

UNIVERSITY *of* MISSOURI

DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCE

Statement on E-learning

The Department of Mathematics views with alarm many of the key goals and plans laid out in the “e-learning realignment report” of February 25, 2011. As recent events within the American Association of Universities have demonstrated, dilution of a university's mission and loss of focus on the quality of its academic core brings the risk of precipitous and irreversible loss of standing. We are proud of the hard-won gains in MU's reputation and rankings within the broader academic community, and we are especially proud that these gains have been earned the old-fashioned way through strategic incremental improvements to the quality of MU's core teaching, research, and scholarship missions. We are concerned that this e-learning initiative is focused on squeezing out short-term profits, with little regard for the very departments and divisions that continue building the university's foundations as a quality institution under increasing financial duress.

Under the guise of a bland business plan, the “e-learning realignment report” makes a number of radical assumptions and proposals about the basic structure of academic decision making at MU. Essential operational points are only implicitly addressed, often based on assumptions drastically at odds with university governance. It is no secret that much online coursework is of a quality far below that of the regular courses at an AAU institution or equivalent. If MU is to avoid falling into the destructive cycle of competing for online student dollars by decreasing academic demands on students, proactive quality control for “e-learning” needs to remain firmly rooted in the respective academic departments and divisions. In particular:

- Academic departments and divisions must maintain full responsibility over the development and evaluation of online curriculum in their disciplines.
- Academic departments and divisions must maintain full responsibility over the hiring, evaluations, and promotion of instructors of online courses.
- MU course credit must not blur or obliterate the distinctions between MU courses and courses offered by outside entities, such as “statewide consortia” (as implied by Observation #1, “Seeking Efficiencies in Instructional Delivery”).
- MU academic departments and divisions must maintain quality control over their degrees. In particular, MU academic departments and divisions must maintain control over course equivalences necessary for degree requirements.

Even a temporary deviation from MU's core academic mission endangers the university's standing in the community of major research universities. Institutions that allow their standing to slip are effectively forfeiting their opportunities for success and growth.



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