

## Issues to Consider When Thinking About Online/Blended Learning

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### I. Reasons to Consider Developing Online Courses at Small Liberal Arts Colleges:

- A significant number of students arrive on our campuses already having taken one or more online courses;
- A number of our students are already taking online college courses for transfer credit;
- A number of our alumni are telling us that they have taken advanced courses online after graduation, and found them to be valuable and of high-quality;
- The proliferation of mobile devices and on-demand services is leading to increased expectations for more flexible scheduling access to lectures and other course assignments;
- Employers will increasingly expect our graduates to be familiar with online learning and related technologies; and
- There may be institutional advantages to providing selected courses online, including flexibility in offering courses to students who cannot physically be on campus for some reason.<sup>1</sup>

### II. Questions to Ponder When Considering the Development of Online Courses at Small Liberal Arts Colleges:

- What courses would be most appropriate for the development of online versions? Should the institution aim for a distribution of courses across the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities? Should it concentrate on courses in majors? Entry-level courses? Courses that its students frequently take elsewhere for transfer credit? Courses that generate high summer-session enrollments?
- What use should we make of high-quality online courses that are already available for free, through MITx, Coursera, Udacity, or similar entities?
- What technology would be required for the development of the institution's own online courses, including technology that assures academic integrity in the completion of assignments, tests, etc.? Could the same technology be useful to

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<sup>1</sup> Examples might include summer courses for students who wish to live at home during summer break; students who are on medical leave, but who could manage less than a full course load; students in a study-abroad program who need to take a particular course at their home institution; or students at other institutions who wish to take a course offered by your institution but not at their own college or university.

faculty in developing “flipped classes”, and other forms of blended courses offered on campus?

- What faculty training and development would be required? How might we incentivize faculty to develop online courses?
- What sort of technical support will be required, not just for faculty training, but for design and development of materials, and for ongoing tech support while teaching?
- What would the upfront costs be of developing and offering selected courses online? What would be the continuing costs – particularly in maintaining platforms, updating material, and updating delivery systems and underlying technology?
- Does a faculty member’s adoption of digital technology and resulting changes in how a course is taught require approval by others (curriculum committee, Provost, etc.)?
- Who will hold the copyright to online materials developed by faculty members using institutional resources?
- What management structure would be most appropriate for the development and ongoing management of such courses?
- What opportunities might be created by encouraging or even requiring students to take certain introductory courses online, freeing up faculty to teach more higher level courses?
- How might we explore opportunities to collaborate in the development of online courses with other high-quality liberal arts colleges to leverage our investment?
- How might our efforts to create online courses enhance the faculty’s ability to develop blended courses and to extend the appropriate use of technology in the regular curriculum?
- What is a realistic timeline for implementation of online learning options?
- What is likely to be the ongoing financial impact on tuition, room, and board revenues for the institution?
- What criteria should be used to assess the results of such an initiative?

## **History 207: Homeric Epic and Greek History**

### **A Flipped MILA\* Course at Muhlenberg**

(\* MILA = “Muhlenberg Integrated Learning Abroad” – and on-campus course with an off-campus fieldwork requirement)

Course size: 13 students (all class years)

Time commitment: 2 hours of class time per week in semester + 10 days of fieldwork in Greece and Crete after the semester

Digital Tools:

- Blogs and blog comments (very successful)
- Online discussion forums (unsuccessful; scrapped)
- Streaming lectures with online “quick quizzes” (apparently successful)
- Archaeological scavenger hunt
- Digital archive of Bronze Age artifact images (pedagogically successful; technologically challenging)

Non-digital Tools:

- Class discussions
- “Archaeology night”
- Fieldtrips to archaeological sites and museums (combined with photography and digital archive project)
- Class presentations
- Term papers

Production Costs:

- \$0.00
- significant additional time investment

Worth it? Definitely!