




November 28, 2018

TO: Dylan Rodriguez, Chair  
Riverside Division

FR: Thomas Stahovich, Chair   
Executive Committee, Bourns College of Engineering

RE: Provost's Taskforce for Hybrid and Online Education Final Report

On November 13, 2018 the BCOE executive committee met and discussed the Final Report from the Provost's Taskforce for Hybrid and Online Education. While the committee is supportive of online education (we offer an MS Online program), the committee does have some concerns with the plans articulated in the report. For example, offering 25% of courses online could detrimentally change the nature of the university experience. Research has shown, for instance, that a student's engineering identity is a significant indicator of educational and professional persistence. It is unknown how a substantial shift from on-campus to online courses would affect students' sense of engineering identity, and hence their persistence. In recent years, many engineering programs, including the ones in BCOE, have increased the number freshman engineering courses as a means of increasing student / faculty interaction and promoting student persistence.

The Report cites several research studies, including a meta-study. However, care must be taken in generalizing from these. The authors of the meta-study ("Online Learning in Postsecondary Education a Review of the Empirical Literature (2013-2014)") state that "Many of the included studies are vulnerable to methodological limitations that endanger the robustness of their results." Additionally, these studies primarily examine the efficacy of individual courses, and there is much less research on the effect of moving a significant portion of the curriculum from on-campus to online.

Many instructors have found that teaching an online course requires more time and effort than teaching an in-person course. Thus, requiring research-active faculty to teach online courses could have a detrimental impact on their research productivity. Furthermore, teaching

evaluations are sometimes more negative for online courses than for in-person courses. Both of these issues could negatively impact merits and promotions for faculty.

Finally, the committee is disappointed that there was no representation from BCOE on the task force. Although Frank Vahid was listed in the report as a committee member, he was not a member. The report may have benefitted from the considerable experience BCOE has accumulated from creating and operating our MS Online program, the only fully online program on our campus, as well as from faculty interest and ongoing work in BCOE on computer-assisted teaching and learning.