Administrative Obstacles to Growth in Online Degree Programs

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Obstacle 1:
Online Students Receive Poor Service from PCE

- Registration calendars remain misaligned
- Tuition and fees remain different
- Academic regulations are not consistently followed (e.g., prerequisite requirements, limitations on courses for non-matriculated students etc.)
- PCE fails to consistently honor assistantship policies including externally funded tuition and fee waivers.
- Online students remain unable to enroll or pay their bill online without staff assistance. See http://www1.umassd.edu/pce/registration/payment.cfm
Obstacle 2:
PCE is poorly organized to support degree programs

• I must work regularly with my Dean to intervene to prevent required courses from being closed.

• Current management insists on managing the course and instructor evaluation process (including when courses are “on-load”) and fails to recognize that this is an exclusively Departmental prerogative because online courses “belong to PCE”.

• The current management practice of halving teaching stipends if enrollment falls below 13 (a level well-above breakeven cost plus reasonable overhead) makes it very difficult to persuade faculty to teach necessary intercession courses.
Obstacle 3: Basic Information is inaccessible

- Prospective (and current) students must know that online courses are operated by a separate unit in order to know where to look for course and registration information.

- Even if one knows how online education is organized, it is difficult to find this information. If you are looking for a graduate degree, why would you search for a continuing education page? If you were looking for an academic program, would you look under the “Academics” or the “Outreach” menu?

- A poorly organized and difficult to use website is an obvious turnoff for prospective online students.
Obstacle 4: Program Marketing is inadequate

- In the past year, over 600 student inquiries about the online MPP were received through UMassOnline.

- The automatic response to these requests (prepared by the GPD) has yielded dozens of follow-up conversations and applications but the vast majority of prospects that have expressed an interest in the program receive no systematic follow-up.

- Can anyone describe the online program marketing plan? Or identify who is in charge of implementation? Or describe the resources available to support student recruitment and retention?
Recommended Next Steps

• Given that current PCE management choices are impairing the integrity of academic degree programs resulting in unfair treatment of matriculated students, we have a professional obligation to insist that these problematic policies and practices be changed.

• In the absence of timely administrative action to remedy these issues, the Faculty Senate should investigate and take necessary action to ensure that our degree programs and their students are being served competently and treated fairly.