

To: Lawrence Williams, Chair  
Undergraduate Council

From: Richard A. Kasschau, Member  
CLASS (Psychology)

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Re: Distance Education Decision Issues

It has come to my attention that in early June while I was away on family business, my chair was sent a letter by the Director of Distance Education to the effect that as of Fall 2009, the University of Houston will no longer offer Distance Education courses by any means other than on line via the Internet. Currently we offer courses via cable, tape purchase, CD, and KUHT, yet we are presumably terminating our use of the University's television channel by virtue of this action. Other agencies and divisions of the University are involved in teaching by television. The decision to offer 3- and 4000-level courses by television received the support of the Undergraduate Council when it was originally presented. It seems obvious that the decision to stop doing so equally clearly has academic elements within it, yet the decision was apparently made unilaterally by the Distance Education division, with no cited academic input. Moreover, the decision was announced during the summer months when a limited number of faculty are available to offer counsel on such decisions. Making the announcement in this way is contrary to previously established Undergraduate Council policy.

My concern is that the development of the Fall 2009 schedule will commence by January 2009 and be finalized by February 2009. We need to examine the decision in an expedited fashion. I request a formal review of the University's long-time use of the midnight-6 a.m. broadcast hours of KUHT to determine whether that remains an effective outlet for our courses. Arguing to continue that arrangement are factors including

- 1) the number of faculty who have worked many hours over the years to establish and maintain that mutually beneficial cooperative arrangement,
- 2) the obvious public relations benefit of having University-produced academic content available for public examination and benefit 6 hours a day during the weekdays,
- 3) the cumulative number of students who, over the years, have enrolled in and benefitted from KUHT-broadcast university courses,
- 4) the use of Distance Education-sponsored aids to effective course development for improving not only our televised courses, but any other courses offered by our current KUHT instructional faculty.
- 5) The University funds in support of faculty course development for presentation via television
- 6) The hours of faculty time previously expended in course development for presentation via television with the reasonable expectation that the

inordinate "front-end" effort in creating TV-based courses will be fully justified through continued use of the courses

Arguments in favor of the termination would include points such as

- 1) Distance Education has never advertised the availability of its courses via KUHT either on KUHT or other commercial stations across Houston,
- 2) The support for such television-based courses though Distance Education is minimal at best,
- 3) The University seems unwilling to exercise its ability to govern course presentation so that some faculty no longer formally related to the university are teaching courses which could provide ongoing support to enrolled graduate students or supplemental support for current faculty, and
- 4) Department-level lack of appreciation of the potential impact of television-related courses has lead to an imbalanced presentation of courses in specific departments meaning some departmental degrees cannot be completed via television. This may or may not be a problem, but it is currently addressed by being ignored.

Distance Education's unilateral decision to move all of its distance courses to an on-line delivery format apparently has not been fully examined by those charged with making education-related decisions. It certainly enhances public awareness of UH as we offer our courses over KUHT. A substantial amount of faculty input and work has been involved in establishing individual courses as well as our long-term working relations with KUHT. As a result, the effects of the decision to terminate such efforts need to be examined more broadly before such a relatively irreversible change is implemented.