November 17, 2011

TO: President Simon, Michigan State University

FROM: Cindy Osborne, Office of Financial Aid

RE: **Online Learning: Part of our Future**

Every innovation in education has its pros and cons, but in the case of higher education at MSU, the future of online learning can have a significant role in increasing college enrollment and graduation success. Although some educators believed online learning would result in the demise of traditional colleges and universities, such as William Doyle who wrote in Online Education: The Revolution That Wasn't, "Universities won't survive. The future is outside the traditional campus, outside the traditional classroom." Doyle quotes other educators that predicted, "Faculty professionals would be replaced by automated simulacra." These statements of doom were made in 1997, however Doyle later stated in 2007 very few educational professionals feel education has been revolutionized and research indicates, "What has happened instead is an absorption: most students have chosen to add online coursework onto their existing, classroom-based curriculum." So, what this means is that online learning has become a supplement to classroom learning and has not supplanted the classroom as earlier predicted and feared. It is also necessary to note that faculty teaching online courses are becoming more imperative to learning. Students taking online courses need to feel the university connection even if it comes through via email or online university systems, such as MSU ANGEL. Another factor to consider in future online learning is webcam. Students can still interact face to face, so to speak, with their professors to allow a more intimate instruction.

An added benefit to online learning at MSU is the recruitment of older, non-traditional students, that wish to pursue their first degree or higher degree that may not have considered the possibility if it required attendance on campus. As older adults, employment and family takes precedence over education, and with required on campus learning, the time and commitment to education may not be available. According to Sam Dillon in Pros and Cons of Online Education, scheduling is the most important pro to online education as he wrote, "Online education is very popular among students with jobs and families…most allow students to complete coursework on their own schedules." In addition, the ability of parents to remain at home with their children is an attractive feature to learning online, not just the monetary savings on childcare, but the peace of mind of being nearby in the event of illness. Consequently, more and more students can be recruited to enroll at MSU. Although many younger students may begin to add online learning to their enrollment, which is considered a major con of online learning, as Dillon observes, "This can deprive you of important networking opportunities for your future career, as well as basic social interaction." Certainly, not all classes can be taught online. At MSU, it would be difficult to milk a virtual cow, or virtually assist a mare giving birth. We certainly do not want our students studying nuclear physics all online. With younger students, the social life of on-campus classes, as well as involvement in sports, or attending sporting events, is essential to the entire college experience. Social involvement is imperative to personal growth, networking and learning involvement with their professors. I believe the issue of online learning replacing traditional learning is a myth. Larry Lawton wrote on ibtimes online

that, "Online education will fade to a degree because interaction with people is the most important part of education." Jason Press from StudyPoint, Inc. wrote on ibtimes, "There's no substitute for a fantastic teacher sitting down face-to-face across the table from a student offering personalized attention to help make the light bulb turn on in a particular subject…Online education creates supplementary tools to help further facilitate that experience. Online education need not be seen as a replacement for the traditional learning environment rather it should be seen as a set of tools that will allow students to excel and for tutors to maximize their effectiveness," Consequently, I do not see online learning replacing traditional learning, but what online learning can do at MSU is give non-traditional students the education they need and deserve through online learning that they may not pursue otherwise due to personal constraints. This would certainly broaden the reach of Spartans world-wide and MSU on campus will continue to thrive and expand the quality of an MSU education.