

# *Special Called Faculty Meeting*

June 11, 2013



*B*UILDING SUCCESS STORIES

**JUNE 11, 2013**

**Special Called Faculty Meeting**

**Athens State University**

(As permitted by Article VIII "Meetings" of the present Constitution and Bylaws)

**2:30 – 3:20**

**(See Attachment A)**

**Communication to be discussed: Should the statement "Complete a minimum of sixty semester hours at upper level college/university credit (300-400 level courses)" be deleted?**

- Respective Catalogue Statements of Other Colleges in Alabama
- SACS Standards Specific to Number of Credit Hours
- Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures
- Presentations and/or Participation of President Bob Glenn, Provost Ron Cromwell, Vice-President of Financial Affairs Mike McCoy and SACS Liaison Officer Dr. Robert Burkhardt

**3:30 - 4:00**

**(See Attachment B)**

- Discussion (if passed by Senate) on "Faculty Evaluation Policy" Proposal from 2012-2013 Standing Faculty Committee. Presented by Chair James Gadberry
- Discussion (if passed by Senate) on "Virtual Faculty Office Hours". Proposal from 2012-2013 Standing Academic Affairs Committee. Presented by Chair Charles (Rick) Roberts
  - a. Academic Affairs Committee Minutes (June 4, 2012?)
  - b. White Paper by John Berzett: "The Use and Efficacy of Faculty Virtual Office Hours"

## Attachment A

## Respective Catalogue Statements of Other Colleges in Alabama

### University of North Alabama

**Upper-Division Credit Requirement.** Students transferring work from a junior or community college must earn a minimum of 64 semester hours from UNA and/or other senior institutions in addition to meeting UNA residence.

### Jacksonville State University

Students may transfer from a two-year college at any time. Although an unlimited number of hours are acceptable from a two-year college, students must earn a minimum of 64 semester hours from a four-year college or university, 32 of which must be earned from JSU. Therefore, **JSU recommends that each transfer student not earn credit beyond 64 semester hours (96 quarter hours) at the two-year college.**

### University of Montevallo

No more than 64 semester hours of two-year college credit may be applied toward degree requirements.

### University of South Alabama

A maximum of 64 semester hours may be transferred from a junior or community college. Courses offered by this University with a course number of 300 or higher will not be accepted as a transfer from a junior college unless approved by the appropriate college dean.



## **SACS Standards Specific to Number of Credit Hours**

### **Core Requirements 2.7.1**

**2.7.1** The institution offers one or more degree programs based on at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the associate level; at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the baccalaureate level; or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the post-baccalaureate, graduate, or professional level. If an institution uses a unit other than semester credit hours, it provides an explanation for the equivalency. The institution also provides a justification for all degrees that include fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit.

**(Program Length)**

### **Comprehensive Standard 3.5.2**

**3.5.2** At least 25 percent of the credit hours required for the degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree. *(See Commission policy*

**"Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures")**

***(Institutional credits for a degree)***



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
Commission on Colleges  
1866 Southern Lane  
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

## **AGREEMENTS INVOLVING JOINT AND DUAL ACADEMIC AWARDS: POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

### **- Policy Statement -**

This policy pertains to agreements between institutions accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and accredited or non-accredited degree-granting institutions of higher education throughout the world for purposes of awarding academic completion awards, e.g., certificates, diplomas, or degrees.

For the purposes of review by SACSCOC, the following definitions apply:

- An agreement by two or more institutions to grant *dual* academic awards is one whereby students study at two or more institutions and each institution grants a separate academic award bearing only its name, seal, and signature.
- An agreement by two or more institutions to grant a *joint* academic award is one whereby students study at two or more institutions and the institutions grant a single academic award bearing the names, seals, and signatures of each of the participating institutions.

While SACSCOC member institutions may use alternative terms for agreements involving dual or joint academic awards (for example, "affiliations" or "partnerships" or "collaborations") for purposes of reporting agreements involving dual or joint academic awards, they are responsible for using the above definitions and for following the appropriate procedures described below.

For the reporting of other arrangements or agreements not involving dual or joint academic awards, member institutions should consult the Substantive Change Policy and reporting requirements for other reviews by SACSCOC.

### **Responsibilities of SACSCOC Member Institutions**

**Provide Appropriate Information to SACSCOC:** Member institutions are responsible for providing notification to SACSCOC of agreements involving dual or joint academic awards, providing signed copies of the agreements, and providing any other documentation or information required by SACSCOC policies and procedures for review. Specific required documentation is listed below.

**Ensure Access to Partner Institutions' Information:** The member institution is responsible for ensuring that SACSCOC has timely access to the partner institutions' materials, physical site(s) and personnel in conjunction with accreditation activities.

**Ensure the Integrity of their Accreditation and their Awards:** Because the SACSCOC accreditation that has been awarded to a member institution is not transferable to a partner institution—either in



actuality or appearance—SACSCOC prohibits the use of its accreditation to authenticate courses, programs, or awards offered by organizations not so accredited with which it has formed partnerships. Likewise, member institutions are responsible for ensuring the quality of courses, programs, or awards offered through relationships with other institutions, particularly those resulting in dual or joint academic awards.

**Provide a Disclaimer Statement:** Member institutions entering into agreements with institutions not accredited by SACSCOC for the awarding of either dual or joint academic awards and their non-SACSCOC partner institutions must use the following disclaimer statement in any materials describing the relationship. The member institution is responsible for reviewing, approving, and monitoring the non-SACSCOC partner institutions' statements of relationship to ensure conformity with the disclaimer:

"[Name of SACSCOC member institution] is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award [state degree levels]. [Name of partner institution] is not accredited by SACS Commission on Colleges and the accreditation of [name of member institution] does not extend to or include [name of partner institution] or its students. Further, although [name of member institution] agrees to accept certain course work from [name of partner institution] to be applied toward an award from [name of member institution], that course work may not be accepted by other colleges or universities in transfer, even if it appears on a transcript from [name of member institution]. The decision to accept course work in transfer from any institution is made by the institution considering the acceptance of credits or course work.

**Ensure Appropriate Percentages of Work Offered by the Member Institution:** To receive an undergraduate academic award, students must earn 25 percent or more of the credits required for the award through the SACSCOC member institution's own direct instruction. To receive a graduate academic award, students must earn one-third or more of the credits through the SACSCOC member institution's own direct instruction.

**Avoid Use of the SACSCOC Logo:** Neither member nor partner institutions may use the SACSCOC logo in any of their materials or on websites. Use of the logo is reserved exclusively for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges.

**Ensure the Quality of Credits Recorded on Transcripts:** When evaluating, accepting, and transcribing credits awarded through an agreement involving dual or joint academic awards, the member institution must ensure the following:

- Examine courses transferred in and transcribed from partner institutions to ensure that they meet the requirements of the member institution and the requirements of *The Principles of Accreditation*. (See a list of applicable requirements below.)
- Assess and monitor effectively courses and components completed through instruction by partner institutions. The assessment and monitoring should be accomplished by academically-qualified persons.
- Record on the academic transcript the name of the institution from which a course is taken. If a member institution desires to transcript as its own a course taken through an agreement with a partner institution, it must be able to demonstrate that the instruction was provided under the member's supervision and included approval of the academic qualifications of each instructor in advance and that regular evaluation of the effectiveness of each instructor occurs.
- Disclose fully the nature of the agreement on the transcript of the institutions awarding the degree.
- Reflect accurately in its catalog the courses being offered through the agreement if they are available to its own students as part of an educational program.
- Ensure that qualified and competent faculty members at each participating institution agree on the content and teaching methodologies of courses and education programs and on the qualifications of the faculty members who teach in the programs.



Qualifications of teaching faculty must comply with the faculty competence requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*.

- Ensure that the educational outcomes of a major or concentration offered as part of dual or joint award agreements are (1) comparable to the outcomes of the same major or concentration offered by the institutions or, if not offered by any of the participating institutions, (2) comparable to the outcomes of a peer institution external to the agreement that offers the same educational program's major or concentration.
- Ensure that, within the agreement, there is appropriate faculty accountability to the institutions accepting the credit, perhaps through dual faculty appointments or other approaches that include evaluation by the accepting institution.

**Ensure Compliance with Appropriate SACSCOC Requirements:** Requirements and standards in the *Principles of Accreditation* which affect the implementation of agreements involving dual and joint Academic awards are listed below. They should be considered when developing the agreement, documentation of compliance, and, if relevant, a substantive change prospectus:

- Integrity (Section 1)
- Institutional Mission (CR 2.4)
- Faculty (CR 2.8 and CS 3.7.1)
- Learning Resources and Services (CR 2.9)
- Institutional Effectiveness: educational programs, to include student learning outcomes (CS 3.3.1.1)
- Academic program approval (CS 3.4.1)
- Admission policies (CS 3.4.3)
- Acceptance of academic credit (CS 3.4.4)
- Practices for awarding credit (CS 3.4.6)
- Consortial relationships/contractual agreements (CS 3.4.7)
- Institutional credits for a degree (CS 3.5.2 and CS 3.6.3)
- Student records (CS 3.9.2)
- Physical facilities (CS 3.11.3)
- Substantive change (CS 3.12.1)
- Program curriculum (FR 4.2)
- Publication of policies (FR 4.3)
- Program length (FR 4.4)
- Student complaints (FR 4.5)
- Recruitment materials (FR 4.6)
- Distance and correspondence education (FR 4.8), if applicable
- Definition of credit hours (FR 4.9)
- Policy: Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures
- Policy: Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions
- Policy: Distance and Correspondence Education (*if applicable*)

### **Reporting Responsibilities and Procedures When Developing Agreements for Dual Academic Awards**

**Prior Notification:** Entering into an agreement with a member or non-member institution involving a *dual* academic award is a substantive change that requires an institution to submit a letter of notification six months prior to implementation of the agreement and a final signed copy of the agreement. Formal, written acceptance of that notification and agreement by SACSCOC is required before implementation of the provisions of the agreement. (See note at the end of this policy for additional requirements if the agreement involves a new program which is significantly different from currently offered programs or an off-campus site where students may earn 50 percent or more of the credit in a program.) Expectations are that the agreement will reflect assumption of responsibility on the part of the member institution for the



academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution's transcript and accepted toward a dual academic award. The following should be submitted to SACSCOC:

- A notification letter that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated beginning date of the agreement, a description of the agreement, the complete address/location of the parties involved in the agreement, and information for contact persons at each participating institution regarding the agreement.
- A copy of the final signed agreement.

### **Reporting Responsibilities and Procedures When Developing Agreements for Joint Academic Awards**

Participating in agreements involving the offering of joint academic awards (as defined above) falls into three categories. Reporting responsibilities differ depending on the accreditation status of the institutions which are partnering with the SACSCOC member institution.

**Category One:** A SACSCOC member institution and partner institutions that are all SACSCOC accredited

**Prior Notification by Each Member Institution:** Entering into a *joint* academic award agreement with partner institutions which are all SACSCOC accredited institutions is a substantive change that requires (1) submission of prior notification at least six months in advance of implementation of the agreement and (2) a final signed copy of the agreement. Formal, written acceptance of the agreement by SACSCOC is required before implementation of the provisions of the agreement. (See note at the end of this policy for additional requirements if the agreement involves a new program which is significantly different from currently offered programs or an off-campus site where students may earn 50 percent or more of the credit in a program.) Expectations are that the agreement will reflect assumption of responsibility on the part of the member institution for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution's transcript and accepted toward a *joint* academic award. The following should be submitted to SACSCOC:

- A notification letter that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated beginning date of the agreement, a description of the agreement, the complete address/location of the parties involved in the agreement, and information for contact persons at each participating institution regarding the agreement.
- A copy of the final signed agreement.

**Category Two:** A SACSCOC member institution and at least one partner institution that is accredited by a U.S. Department of Education-recognized accreditor other than SACSCOC

**Prior Notification by SACSCOC Member Institution:** Entering into a *joint* academic award agreement with at least one partner institution which is accredited by a USDOE-recognized accreditor other than SACSCOC is a substantive change that requires (1) submission of prior notification at least six months in advance of implementation of the agreement along with the required documentation listed below and (2) a final signed copy of the agreement. Formal, written approval of the agreement by SACSCOC is required before implementation of the provisions of the agreement. (See note at the end of this policy for additional requirements if the agreement involves a new program which is significantly different from currently offered programs or an off-campus site where students may earn 50 percent or more of the credit in a program.) Expectations are that the agreement will reflect assumption of responsibility on the part of the member institution for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the



institution's transcript and accepted toward a *joint* academic award. The following should be submitted to SACSCOC:

- A letter of notification that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated implementation date for the agreement, a description of the proposed agreement, the address/location of each institution involved in the agreement, and information for the contact person at each participating institution
- A copy of the final signed agreement
- Documentation that the non-SACSCOC partner institution is not on a public sanction with its accreditor
- Documentation that the courses or programs of the non-SACSCOC Partner institution(s) are consistent with the educational purpose and goals of the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s)
- Documentation that the institution meets the provisions of Comprehensive Standard 3.4.7 (Consortial relationships/contractual agreements), including the analysis of credits accepted in transfer
- A plan to monitor and ensure that the quality of contributions made by the partner institution(s) meets SACSCOC expectations
- A plan and process produced by the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s) ensuring that the agreement and awarding of a joint award does not result in the appearance of extending SACSCOC accreditation to partner institutions through promotional materials, academic publications, student transcripts, credentials verifying program completion, and releases to the news media. (See the disclaimer statement above.)
- Prototypes of official academic documents (e.g. student transcript, degree, diploma, certificate) involved in the agreement.

**Category Three:** A SACSCOC member institution and at least one partner institution that is not accredited by a USDE-recognized accreditor

**Prior Notification by SACSCOC Member Institution:** Entering into a *joint* academic award agreement with at least one partner institution which is not accredited by a USDOE-recognized accreditor is a substantive change that requires (1) submission of prior notification at least six months in advance of implementation of the agreement along with the required documentation below and (2) a final signed copy of the agreement. Formal, written approval of the agreement by SACSCOC is required before implementation of the provisions of the agreement. (See note at the end of this policy for additional requirements if the agreement involves a new program which is significantly different from currently offered programs or an off-campus site where students may earn 50 percent or more of the credit in a program.) Expectations are that the agreement will reflect assumption of responsibility on the part of the SACSCOC member institution for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution's transcript and accepted toward a *joint* academic award. The following should be submitted to SACSCOC:

- A notification letter that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated beginning date for the agreement, a description of the proposed agreement, the address/location of each institution involved in the agreement, and information for the contact person(s) at each participating institution
- A copy of the final signed agreement
- A description of (1) any external governmental or accrediting agency approval for the institution(s) or program(s) involved in the agreement, excluding the SACSCOC institution(s), (2) the process of quality assurance used by the agency granting this approval, and (3) any required legal or licensing approvals
- Documentation that the courses or programs of the non-SACSCOC Partner institution(s) are consistent with the educational purpose and goals of the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s)

- Documentation that the institution meets the provisions of Comprehensive Standard 3.4.7 (Consortial relationships/contractual agreements), including the analysis of credits accepted in transfer
- Documentation that faculty involved in the collaboration are qualified to teach assigned components or courses and a description of the means by which the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s) will monitor these qualifications (Submit a completed SACSCOC Faculty Roster Form.)
- Documentation describing the physical and learning resources that will support the collaboration
- A plan and process to monitor and ensure that the quality of contributions made by the partner institution(s) meets applicable SACSCOC requirements
- A plan and process produced by the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s) ensuring that the agreement does not result in the appearance of extending SACSCOC accreditation to partner institutions through promotional materials, academic publications, student transcripts, credentials verifying program completion, and releases to the news media. (See the disclaimer statement above).
- Prototypes of official academic documents (e.g. student transcript, degree, diploma, certificate) involved in the agreement.

When necessary to ensure compliance with SACSCOC requirements, SACSCOC may request additional information concerning any of these agreements involving joint and dual academic awards.

**Note:** *If the joint or dual academic award arrangement involves offering 50 percent or more of a program at a previously unapproved off-campus site by a member institution or involves offering a new program which is significantly different from currently offered approved programs, notification is due six months prior to the implementation date with a prospectus for approval due at least three months prior to implementation.*

**Document history**

*Note: Previously called "Collaborative Academic Arrangements"*

*Approved: SACSCOC Board of Trustees, June 2010*

*Revised: Executive Council, December 2010*

*Revised and Approved as "Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Programs":*

*Approved: SACSCOC Board of Trustees, December 2012*



## Attachment B

## **6.7 FACULTY EVALUATION**

In order to allow the faculty of Athens State University to maintain a high standard of excellence in teaching, scholarly activity, and service, the faculty of Athens State University do hereby establish a formal, annual performance review of all members of the ASU faculty, whether tenured, tenure-track, or non-tenure-track. The performance review shall consist of four parts: (1) a self-review, (2) classroom observation, (3) annual summary data provided by the Student Rating Form, and (4) an annual review by each faculty member's Department chair or College Dean.

The faculty evaluation shall provide information that will allow for formative evaluation, information that can be used by the faculty members to improve teaching, scholarly activity, and service. The evaluation should also provide information that will allow for summative evaluation, so as to allow for comparison to others and established professional standards, such that the information can be used to assist in decisions concerning tenure, promotion, and merit raises. This process should provide for faculty development including, for tenure-track faculty, an internal pre-tenure review. For pre-tenure faculty it is important to have evaluative information for use in faculty development.

### **I. Faculty Self-Evaluation**

The procedure starts when the faculty member conducts a self-evaluation utilizing a form that includes teaching competency and effectiveness, advising responsibilities, service, professional development/scholarly activities, and other faculty duties. The faculty self-evaluation is reviewed by the faculty member and Department chair.

### **II. Classroom Observation**

1. The Department chair shall make at least one in-class observation per year for all faculty members who are on tenure-track or other probationary contracts. For tenured faculty the Department chair shall make at least one in-class observation within 18 months prior of the date that the tenured faculty member is evaluated for promotion by the Tenure and Promotion Committee. Faculty may request additional class observations by the Department chair for the purpose of preparing application packets for tenure and/or promotion.
2. The purpose of in-class observation is to raise the awareness of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs, College Deans and Department chairs of teaching expertise and needs of individual faculty members in the department.
3. The time of the in-class observation visit shall be determined by the Department chair in consultation with the faculty member.
4. The Department chair shall complete the In-Class Observation Evaluation Form soon after the in-class observation. Along with syllabi and other materials, the evaluation form shall be used by the Department chair as a basis for the annual report of the faculty member. The Department chair shall discuss findings of the in-class observation with the faculty member within two weeks of the visit. The Department chair shall share the evaluation form with the faculty member at this time. The original evaluation form with the signatures of the Department chair and faculty member shall be filed in the office of the Department chair and/or College Dean, with a copy given to the faculty member and the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs. The observer for in-class observation of teaching College Deans is to be selected by the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs. The observer for in-class observation of Department chairs is to be selected by the College Dean. For observation of the teaching Dean or Department chair, the original evaluation form with signatures of the observer and College Dean or Department chair shall be filed in the office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs, with a copy given to the observed College Dean or Department chair.

### **III. Student Evaluations of Faculty**

#### **A. General Guidelines for Use of Student Rating Forms**

1. Student course evaluations will be conducted during spring, fall and summer sessions.
2. Summative evaluation shall normally be based on one year's data. Faculty shall not be evaluated solely on the basis of one student or one class. Except in the case of first-year appointments, faculty shall not be evaluated based on data from one semester.
3. Student Rating Forms shall always be used in combination with other sources of information concerning teaching, for example, annual evaluations by deans/chairs, annual self-evaluations, evaluation by colleagues, and/or portfolio information.
4. Faculty shall never be rank-ordered on the basis of Student Rating Forms or any other single piece of data. Differences among class averages of student ratings, even based on several semesters, cannot be assumed to measure accurately differences in teaching effectiveness. No single instrument to measure teaching effectiveness is so reliable and valid as to allow ranking of teaching effectiveness, as small numerical differences cannot be assumed accurately to distinguish significant differences in teaching effectiveness.
5. Student ratings shall always be viewed within the context of an individual's teaching assignment. The factors to be considered might include class size, rating of instructors of similar courses within the discipline, teaching load, experience in teaching a course, etc.
6. Faculty shall always have the right to provide clarification of student evaluations.
7. Faculty should take the steps necessary to understand clearly how student ratings will be used in faculty evaluations.
8. No one item on a student evaluation shall be used to draw conclusions. Even the most effective instructor, due to style or experience, may not score high on any particular item.

#### **B. Data Analysis Procedure**

The results of mandatory student course evaluations are provided to each faculty member and their Department chair and College Dean.

### **IV. Complete Faculty Evaluation**

The complete evaluation of faculty shall contain:

1. Self-evaluation
2. Classroom observations (as appropriate)
3. Student evaluations
4. Annual evaluation by Department chair or College Dean that includes an overall performance rating

These four components will be reviewed by the faculty member and Department chair. The form will be signed by the Department chair/College Dean. Signing the Faculty evaluation review form by the faculty member is an acknowledgment that a meeting occurred between the faculty member and Department chair and is expected.



**Athens State University  
Academic Affairs Committee  
June 4, 2012, 12:00p.m.  
Sanders Hall Conference Room**

**Present:** Leigh Bunn, Al Elmore, Wanda Hutchinson, Bryan Kennedy, Nathaniel Mitchell, Charles Roberts, Quanda Stevenson, Teresa Wanbaugh

**Absent:** John Berzett, Kathy Buck, Malcolm Cort, Wade Myhan, George Williams

**I. Call to Order** Dr. Roberts

**II. Minutes** Dr. Roberts

**III. Old Business**

**Virtual Faculty Office Hours**

A paper that addresses virtual office hours was prepared by Professor Berzett and presented to the committee by Dr. Roberts. Some of the considerations for instituting virtual faculty hours were as follows:

Students are currently advised via phone, email, IM, and other computer-mediated communication technologies.

Students who reside at a distance often welcome the option of not having to incur a traveling expense to physically meet with an advisor or professor.

The current Athens State DL policy has provisions for virtual office hours.

"Advocate for technology" is included in the Conceptual Framework in the College of Education.

After a lengthy discussion it was motioned by Professor Bunn and seconded by Professor Mitchell that the proposal, "Regular office hours (currently 10 hours per week) be reasonably divided between virtual and physical office hours.", be presented to the faculty and administration. The motion carried unanimously. It was also motioned by Dr. Elmore and seconded by Dr. Kennedy that the paper prepared by Professor Berzett be attached to the proposal. The motion carried unanimously.

**IV. Adjournment**

Dr. Kennedy moved to adjourn.

Dr. Elmore seconded the motion.

**Respectfully Submitted by Dr. Wanda Hutchinson, Secretary**

**Dr. Charles Roberts, Chair**

## The Use and Efficacy of Faculty Virtual Office Hours

A Brief White Paper Prepared for the Athens State University Academic Affairs Committee

## The Use and Efficacy of Faculty Virtual Office Hours

### **Introduction**

The use of computer-assisted communications by faculty members in institutions of higher education to augment and supplement traditional office hours has become salient in the past several years. Synchronous and asynchronous forms of virtual communication are now prevalent and commonly used by faculty to improve student-faculty interaction and student persistence. With multiple forms of computer-assisted communications available to and increasingly utilized by both faculty and students, the recognition of the widespread and essentially required use of these virtual forms of communications is required to appropriately acknowledge faculty's holistic efforts outside of the classroom. There is no doubt that traditional office hours in which faculty physically inhabit their offices must remain steadfast. However, the consideration of students' increased use of virtual communication with faculty members, especially when considering the highly proportional mix of non-traditional and distance learners at Athens State University, is merely sought to be recognized as a component of the minimum required office hours expectation for faculty members. This succinct white paper will provide a review of some fairly recent literature concerning the use and efficacy of virtual office hours and will conclude with some policy recommendations for consideration by the administration.

### **Review of the Literature**

Research aspiring to ascertain the variables that influence student satisfaction, retention, and persistence is prevalent. Many studies have concluded that, among other things, student interaction with other students and faculty can have a noticeable effect on overall student satisfaction and performance (Li & Pitts, 2009). The modern-day attributes, needs, and preferred modes of communication of college and university students present faculty members



with new opportunities and challenges in their efforts to effectively use computer-mediated communication (CMC) to effect positive and satisfying college experiences for students (Li, Finley, Pitts, & Guo, 2010). A primary deliverable for colleges and universities is to gain an understanding on how to engage students in communications that encourage increased quantity and quality interactions with faculty (Li & Pitts, 2009). The Internet and Web-based course management systems provide a convenient and preferable alternative to traditional face-to-face office hours for many students who have replaced live conversations with their professors with discussion board postings and email (Li & Pitts, 2009). In their study which investigated students' utilization of office hours offered as an alternative means of communication for students in addition to traditional office hours, Li and Pitts (2009) hypothesized that evening (nontraditional) students would be more likely to use virtual office hours than daytime (traditional) students did, but, interestingly, the researchers failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students in evening classes did not utilize virtual office hours more than traditional students. However, the researchers further hypothesized, and in this case confirmed, in the same study that the average satisfaction of students in classes that offered virtual office hours was statistically higher than students in classes lacking virtual office hours (Li & Pitts, 2009).

The use of synchronous and asynchronous technology to conduct virtual office hours and enrich out-of-class communication with college and university students is now commonplace. With respect to synchronous technology, Lih-Ching and Beasley (2006) explored the use of Instant Messenger (IM) software to conduct virtual office hours and concluded that, when used appropriately by both student and professor, Instant Messenger (IM) provides a functional equivalent of traditional face-to-face office hours. Using enVision as a synchronous platform for

providing online help and discussion sessions in their first-year calculus courses, Hooper, Pollanen, and Teismann (2006) found that virtual office hours, as compared to traditional office hours, produced a noticeably larger turnout for their study sessions and greatly increased communication with students. In their study of accounting students using Skype to conduct live virtual office hours, Lillie and Wygal (2011) revealed that (1) a majority of the students highly agreed that virtual office hours were as effective as traditional office hours, (2) the use of virtual office hours was more convenient than traditional office hour visits, and (3) the students overwhelmingly would recommend the use of virtual office hours in other classes. In their survey-based study to ascertain students' perceptions of using instant messaging, Balayeva and Quan-Haase (2009) reported that students regarded instant messaging as a useful tool for conducting virtual office hours based on its convenience, interactivity, and ease of use. With respect to the use of asynchronous communication technology, email and online discussion boards are most commonly used by faculty to facilitate interaction and conduct virtual office hours with students (Li & Pitts, 2009). In their survey-based research which investigated student preferences for asynchronous and synchronous forms of communication outside of the classroom, Li, Finley, Pitts, and Guo (2010) reported that students who were offered an email-turnaround-time guarantee exhibited a much higher level of satisfaction than students were not provided such a guarantee. Interestingly, Li et al. (2010) also revealed that students preferred an email-turnaround-guarantee over virtual office hours, thus prompting possible future implications for the use of computer-mediated communication, especially given the reported preference for asynchronous tools such as email.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**



Faculty have traditionally availed themselves to students outside of class in the form of face-to-face office hours, but students generally resist connecting with their professors and establishing relationships in this venue that will positively accentuate their academic experiences (Balayeva & Quan-Haase, 2009). In light of the research reviewed in this paper, it is clear that the use of virtual office hours by faculty to interact with students in teaching and advising capacities outside of the classroom is already prevalent and can be highly effective if used appropriately. There is no doubt that widespread use of virtual forms of synchronous and asynchronous communication, including email, discussion forums, instant messaging, Skype, and chat rooms by faculty are already an inherent part of their out-of-classroom efforts to enrich students' college and university experiences.

Given the supporting research discussed in this paper and based on extant virtual communication efforts of the faculty within all colleges and multiple disciplines at Athens State University, the Academic Affairs Committee respectfully requests the administration to formally acknowledge via institutional policy the use of virtual offices hours as a component of the current 10 hours minimum weekly requirement for office hours. The Academic Affairs Committee advocates the current policy of a minimum of ten hours per week for full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty, but further suggests that full-time faculty are allowed to conduct no more than four of these hours each week on a virtual basis as necessary based on student and discipline demands. The requested acknowledgement of virtual office hours is not meant to minimize interaction with Athens State University students, but rather it is intended to complement the primarily non-traditional proportion of students at the institution while also acknowledging faculty's extant, and in some cases required, out-of-classroom interaction efforts with students along with students' preferences for out-of-class communication. The Academic



Affairs Committee further supports faculty documentation of the use of virtual office hours as posted in each faculty member's officially published office hours schedule for each semester of the academic year. Finally, the Academic Affairs Committee respectfully requests the acknowledgement and consideration of the use of full-time faculty virtual office hours and revision of the current policy by the administration and the faculty as a whole in the spirit of shared governance at the institution.

## References

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