



Preliminary Report Online/On campus Enrollment Interactions, Implications and Recommendations

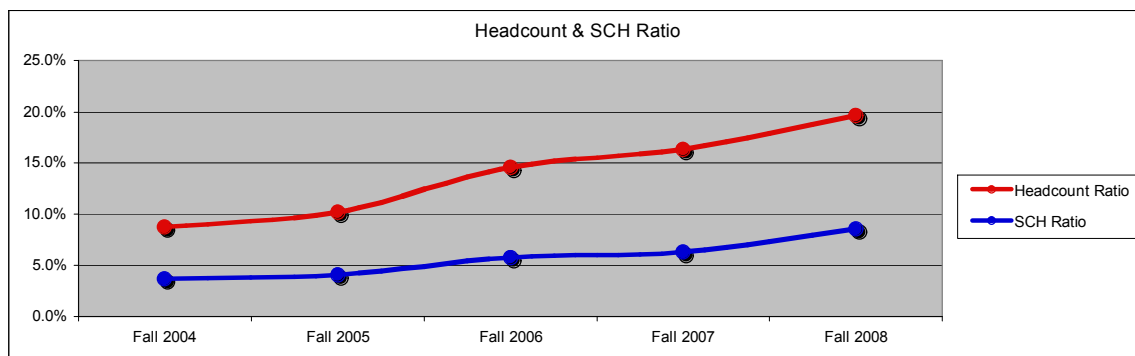
Observation of Student Behaviors

It is little surprise to anyone on the Eastern campus that online courses are becoming increasingly popular with all students. As our on campus total student credit hours have shrunk over the last five academic years, online enrollments have grown at a double digit proportional rate. Although we had collected some data about how students chose online courses in the past, we had little evidence to support the specific behaviors of students insofar as how on campus students avail themselves of online courses.

During spring term Academic Affairs spent a great deal of time thinking about this issue and designing queries that could unearth the detail of student behavior. In this first section of the report are summarized the data and analyses of student behaviors and trends for on campus students choosing online courses.

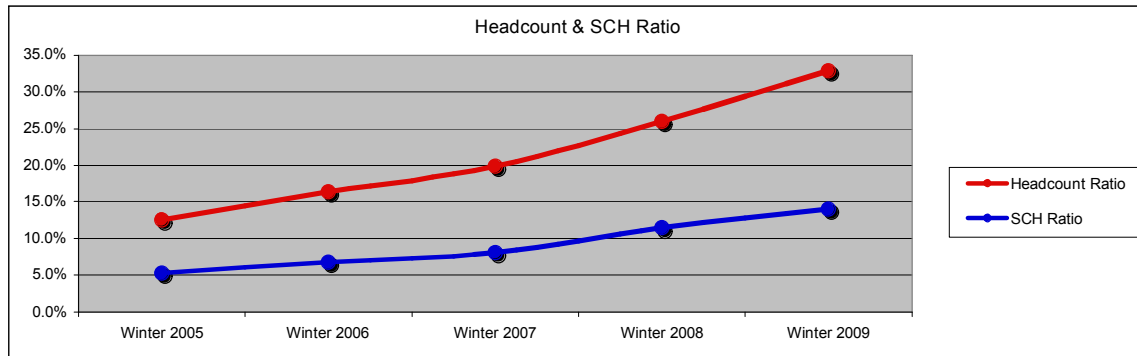
Historical Trends. Given below are three trend graphs that detail the increase in the number and the total of on campus students' credit hour participation in online courses. What is dramatic is the overall increase in the proportion of students who take advantage of the online courses. For fall term, online participation grew by 11% since 2004 from 8.7% to 19.7%. This means that 19.7% of our on campus students took at least one on line credit during fall term 2008. The student credit hour growth during that same period of time grew 4.8%. from 3.7% in 2004 to 8.5% in fall of 2008. This means that of the total credit hours that on campus students took in fall of 2008, 8.5% of those credits were online.

Fall Term

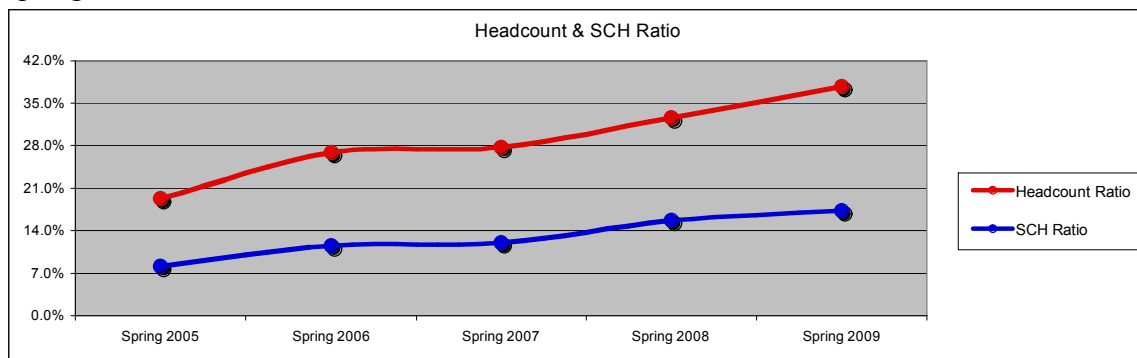


Although fall may not appear to be too dramatic in terms of overall participation or SCH proportion, winter and spring terms are greater. The graphs below depict winter and spring term growth in online participation. Note that the proportion of students in winter grew from 12.5% to 32.5% and spring from 19.2% to 37.7% taking at least on online course.

Winter Term



Spring Term



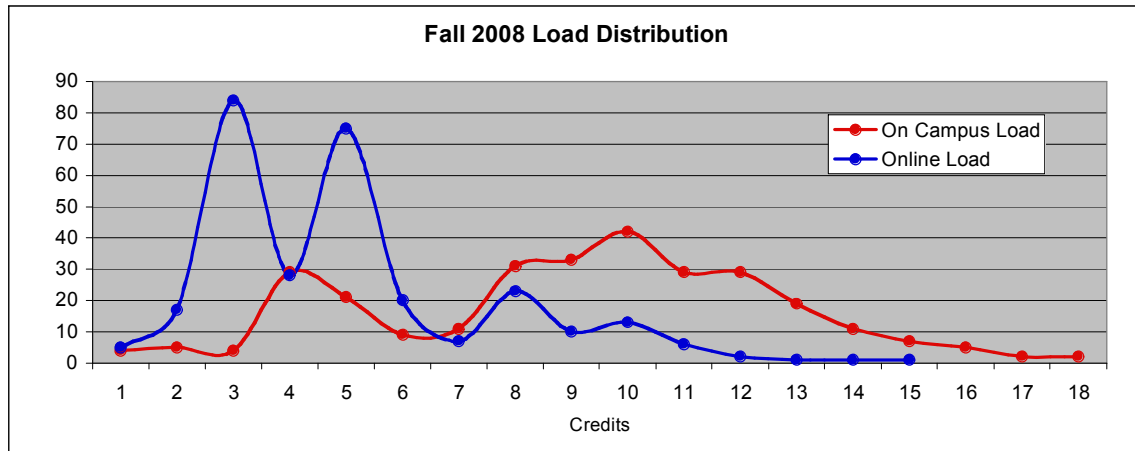
Student credit hour growth is aligned with headcount growth. In spring term 2009, 17% of on campus student credit hours were online course registrations.

There is no evidence that these trend lines are slated for a reduction or a plateau. Headcount and SCH correlations are solid and slopes portend an increase in both these proportions for AY 2009-10.

Distributions: A second observation about these data can be answered in an analysis of the “typical” student. We wanted to know about the 37.7% of on campus students taking online courses. How many do they take? What proportion of their load is online?

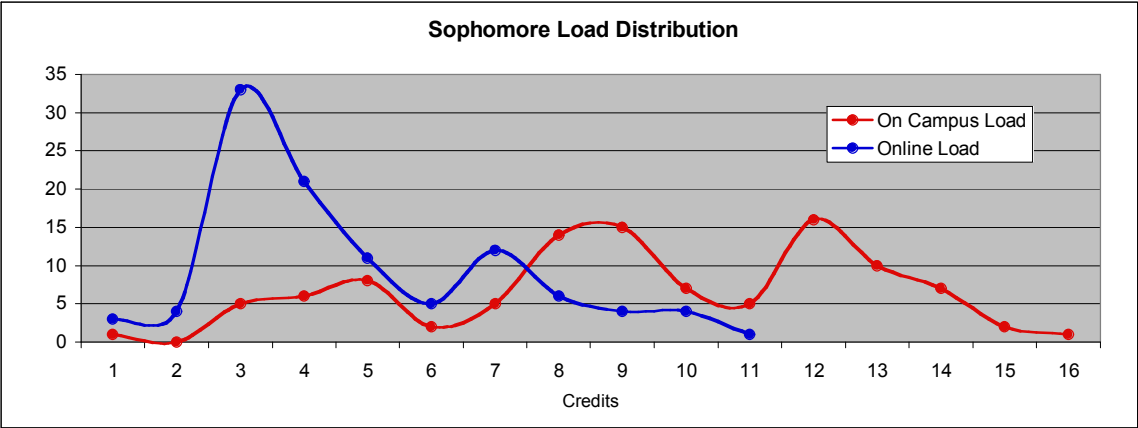
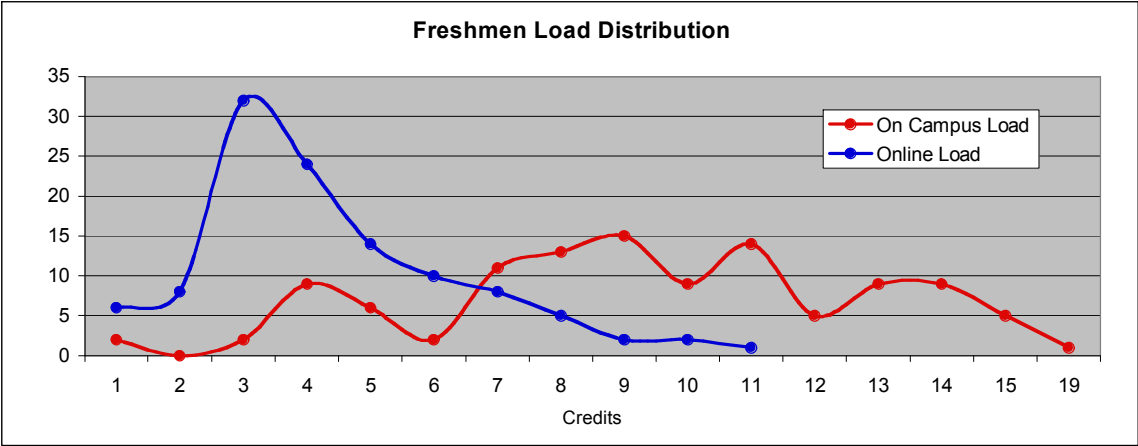
The graph below showing fall term is typical of winter and spring. It shows the behavior of on campus student with respect to the number of credit hours taken both on and off campus. Note that the modal number of on campus courses is 10 credits and the modal number of online credits is three and five credits. This means that a typical student will take two courses on campus and one course online to make-up their schedule. There are,

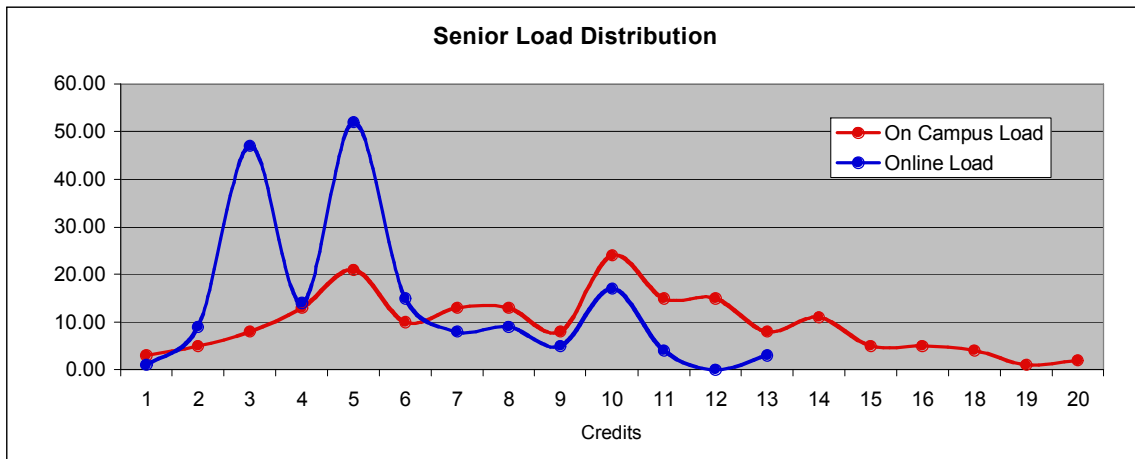
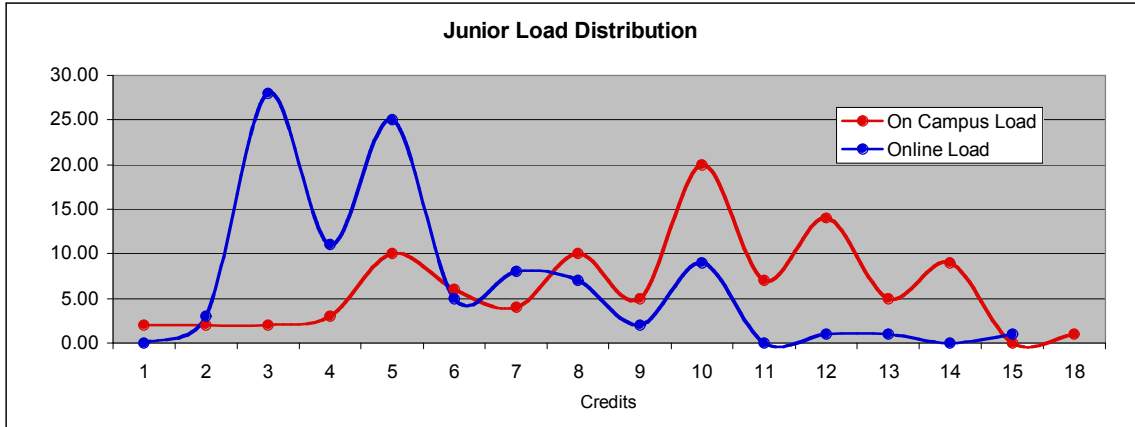
of course variations on this theme, but the lion share of students take only one course online as part of their schedule. This is true for winter and spring terms as well.



Class Level Differences: We next were interested to see if there was a difference in number of credits or proportions by class level. Do freshmen take fewer online courses than upper classmen? To answer this question, note the four graphs below:

Note that each graph shows a consistent trend, that the regardless of class level, the modal number of online courses taken is one.





Although counterintuitive, class level has little to do with the proportion of total credit hours taken. Freshmen, for example, took 32% of their credits online in spring term 2009. In comparison, sophomores took 34%, juniors 36% and seniors 38% of their credits online.

Courses that Draw Students. What online courses are drawing these students? Faculty members have reported drops in enrollment in certain classes and have speculated that online opportunities draw students away from some courses. In order to precisely understand this variable, a registration list was generated to determine the distribution of enrollments in online courses. Given below is the general distribution of online enrollments for on campus students.

	Total Different Courses Taken	Enrollments			
		>20	15-19	10-14	<10
Fall Term 2008	141	0	0	2	139
Winter Term 2009	154	2	4	8	140
Spring 2009	161	2	6	9	144

What is remarkable about these data is that the number of total online courses involved and the relatively few numbers of these courses with high enrollments. Although there are a handful of courses with enrollments of over 10 on campus students, 93% of the enrollment is distributed to small numbers of students in many different classes. Sixty per

cent of the enrollment are distributed in courses with five or fewer on campus participants, and 24% of the courses have only one on campus student. In terms of different courses, about 40% of the courses are lower division and 60% are upper division). Considering enrollment, lower and upper division classes are equal in distribution.

A full class listing of these data as well as other source data is available at the Provost's page found at <http://www.eou.edu/provost/Reports.html> under Online/On campus Enrollment Resources.

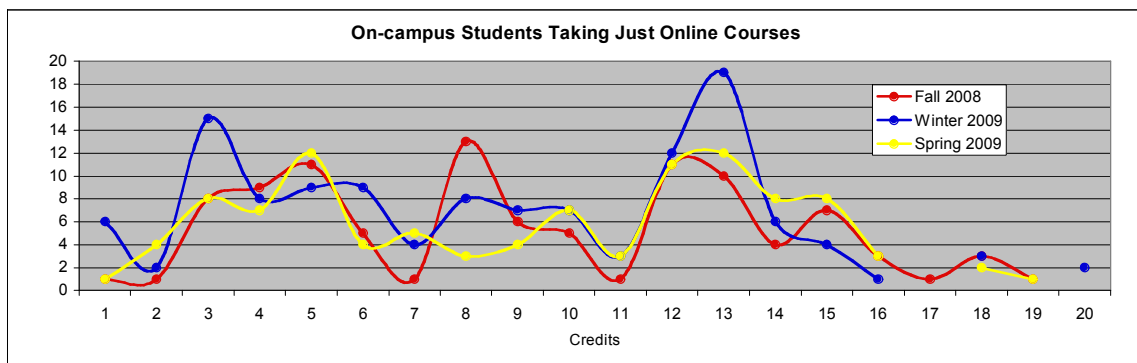
Financial Implication of a Mixed Schedule. Student who select the hybrid model of blending online courses with their on campus schedule are greeted at the Accounts Payable office with a larger bill. For the most common number of total credits taken (12) the following chart shows the bill generated by each combination:

On campus Credits	Online Credits	Total Bill
12	0	\$1,760
9	3	\$1,832
6	6	\$1,904
3	9	\$1,855

Increased cost as a result of mixed on campus/online course schedule is experienced for all higher total load hours as well. A complete breakdown of combinations for other credit hour loads is available on the Provost's page.

On Campus Students Who Take Online Courses Exclusively. It is difficult to capture data for students who choose to shift from on campus courses to online exclusively. Without tracking individual students, summarizing data similar to those details in the sections above is almost impossible.

What we do have is the ability to track students that were once on campus students who now only show as online registrations. The graph below summarizes these students.



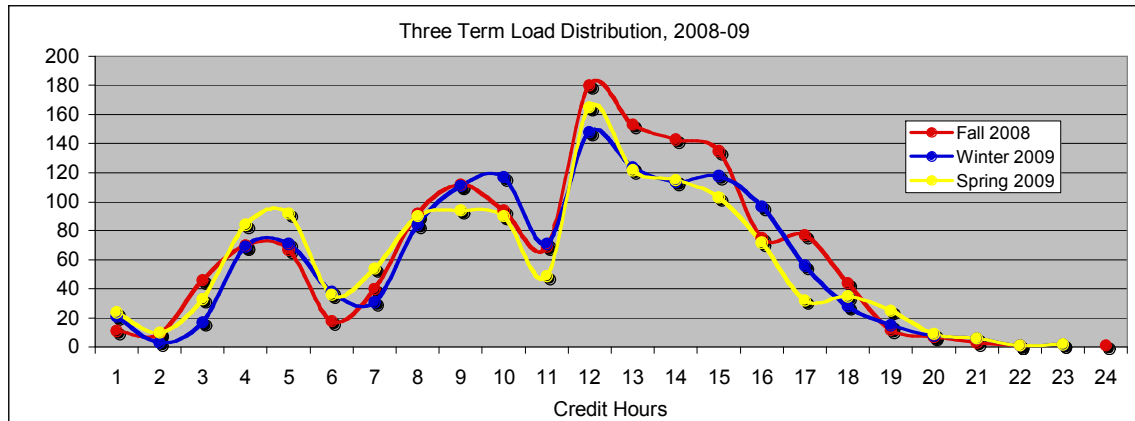
The total headcount per term averages almost 110 for students per term who are taking online exclusively who were once on campus. The SCH that is generated by these students is 2, 990 per year. The graph above shows that these students have a wide

variance in their enrollment behavior. We know very little more of these students other than anecdotal reasons why they are now taking online classes exclusively. Reasons vary from seniors who have job options and can finish the degree online, those that stop out full-time to work and then attend part time, or athletes who find that the schedule allows them to have greater flexibility with travel and practice.

There are certain financial implications for students if they do move to online courses exclusively. In the spreadsheet below note that an on campus student who moves to online courses exclusively saves a significant amount of tuition money. Over a year period a student would save as much as \$420 for a 12 credit hour load and considerably more by taking fewer credits. Efficiency for taking on campus courses exclusively is not realized until the tuition plateau is reached at the 16th credit.

Credits	Campus	Online	Savings	%	AY
0	0	0			
1	264	135	129	49%	387
2	397	270	127	32%	381
3	530	405	125	24%	375
4	663	540	123	19%	369
5	796	675	121	15%	363
6	1,086	810	276	25%	828
7	1,199	945	254	21%	762
8	1,312	1,080	232	18%	696
9	1,425	1,215	210	15%	630
10	1,538	1,350	188	12%	564
11	1,649	1,485	164	10%	492
12	1,760	1,620	140	8%	420
13	1,865	1,755	110	6%	330
14	1,970	1,890	80	4%	240
15	2,075	2,025	50	2%	150
16	2,128	2,160	(32)	-2%	-96
17	2,181	2,295	(114)	-5%	-342

Overall Credit Load: One final bit of data that helps understand something about the larger picture for students is their overall behavior in how they choose their total academic load. Given below is a graphic summary of the distribution of load for each term of the year. Note that the modal number of credits that students take is 12. There are sub modal points at 5 and 9 representing the notion that students take one, two or three courses and since our credit hour modulus is 3, 4 and 5 hours, these modes are understandable.



What is interesting to note in this information is that there is a sharp decline after 15 hours. Not many students take a fifth class. This data can explain, in part, why students did not avail themselves of the tuition plateau installed in fall of 2008. In summary, the data show that a smaller proportion of students took more than 15 hours than they did in previous years. A summary of these data is also available on the Provost's page.

Implications

Thus far this report has not attempted to impute value to these observations. The data trends show that on campus students are hybridizing their schedules with a combination of on campus and on line courses at a constant rate of growth. The rate of their adoption of this strategy is increasing and their forbearance of the differential costs communicates a strong motivation to employ these options. The motivations come from individual preferences, schedule accommodations, perceptions of less difficulty and smaller time commitments with online courses, and a variety of other reasons.

Eastern's experience with the online phenomena is not idiosyncratic. Dr. Jim Black of Semworks reported in an on campus interview with the President's Cabinet that students across the nation are rearranging their college schedules to accommodate online courses. Convenience, course availability, and cost competitiveness are reasons cited by those who observe this trend nationally.

We now pose the question, is this a good trend or a bad trend? If we continue at the current rate, what will this mean for Eastern?

For the most part, online instruction at EOU is part of our faculty overload and online adjunct work. The student credit hours assigned to online are, for the most part, remunerated at a per student per course rate. In the past 5 years, as on campus students have migrated to online courses, pay for faculty for this instruction has jumped from \$164,208 in 2004, to \$299,773 in 2009. Adjusting this total by adding in all those on campus students who choose to jump to online exclusively (\$137,750), a grand total of \$473,523 in labor is assigned to this set of SCH. On a positive note, we know that we are inloading several online sections into the on campus load for faculty. Estimates thus far put this figure at about \$125,000 for all three Colleges combined. Even with this economy the University is spending more \$300,000 per year to teach the same number of

students it had in 2004. Faculty members have fewer and fewer students in on campus sections and more and more in online sections.

Given our funding methods, our current fiscal standing and future concerns for overall sustainability, this trend is unfortunate. If it continues, and the shift of students to online instruction keeps pace, we can expect an additional \$50,000-75,000 expenditure each year to compensate faculty for overload or adjunct pay. In the most graphic terms this means that we need would reduce an on campus faculty member every year and transfer that expense to online instruction.

Therefore, based on this variable alone, the overall analysis dictates that we must do whatever we can to try to slow the growth in online instruction for on campus students.

Recommendations

What We Have Already Employed. We are not approaching this problem anew. Since January of 2008 we installed policies and strategies to try to contain our on campus students' enthusiasm for online courses. Given below is a list of specifics that were or will be implemented in the near future:

1. The Tuition Plateau. In the fall of 2008, President Lund installed a tuition plateau for on campus students taking the 16th credit. Every on campus credit beyond 15 hours would be billed at half rate. As previously mentioned, this strategy has not precipitated additional interest. We may speculate that it might have helped slow some of the online growth above 15 hours, but we have no evidence to support this hypothesis. It may be that our online enrollments might have been even larger without the plateau.

As we move forward with the plateau we should do a much better job of marketing this option to students with the aforementioned cost differential for mixing classes. We should consider a brochure that helps students understand the benefits of taking on campus courses without denigrating online offerings. We should watch enrollments carefully to determine if students may avail themselves of the option.

If the tuition plateau fails to draw students after the 15th hour we should either consider lowering the plateau, or installing a sloped plateau where after 12 hours the cost per credit is progressively discounted, or abandon the plateau altogether. A study should be conducted to determine the fiscal effects of all three scenarios.

2. Scheduling. Fall term 2009 will be our first foray with the blocked schedule. One consistent reason students give concerning choosing the online version is the availability of the course. If we can plan carefully and keep students tightly scheduled with as few conflicts as possible, they may be more apt to take an exclusive on campus schedule. Going forward, our scheduling software will assist us in finding more commodious combinations that may help students have more success with puzzling their programs together.

3. Institutional Data. Prior to 2007, EOU had few data points to drive decisions. With an ongoing commitment to acquiring and promulgating information, the University will have the data it needs to make good decisions about the future.

As we go forward, we need a few more pieces of data. Deans and faculty members will need to analyze the online course lists to determine if there are popular online courses that could be rescheduled on campus or replaced with one scheduled at an awkward time. Why students choose the most enrolled course list is an important data search that probably can only truly be understood with student surveys. We should conduct both web-based and phone interviews of students to determine why students register for certain classes.

We also need data to examine the relative success rates of students in online courses as a function of class level and number of courses taken. This may help direct some of the recommendations below.

4. Incorporation of Online Courses Into the Regular Faculty Load. Thus far, faculty members have incorporated a number of online courses into the regular inload campus schedule. The exact impact of that incorporation will not be known until we collect data for total disbursement and total online credit hours.

As we move forward there is still opportunity to inload some additional courses or experiment with hybrid courses. There is a theoretical limit to this activity and a practical limit based on the notion that moving too much enrollment to online sections merely exacerbates the problem and encourages students to accelerate their mixture of online/on campus schedules.

Recommendations for Further Actions

5. Restricting Enrollments. Freshmen retention is one of our highest priorities. We lose far too many students—our 10-year average hovers at about 32% who do not return in fall of their sophomore year. Much of the problem is academic failure. We may posit that an online class may not be the best alternative for freshmen. If we do, we may want to restrict freshmen from online courses in their first term absolutely, the second term unless authorized by the Dean and with evidence of positive academic standing, and perhaps limited to one course in spring terms dependent on continued positive academic standing.

We may also want to restrict sophomores to one online class per term. Although we have fiscal and curricular rationale for these restrictions, we can also justify these side boards for lower division students by observing that they have far more options available to them early on to choose general education and program support courses. With juniors and seniors, the options start to close in and in order to graduate in a timely fashion there are sometimes no alternatives than to take the online course that helps them graduate in a timely fashion.

If we reduce freshmen and sophomore participation in online instruction by ½ or more, we can push as much as 1000 SCH back to on campus courses we can save a significant portion of instructional FTE.

6. Restricting the Use of EOU-offered Scholarships for On Campus Students for On Campus Courses Only. For those on campus students who receive a significant award from EOU as tuition remission, we may restrict the application of that award to on campus courses only. It may be that a student could use other financial aid to support online courses, but it would delimit a large share of dollars to be used for online tuition. The rationale here is that tuition remission is an agreement of the University to forgo revenue. If it has to pay for the actual credits taken then it loses twice. We can and should only give away what does not cost us more to provide.

7. Advising. Advisors have a great deal to do with how students register for courses. Advisors can work positively to influence students to puzzle a schedule together that maximizes the on campus load. It may be harder to figure-out, but with a bit of effort we may redirect students. Further, advisors can be instrumental in pointing out the cost differentials considering a hybrid schedule of courses.

8. Rigor of Online Courses. A perception by some students and faculty members is that some online courses are less rigorous than on campus offerings. Deans and faculty members must work to assure that online courses have the same requirements as on campus ones and that if exact learning experiences cannot be achieved online, that alternatives be invented. Students must not have the idea ever that they can complete a course over a “weekend” or that they don’t have to do anything in the online version. We must assure that our online offerings are at parity with on campus courses.

9. Resisting the Personal Financial Incentive to Push Enrollments Online. Although only anecdotal, there have been enough data points to suggest that some faculty members encourage students to take the online version of a course for a variety of reasons. One odious one is that the faculty member desires the opportunity to earn more in overload payment.

10. Restructuring the Freshman Experience. Creating a suite of courses designed to serve freshmen may be a way to reduce the incentives to enroll in online courses. If we can carefully plan a series of suites of aligned course clusters for freshmen we can set schedules and assure a coordinated experience and an ease of registration.

There may be other strategies that may be suggested that may help lessen the impact of the increase of on campus students involved with online courses. I would like to invite the Senate to host an open forum on this matter as early as orientation week to discuss this further.