Memorandum

To: Faculty Senate Executive Committee
From: Dr. Richard A. Whitney, Chair – University Technology Council
Date: 5 April 2012

Subject: University Technology Council recommendation

The University Technology Council operates as UAA's principal technology governance group. The Council's structure and operation permit creation of "working groups" to take charges from Council membership to investigate major areas of technology utilization in higher education. One of the Council's key working groups is the eLearning working group.

Earlier this week, the Council received a recommendation from the eLearning working group pertaining to the recently published recommendation from the UA Distance Labs Science Task Force. Working group members have spent considerable time reviewing the work of the task force.

I have attached here a summary recommendation by the eLearning working group presented to the Council for formal action. Council members have reviewed their recommendation and wish to forward it to Faculty Senate leadership as a formal recommendation of the University Technology Council.

Given some of the concerns expressed by the eLearning working group, the Council believes postponement of a final decision with further research and discussion is warranted.

Should you have questions concerning this recommendation please let me know.

RAW:
Attach.   **eLearning Working Group recommendation**

RECOMMENDATION

The eLearning Workgroup of the University Technology Council requests that Faculty Senate postpone any decision related to the UA Distance Labs Science Task Force Recommended Policy. Our concerns in brief are as follows:

- We believe that the policy is mistaken in its priorities. A primary concern of the policy is whether online labs might adversely affect face-to-face enrollments. That is misleading. Student learning, including the learning of students unable to attend traditional classes (such as students who are members of the military, who live in remote areas, or who experience disabilities), should be our priority, not the politics of enrollment.
- The policy excludes 300 to 400-level online science labs.
- The policy suggests that its proposed criteria should be applicable to online courses alone, and not to courses conducted face-to-face.
- The policy fails to address the transferability of online science labs out of the University of Alaska system.
- The policy, as delivered, is apparently unsupported by research; or at least, no research is cited. We are left wondering whether the recommendation reflects personal preference (if not bias), rather than proven instructional strategies.
- The policy fails to include assessment and learning outcomes among its review criteria.

As education professionals, we continually strive for excellence in teaching. We continually seek out techniques and technologies that make our courses more accessible to students and improve learning outcomes. We continually strive to align our teaching strategies with strategies proven by research to be effective.

We fear that the task force's recommendations may be short-sighted since, in our opinion, they do not fairly and specifically address student access and student learning outcomes; they do not fully acknowledge the potential of new learning technologies; and they are insufficiently aligned with research.

Our goal is to open a dialogue that will help improve all courses, enhance student learning, and retain academic freedom for our teaching professionals.