instructors of record for online versions of courses have generally the same level of faculty status as do instructors in face-to-face versions of the courses? Similarly, online courses often are appealing because they are easier to scale up. Will the same level of access to faculty members per student be available in each online version of a course as is available in each face-to-face version?

5. When relevant, how will problem-solving in teams and experiential learning be replicated or replaced in online versions of courses, and will faculty continue to play the same role in supervising online work of this nature as they do in face-to-face courses?

6. Many services that support student and instructor success — copyright clearance, assistance for students with disabilities, laboratory facilities, exam proctoring, physical library resources, referrals for academic support, other student support services, etc. — are readily accessible through campus resources for face-to-face courses but are not easily available for online courses. How will these be addressed for online courses?

7. Development of a single online course can require far more time and university resources than does remote delivery of face-to-face courses. How will this challenge be met? What tradeoffs might occur?

It is the Committee on Educational Policy's goal to assist units in expedited consideration of whatever delivery mechanisms the unit believes present the best opportunities for furthering the general educational policies of the university.

To that end, the committee will adopt mechanisms that allow it to participate fully and rapidly in the process of considering any proposals, even after the current semester has ended. This memorandum, identifying some of the likely topics the committee will ask about during its deliberation, is intended to further expedite that process by allowing responses to be inserted into original proposals rather than waiting for questions to be asked.

If we can be of assistance in helping craft a proposal or anticipating what questions might be asked, please contact committee chair Eric Meyer at ekmeyer@illinois.edu.