**Working Group on Distance Education**

Jeffrey Fleisher       Joe Warren
Anatoly Kolomeisky    Josh Eyler, ex officio
Kirsten Ostherr       Caroline Levander, ex officio

The working group of distance education was charged with determining whether Rice needs a policy on the creation and evaluation of distance education courses. We define distance education as:

a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place.

**We recommend not creating a formal policy at this time, for the following reasons:**

1. There is no University-wide policy that currently governs the creation of courses more generally; policies only exist at the departmental level, if at all.
2. No distance education courses (those for credit) have yet to be taught at Rice and there is currently no articulated vision at Rice to develop significant online for-credit courses.

There was some concern among the working group members that a formal policy on distance education courses might unintentionally stifle some of the innovations and possibilities that are currently under discussion across campus.

**The working group recommends that the faculty senate affirm the following:**

1. Oversight for distance education at Rice University should be provided by the Digital Education Advisory Committee (based in the Office of the Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Initiatives and Digital Education), which has substantial representation from the Faculty Senate Committee on Teaching.
2. All distance education courses must meet the same standards as on-campus courses and be evaluated and approved by departments.
3. Unless they are funded by the Provost’s grants for courses with asynchronous content (MOOCs), the responsibility for the costs of preparing, creating and maintaining distance education courses rests at the departmental level.
4. The Digital Education Advisory Committee should reassess annually the need for a policy on distance education at Rice.

**Finally, we ask that the Digital Education Advisory Committee take up the following:**

1. Research and draft a statement on best practices in distance education to help guide faculty that plan to develop distance education courses to resources available at Rice.
2. Administer a survey of online content and courses at Rice to create a baseline for future assessments.