

Senate Question Period
February 12, 2013

Submitted by Senator Murphy

Question for the APTF re Surveys.

The Senate Academic Planning Task Force (APTF) for 2012-13 has initiated two surveys (see http://www.queensu.ca/sapft/?page_id=864), one on “online teaching” and one on “quality assurance in online courses.” Both surveys have been criticized for poor design (e.g. the [SAPTF website](#)). Will the APTF explain to Senate how it views the objections that have been made to these surveys and how it proposes to proceed?

Response from Chris Moyes, Chair, Senate Academic Planning Task Force.

The process leading to the 2011 Academic Plan involved a great deal of consultation with diverse groups, and led to a draft of the Plan with 1 page discussing Virtualization. Discussion of the draft prompted great debate about many aspects, but considerable attention was given to the statements in relation to Virtualization. Despite more than 18 months of effort, that APTF decided that it would be best to delete all reference to Virtualization in the final version. Presumably, they felt that they could not create a section that would satisfy the various parties. Nonetheless, the final version, which lacked any reference to virtualization, triggered more debate about virtualization.

The current incarnation of the SAPTF was tasked with addressing this short coming, and we have been working diligently to consult broadly to identify areas of concern and explore avenues for ensuring that Queen's efforts in online learning achieve the academic goals we all share. Given the past controversies, we were not terribly surprised that the discussions and debate would be energetic. Part of the approach that we have chosen is a pair of surveys distributed widely. The forum associated with the questions has collected a lot of commentary, some of which form the basis of the submitted question. On behalf of the committee, I offer the following responses.

A priority of this committee was to survey the diversity of opinions in the community on a number of issues related to the broad umbrella of online learning. Our intent was to employ complementary approaches to ask questions that we felt are not easily answered from the data currently available. We have every expectation of generating a balanced report, addressing the strengths and weakness of current practises, and offering constructive suggestions for policies and practices moving forward.

The surveys were envisioned as a mechanism to gather general information from a broad audience on a number of issues. We were struck that many discussion sites were dominated by a handful of voices, and though we became acquainted with their positions, we were uncertain as to whether these positions reflected broader opinion in the community. In some cases survey questions sought quantitative information on specific issues that arose in our early discussions. We created questions that were categorical in nature, which enabled quantitative analyses (X% state this is an issue, Y% believe this an issue).

The first survey focused specifically on Technology and Support. The survey had an unexpected consequence of unleashing a torrent of criticism about online learning in areas that had little to do with Technology and Support. Several responders appeared frustrated that the survey did not give them an opportunity to express these opinions on online learning in general. Quite simply, that was not the intent

of the survey. From this first survey we learned more about the diversity in attitudes about online learning, and much more about the nature of the successes and weakness in technology and support for online learning. To that end, it served its purpose. The information about people's experiences with the other learning Management Systems on campus was very valuable, particularly for those of us with little direct experience outside FAS and Moodle. We have been working with ITS on a survey they prepared to gain more specific information about the nature of the problems with Moodle.