Minutes of the Spring 2005 Faculty Roundtable Discussion, April 2, 2005

<u>Morning Session: MSU Online–Present and Future of Online Instruction</u>

Roundtable participants engaged in a free-ranging discussion that was loosely guided by a document that originated from the Division of Academic Outreach and Continuing Education (AOCE) during Spring 2005. The document proposes a more organized and integrated approach to online instruction at MSU than what currently exists, and explores "General Principles", "Course/Program Offering Policy", "Faculty Participation Policy", "Student Related Policies", and a "Revenue Distribution Scheme".

Issues discussed included requirements for admission to online courses, the difference between "academic outreach" and "continuing education", the degree to which online instruction through AOCE might be expanded at MSU (i.e., possible increase in the number of online students), and categories of students taking classes offered through MSU (see Campus designations below).

Campus 0 = Geosciences
Campus 1 = Main Campus
Campus 2 = Meridian
Campus 3 = Vicksburg
Campus 4 = Stennis
Campus 5 = Continuing Education

·   It was noted that currently MSU enrolls approximately 900-1000 students taking online classes and could expand to more than 3000 online students over the next few years.

·   Concerns were voiced regarding the need for a clear distinction between traditional "Campus 1" students and their presumed educational experience as compared to students who may take online courses. What is the qualitative difference between the two types of students and the educational experience they are expected to have?

·   How does one maintain "course integrity" in online courses? How do you make sure students are not cutting corners, cheating, etc? How do you make sure students are learning what they are supposed to be learning? How to standardize student evaluations in a distance learning environment?

·   Should all or some Core University Requirements be offered online? General reaction was yes, if they can be offered in a distance learning format without sacrificing course integrity.

·   Suggestion was made to focus on "learning outcomes" rather than the how and where teaching is done. This is relevant to the importance of implementing outcome (learning) assessments for accreditation.

·   Observation was made that recent changes in the demographics of university students (more older students, women, minorities, "non-traditional" students, etc) necessitates

changes in teaching methods to successfully accomplish targeted learning outcomes.

·   Lifelong learning and learners must become a priority for the future of online instruction.

·   Discussion pointed to the need to incorporate a "technology fee" of sorts in order to support the increased cost of providing ITS services to distance learners. Suggestions included the development of a 24 hour "online hot line" since students taking online courses and using web-based technology often do so outside of normal business hours.

·   Participants voiced general agreement that additional support should be provided to ITS in order to enhance its distance learning personnel and services. There was also a perceived need to enhance AOCE support services to go along with the expected rise in online enrollment. The growth of MSU Online would appear to require enhanced coordination between AOCE and ITS in order to provide online instruction and services to an increasing number of students.

·   It is expected that AOCE will gradually become completely self-supporting over the next few years as enrollment in online courses increased, at which point AOCE would become a "revenue producing" unit.

·   MSU should explore incentives for faculty to become more involved in distance learning. Suggestions included course reductions for developing on-line classes, course reductions for teaching such a class the first time, increased compensation to the instructor and the instructor's department, and programs designed to promote faculty involvement in academic outreach and distance learning. In order to grow the online component and associated course offerings, more instructors will be needed.

·   Features of the AOCE plan for online instruction at MSU would necessarily be routed through the AOP process–particularly those dealing with "Course/Program Offering Policy", "Faculty Participation Policy", "Student Related Policies", and issues related to teaching eligibility and compensation.

·   Related to the last point, a proposed "Revenue Distribution Scheme" generated concerns from some faculty who observed that the proposed new distribution model would significantly reduce the amount of revenue that is currently returned to the department from which online courses originated.

·   It was suggested that a "steering committee" charged with periodically reviewing the status of online instruction at MSU might be a worthwhile venture. Such a committee would meet every few months to get a handle on the growth of online instruction at MSU, and any associated issues or problems. Members of such a committee would include representatives from the Provost's Office, AOCE, Faculty Senate, ITS, Instructional Development, and faculty with significant involvement in online teaching.

Afternoon Session: Excellence in Teaching

Discussion in the afternoon session kicked off by exploring just what is excellence in teaching, how to do it, and how to measure it. It was noted that excellence in teaching should translate to excellence in learning, and discussion followed that distinguished between the "instructional paradigm" and the "learning paradigm" of pedagogy.

· Participants observed an inherent tension/disjunction at MSU between research and excellence in teaching at MSU due to MSU's role as a "research institution". Faculty performance and productivity–and particularly metrics applied to promotion and tenure reviews–are typically measured according to research and publications, and rarely with regard to teaching. Teaching has played second fiddle to research/publication. As a consequence, excellence in teaching has been secondary in importance to research.

· It was suggested that MSU develop/resuscitate a "Faculty Learning and Instructional Development Center" to provide assistance and resources to faculty who what to improve their teaching effectiveness, or who need help to do so. Perhaps call it a "Learning Assessment Center"–some kind of resource center for instructional faculty.

· Individual departments and colleges could develop ways to recognize/award teaching in a way that would make excellence in teaching a more valued commodity. Perhaps the establishment of departmental or college-level teaching awards would help achieve this. Currently there are the university-wide awards (alumni association awards, Grisham teaching awards), but teaching is not typically recognized at other levels. Such awards would require only a small investment but might have a big payoff in promoting excellence in teaching. Awards like those mentioned above might allow teaching to play a larger role in promotion and tenure reviews, and might encourage faculty to focus more on excellence in teaching.

· Discussion ensued regarding how we evaluate "learning outcomes" and "learning effectiveness". How do we know when we are teaching effectively, and if students are learning effectively? Exit exams/evaluations seem useful. Educational Testing Service (ETS) provides exit exams for a wide variety of academic programs that can be used to measure learning outcomes. Alternatively, programs can develop their own learning outcome measures.

· The "Excellence in Teaching" document, which has been in the works and under review for several years, was examined. It was recommended that the document be provided to all newly hired instructional faculty, and that it be distributed at all "New Faculty Orientations".

· A suggestion was made to involve the MSU Honors Program to help promote excellence in teaching.