

Arts & Sciences eLearning Working Group Report

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Prepared by: John D. Griffin
Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Arts & Sciences

Introduction:

This report details the recent activities of the Arts & Sciences faculty who have been involved in formal discussions on eLearning and its' role in the curriculum. These discussions began with a week-long seminar in June 2013 which was co-sponsored by the Office of the Dean of Arts & Sciences and Gene Roche as part of his role as Director of eLearning Initiatives and a recent creative adaptation grant. This seminar resulted in the development of an eLearning Vision Statement for Arts & Sciences that was presented to Dean Conley in August. At that time, Dean Conley asked me to form and lead a working group to further these conversations and to work with a small core of faculty to develop and pilot several courses that use eLearning methodologies to their fullest extent. Several of these pilot courses are considered flipped courses and will be offered during the 2014-15 academic year as part of the Arts & Sciences undergraduate curriculum. Additionally, two fully on-line courses will be offered as part of the upcoming summer session. Along the way, the working group has identified policies and procedures that need to be more fully developed, and has begun to define more specifically the resources required to grow these initiative across Arts & Sciences.

Arts & Sciences eLearning Seminar (June 10-14, 2013):

In advance of a summer seminar on eLearning, John Griffin (Dean of Undergraduate Studies) attended a national conference on eLearning in the Arts & Sciences, sponsored by the Council of Colleges of Arts & Sciences. A report from this conference entitled "On-Line Education in the Arts & Sciences" was provided to each of the participants prior to the summer seminar. (A copy of this report is provided in the addendum.) The report summarizes the need to align eLearning with the mission of the University and Arts & Sciences, the many decisions that need to be made ahead of offering our first on-line courses, and describes the basic forms on eLearning that should be considered for integration into courses in the Arts & Sciences curriculum. These include "flipping" a course to provide more interactive classroom experiences, fully on-line courses, the development of "Legacy MOOC" courses that are part of the outreach and branding of the University, and the use of on-line short courses for pre-enrollment placement into courses in particular fields of study.

The Arts & Sciences eLearning Seminar was well attended by faculty from across the disciplines, with a full agenda and invited guests depending on the topics. A list of attendees and the agenda are provided in the addendum as well as the eLearning Working Group Charge that incorporates a vision statement for eLearning in the Arts & Sciences that resulted from the seminar and endorsed by all involved.

It is clear that eLearning methodologies have a great deal of potential for enhancing the educational experiences of our students in the Arts & Sciences. However, that potential needs to be specifically linked to the learning objectives each instructor develops for a particular course and will vary by discipline and level.

The seminar group determined four objectives for the use of eLearning in Arts & Sciences:

1. Learning objectives should be the driving force behind the use of eLearning, and its use should reinforce our emphasis on student-centered education.
2. eLearning should make courses more interactive (between students and faculty and among students) and allow an increased emphasis on problem-solving and more immediate faculty feedback.
3. eLearning can free up the space and time necessary for students to develop tools for self-learning; at the same time, care should be taken that the introduction of eLearning not significantly increase the amount of student time required for the course.
4. Uses of eLearning should vary by discipline and level of advancement (i.e., lower-division vs. upper-division courses, undergraduate vs. graduate levels).

Additionally, the seminar group looked closely at what was needed to bring eLearning into greater use across Arts & Sciences. Currently, very few policies exist concerning the use of eLearning, and those that do, need to be better defined. This includes criteria for governing the transfer of eLearning courses for credit from other institutions, the level of oversight needed to assure quality and receive formal approval for courses in Arts & Sciences, and a clear definition of institutional property rights. Furthermore, more attention needs to be focused on the resources required to support faculty in developing eLearning as part of their courses.

The Vision Statement also recommended some best practices for using eLearning methodologies in Arts & Sciences. First, the faculty should consider using on-line resources to compliment or substitute for textbooks and other traditional sources, where appropriate. Second, faculty should consider “flipping” some or all of their classes by moving course content on-line, so that classroom sessions can be used to engage students in interactive exercises that apply what they have learned. It is also clear from student focus groups and from discussions with faculty that when they are on campus during the regular academic year, they all prefer face-to-face interactions in and out of the classroom. However, there may be times when eLearning tools can be used to provide on-line course content such as instruction by faculty who may be located at a distant research or field location. We also found that while William and Mary students want face-to-face instruction while they are on campus, these same students will enroll in on-line courses offered by other institutions when they are away from campus during the summer. This presents an opportunity for Arts & Sciences to consider the role of fully on-line courses as part of the summer school program, targeting enrollment of our own current students.

As detailed below, Arts & Sciences will be the first to offer fully on-line asynchronous courses this summer. Till Schrieber, Arts & Sciences first appointed Senior Lecturer, will offer a course in Macroeconomics. Randy Coleman, an early adopter and user of eLearning in the classroom, will offer Biochemistry. Both of these courses are in high demand during the regular academic year.

Arts & Sciences eLearning Working Group:

With a vision statement for eLearning in hand, developed through the hard work of the summer seminar group, a smaller contingent of faculty began working in the fall on their ideas for developing fully flipped and on-line courses.

On-line Courses: Till Schrieber (Economics), Randy Coleman (Chemistry)

Flipped Courses: Suzanne Raitt (English), Peter Kemper (Computer Science), Margaret Saha (Biology), Gene Tracy (Physics), Oliver Kerscher (Biology), Larry Leemis (Mathematics), and Iyabo Osiapem (Africana Studies)

These faculty were joined throughout the fall by Gene Roche and members of his instructional learning development team (Rachael Kleinsorge, April Lawrence, John Drummond, Pablo Yanez, and Michael Blum).

Throughout the fall semester, this team of faculty and staff began to define their ideas for developing learning modules that could be used to provide students with content outside the classroom, leading to more engagement in the classroom or providing content for fully on-line courses. As these discussions progressed, the group began to develop dependable and common resource tools that will lead to a high level of consistency and quality in the final content products. As part of this effort, John Drummond recently unveiled an eLearning Kit in a Box for use by faculty in developing on-line content. This kit includes a laptop computer that is pre-loaded with supported software and comes with a high quality microphone, video camera, and writing tablet. Several of these kits are being developed in collaboration with Arts & Sciences. Through the efforts of the eLearning Working Group, we have also begun to develop policies on who should be allowed to take there courses on-line, what level of compensation should be provided for developing on-line courses, what resources are needed, and how do we ensure quality across courses developed in the various disciplines. These issues and questions will be a focus of our time as we move forward.

Current Status:

As the eLearning Working Group continues to meet throughout the spring semester and into the summer, a main focus will be on getting the two on-line courses ready for the upcoming summer session. As these are the first two fully on-line courses offered by William and Mary, there was no clear procedure for listing them in the summer schedule. Further, there is nowhere on the current William and Mary website describing the requirements and support for these course. We worked with the Office of the Registrar to develop procedures for listing on-line courses and are currently working on a web page promoting on-line courses in Arts & Sciences and detailing the requirements and support that will be in place for these course while they are in session. We have also continued to work with the faculty who plan on using eLearning methodologies to flip their courses in the coming academic year.

Moving Forward:

There is a clear need for the University to develop its commitment to on-line education as Arts & Sciences and the other schools begin to offer on-line courses and use more eLearning methodologies in the classroom. Faculty support is essential in creating consistency in implementation of these methodologies and assuring quality through assessment. We look forward to continuing our work throughout the summer and into the coming academic year.