To: Faculty Senate

From: Susan Jaworowski
      Co-chair, Ad-Hoc Distance Learning Committee

Re: Final Ad-Hoc Distance Learning Committee Report on Office Hours

Date: April 30, 2010

What We Did

The Ad-Hoc Distance Learning Committee (DE committee) has been studying the issue of appropriate methods of faculty contact for online courses. At present, the UHPA contract only requires faculty to "keep[] regularly posted office hours which are scheduled at times convenient for students[]" UHPA Contract, Article IV.B. It was the sense of the committee that this traditional type of office hours was not generally used by online students, and that other forms of faculty contact were more highly desired by online students. The committee partnered with the Faculty Senate Subcommittee on Admissions, Academic Standards, and Graduation, chaired by Karl Naito, to study office hours for three types of courses: online, hybrid, and face to face. A lengthy survey sent to faculty members in Fall 2009 and a shorter survey sent in Spring 2010 to all KCC students. The survey results and reports are documented below.

What We Recommend

Based on the materials referenced below, the Ad-Hoc Distance Learning Committee makes the following recommendations to Faculty Senate:

(1) Email (or the email-type communication provided by Laulima private messages) should be a required form of contact for all faculty who teach online, and is highly recommended for all faculty who teach hybrid and face to face courses.

(2) Every syllabus for online, hybrid, and face to face courses should state the faculty contact methods, and for email, the expected response time for the individual faculty member should be stated. Faculty response time is recommended to be 24 hours, excluding weekends and holidays.

(3) Approve email plus meetings by appointment as an alternative to fixed office hours for online faculty. Both surveys clearly indicated that regularly scheduled on-campus office hours are rarely used by online students, and may even represent a hardship for distance learning students at remote locations. If Faculty Senate believes that online faculty must continue to "keep regularly posted office hours," approve that those hours may be provided either physically face to face or online through synchronous discussion. It
was the sense of the committee that hybrid and face to face courses may still profitably retain regularly scheduled office hours, but this Committee will defer to the Subcommittee on Admissions, Academic Standards, and Graduation for a recommendation.

(4) Department chairs should be required to ensure that new lecturers and faculty members are apprised of these guidelines and offered training or mentoring in use of online contact with students before or as they teach online for the first time. A peer evaluation of the online course should be required the first time a lecturer or faculty member teaches online, including an evaluation of appropriate student contact according to these recommendations.

Comments

Office hours that a student cannot or does not attend do not benefit the student. Students have their own priorities and preferences for how they seek help from faculty, and, in general, the traditional office hour is not meeting student needs. Students show a high preference for immediacy in their faculty contact. In all three types of courses, online, hybrid, and face to face, the most widely used method in Fall 2009 (the semester surveyed) was email, which was also the most strongly favored for future contact with faculty. Specifically, according to the student survey, 84% of online students contacted their instructors at least once or twice a month by email, as compared to 21% who used the traditional office hours, a quarter as many. The overall usage of the three in-person methods of faculty contact was limited: 21% for the traditional office hour, 10% for by-appointment hours, and 9% for informal, before or after class contact. Online discussion boards were much more popular, at 65% actual usage at least once or twice a month.

Faculty who offered email contact noted that email often can take much more time than a regular office hour, as there can be a greater volume of requests, and a student expectation of timely response, as compared to traditional office hours. Not offering traditional office hours does not equate to an unwillingness to provide needed assistance to student. The time commitment often exceeds that of just offering traditional hours.

It was mentioned that traditional office hours may have been required of online faculty in the past as a way to make them establish a presence at KCC. The Committee does not think this is appropriate. Office hours are for student contact. They should not be used as a proxy for general presence of faculty on campus.

While this Committee’s kuleana was distance education only, and it defers to its fellow Subcommittee on Admissions, Academic Standards, and Graduation for a definitive recommendation on office hours for hybrid and face to face courses, the Committee did feel that a consistent office hour policy would be desirable, and thus offers suggestions
for office hours for these two other types of courses. Instead of “requiring” email contact, it is “highly recommended” for hybrid and face to face courses. The student survey showed that 73% of hybrid students used email at least once or twice a month, compared to 53% for traditional face to face and before/after class, and 30% by appointment. Similarly, 80% of face to face students used email at least once or twice a month, compared to 52% for traditional office hours, 34% for appointment hours, and 74% for informal before/after class hours. As the greatest number of students desiring contact in these courses used email, it is not a method that faculty can ignore in favor of hewing solely to the traditional office hour. Students desire the ability to contact an instructor and receive timely feedback via email.

For more information, including an in-depth look at the statistics and student comments, please see the reports listed below.

Data

The recommendations come from the survey and its reports. Those reports are:

Faculty Office Hours Survey:

  Executive summary
  11A Answers (16 pp, prepared by Susan Jaworowski)
  11B Answers (9 pp, prepared by Susan Jaworowski)
  Faculty Office Hours Data (prepared by Karl Naito)

Student Office Hours Survey

  Executive summary
  Student Office Hours Survey Narrative (9 pp, prepared by Susan Jaworowski)
  Student Office Hours Data and Charts (119 pp, prepared by Steph Nelson)