

# On The Cutting Edge

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**Showcasing Distance Learning in the NC Community College System**

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## Governor's Budget Includes Distance Learning Funds

Governor Michael F. Easley included support for distance learning in the NC Community College System when he announced his recommended adjustments to the 2005-2007 biennial budget.

The recommendations included more than \$3.8 million to support a course management system project; a learning objects repository initiative; four new Virtual Learning Community (VLC) course development centers (three for curriculum courses and one for continuing education courses); an online help desk; and upgrading of NC Information Highway (NCIH) facilities.

It also included \$11 million in related equipment funding, which represents the largest recommended recurring increase in equipment funding in the System's history.

## President Lancaster Responds

"Significant support for our distance learning efforts is particularly encouraging," says System President H. Martin Lancaster. "This is the first time the Governor has included this important area, and we are grateful."

The recommendations require legislative action. On May 23, the Senate recommended eliminating the new VLC course development centers and online help desk items and reducing related equipment funding. All other recommendations remained. The bill was referred to the House Committee on Appropriations on May 30.

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## Nelms Joins NCCCS Staff As Distance Learning Coordinator

Dr. Delores A. Parker, Vice President for Academic and Student Services, announces that Dr. Linda M. Nelms has been named the System's new Distance Learning Coordinator, effective May 8, 2006.

Dr. Nelms previously served as Director of Distance and E-Learning at Southeastern Community College (SCC) for six years; as Registrar at SCC for four years; as Student Services Manager at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW) for three years; and as Educational and Career Counselor at UNCW for two years.

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*On The Cutting Edge* represents the variety of Distance Learning (DL) programs and initiatives in the NC Community College System under the expanded vision of the Virtual Learning Community (VLC).

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Dr. Nelms completed her doctorate in Higher Education Administration, with an emphasis in distance education, at Capella University. In her new capacity, she will work with a variety of distance learning initiatives, including course development, providing staff support to the Distance Learning Council, and providing leadership to the Virtual Learning Community (VLC) Development, Editing, and Web Centers.

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## Survey Shows Basic Skills Distance Education Courses Increasingly Popular

A survey sent to all 58 community colleges and 27 community-based organizations funded by the System Office reveals that distance education is becoming increasingly popular as a way of providing Basic Skills/literacy courses in the community.

The purpose of the survey was to get information regarding the courses offered, and to determine possible barriers or concerns that local programs have related to distance education. The overall return rate for all surveys was 69%; the return rate for community college surveys was 100%.

### **39 Colleges Offer DL Basic Skills**

The study revealed that 39 colleges (67%) offered at least one Basic Skills course using a distance learning (DL) delivery method during Fall Term 2005.

Course titles included Adult High School Earth Science, Adult High School World

History, Writing in the Workplace, English as a Second Language, and English Online.

### **Basic Skills Survey Overview**

The Basic Skills DL survey also provided an overview of course codes, materials, assessments, recruitment strategies, student/FTE counting methods, and orientation procedures used systemwide.

Complete survey results can be found in the Basic Skills section of the NCCCS website ([www.nccommunitycolleges.edu](http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu)) or in NCCCS Numbered Memo CC06-121.

### **Basic Skills DL Concerns Identified**

Every respondent was asked to list barriers and concerns, even if they were not currently offering Basic Skills distance education courses. The top-ten identified issues follow:

- **Funding/staffing**
- **Student equipment availability**
- **FTE/hours reporting**
- **Instructor training**
- **Low-functioning students**
- **Student computer training**
- **Retention/progress**
- **Student/instructor communication**
- **Administering assessments**
- **Materials distribution**

### **Basic Skills Distance Ed Committee**

The Basic Skills State Leadership Advisory Board has established a committee to examine the Basic Skills distance education surveys and to make recommendations for overcoming barriers/concerns, as well as to establish guidelines for local programs to follow in offering Basic Skills distance education courses.

A *Basic Skills Distance Education Manual* is also being developed as a result of the survey.

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## NC-NET Provides Online Professional Development

The North Carolina Network for Excellence in Teaching (NC-NET) offers online professional development opportunities for NC community college staff and instructors, including information related to online teaching and other distance learning methodologies.

Some of the self-paced instructional modules include the following:

- **Effective Online Teaching**
- **NC-NET Telecourse Instructor Course**
- **Online Teaching Template**
- **Teaching Through Videoconferencing: North Carolina Information Highway**
- **Developing Interactive Activities for Online Labs and Classes**

NC-NET Regional Centers have developed a total of 14 online, self-paced professional development modules on a variety of subjects. Instructions for accessing the modules can be found at <http://www.nc-net.info/modules.htm>. Other professional development resources are also available at [www.nc-net.info](http://www.nc-net.info).

Funded by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998, NC-NET is managed by the NCCCS Federal Vocational Education section, with assistance from the Center for Occupational Research and Development (CORD), Waco, TX.

Services to all 58 community colleges are provided by three regional centers: the Western Regional Center, hosted by Southwestern Community College; the Central Regional Center, hosted by Fayetteville Technical Community College; and the Eastern Regional Center, hosted by Martin Community College.

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## Continuing Education Distance Learning Task Force Created

The Continuing Education Division has established a systemwide Distance Learning Task Force to help identify current and emerging issues of specific interest to continuing education instructors and administrators.

The group's first meeting was held April 3<sup>rd</sup> in Raleigh. The agenda included defining the task force's role; a look at continuing education DL data; information on DL vendors; and an overview of the Virtual Learning Community (VLC).

### Statewide Membership

The members of the task force follow:

- Jim Benton, Western Piedmont CC
- Barbara Boyce, System Office
- Willa Dickens, System Office
- Rob Everett, Alamance CC
- Michael Greene, Edgecombe CC
- Beth Hollars, Gaston College
- Unita Knight, Cape Fear CC
- Christy Leadingham, Fayetteville TCC
- Sharon McGinnis, Coastal Carolina CC
- Bryan Scyphers, Davidson County CC
- John Smith, Carteret CC
- Diane Steinbeiser, System Office
- Amy Stowers, Guilford TCC
- Sam Strickland, Wake TCC
- Sherry Turpin, Fayetteville TCC
- Stuart Wasilowski, South Piedmont CC

The task force invites input and questions to help direct the group's focus and priorities.

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## Student Development Services Focuses on Virtual Counseling and Online Accessibility Issues

As students access classes using distance education options such as online courses and videoconferencing, college counselors and other student services personnel must be ready to respond to the counseling and advising needs of these virtual students.

Colleges must also ensure that virtual options are accessible to students who have cognitive, physical, or other challenges.

Student services staff across the system are working to address these issues through committees, resource guides, and training.

### Virtual Counseling Resources

The systemwide Virtual Counseling Services Committee met on May 18 to discuss the results of a recent student services survey and to propose revisions to the *Virtual Learning Counseling Services Resource Guide*.

The current guide is available on the NCCCS website at the following location: [http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/Stu\\_Dev\\_Services/StudentDev.htm](http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/Stu_Dev_Services/StudentDev.htm) (under the "Advising and Counseling" heading).

The guide includes sections titled *General Tips For Improving Effective Online Counseling Services*; *Descriptions and Examples of Effective Online Counseling Services*; *Useful Questions to Ask In Designing Online Counseling/Advising Services*; and *Resource Guide*.

The committee expects the updated guide to be available online before Fall Term 2006.

The members of the committee follow:

- Daniel Alvarado, Vance-Granville CC
- Kevin Brown, Wake TCC
- Tammy Buck, Lenoir CC
- Pamela Little, System Office

- Jacquelyn Harrison, who represented the State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (SOICC)

### Accessibility Training

Some students accessing online courses have special internet navigation and other needs due to visual, hearing, motor, or cognitive challenges.

A series of five accessibility workshops was conducted in March and April for community college staff systemwide on designing online course content to meet accessibility laws such as federal Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), and NC Senate Bill 866.

The training was the result of a professional development grant awarded to three colleges and funded by federal Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act funds.

The involved colleges, and respective grant managers, are listed below:

- Blue Ridge CC - Judy Stoneham
- Catawba Valley CC - Wanda Horvath
- Surry CC - Candace Ring

Other grant-funded activities include a recent web seminar; presentations at the national Tech Prep conference, and state, regional, and national Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) conferences; and a website for NC Vocational Instructors Training in Accessible Learning (NC-VITAL).

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**[WWW.NCVITAL.INFO](http://WWW.NCVITAL.INFO)**

**For accessibility compliance guidelines,  
universal design concepts, and  
other helpful links**

## Online Chemistry Lab Simulations Funded

The State Board of Community Colleges has approved a contract between the NCCCS and Late Nite Labs™ to allow for faculty training and assistance in developing interactive, online chemistry labs for community college Virtual Learning Community (VLC) courses.

The simulation software and support will allow colleges to offer consistent, high-quality chemistry lab experiences for online students across the state.

Funding for this initiative comes from the UNC-NCCCS 2+2 E-Learning Initiative funded by Senate Bill 622 to support collaborative teacher education programs among NC community colleges and universities.

### Lab Simulations Offer Online Options

Laboratory exercises involve eye-hand coordination, precise measurements, and potentially dangerous chemicals. Well-designed, realistic, online simulations offer viable alternatives to hands-on laboratory experiences for online learners.

Late Nite Labs™ offers chemistry laboratory simulation services with the following advantages to colleges:

- Can be used to develop lab exercises for online courses, hybrid courses, or traditional chemistry course supplements.
- Can be developed as modules that mimic lab activities currently undertaken in face-to-face courses.
- Can be imbedded in VLC courses and shared statewide.
- Can be customized per college, as needed for individual college planning requirements.
- Can be customized for changing accreditation and licensing standards.
- Will pose no liability risk to colleges, unlike some "kits" available on the market today.

### Perpetual Licensing

Late Nite Labs™ offers hosted service that is based on a "perpetual" license in which up-front license fees are charged the first year to establish the hardware configuration to support initial lab development.

Subsequent annual license fees translate to \$11 per student per course. Colleges will not need to purchase nor support additional hardware for this service.

The Late Nite Labs™ license structure allows the North Carolina Community College System to do the following:

- Establish the capability for a team of discipline experts to develop chemistry simulations that can be used by all 58 community colleges.
- Provide reliable chemistry lab resources at an affordable price once the lab simulations are developed.
- Establish reliable online chemistry lab simulations that do not place the burden of IT support and hardware procurement on the NCCCS institutions or System Office.

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### VLC Course List Available

More than 190 curriculum courses are available for download from the Virtual Learning Community (VLC) library.

For a complete list, go to the following URL:  
[http://www.ncccommunitycolleges.edu/Distance\\_Learning/index.html](http://www.ncccommunitycolleges.edu/Distance_Learning/index.html)

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## Allied Health Programs Offer Distance Learning Options

A recent survey of community college allied health programs shows that students are able to access selected courses via computer, the NC Information Highway (NCIH), and hybrid (part online/part traditional classroom) courses.

Forty-six colleges responded to the survey, which revealed that more than 30 colleges offer one or more courses online. Five percent of the respondents indicated they offer NCIH-based options for students.

### *Variety of Courses Offered*

Allied health courses offered through distance education options at one or more colleges include the following:

- Nursing
- Emergency Medical Science
- Speech and Language Pathology
- Medical Assisting
- Radiology
- Sonography
- Cancer Information Management
- Medical Laboratory Technology
- Health Information Technology
- Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) Refresher

Fifteen colleges indicated that they do not currently offer distance learning options for allied health courses, but ten of these indicated plans are underway to start.

The survey results were presented recently to the legislative Subcommittee on Healthcare Workforce (House Select Committee on Health Care).

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## Fall Curriculum Distance Learning Data Available

College-by-college distance learning data for curriculum course offerings are now available for Fall Term.

The system totals follow:

### *Curriculum Data (Fall 2005)*

Delivery Method	Students*	FTE**
Internet	63,725	6,464
Telecourse	4,061	382
Teleweb	1,035	118
Two-Way Video	3,666	356
Hybrid	10,398	1,211
Web-Supported	46,377	5,418
Digital Media	132	13
Other DL	179	18
<b>System Total - DL</b>	<b>129,573</b>	<b>13,980</b>

\* duplicated headcount

\*\*FTE rounded up to nearest whole number

Source: NCCCS Data Warehouse

### *Local College Statistics Available Online*

The most recent college-by college statistics are now available online at the following link on the NCCCS website:

[http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/Distance\\_Learning/distance\\_learning\\_data.htm](http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/Distance_Learning/distance_learning_data.htm).

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## Moodle Course Management System Users Group Created

Five community colleges will be selected in June to participate in an organized, statewide trial of the Moodle open source Course Management System (CMS) to assess its usefulness as an alternative to proprietary CMSs on the market.

Software is considered "open source" when the source code is made available to the public without royalties or fees. The software then evolves through community cooperation managed through users groups.

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Standards-based, open source products, such as Moodle, are particularly attractive to education clients since the content developed in such systems can be shared across platforms and can provide a basis of compatibility not possible with proprietary systems.

Colleges use such products – open source or proprietary – to manage online course details such as course creation; student registration; access to course materials; course testing; links to related materials; and electronic communication; such as discussion forums.

### ***Users Group Development Centers***

The key to effective utilization of open source Course Management Systems is the creation of users groups to coordinate and share online courses, resources, experiences, and successes.

The NCCCS seeks to coordinate efforts by creating Moodle Users Group Development Centers at five host colleges. Each center will consist of one administrator and five instructors who will receive training, technical support, and Moodle hosting services. The centers will develop/migrate online courses and resources in Moodle to share with other NCCCS institutions. All activities will be completed by December 10, 2006.

Funding for the Moodle Users Group project comes from the UNC-NCCCS 2+2 E-Learning Initiative funded by Senate Bill 622 to support collaborative teacher education programs among NC community colleges and universities. Details of the project can be found in NCCCS Numbered Memo CC06-117.

### ***Independent Trials Already Underway***

Several independent Moodle trials are already underway, as NC community colleges use this open source course

management system to support courses, conferences, committee work, and/or training purposes.

One example is Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC). CPCC began to pilot Moodle in February of 2004 when D.I. von Briesen, Program Chair of Internet Technologies, converted several of his web-based and hybrid classes to Moodle.

With the help of CPCC's Information Technology Services (ITS) staff, under the direction of Malik Rahman, von Briesen led several awareness and training sessions for fellow instructors in subsequent semesters. By Fall of 2004, CPCC began to run Moodle in "beta" with increased technical and helpdesk support, in addition to integration with the college's Information Systems.

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### **NC3ADL Hosts DL Listserv**

The NC Community College Association of Distance Learning (NC3ADL) hosts an email list service for anyone who may be interested.

#### **Instructions for Subscribing:**

Send a message to the following address: majordomo@list.ncccs.cc.nc.us.

In the message area, type "subscribe NCCCADL" (without the quotes). Leave the Subject field blank, and do not add your signature to the email.

You should receive an email confirming your subscription to the listserv along with a welcome message. Send messages for the NCCCADL listserv to NCCCADL@list.ncccs.cc.nc.us.

For more information, go to the association's website at [www.ncccadl.org](http://www.ncccadl.org).

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By January of 2005, Moodle was running in full production for curriculum courses, and gaining increasing usage from both experienced online instructors and instructors new to CMS delivery. Moodle was adopted in 2005 by CPCC Corporate and Continuing Education as its sole distance learning delivery system.

### **Collaboration Is Key to Users Group**

The NCCCS Moodle Users Group project is designed to consolidate these independent efforts; to harness the expertise of community college faculty and staff; to provide common training and resource development tools; and to create a systematic approach to the utilization and future transition to promising open source products.

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### **Senate Bill 622: UNC-NCCCS 2+2 E-Learning Initiative Update**

In passing Senate Bill 622, the General Assembly approved \$1 million in recurring funds for the NCCCS and \$1 million in non-recurring funds for the University of North Carolina (UNC) System to support online teacher education programs, professional development, student tracking, and technology infrastructure.

The provision mandates that the two education systems continue -- and strengthen -- a partnership to address the critical teacher shortage facing the state and nation, both now and in the future.

The State Board of Community Colleges approves contracts related to implementing this mandate. Many initiatives have already been approved, including contracts with Late Nite Labs™ (see story on p. 5) and support of the systemwide Moodle Users Group (see story on p. 6).

Other related projects recently approved by the State Board include upgraded equipment for the system's North Carolina Information Highway (NCIH) videoconferencing facility/classroom; licenses for software development tools to support the system's involvement in learning object repositories (LORs); and enhancements of teacher education modules for one of the state's web-based career development sites, [www.cfnc.org](http://www.cfnc.org).

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Faculty and staff at NCCCS colleges are encouraged to submit story ideas to any of the staff listed above.



**North Carolina  
Community College  
System**