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## *Creating a Virtual Learning Community*

Autumn 1999 - Volume 1, Issue 1

### *North Carolina Community Colleges Build Online Learning Community*

#### Beginnings: Designing a Blueprint

In September 1998, something extraordinary happened: all 58 North Carolina's community college presidents agreed. They agreed to collaborate in a future of increased online learning. After studying the success and failure of online learning in other states, they began a collaborative venture: the *Virtual Learning Community*.

A steering committee of 12 presidents, chaired by Larry Norris of Fayetteville Tech CC, and including Don Altieri of South Piedmont CC, Ray Bailey of Asheville-Buncombe Tech CC, Ken Boham of Caldwell CC & TI, Gordon Burns of Wilkes CC, Ronald Champion of Beaufort County CC, Bruce Howell of Wake Tech CC, Ronald Lingle of Coastal Carolina CC, Charles Russell of Pitt CC, Pat Skinner of Gaston College, and Desna Wallin of Forsyth Tech CC. The State Board Reserve granted \$126,000 to pay for a coordinator and other costs.

#### Why a Community?

Online learning is a juggernaut, growing rapidly and achieving unique success. North Carolina community colleges are part of this wave, enabling new achievement by current students while reaching new students.

But online learning is not problem-free. Done poorly, it can leave students lost and instructors overwhelmed. Resources are wasted as one institution after another reinvents similar classes. Our Virtual Learning Community will pool the efforts of thousands of talented people.

The October SACS visiting team that reviewed distance learning in 38 North Carolina community colleges took special notice of the Virtual Learning Community. "The team commends the collaborative efforts underway and strongly encourages their continuation for the benefit of colleges and their students," stated Robin Hoffman, team chair, in the exit report.

She noted that the statewide strategic plan included goals to create and support the Community, and agreed that it would be truly collaborative. "It will provide easy access and quality distance learning for students in a cost-effective manner," she said.

## Work Teams to Build a Community

Already, five teams are hard at work, turning the concept of a Virtual Learning Community into reality. Team 1, led by Don Altieri, has carefully evaluated software delivery products with community colleges in mind. We'll report on their selection in the next newsletter.

Team 2, chaired by Desna Wallin, will select 10 course areas for initial focus. Course development teams, forming through nominations soon, will build online courses and archive hints for teaching online in the context of those courses.

Ray Bailey drives Team 3. They are examining online student services. Subcommittees deal with admissions, tuition, financial aid, registration, advising, library access, and other support services that encourage students to try online learning.

Team 4, guided by Ron Champion, is creating training for faculty and staff who want to improve their practice of online education. This training will include live and online elements, bringing training to a variety of places and times.

Team 5, helmed by Pat Skinner, is working on marketing. They'll make sure everyone knows about important Community developments.

## The Work Teams

All of North Carolina's community colleges were invited to nominate members for Virtual Learning Community Work Teams. The following were selected from 230 nominations. Each college that submitted nominees has at least one representative on a team or subteam. Our sincerest thank you to those listed below!

### *Work Team 1*

*Selecting a common delivery system.*

Don Altieri, Chair South Piedmont CC  
Dean Byrd Isothermal CC  
Perry Cumbie Durham Tech CC  
Linda Earnhardt Rowan-Cabarrus CC  
Susan Everett Pitt CC  
Celia Hurley Randolph CC  
Darryl McGraw Vance-Granville CC  
JB Simpson Fayetteville Tech CC

### *Work Team 2*

*Selecting course templates and overseeing course development.*

Desna Wallin, Chair Forsyth Tech CC  
Savannah Clay Central Piedmont CC  
Harry Cooke Catawba Valley CC  
Rosanna Hartley Western Piedmont CC  
Janet Hobbs Wake Tech CC  
Will Johnson Montgomery CC  
Sam Layell Robeson CC  
Dewey Lewis Coastal Carolina CC  
Rick Mutton Forsyth Tech CC  
Molly Parkhill Blue Ridge CC  
Elaine Seeman Pitt CC

Diane Tyndall Craven CC  
Susan Wooten Caldwell CC & TI  
Sam Zahran Fayetteville Tech CC

*Work Team 3*

*Examining online student services.*

Ray Bailey Asheville-Buncombe Tech CC  
Susan Allred Forsyth Tech CC  
Cleve Cox Wilson Tech CC  
Cuyler Dunbar Catawba Valley CC  
Beverley Gass Guilford Tech CC  
Melba McCallum Bladen CC  
David McLawhorn Beaufort County CC  
James Owen Piedmont CC  
Howard Paris James Sprunt CC  
Charles Russell Pitt CC

*Subcommittee Members*

Reg Boland Rowan-Cabarrus CC  
Don Buie Central Carolina CC  
Jack Fernald Fayetteville Tech CC  
Larry Garrison Western Piedmont CC  
Mel Gay Central Piedmont CC  
Diane Gibson Guilford Tech CC  
Tom Jaynes Durham Tech CC  
Glenda Lawrence Pitt CC  
Angela Leak Guilford Tech CC  
Shirley Luckadoo Rowan-Cabarrus CC  
Sylvester McKay College of the Albemarle  
Billie Meeks Mitchell CC  
Susan Melson Central Piedmont CC  
Paul Norman Wake Tech CC  
Carl Peay Wake Tech CC  
Susan Sasser Wayne CC  
Brad Sears Craven CC  
Lamar Wommack Western Piedmont CC  
Matlynn Yeoman Brunswick CC

*Work Team 4*

*Designing training for instructors and staff.*

Ronald Champion,  
Chair Beaufort County CC  
Tony Gaddis Haywood CC  
Diby Kouadio Roanoke-Chowan CC  
Bud Mayes Wilkes CC  
Darrell Page Bladen CC  
Frank Sells Surry CC  
Witold Sieradzan Wake Tech CC  
Jeanne Whisnant Mayland CC

*Work Team 5*

*Marketing the Virtual Learning Community.*

Pat Skinner, Chair Gaston CC  
Marion Altman Pamlico CC

Fred Bayley Isothermal CC  
William Carver Nash CC  
Laura Davenport Sandhills CC  
Rob Everett Guilford Tech CC  
Pamela Hilbert Carteret CC  
Jody Ledford Cleveland CC  
Steve Miller Davidson County CC  
David Slagle Tri-County CC  
Al Warrick Johnston CC  
Wanda Winslow Durham Tech CC  
Ben Wolverton Alamance CC

### *The Virtual Learning Community is...*

- A library of ready-to-go but easy-to-adapt online courses—ten by Fall 2000 with many more to follow. Instructors can offer them as they are or make adjustments. Both curriculum and non-credit courses will be included.
- Access for every community college instructor to software they can use to develop and deliver both full online courses and online support for regular courses.
- An archive of hints for teaching in the online context, including both general guidelines and specific hints for each of the online courses.
- Training for faculty and staff in the practice of online learning as it applies to them. This training will be available both online and in person. The training will focus on teaching and your subject area, not just technology.
- Open lines of communication between online educators around the community college system, including online forums for discussion.
- A web site that lists all of the online offerings at all of our 58 colleges. Links there will take you to the web sites of the colleges themselves
- Guidelines and methods in how to provide student services online.

### *The Virtual Learning Community is not...*

- The 59th community college. It is collaboration between existing colleges with the goal of increasing student access. Community courses can be offered by local colleges as they see fit.
- A one-size-fits-all approach to online learning. The Community has pieces to help both experienced online educators and beginners. All products will be prepared with customization in mind.
- A replacement for existing online courses. Each college can continue to tailor and expand the courses developed by the Community.
- A set of rules from the System Office. The Community is a source of advice and materials built by contributions from all 58 colleges.
- A technology-obsessed entity that ignores traditional methods of education. Online learning can support traditional classrooms and regular students as well as distant learners in virtual classrooms.
- An attempt to replace faculty. Online learning relies on educators who know their subject, can communicate with students, and are ready to facilitate learning through interaction.
- A program that forgets students. Online student services are key to the project. Online learning brings education to people with complex, busy lives.

### *The Timeline*

#### *Fall-Winter 1999*

- Software product announced; purchase and installation follow.

- First 10 courses announced; course development teams form.
- Course templates decided.
- Work teams develop training, student service guidelines, and marketing.

### *Spring 2000*

- Courses and help archives developed.
- Select student service guidelines released.
- Additional courses selected for development.
- Online discussion forums open.

### *Summer 2000*

- Training becomes widely available.
- Pilot courses offered.

### *Fall 2000*

- Courses available to all colleges.
- Project components evaluated and revised.
- New course development begins.

## ***Meet the Project Coordinator***

*Hi, I'm Neil Hollands, a recent arrival to North Carolina from Utah. My background includes three years of debate and history teaching, followed by five years at Utah Education Network. At UEN, I led a group of trainers who developed and taught 40 different courses to educators at all levels. Those courses ranged from basic computer skills to advanced networking, but centered on techniques for implementing Internet in education, both through online classes and as a supplement to traditional classes. I also collected a library of over 10,000 links across all subject areas and developed other online content*

*When my wife began graduate school at UNC-Chapel Hill, I was happy to come to North Carolina. Creating a Virtual Learning Community is a fantastic challenge that I look forward to sharing with you. I'm excited because this consortium offers something for everybody, while still leaving power in the hands of instructors at local colleges. The success of a project goes back to you as individuals, not a web site. I've visited several colleges, and plan to continue until I've talked with everyone who will see me. To schedule such a visit or just chat about the Virtual Learning Community, send email to [Neil Hollands](mailto:Neil.Hollands) or call (919) 733-7051, ext.404.*

### ***How Can You Get Involved?***

*Are you interested in online learning? Do you have something to offer to the Virtual Learning Community? Our Community will fail without your involvement. There is still time to become one of the "founders." Course development teams form soon. Every college will be asked for nominations. Let your President and others who administer online learning know that you are interested. We'll also be looking for help with training soon. We want to have trainers at every college.*

*Now is the best time to decide to try online teaching. That way, you'll have plenty of time to develop skills and curriculum. No matter what your current level of skill, with preparation beginning now, you'll be in good shape to try teaching online next Fall. The Community will help you get ready with training and materials.*

*Finally, the simplest way to get involved is just to share your voice. Whether you are an online "old-timer" or an absolute "newbie," we'd like to hear your perspective on online learning. Schedule an appointment with the Community Project Coordinator or talk with the local members of our work teams. That way, we can be sure that when the Virtual Learning Community is built, it will be a place where we all can live.*

### *In the Next Issue*

- Software delivery system announced
- First Virtual Learning Community courses identified
- Advice for getting started in online education
- Information about how online education can impact community colleges

*This page maintained by [Neil Hollands](#), System Office, 919-733-7051, ext. 404.  
Last updated 11/5/99*

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