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Creating a Virtual Learning Community

Spring/Summer 2002 Volume 3, Issue 3

Distance Learning Roundtable Held at GTCC

On April 18, Guilford Tech CC hosted the first of what is hoped will be many meetings of distance learning coordinators and administrators. Thirty-two representatives from 25 colleges and the System Office were in attendance.

Topics included training, course development, quality control, evaluation, student services, marketing, software, and future directions. "The meeting gave us a wonderful opportunity to collaborate with our colleagues, build relationships, and share ideas and resources," said organizer Connie Cerniglia.

Participants shared success stories and fantastic tools developed by their colleges and the System Office, many of which are available for use by other colleges. Some of these are highlighted in the "More Web Sites for Online Educators" article later in this newsletter.

Techniques for evaluation, preparation of instructors, quality control and provision of student services were discussed. "None of us left without learning several tips and hearing a solution for at least one problem we have experienced," remarked Ann Harrison of Brunswick CC.

Participants made contacts and shared information about how the support of distance education is divided at their college. As Sylvia Proctor of Johnston CC noted, "The combined efforts of all those talented people can only strengthen our efforts in providing strong, superior distance learning programs for our students, faculty, and staff across the state of North Carolina."

There was strong indication that this meeting will lead to organization of distance learning administrators. If you are interested in becoming involved, make sure you are included in the list at <http://www.nccei.org/dladministrators/#list>.

Thanks to Connie Cerniglia for originating and implementing the event. Melvina Davis provided able assistance. The Guilford Tech CC Foundation provided generous financial support.

New Heights for Number of Courses Online

North Carolina community colleges continue to find ways to bring new courses to the online

environment. By the end of summer semester, our colleges will have offered 2704 different courses either completely or mostly online, up from a count made last year of 1354 courses.

The 2704 courses include 764 different course titles from 123 subject headings (up from 508 courses in 108 headings last year). Rapid growth is attributed to the efforts of colleges, the Virtual Learning Community, and consistent demand from students. At many colleges, online sections fill more quickly than other courses.

On average, each college in the NCCCS has tried 47 different courses online. Fayetteville Tech CC has offered the most—157 different courses—followed closely by Pitt CC, Guilford Tech CC, Central Piedmont CC, and Forsyth Tech CC. All but two colleges have tried over 10 courses online; 48 of 58 have offered over 20.

Among colleges with less than 3000 FTE in 2001, Craven CC has tried the most different courses online: 96. They are followed by College of The Albemarle, Davidson County CC, Western Piedmont CC, and Randolph CC.

Among colleges with less than 2000 FTE in 2001, Carteret CC leads the way with 68 courses tried online. Piedmont CC, Southwestern CC, Stanly CC, and Edgecombe CC complete the top five in colleges of this size.

CIS 110 has been taught online by 53 colleges, more than any other course. Other courses offered by over 30 colleges include ENG 111, CIS 120, CIS 172, BUS 110, PSY 150, ENG 114, SOC 210, and ECO 251.

Figures for this article do not include multiple sections of the same course or continuing education offerings. Figures are cumulative over the last four years. A listing of courses that have been tried by each college to date is available from hollandsn@ncccs.cc.nc.us on request.

NCCCS Mourns Loss of Parks Todd

Parks Todd, Director of Telecommunications with the NC Community College System, died Thursday morning, May 9th, at Western Wake Medical Center in Cary following a long illness.

Parks was a believer in the value of education for everyone. His work was instrumental in the expansion of distance education throughout the state, especially in those rural areas that were so close to his heart.

Parks was one of a small group of truly visionary pioneers who foresaw the benefits of a video conferencing network for community colleges, public schools and other State organizations and worked tirelessly to establish and sustain it. In a similar vein, he recognized the potential for a wireless network, at first as a way of distributing video programming and later for wireless Internet access. He developed partnerships with community colleges and telecommunications companies to bring the potential to reality.

Parks was widely known for his humor and insight into life. He loved his music, his family and his friends. He was a unique and special person who influenced a great number of lives in positive ways. Parks will be missed by his many friends and the community colleges that benefited from his dedication and accomplishments on their behalf.

Best Practices Document Available for Online Counseling

A Virtual Counseling Resource Guide is now available for counselors and others seeking to provide guidance to online students. This is the first of a series of documents that will document best practices in online student services.

Thanks to those who contributed to the guide:	
Beth Brockhaus	Vance-Granville CC
Tammy Buck	Lenoir CC
Patsy Ferguson	Halifax CC
Marielena Hange	Central Piedmont CC
Vanessa Jones	Vance-Granville CC
Don King	Pitt CC
Pam Little	NCCCS
Jacquelyn Morales	Fayetteville Tech CC
Ann Newbern	Halifax CC
John Saporilas	Wake Tech CC
Clay Smith	Beaufort County CC
DeSandra Washington	Fayetteville Tech CC
Ken Whitehurst	NCCCS

Don King of Pitt CC, chair of the committee that created the guide notes, "The Virtual Counseling Resource Guide is an excellent tool for all of North Carolina community college counselors when working with both traditional and virtual students. The information within the guide was gathered by a committee of community college counselors across the state."

The guide includes many tips for effective online counseling, examples of services, links to online resources, and a set of questions to use when designing an online counseling program.

The guide has been distributed to counselors around the North Carolina Community College System, and can be found online at [this site](#).

Plans for more guides on financial aid, student activities, disabilities, learning resources, and records/

registration are also in the works.

Online Learning College Showcase

This is the first article in a series about online learning experiences at North Carolina community colleges.

Fayetteville Tech CC had over 2500 online students in 2000-2001, a number that will soon jump as they become one of the few colleges selected to participate in the US Army's online learning program. The college has tried over 150 different courses online.

Fayetteville Technical Community College—by Associate Vice President for Learning Technologies Bob Ervin

When FTCC began online courses in the spring of 1995, there was no faculty training in how to teach online. We began by enrolling faculty in the Eng 111 course as students to let them see what the instructor was doing. We quickly discovered that since faculty had never been online students, that there were two components to their training. One was the pedagogy of online learning and the other was the practical use of the emerging online tools.

The challenge was (and still is) to assist an instructor to make the leap from a traditional classroom to a virtual classroom. Since the vast majority of faculty earned their degrees in traditional instruction, they expect the virtual classroom to mirror that environment. It does not take long to see that while there are similarities, there are also vast differences.

Communication is probably at the top of the list. Careful detail in "spelling out" exact expectations for the student is a key focus. There can never be too much communication, nor can it occur too frequently. Since students can just hit the "submit" button, they tend to expect instant feedback.

The professional development class that FTCC faculty take places them in the role of student for the first half of the course. We tell them up front that we want them to experience all the frustrations and stress of being an online student. We want them to continually think about how they would handle the situation better in their own virtual classroom. It works, because I see the frustrated emails and discussion entries bemoaning how "this or that" doesn't work or is too hard, or takes too much time. Sounds just like our students!!

Several faculty use little tricks. Brenda Britt will send the students a "missing you" virtual greeting card if they are absent from discussions. Ken Digby uses Internet searches to enliven his research projects. David Young has his students work in teams to develop online presentations for Cultural Studies. Jose Cruz uses audio files to help students with Spanish pronunciation. All these little things keep students involved in the learning process.

Often we talk about "thinking outside of the box." Teaching and learning online is just that: How can I make my classroom better with all the rich resources the Internet brings me? Can I involve a guest lecturer? Can I show places where I can't physically travel? Can I spin the molecule to show students different view? Can students teach part of a course where they have knowledge and expertise? The overwhelming answer is **YES**.

So while we continue to provide professional development to our faculty, we need to continue to help them understand how to stretch and grow. Just as we did in the beginning, the learning never stops. For online faculty it is truly lifelong learning. Keep the faith and "get outside of the box."

NCCCS Receives Federal Grant; VLC Funded for Upcoming Year

Thanks to the efforts of Systems Office staff and the support of Congressman David Price, the Virtual Learning Community has funding for the next year. A federal grant of \$250,000 will cover a full time coordinator's position and one course development center. Funds will also be shared with colleges in matching grants. Details on how to apply for these will be announced in the near future.

Original plans were to obtain permanent funding for the VLC this year, but given difficulties in the state budget, pursuit of permanent funding through the legislature has been delayed.

Thanks to the new funds and continued support of five course development centers through Perkins Grants, the Virtual Learning Community is preparing for a new year of course development, course editing, and training opportunities. The list of new courses to be developed will be announced during the summer. Course development centers, developers, and editors will also be selected for work beginning in the fall.

Web Sites for Online Educators

In the Spring 2001 issue, we featured an article about web sites useful for online educators. In this issue, we add to that list with more sites from North Carolina community colleges and many other sources. The earlier article is still available from the newsletter archive located at http://www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/Distance_Learning/vlc_newsletters.htm.

The Technology Source

<http://ts.mivu.org/>

From the Michigan Virtual University, this peer-reviewed bi-monthly journal is available online. This is one of the best sources for thoughtful articles about all aspects of online instruction in higher education.

Horizon Live Lectures

<http://lecture.horizonlive.com>

After registering, you get access to a series of online events delivered in streaming video and chat. You can participate in current events or visit the archives.

The TLT Group

<http://www.tltgroup.org>

TLT stands for Teaching, Learning, and Technology. Over 500 educational institutions have collaborated to create a center that offers "tools, information, training, and coaching to accelerate educational improvement while easing the stresses of institutional change."

UMUC Virtual Resource Site for Teaching with Technology

<http://www.umuc.edu/virtualteaching/>

The University of Maryland University College is one of the world's largest providers of online education. Here, they share examples of fantastic interactive online teaching activities.

MERLOT

<http://www.merlot.org/Home.po>

This is the Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching. This is a large archive of free sites you can use to support your online teaching efforts.

The Moderator's Home Page

<http://emoderators.com/moderators.shtml>

Berge Collins Associates offers this annotated bibliography of resources for those who moderate and facilitate online discussion. Learn to maximize communication in online courses or add discussion activities to face-to-face courses.

Web Teaching at Dartmouth College

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~webteach>

Here's an excellent example of a support site for online faculty. Dartmouth College has a superb collection of articles, case studies, and resources for online education.

Distance Education Clearinghouse

<http://www.uwex.edu/disted/home.html>

From the University of Wisconsin Extension, this site will help you find links to dozens of other quality distance education resources.

Teaching and Learning Strategies

http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/front_strategies.html

From New Horizons, this site covers education theory. While some information is aimed at K-12 education, it's applicable to all learners.

Online Learning Update

<http://people.uis.edu/rschr1/onlinelearning/blogger.html>

The University of Illinois at Springfield compiles this collection of recent online education news that pertains to institutions of higher education.

Resources from North Carolina Community Colleges

You don't have to look beyond the NCCCS to find great sites for online education! Here are some

options to add to the list begun in our Spring 2001 issue.

North Carolina Conference of English Instructors

<http://www.nccei.org/>

Rick Lewis maintains this site and writes most of the content. Try "Blackboard Instructor Help," "Blackboard Student Help," and "Online Education" first. This is one site you must bookmark.

Davidson County CC Student Orientation

<http://webcourses.davidson.cc.nc.us>

When you reach this site, use "web" as user id and "student" as password. This is an exemplary student orientation to using Blackboard and taking online courses.

Randolph Virtual Campus Faculty Resources

<http://www.virtualrandolph.org/faculty.html>

Randolph CC has many good resources for online learning. For starters, try this collection of links for online instructors.

Wayne CC Blackboard Support Page

http://www.wayne.cc.nc.us/dist_ed/bbsupport.htm

Among features of this page that other colleges should model are links to plug-ins and other downloads that students may need. Check out the student and faculty manuals.

Blue Ridge CC Distance Learning Page

<http://www.blueridge.cc.nc.us/DistanceLearning>

Blue Ridge is assembling a good base of resources for online learners. In particular, try out their online orientation.

Cape Fear CC Student Orientation

<http://cfcc.net/orientation>

Cape Fear has an orientation that emphasizes student support services.

Listservs Available for Blackboard Server Administrators

Two listservs are open to Blackboard Server Administrators looking to discuss topics relating to the software with their peers.

To join the list from East Carolina University, send a message to listserv@ecumail7.ecu.edu of "subscribe csinfo-l Firstname Lastname." Do not include a subject line, signature, or any other content in the message.

To join the list from Arizona State University, send a message to listserv@lists.asu.edu of "subscribe blkbrd-l Firstname Lastname."

VLC Progress Report: Courses Near Readiness; Degrees Available

Developers and editors are finishing the 2001-2002 Virtual Learning Community courses. By June 15, 49 new courses will be available. In addition, many existing courses, particularly those developed in the first year of the project, have been edited and revamped.

The addition of this year's courses will bring the size of the VLC Course Library to 110 courses. These include all of the courses needed for a college to offer a Business Administration A.A.S., Information Systems A.A.S., or as of June 15, a General A.A. degree entirely online. As usual, any course in the VLC Library can be used by colleges as-is on local servers or adjusted to the preference of instructors.

Many other degrees are nearly complete. Next year, the General A.S. degree, Accounting A.A.S., Office Systems Technology A.A.S., and Computer Programming A.A.S. will be completed, while the Internet Technologies A.A.S., Medical Office Administration A.A.S., Early Childhood A.A.S., Criminal Justice Technology A.A.S., and Paralegal A.A.S. will either be completed or within a few courses of completion.

Other course development continues in a variety of disciplines. Existing courses will be edited regularly to ensure their continued viability. Help in developing new training and communication and coordination of online learning efforts re-main high on the list of goals.

Requests for the new courses should be routed through your local Blackboard server administrator, who will know how to obtain the files to set up the courses on your college's own server.

Training Options for Online Instructors

If you are interested in teaching online courses, but are not yet ready to try it, several ongoing and upcoming professional development options are available.

The first place to check is with your own college. In most cases, your distance learning administrator would love to help you prepare for online instruction. If not help is available locally, they can help you find an external option.

One option is the Principles and Techniques of Online Instruction (PTOI) course available from the Virtual Learning Community. This course is in Blackboard and can be transported to any college's server for local use. PTOI can be taken as a self-directed effort by individual instructors or as an instructor-led group course. The course is designed so that instructors can work through the entire semester-length sequence or select portions of content most relevant to their needs.

PTOI will help you understand how online teaching differs from classroom teaching and how the two forms of education are the same. It focuses on skills and theory needed to successfully organize and teach adults in the online environment.

This spring, ten colleges have been piloting the PTOI course using grants received from the Professional Development section of the NCCCS. These include Bladen CC, Forsyth Tech CC, Halifax CC, Lenoir CC, Martin CC, Nash CC, Sampson CC, Tri-County CC, Wayne CC, and Wilkes CC. Evaluation of these pilot sessions will be used to further improve the course, but PTOI is available at any time for use by any college in the NCCCS.

For those looking for intense training in Blackboard, the company itself is offering full-day seminars this summer in Washington, DC. These include a "Fast-Paced Fundamentals" course on June 21 or "Effective Course Design in Blackboard" on May 24 or June 3. Cost is \$250 per event. Call Rita at Blackboard, (800) 424-9299 ext. 332 with questions.

If your focus is building your first online course, make sure to get a copy of the "Online Course Template" from the VLC. This is a Blackboard course that can be transferred to your server. It will give you a significant head start in creating your online course. Student help documents are built in, as are sample templates that aid completion of an online syllabus, course content, and many kinds of assignments. Background files provide advice on building other portions of the course. By using the template, you guarantee that your first course meets basic standards for effective online teaching.

If your college is offering training for online faculty, we encourage you to share information about it with the Virtual Learning Community. We will advertise the opportunity to other colleges. Often, involvement of participants from multiple colleges brings a perspective that greatly enhances online teacher training.

Mike Pittman (pittmanm@ncccs.cc.nc.us) and Ken Farmer (farmerk@ncccs.cc.nc.us) are collecting information about best practices in online teacher training for an upcoming publication. Please send them information about practices at your college that have been helpful.

Online Learning Software to be Evaluated

Members of a software evaluation committee have been selected to look at software available to support online learning and recommend products for use throughout the NCCCS.

The group will look at course building, delivery, and testing software, as well as other products. Recommendations will be forwarded to the VLC Steering Committee. Although a change from Blackboard is not likely, one goal of the committee is to apprise NCCCS colleges of developments in competing products.

Committee members will represent the concerns of administrators, faculty, technicians, and online learning support. They will begin to meet soon. Meetings will be open for the participation of those outside the committee, or you can share any input you have concerning this subject with any of the following members.

Thanks to those who have volunteered to serve:
Bob Blackmun NCCCS
Connie Cerniglia Guilford Tech CC
Perry Cumbie Durham Tech CC
John Davis Randolph CC
Kay Dennis Carteret CC
Ken Farmer NCCCS
Neil Hollands NCCCS
Dennis Keough Southwestern CC
Darryl McGraw Johnston CC
Debra NeeSmith Rowan-Cabarrus CC
Adam Oates Carteret CC

Study Emphasizes Need to Train Faculty, Advertise VLC Course Availability

Nancy Massey and Elizabeth Brown

NCCCS

Preliminary information on the perception and use of the Virtual Learning Community was captured in last fall's professional development survey of curriculum faculty and administrators. The online survey, conducted by CORD (Center for Occupational Research and Development), a group from Waco, Texas, was available from November 13 through December 15, 2001 and drew responses from 1660 faculty and 450 administrators at North Carolina Community Colleges. Below is a summary of the results that relate to the VLC:

- 73% of administrators report that some of their college's faculty *are using* VLC courses.
- 87% of responding faculty are *not using* VLC courses
- Administrators' comments regarding the VLC can be categorized broadly as addressing:
 - Unfamiliarity with the VLC
 - Current use of the course platform Blackboard
 - Need for the VLC to offer non-credit, continuing education courses
 - Need for faculty to experience online course technology
 - Need for hybrid training integrating online and face-to-face methodologies
 - Desire to avoid duplicate training efforts
 - Technology access issues
 - Need for training in basic computer skills first
- Faculty comments on the VLC included the following:
 - Desire for advanced training
 - Need for higher level of technical support both at state and local levels
 - Need for time to absorb information and incorporate knowledge
 - Already heavy course loads make it difficult to find time to learn VLC
 - Concern that many students don't have the technical skills or equipment to take advantage of this format
 - Needed courses not yet available
 - Desire for peer mentoring/support group in use of Blackboard
 - High value of face to face classes/need for personal contact with students
 - Utilizing portions of VLC, such as testing, skills preparation, and independent assignments

A recommendation was made to **take a closer look at the reasons cited by faculty for non-use of the Virtual Learning Community**. Colleges should consider providing an in-depth summer seminar in online course development that addresses both technical and teaching issues to equip instructors to use VLC resources.

Pitt CC Finishes Successful Series of Training Events by Phyllis J. Broughton

Pitt Community College has worked hard this past year to provide technology training for community college faculty. Training was funded through a North Carolina Community College grant and began September 2001. The grant provided funding for training faculty in designing presentations, materials, and entire lessons for community college courses.

The training provided faculty an opportunity to make traditional courses web-enhanced, whereby a blend of media was used to enhance a traditional course. These events have served 213 faculty from 26 community colleges.

Dr. Wanda Bunch directed this grant. Although I have moved to a new position at Martin Community College, I have facilitated and coordinated the training opportunities.

One of the major training events occurred on April 26 at Pitt Community College entitled "Technology Show and Tell." Delta Pi Epsilon, Gamma Psi Chapter of East Carolina University, Department of Business, Career, and Technical Vocation Education sponsored this event.

The event included demonstrations on using handheld computers in the classroom, taking advantage of new features in Office XP, energizing PowerPoint presentations, understanding upcoming changes in Blackboard 6.0, and enhancing online instruction with streaming audio, video, and screen captures.

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