

Some challenges and bright spots for low-residency programs and five year combined bachelor's and master's degrees Kay Long, Dean of Graduate Studies, West Virginia Wesleyan College, 2012 CGS Annual Meeting

Low-residency graduate program – background

For WVWC, low-residency means the MFA in Creative Writing in three genres: poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction. The program requires four ten-day intensive residencies (two per year) followed by a longer than usual semester (18 weeks) at home individualized program of study. This course is mentored one-on-one by a faculty member with minimum prescribed assignments or activities. Students earn 4 credits during each residency and 8 credits each in the semester project or thesis semesters. During the residency the schedule is 8 am until 8 pm, so this is very much like running a summer camp. This is especially true as most of each residency is held when no one else is on campus – 4th of July and New Year's week.

Four Challenges

1 – Establishing the program. If the proposed program is the first of this type, shepherding the proposal through various faculty governance and administrative hurdles will be very time consuming, e.g. equating time in residence to credit hours, different semester system for financial aid, different registration periods for the Registrar, etc.

2 – Getting the institution to flex for new format. As the institutions systems (Registrar, financial aid, IT, library, and because of residency portions, residence life, dining services, security, custodial staff and physical plant) are not programmed for this type of delivery, one person needs to be the coordinator within the institution to plan ahead with these folks and to trouble shoot during the residencies and at other times.

3 – Payment of faculty. This is different animal from either F2F or distance coursework. If their work is considered overload – what is an equitable formula; if it is within load, what is an equitable formula. Clearly the preparation, teaching and feedback to students (grading) does not match most formulas and existing policies.

4 – Program and student policies. Must think through and document current policies for F2F and distance programs and adapt or create new policies for this unique program. Link to our student handbook:

http://www.wvwc.edu/academics/gradprograms/MFA/files/MFA_Handbook_Final_June_2012.pdf

Benefits

1 – Community of learners. This format quickly establishes a community of learners among the students, faculty and visiting writers that sustains the students during the long non-residency semester.

2 – Non-traditional students thrive. This format works well for older or other students who need to maintain their lives at their own place of residence and/or who have a complicated work schedule, especially with travel.

3 – Ease in scheduling and using space. As almost no other programs or folks are on –campus when the residencies occur, one can virtually schedule any space with ease.

Five year combines bachelor's and master's as one way to offer combined degrees

Not a 4 plus 1 or 3 plus 2, the five year student earns both degrees at the same time at the end of both programs. The advantage is that the student keeps our institutional aid for the full time, although their final year is considered the graduate year for financial aid loan purposes.

Advantage when recruiting students who already have earned AP or dual credit before college. Parents also like it.

When total income to institution is calculated per student, the institution at worse case breaks even with what they student would have paid if they earned the undergraduate degree with dual credit, and then the master's. At best, and this is usually the case, the institution earns more by the student paying the UG tuition and fees for all five years.

The student must still earn 120 undergraduate credits (although sometime a graduate credit is earned and counts for undergraduate). Thus, the reduction in hours occurs at the graduate level from a low of one course (3 hours) waived to a maximum of 12 hours waived in a 42 credit graduate program. Three degrees use this model: MBA, MEd: Reading Specialist and MEd: Multi-categorical Special Education with Autism. Student in the BSN program may apply to take graduate credit for up to 8 hours of the UG requirements as part of their BSN. If they subsequently enter the MSN program, their total required hours are thus less, however an earned BSN is required for MSN admission.

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