

**QUALITY**

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**ENHANCING**

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**PRACTICES**

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**IN DISTANCE**

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**EDUCATION**

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V O L U M E 2

# STUDENT SERVICES

*Edited by  
Christine Dalziel  
and Michele Payne*



*This publication in part funded by the  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation*



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### **About the Editors**

Christine Dalziel is the executive director of the Instructional Telecommunications Council in Washington, D.C. Michele Payne is the director of learning initiatives at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

The Instructional Telecommunications Council (ITC) provides leadership, information and resources to expand access to, and enhance learning through, the effective use of technology. An affiliated council of the American Association of Community Colleges established in 1977, ITC represents higher education institutions in the United States and Canada.

The W.K.Kellogg Foundation was established in 1930 to “help people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations.” Its programming activities center around the common visions of a world in which each person has a sense of worth; accepts responsibility for self, family, community, and societal well-being; and has the capacity to be productive, and to help create nurturing families, responsive institutions, and healthy communities. [www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org).

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## **Introduction**

Providing effective, efficient online student services is an enormous challenge for higher education administrators. This monograph presents some insights into delivering those services, discusses the challenges that face student service practitioners, and gives examples of best practices among colleges that offer services on the Web.

Ten years ago, administrators did not think about delivering student services online, since most educators had not explored cyberspace and did not use it for education. Boettcher (2001) discusses the growth of the Internet since the early days of the Mosaic browser and the advent of tools such as personal digital assistants, wireless Web devices, and cell phones.

In the past, students applied for admission and financial aid, registered, and sought academic advice on campus. They needed to talk to someone face-to-face to receive service that they perceived as personalized. Today many, if not most, of our students come to us with a different expectation. Many began exploring the Internet in elementary school and have a great deal of experience using the Web for education and entertainment. They increasingly choose colleges that provide student services online.

Many colleges claim they provide such services, yet a national study pans the 100 colleges and universities that Yahoo *Internet Life* named the “most wired” (McRae 1999). The study considered six services that the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools scrutinizes carefully for accreditation purposes—counseling, career services, financial aid, discipline,

student activities, and student health—examining the Web sites of those 100 schools to determine if services were being offered or merely described online, were posted as “in progress” or “under construction,” or were not listed at all.

The study put the colleges into four categories according to student enrollment: fewer than 5,000; 5,000 to 9,000; 10,000 to 19,000; and 20,000 or more. Thirty-six percent of the institutions were public, while 64 percent were private.

Small private colleges with fewer than 5,000 students and large universities with more than 20,000 students offered the most student services online. Eighty-eight percent of the 100 “most wired” colleges and universities offered online career services; 73 percent offered online financial aid services. The least available service was links to the offices responsible for disciplinary action. Only one of the institutions Web sites provided incident report forms for immediate submission to judicial affairs staff.

Counseling services and student activity information were also rare, at 24 and 23 percent, respectively. Student activity sites were typically unsophisticated and out-of-date. Counseling department sites tended to be livelier, with services, such as a “Counselor Is In” program that lets students ask questions online and receive confidential feedback. Many of these departments linked their sites to the University of Chicago virtual counseling pamphlet, which offers excellent information and links to useful sites. Thirty-one percent of the colleges offered some type of online health service. Many had “ask a nurse” services that let students ask questions and receive confidential responses online. Students at the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas, could refill prescriptions online.

Until recently, such services were innovative, but colleges have raised

the bar. Most offer online forms for admissions and registration. Students now expect to conduct business online with colleges as they do with banks, credit card companies, and retail stores. They expect their college's Web site to be interactive, up-to-date, and useful.

Newton (2000) describes "millennial students" who are on the cutting edge of technological proficiency, and often beyond their parents, teachers, and potential bosses. These students receive "extensive and rapid exposure to a vast and ever-increasing level of informational activity, making them the most informed generation to have lived on the planet."

How are colleges preparing for these students? Do they provide information online in a way that makes sense? Do they deliver services and otherwise engage students in the click-and-point world to which they are accustomed? Do colleges help students refine the skill Newton says is critical: the ability to synthesize and delineate information and check it for accuracy?

Student-service providers must never forget their critical role: to support the processes of teaching and learning. Students must be at the heart of every decision they make about curricula, student services, policies, and procedures.

An institution's *ethos* is the belief system that faculty, staff, and students hold (Kuh 1993). Community colleges must keep all their constituencies in mind and remember that students do not fit into one-size-fits-all modes of instruction and service delivery.

This book highlights some best practices in the areas of learner support services and online student services. Case studies address issues of quality, accreditation, availability, and the depth and breadth of the services that are currently available and those that are still on the drawing board.

Highlighted services include admissions, assessment and advising, library services, learning support skills, student orientation and self assessment, technical support and help desks, open enrollment, online tutoring, student life, health and wellness, financial aid, and bookstore services. The study provides practical information, looks at valuable Web sites, and identifies colleges and universities that are bridging the gap between on-campus and online services.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **A Comprehensive Orientation to Address Diverse Student Needs**

*By Jackie L. Brusco, Coordinator of Distance Programs, Regent University's School of Education*

An effective distance learning program begins with careful planning and a focused understanding of course requirements and student needs. As an institution expands its distance education offerings, the diversity of its student population increases, particularly in the area of students' proficiency with technology. While some students can easily navigate online courses, others have never operated a computer. Some students have compatible hardware and software, while others have no clue as to what to buy and how to use it. Helping students close this technology gap is essential if distance learners are to succeed academically.

One way colleges can help is to provide effective student orientation to the online environment, including sufficient opportunities for practice and application. This will help our students become truly successful learners. As the developer of one such orientation program, my goal was to create a program that would help learners make the most of their online experiences. For some students, that means updating their computer skills; for others, it entails helping them become more familiar with the online course environment. Students also often need help with time management

and motivation.

Another important area is academic self-concept; that is, students' perception of themselves as learners. Gibson (1996) has shown that self-awareness affects learner success in distance education:

A student's academic self-concept holds an important place in persistence in distance learning, and that general self-concept is a dynamic and situational attribute of the distance student and, importantly, is open to intervention.

It is essential to understand the general profile of the distance student to determine the best ways to help learners.

Although there is no evidence that distance students are homogeneous, many share similarities that provide the basis for a profile of the "typical" distance learner in higher education. It is important to understand learner traits, such as personality type, preferred learning style, and motivational issues. It is equally important to help learners identify and recognize these characteristics in themselves.

Designing, developing, and maintaining a distance education student orientation program can be quite an endeavor. Balancing the need to impart technical information and verify technical proficiency while nurturing and encouraging the learner is challenging. Regent University's School of Education in Virginia Beach, Va., has revised its program several times over the last several years, each time moving a little closer to achieving that balance.

At the program's inception, the School of Education used distance education orientation to ensure that students could send and receive e-mail, navigate the Web, and work in the online course environment. As our distance programs become more popular, we were faced with a much larger group of students who needed orientation, and with their diversity of

technical skills and learner readiness.

To meet the challenge, we designed orientation that focuses on providing students with information and experiences in four major areas: basics of online learning, hardware and software requirements, online learning environment, and available university resources.

### **Basics of Online Learning**

Many students, even after they have decided to take an online course, lack a clear understanding of what online learning constitutes. Some believe it is based on the correspondence model, where students read the text, prepare an assignment, and submit their work. Others view it as a self-paced, self-prescribed educational experience. Still others perceive it as a solitary activity that requires the student to have little or no contact with the instructor or classmates. For many online learning opportunities, these perceptions are accurate. More-effective distance courses, however, are based on a model of interaction and collaboration.

The School of Education's online program requires student-to-student and student-to-instructor discussions for successful completion. It is crucial that distance students be aware of these requirements and fully understand what is expected of them. Misconceptions abound and can cause a great deal of confusion and discontent on the part of the learner if they're not dealt with during the orientation process.

Another aspect of online learning is personal motivation and self-discipline. Students often do not realize how much they rely on the physical presence of others to provide them with encouragement and support while they're learning. Without that support, it is easy for students to lose interest in and become disengaged from their course work. It is important that students understand the potential pitfalls of studying via distance.

Instructors should ask students to honestly and accurately evaluate their level of personal motivation and self-discipline. Orientation should encourage students to think about their study habits, learning styles, and motivational factors. Can they work on their own? Do they require constant, immediate interaction or instructor feedback? Are they comfortable communicating in writing with the instructor and classmates? It is often beneficial to ask students to complete a self-assessment (either Web-based or on paper) that deals with these areas to help determine their readiness for online learning. Although these questions and the self-assessment will begin to focus learners' attention on one important facet of successful distance learning, there are several others to consider.

Time management is another basic component of online learning. Although many students still think of distance education as a shortcut to easy grades or a degree, quality distance education programs often require an even greater time investment than equivalent on-campus learning experiences do. In lieu of travel time to and from campus and the time required for faculty-student classroom contact, distance learning students must discipline themselves to use their computer to access courses, read, study, conduct library research, and write on their own.

Students must carefully consider whether they are willing to make the time commitment necessary for distance course work, and they must manage other responsibilities accordingly. Instructors can use time-management self-assessments to help students develop a greater awareness of their time-management skills and techniques. Numerous self-assessment instruments are available and can be incorporated into the distance education student orientation.

## **Hardware and Software Requirements**

Once students have determined they are willing and able to commit the time that's necessary for a distance course, they must also be able to equip themselves with the necessary equipment. Distance education orientation must give students specific guidelines about the computer hardware and software that are necessary for the online program, and must verify that students can comply with the guidelines.

Orientation should address hardware issues such as processor speed, memory, multimedia devices, and modems. For example, if an instructor plans to provide course resources or supplemental material on compact disk, students will need a CD-ROM player. If a program uses video media extensively, students will need sufficient modem speed and bandwidth for viewing.

Depending on the extent to which professors use, and require students to use, various technologies, software issues might include the need for students to have word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation programs, as well as special readers and media players. Orientation should ensure that students have the hardware and software they'll need to access and use course materials before they begin their online courses. For example, Regent's School of Education puts a great deal of material on electronic reserve through the library system and students must have the Adobe Acrobat Reader to view that material. The online orientation requires students to download and install a free copy of the reader on their computers if they do not already have it. By making this process part of the orientation, we can be sure that students will have the necessary software when an instructor requires them to use the electronic reserve system.

There are various ways to determine what computer components

students have. Our orientation includes a Web-based survey that requires students to indicate the computer components they will be using. If a system does not meet our minimum standards, the student is counseled about upgrading or purchasing new equipment.

Some institutions require that distance students provide proof, such as the technical specification documentation that comes with a computer, that their systems meet institutional standards. Many institutions address the issue of compatible hardware and software by providing distance students with a desktop or notebook computer. Such colleges generally add computer costs to tuition costs.

Because most of our distance education courses are conducted using Web-based interaction, students must have a reliable Internet access. Choosing an Internet service provider (ISP) can be confusing and frustrating. Due to the sheer number of options available, students often feel overwhelmed and ill-equipped to make the decision. Orientation should give students information that helps them make a well-informed, economical choice of ISPs. While a few institutions require that students use a particular service provider, most offer suggestions, placing minor restrictions if needed, to help students select their own ISPs. Our distance education orientation cautions students against using a few specific providers, but offers no other restrictions.

We also offer some commonsense guidelines to help students choose a service provider. This includes advising them to select a provider that offers unlimited Internet access at a reasonable fee, has the highest possible connection speeds, and offers adequate customer service and technical support. The ISP must provide students with an e-mail account, since instructors most commonly communicate with students via e-mail. We stress that students must obtain their own e-mail account.

Novice distance students often think they can share a computer and Internet access with a friend or relative because they underestimate the amount of computer time the program of study will require. Furthermore, many plan to do their course work at work, with the computer they have there. Distance education orientation should help students think about when and where they will study—most likely in the evenings and on weekends, times when they're not likely to be at work. The orientation should stress the convenience of working on studies from home and highlight the disadvantages of trying to study from the workplace.

### **Online Learning Environment**

Because the online learning environment is such a vital part of the learning experience, this portion of the distance learning student orientation is generally the most comprehensive. Depending on the delivery methods the distance learning course uses, the orientation can contain information about e-mail, bulletin boards, Web-based course sites, and course management systems.

For institutions that primarily use e-mail and electronic bulletin boards to conduct online courses, orientation should include thorough instructions on how to use e-mail, with specifics about when and how to e-mail the instructor and other procedural information. If a course uses electronic bulletin boards, the orientation should provide ample opportunities for students to practice reading and posting to the board. It is a good idea to put sample materials or assignments on the class bulletin board and require students to respond to them. Basically, the orientation should provide a trial run of the types of activities the actual online courses will require.

Thanks to the wide assortment of Web authoring products available, many instructors have learned to create dynamic Web pages for their

courses. As a result, their online courses are conducted through Web sites that contain lecture notes, graphics, slide presentations, and much more. With the addition of streaming audio or video, an instructor and course can “come alive” to students through their Web browsers.

For institutions that use this Web site delivery method, orientation should include a thorough introduction on how to access the course site, what types of information can be found there, and how students will interact with the instructor and one another. Because some students may be new to the Internet and not accustomed to using the Web, the orientation should give students ample opportunities to learn how to navigate within the browser, use browser controls and functions, and follow hyperlinks.

One way to facilitate this skill-building is to require that students complete a Web-based scavenger hunt that asks them to respond to questions by finding the answers on specific Web sites. The instructor can structure the hunt so students need to search through the institution’s own Web site, which lets them discover more about the resources and services available through the college.

Online courses that include a discussion component should give students access to a class e-mail distribution list or other means for carrying on discussions with classmates and the instructor. If the course uses such a list, the orientation should describe how to access, use it, and provide a chance for students to practice reading and posting messages.

Many institutions use Web-based course management systems that offer many features and functions for faculty and students. While the number of course management systems is increasing rapidly, most have elements that allow faculty and students to interact within the online learning environment. The most common features are e-mail, electronic discussion boards, hyperlinks to access other parts of the Web, online course materials,

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online assessment, and grade book functions. Detailed, in-depth orientation is usually needed to acquaint students with the system features and functions.

Regent's distance education orientation takes learners through each of the system's features. Students perform activities like the ones they will do in their online courses, such as sending e-mail, accessing course announcements, downloading course documents, and posting to the discussion board. Mastering this part of the orientation is imperative if students are to succeed in the online environment.

If students do not understand how to navigate and interact within the course environment prior to beginning their distance education studies, they will have an extremely difficult time keeping up with the workload. Frustration levels will rise, and students will become dissatisfied with the course. This usually results in less than optimal student achievement and lower than average student course evaluations, because frustrated students have a tendency to focus on the negative aspects of the technology rather than on the positive aspects of the course content.

Concern about how they will be assessed is one of the most prevalent worries students have when taking an online course. If students do not have a clear understanding of how assignments will be submitted, graded, and returned, they feel anxious and uneasy. Learners worry whether the assignment they e-mailed to the instructor—the one they worked on diligently for three weeks—is going to arrive at its proper destination. Once the instructor has acknowledged receiving an assignment, students continue to worry whether their grades will be recorded properly. Students often perceive that handing in a paper and having an instructor return it to them makes the grade more official than sending the work via e-mail. Since submission and grading are among the biggest concerns of new

distance learning students, orientation should eliminate their anxieties about the process.

### **Available University Resources**

One final consideration is the university resources that are available to distance learners. Just as on-campus students have access to administrative departments, technical support, and library services, so should distance students. Regent's orientation makes distance students aware of the resources that are available to them. There are several ways to do this. For example, the scavenger hunt described earlier could require students to search for information about online databases, administrative services, or special registration procedures for distance learners. Orientation could include instructions about remote access, setting up an e-mail account within the course management system, or require students to navigate through the system to find the information. The goal is to encourage learners to find out what is available to them while helping them get acquainted with the online environment.

### **Conclusion**

Without exception, effective distance education programs begin with careful planning and a focused understanding of course requirements and student needs. Such planning must always include a means to orient learners to the online environment, and provide students with sufficient opportunities for practice and application. By providing students with good orientation, we enable them to become truly successful in their educational endeavors.

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## **Chapter 2**

### **Creating an Online Orientation and Student Support Services**

*By Elaine Seeman, Associate Vice President for Virtual Education, Pitt Community College*

Pitt Community College (PCC) is a rural, two-year college located in Greenville, N.C. The college began teaching online in 1996 and now offers more than 200 courses via the Internet. Online degree and certificate programs include business administration, computer programming, health information technology, information systems, and office technology.

PCC's courses are designed to meet the objectives specified in the North Carolina Community College System's common course library. In fall 1999, the Southern Association of College and Schools (SACS) determined that the only difference between PCC's distance learning and traditional on-campus courses was in their mode of delivery, not in their substance, quality, or outcomes.

The college administration has always agreed that student support is an important element for providing quality online courses. Students should have a means of self-assessment and an online learning orientation. PCC has used student and instructor feedback to improve its processes numerous times since its first days offering online instruction.

PCC first taught online classes to students majoring in computer

programming, computer support, and networking through its information systems department. Most of the learners were computer and Internet savvy, so skill assessment was not essential to student success. However, when PCC began offering online classes to students from other areas of the college, technical readiness became a major factor that determined whether students could successfully complete the course work. Students' technical expertise, or lack thereof, began to influence how PCC developed its online courses.

Faculty members found that students needed advanced preparation before taking online courses. Many students overestimated their computer skills and asked technical questions that instructors were unprepared to answer. Meanwhile, students were asking the library staff for technical assistance when they worked on online courses in the college's learning resource center. Consequently, PCC established a student help desk to more efficiently address technical problems.

Students are often frantic to get into required classes and thus enroll in online courses when the on-campus section is full. Ensuring that students have the know-how to take an online course requires careful screening during the advising and registration process. Many students lack the attention to detail and maturity needed to keep up with the demands of online learning.

PCC developed a profile of a successful online student to help potential distance learners assess whether they have the appropriate learning and work styles to take an online course. The profile stresses that taking an online course can be difficult, but that perseverance can lead to success. Students can review the profile on the college Web site or get a printed copy during registration. Many advisors review the profile with students so students can screen themselves out of online classes if they have

inappropriate study habits. Students who have registered for online classes receive a letter before they begin their first class that directs them to the Web site ([http://styx.pitt.cc.nc.us/is/orientation/Student\\_Profile/student\\_profile.html](http://styx.pitt.cc.nc.us/is/orientation/Student_Profile/student_profile.html)). Here is the profile:

- Self-discipline. Students who procrastinate will get behind in their work and find it difficult to catch up. Those who try to meet deadlines will be successful at PCC and in their careers.
- Self-confidence. Students should be able to get themselves out of difficulty. Instructors can help in debugging and problem solving if the student has already tried to solve the problem. Students can refer some e-mail and software problems to their instructor or the PCC help desk for troubleshooting. Students should contact their ISPs for most e-mail and software problems.
- Ability to overcome frustration and confusion. Every student finds some parts of a course, project, or assignment difficult to understand or falls into a disaster from time to time. Successful students grit their teeth, calm their nerves, and plunge into a problem rather than avoid it. Sometimes short-term misery brings long-term satisfaction.
- Completed course prerequisites. Students should check the course syllabus before registering to make sure they have completed the prerequisites by the time the class begins.
- Ability to work independently. If students find classroom interaction essential, they might not like an Internet class.
- ISP, e-mail, and software. Students must successfully install all required software and services before the semester starts.

Although this profile has been helpful for self-assessment, students still sign up for online classes inappropriately. Some skip the profile entirely,

while others ignore their incompatibility and choose to enroll in an online course because it's convenient and doesn't conflict with their schedules.

While some colleges require distance learning students to attend face-to-face orientation, PCC believes this would be contrary to the purpose of distance education and would limit the student base to those who could get to campus. Students usually enroll in online classes for scheduling convenience. Most are mature individuals who have job and family responsibilities that prevent them from attending traditional on-campus classes. They need distance learning opportunities to further their education. PCC increasingly attracts students from throughout the state, country, and world. The college also targets homebound and disabled students who require online instruction.

PCC's online orientation has undergone many iterations. The current instrument is a tutorial and short quiz designed to familiarize students with how online instruction works at the college and help them assess and develop the competencies they need to be successful online students. The orientation instrument is posted on PCC's Web site (<http://styx.pitt.cc.nc.us/is/orientation/>). Students are directed to take the orientation on the first day of class. The college mails a letter about the student profile to students so they can change their schedules during late registration if they decide virtual instruction is not for them.

PCC regularly reviews the feedback it receives from students, faculty, counselors, and the help desk's log of problem calls to determine the minimum computer skills students need to take online courses. Other colleges should review this type of feedback each semester to identify changing or emerging problem areas and competencies. For example, File Transfer Protocol (FTP) used to be a major problem area since students had to download freeware from the Web and configure their

computers to access the school FTP site. The college's transition to Blackboard's course management system, which provides a transparent way to upload and download files, eliminated the need to teach students how to use FTP.

Just as FTP difficulties disappeared, students and instructors began having problems with caching Web pages, displaying saved copies rather than updated pages. PCC's orientation and letter to enrolled students now explain the steps for clearing the cache in Netscape and Internet Explorer. Disseminating this information drastically reduced the number of problem calls students made at the beginning of each semester.

PCC also developed a short quiz that addresses very basic competency issues. This "No Sweat Quiz" is available at <http://styx.pitt.cc.nc.us/is/orientation/test/index.html>. Quiz questions include the following:

- What if my browser doesn't show me the updated pages?
- How do I submit a report via e-mail as an attachment?
- How do I use hyperlinks?
- How do I use Blackboard?
- What is the difference between a student's drop box in Blackboard and a regular FTP program?
- What is the difference between Blackboard's discussion board and the other Web board available to Pitt Community College students?
- What makes a successful Internet student?

The quiz is written in dynamic HTML and provides students with immediate feedback for each question. PCC will use Allaire's Cold Fusion for the next version of the quiz, which will be able to give students positive feedback for correct answers, display brief explanations for incorrect

answers, and route students to the area of the orientation that discusses a particular topic.

The orientation also teaches students how to use the Blackboard course management system. It describes how to access asynchronous discussion boards for group interactivity, use Blackboard's threaded discussion board, and access the O'Reilly Web board software. A frequently asked questions (FAQ) section explains how to e-mail instructors and use proper e-mail etiquette. The orientation includes a link to the profile of a successful online student.

FTP is covered in depth for students in classes that use it, such as those from the information systems department. The orientation directs students how to use FTP to download free software from the Web and save it to a computer hard drive, and how to access the college's FTP site.

The online orientation is constantly growing and changing as technology demands. It appears to be successful, since students experience fewer difficulties with their online classes than before. PCC may incorporate the online orientation into the required one-hour course "Academic Student Success."

There are still problems. For example, most of the students who registered late proved to be procrastinators. Since they got behind in their online classwork and stopped progressing in the course, PCC decided to close admission to online courses before the first day of class at the end of regular registration. Although PCC later stopped this practice, the college is considering whether to reinstate it, since many students who begin late never catch up on their course work.

Since many faculty are dissatisfied with the screening process for online classes, the college is discussing plans to enlarge the scope of the "No

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Sweat Quiz” to encompass the computer skills students need to take an online class. PCC is also considering testing enhancements for the upcoming summer semester.

PCC plans to link the online orientation and “No Sweat Quiz” to online classes so students will not be able to access online course material until they have successfully completed the skills assessment quiz. The college still needs to resolve some technical issues relating to security and integrating Cold Fusion with the Blackboard course management software. For example, students who enroll in multiple online classes each semester now have to take the quiz multiple times. By fall 2001, PCC hopes to develop an advising survey so instructors can assess students’ “learning fit” and their computer expertise and experience. The site will include topics from the profile of a successful online student and instructions on using e-mail, Web access, and search engines.

Student self-assessment and orientation is a work in progress. PCC will continue to improve and enhance its systems as new problems emerge and as technology advances.

## **Chapter 3**

### **New Student Assessment for Students in Rural Colorado**

*By Suzanna Spears, Dean of Arts, Sciences, and Instructional Development,  
Morgan Community College*

Community colleges have served as an entry way for many individuals who want to start or restart the higher education journey. Their traditional “open door” policy lets students start programs that will bring them success in their careers and give them opportunities to transfer to four-year and other institutions. Because this policy guarantees admittance to everyone, community college students have varying levels of skills in reading, writing, computation, and general study habits. Colleges are using new assessment tools to help students better understand their operational level in these skills areas and to compare students’ actual levels to what they need in order to succeed at college-level work.

The Colorado state community college system has an online application form. Potential students go to the Community Colleges of Colorado Web site, or that of an individual college, and fill out the form, which is then transmitted to the institution the student wants to attend. Most of the Colorado colleges use this system for online students, and as the colleges perfect the system, traditional on-campus students will also be able to apply for admission online. Once it receives an application, the “home” college

contacts the student and helps him or her move into the new student assessment process.

For many years the Colorado state board of education has required colleges to assess every community college student who is admitted to a degree or certificate program. Colleges have waived in-house assessment for students with qualifying SAT or ACT scores or those who have completed a two-year degree. In 2000, state legislation and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education began requiring colleges to use standardized exams to measure reading, computation, and writing skills for incoming students who do not qualify for a waiver. Students must also complete a prescription for remediation during their first 30 hours at the home institution.

Colorado's community colleges require the placement assessments and strongly encourage students to follow the prescription for remediation before jumping into college-level courses. Students who do not follow the prescription often end up on academic probation and suspension, become ineligible for continuing financial aid, withdraw from some of their classes, or drop out of college altogether.

In 1994–95, Morgan Community College (MCC) in Fort Morgan, Colo., developed its “Plan for Assessing Student Academic Achievement” for its North Central accreditation review. The college viewed assessment from a three perspectives: new student, end of course, and end of program.

The college wanted to use the new student assessment instrument throughout its rural service area. MCC serves nearly 3,500 students each year. Fifty-nine percent attend classes at the main campus in Fort Morgan, while 41 percent attend one of the college's five centers, which are in a service area of more than 11,500 square miles.

MCC offers a pencil-and-paper exam and has used Accuplacer, a

computer-based test developed by the College Board, for the past five years. In spring 2001, MCC began using the pencil-and-paper companion version of Accuplacer.

MCC first set up Accuplacer's software version at computer labs throughout the service area so students could come in to complete the program. Data was downloaded from each computer and student performance statistics were forwarded to the College Board. Students could also take the pencil-and-paper test if computers were not available; this required that a proctor time the various sections and score the test by hand. The Accuplacer is self-paced, moves students through various levels of difficulty, and provides a printout of individual performance.

MCC adopted Accuplacer's online version in 2000 to ensure that scoring and placement would be consistent. The college uses the companion pencil-and-paper test if reliable Internet access is not available. The paper test is also available in large type, Braille, and audiocassette versions to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Both the online and paper tests can be completed in less than two hours and can be administered in a proctored environment. No timing is required.

Distance learning students can schedule a testing appointment at a local center or high school. MCC's testing center director provides the test information to the on-site proctor. Results for placement into appropriate course levels is immediate for either test. Students outside the college's service area can also ask the testing center director for alternate ways to complete the required assessment.

Test scores are paired with MCC's course offerings. The college had identified entry-level scores for pre-college courses in reading, mathematics, and writing. They can also apply as prerequisites for college-

level courses. The profile provides students with immediate advising tools to map a program plan at MCC.

As students complete pre-college courses, MCC uses the Accuplacer software and paper tests as exit exams to make sure students are ready to go on to the next level. The success rate of students who follow the prescription of courses indicates the assessment is accurate. The Colorado community colleges plan to standardize the curriculum in pre-college courses and set the same scores for entrance into each course. This will provide consistency among colleges.

In 2000 MCC also piloted the College Board's Academic Profile as an end-of-program assessment for students who were within 15 semester credits of completing a degree. Currently, there is no data comparing the two Accuplacer tests and the Academic Profile. Should such data be developed, MCC could use the two assessments to determine what value is added during a student's experience at the college.

The faculty and staff at Morgan Community College understand there is more to identifying a student's readiness for college-level work than performance on one test. Our success with the Accuplacer, however, gives us an on-demand standard to use with all students, in a variety of locations. For an open door institution that offers many of its programs via distance learning technologies, this assessment, in conjunction with an advising session, offers a reliable way to help students successfully embark on the journey of learning.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Helping Students Develop Successful Career Planning Skills**

*By George Knox, Instructor, Career Help and College Success, Portland  
Community College*

Portland Community College (PCC) in Portland, Ore., has offered curriculum and services to distance learners in Oregon since 1978. Like many colleges, PCC has experienced significant growth in this area, especially in online instruction. Distance enrollment for the 1999–2000 school year was just over 12,000. The college has made major progress toward developing a full distance learning curriculum, offering comprehensive degrees and certificates to distance learners. With this growth and expansion, the college has experienced a growing demand for support services for distance learners.

#### **Standards and Goals**

In spring 2000, PCC adopted a set of instructional standards for distance learning courses that focuses on four areas: learning outcomes and content presentation, learner activities, evaluation, and instructional design. Several of these are directed toward improving students' learning skills and involving them in the learning process. These standards state the need to use course activities to connect students with academic support and advising staff.

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PCC is addressing these standards in two ways. First, the college is increasing access to academic support and advising services via the Internet and providing general information about student services (descriptions of services offered, office locations and hours, staff contact information, etc.) on its Web site. Several departments are developing distance delivery of services. The initial stages of online services, which PCC provided to students in fall 2000, focused on registration, student records, and billing services.

Students had limited access to some advising and admissions services, such as new student orientation, transcript evaluation, testing, and job placement. The college is beginning to explore offering student life activities online. Future goals include making a fuller range of advising and counseling services, in addition to writing and tutoring labs, available to distance learners via the Web.

PCC has partnered with Rogue Community College (RCC) in Grants Pass, Ore., to develop online writing labs (OWLS) at each college. A grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) will support this project for three years. The OWLS will be available to both on-campus and distance learning students and will focus on providing writing support to students in professional and technical areas. PCC and RCC plan to develop a model, and possibly templates, that could be followed by other community colleges in Oregon that are interested in developing OWLS.

The career help and college success department, which represents the academic side of the college's counseling and advising offices, initiated a second approach to supporting PCC's distance learning standards. Using existing curriculum, these offices developed four online courses to help build learning skills in distance learning college students: College

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Survival and Success, Career Development, Job Finding Skills, and Cooperative Education: a Career Exploration Seminar. Each course focuses on a different part of the learning process that students encounter in college.

These Web-based courses use WebCT as the course management system, although additional online tools are available to instructors. PCC first offered all of these courses by distance in the 1999–2000 academic year. Enrollment was 289 students over four quarters.

These learning skills courses integrate easily into existing student services, with direct referral to the college's advising and counseling services, career centers, job placement offices, and cooperative education services. Although these services are primarily campus-based, PCC plans to offer them on the Web in the near future. All of the instructors in the career help and college success curriculum also work within PCC's student services areas to provide direct support services. This gives our distance learners an additional level of access to student services, including advising, counseling, and job placement.

### **College Survival and Success**

College Survival and Success is a 10-week course that helps students make the personal, academic, and social adjustments needed to succeed in college. It covers college terminology and information, class choice, degree requirements, library use, tours, and student services. It discusses personal learning strengths and weaknesses; balancing work, school, and home demands; forming study partnerships; and stress and time management. The course presents strategies for new and returning students, and the online version focuses on topics specific to distance learners.

The program is offered for one, two, and three credits. Learning

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activities include online discussions, quizzes, textbook assignments, and a final project paper responding to questions the instructor posts. The final project is submitted online and is available for peer critique. The textbook is *Keys to Success: How to Achieve Your Goals* by Carter, Bishop, and Kravits. Discussion topics correspond to the chapters in the text:

1. Becoming a Lifelong Learner: Opening Doors
2. Resources: Making the Most of Your Environment
3. Goal-Setting and Time Management: Mapping the Course
4. Self-Awareness: Knowing Who You Are and How You Learn
5. Critical and Creative Thinking: Tapping the Power of Your Mind
6. Reading, Studying, and Using the Library: Maximizing Written Resources
7. Note-Taking and Writing: Harnessing the Power of Words and Ideas
8. Listening, Memory, and Test Taking: Taking In, Retaining, and Demonstrating Knowledge
9. Relating to Others: Appreciating Your Diverse World
10. Personal Wellness
11. Managing Career and Money: Reality Resources
12. Moving Ahead: Building a Flexible Future

Students discuss these elements with the instructor and each other in an online chat room every Monday evening and through a threaded-discussion bulletin board. Each week, the instructor posts a timed quiz online.

The desired outcomes for this course are familiarity with the community college system and resources, effective use of personal and college-related tools to achieve academic success, awareness of peer

support groups, and a positive mental attitude. These outcomes are especially important for distance learners, who often feel separated from help systems within the college. The course's instructor refers to these outcomes collectively as "empowerment" of the student.

Student feedback about the course is strongly positive relative to these outcomes, with students reporting increased familiarity with PCC and its structures, and increased self-confidence and the ability to overcome barriers. Many students have related how much they learned from reading other students' responses to questions and personal life stories, or have talked about the value of learning online.

### **Career Development**

Career Development helps students make informed career decisions. The course introduces interest testing and self-assessment of skills, values, and attitudes. Students learn how to locate occupational information, conduct informational interviews, make decisions, and set goals. The course also covers choosing a major.

The program is offered for one, two, and three credits. The textbook is *The Career Fitness Program*, by Sukiennik, Bendat and Roufman. Learning activities include participating in online discussions, completing textbook assignments, conducting informational interviews, researching occupational areas, writing reports on various careers, and developing a working résumé based on skills and interest assessment. Students are introduced to a variety of relevant Internet resources.

Assignments and career reports are posted on a bulletin board for peer review and comment. Students discuss these postings and other assigned topics with the instructor and each other in an online chat every Monday evening and through a threaded-discussion bulletin board.

Outcomes for Career Development include an ability to identify values, skills, and personality style; understand current patterns and future trends in the workplace; identify self-defeating behavior or barriers; and develop a plan of action for achieving personal and professional development.

Students report high satisfaction with the course, appreciate the opportunity to interact with other career explorers, and share career information they have gathered. Completing the course helps students set academic goals and choose courses of study. Because the class only introduces the concepts and practices of career development, students are referred to a career counselor if they need additional assistance. Student feedback about the online version of the course is strongly positive.

### **Job Finding Skills**

Job Finding Skills promotes an overall understanding of the job search process and explores a broad range of job search techniques, including building a job network, compiling information for job applications, targeting cover letters and resumes, and developing responses to typical interview questions. Students develop skills that will help them attain full-time, part-time, summer, and internship employment.

The course is required for professional-technical students in several career curriculum areas, including accelerated computerized accounting, architectural design and drafting, automotive service technology, building inspection, industrial design and drafting, interior design, and publishing technology. It is also recommended in several other career programs where cooperative education or an internship is either required or a technical elective. In 2000 this course was converted to distance learning to meet the needs of students in curriculum areas that were already full.

Job Finding Skills is a self-paced, one-credit course. There is no

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required text. Students access online lectures and activities customized to their majors and explore real companies and jobs via the Internet. Students develop job search materials that are critiqued by an employment specialist who is responsible for placing students. Contact with the instructor is available in person and by e-mail, fax, and phone.

The outcomes for the course are an understanding of the job search process; the ability to develop job search tools, including a résumé, cover letter, and application; demonstrated strategies for successful interviewing; and the ability to develop a job search plan. Some instructors require majors to develop a mini-portfolio showing work samples. Job Finding Skills students are strongly encouraged to use the college's job placement services. The course seems to be especially effective now that PCC has made employment services available to distance learners via the Web and e-mail.

Student evaluations have shown a strong level of satisfaction with the course content's relevance to "real life" and with the online course's ease-of-use. Students seem to strongly appreciate the ability to approach the topic areas that interest them at their own pace. Completing the course also ensures that students prepare the job search materials they will later need for placement in cooperative education work experiences.

### **Cooperative Education: Career Exploration Seminar**

Cooperative Education: Career Exploration Seminar is a required seminar, supplementing the cooperative education experience, in which students explore their interest in and suitability for a career through work situations in selected occupations. The seminar offers a flexible menu of online assignments exploring the topics of job search, job success, and personal achievement.

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The course is a self-paced, one-credit seminar. Students are required to complete a journal in which they respond to questions about their work experiences. They also complete an informational interview, usually at the work site, responding to questions provided by the instructor. Students choose five learning activities they need to complete from an online menu of 10 to 15 readings and activities to earn the credit for the course. The instructor changes these activities in response to class needs or newly available materials. Current topic selections include salary negotiation, portfolios, sexual harassment, workplace safety, and stress management. Students can also create their own activities from online sources, with instructor approval.

The primary outcome for the course is a realistic evaluation of whether a particular career is relevant to an individual's interests and aptitudes. Instructors expect students to demonstrate self-reflection when evaluating their work experience and the information they collected through the seminar activities. An additional outcome is that students become familiar with using the Internet as a source of information on careers and employment.

Student feedback about the seminar has been positive. Students particularly like the flexibility of the online assignments and often repeat the seminar to gain additional work experience, choosing different learning activities from the menu. Like Career Development, this course may help students make career and academic choices. When this occurs, students are referred to a counselor or advisor for further assistance.

An important benefit of the online format is that it makes the seminar available to students who work outside of the college's district. Last year, PCC had cooperative education students around the world (in Japan and Saudi Arabia) and across the country (in Washington, Alaska, Utah, and

Florida).

Other PCC programs often use the online seminar in lieu of their own face-to-face workshops. For example, business majors (management, marketing, and accounting) are required to attend a weekly seminar in conjunction with their co-op work experience. Students who are unable to attend that seminar may use the career exploration seminar to fulfill the requirement. Since no business instructor is available during the summer term, students who participate in the work experience are required to teach the “live” seminar.

### **Plans for Online Course Offerings**

PCC’s Career Help and College Success Department offers other courses that may work well in an online format. The college could target those courses to distance learners alone, or could use them for both distance learners and traditional students who seek the flexibility of an online course.

Study Skills for College Learning provides information, techniques, and strategies that help students become more skilled at time management, studying, listening, and taking notes and exams. This course is more focused than College Survival and Success is, since it targets behaviors and strategies that are directly linked to learning. It may be a natural addition to supporting learning skills for distance learners. The number of PCC students taking distance learning courses is growing, and many are new to the medium. These learners would greatly benefit from more advanced instruction in study skills.

Today’s Careers may also fill a niche in PCC’s distance offerings. This course gives a broad overview of careers and what it takes to succeed in them. It seems to interest people who are considering entering or re-

entering college and are exploring the value of such a choice. Given the career exploration and industry resources available through the Internet, it would probably be easy to convert Today's Careers to an online format and tie it to online career databases such as America's Learning Exchange.

Other courses PCC could adapt for distance delivery are Stress Management, Values Clarification, Decision Making, and Stopping Test Anxiety. These courses often have low enrollment. Perhaps they could be offered online as self-paced, continuous enrollment courses.

Ideally, PCC could tie several career growth courses together to support learners throughout their college experience. For example, a student could explore possible careers and the corresponding college options with the courses Today's Careers and Career Development, then take College Survival and Success and Study Skills for College Learning to develop the skills needed to achieve their goals. Students could use what they learn in Job Finding Skills and Cooperative Education: Career Exploration Seminar to ease the transition into the workforce.

Distance delivery of learning support courses is important because distance learners often cannot directly access advising and counseling services and because traditional students may have difficulty fitting face-to-face support classes into their busy schedules. Potential students who have not yet committed to attending college may find online exploration an attractive option.

As more and more of PCC's student services go online, the college will need to make its career growth courses and support services available to distance learners. PCC already refers students to Web-based job placement services. Students might use other courses to connect to online advising, counseling, testing, and tutoring services as they become available. This approach would help PCC meet instructional standards for distance

learning courses and fulfill its plans for distance delivery of academic and student services.

### **Conclusion**

Portland Community College is committed to helping distance learners develop their learning skills. The instructional standards for distance learning courses adopted in 2000 address this important part of the college's program. PCC is moving toward its goal of offering admissions, advising, counseling, tutoring, and employment services online, and offering learning support courses via distance learning strengthens this commitment. In the future, PCC will offer more courses and services to further support its distance learners' learning skills development.

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## **Chapter 5**

### **How to Create A Model Online Student Service Center**

*By Cheryl Chapman, Educational Technologist and Trainer, Coastline Community College*

In 1997 the California Community Colleges chancellor's office awarded Coastline Community College in Fountain Valley, Calif., a two-year Telecommunications Model Applications Pilot Projects (TMAPP) grant for 1998 to 2000 to design, develop, implement, and evaluate online registration, counseling, and advisement services at the college and to create a plan and model that other colleges could replicate.

#### **Target Audience**

Coastline's Online Student Services Center (OSSC) serves distance learners, working adults, students who are not native English speakers, and advanced placement or college preparation high school students. This diverse population is typical of Coastline's overall student base. The OSSC Web site will provide information for all students.

The TMAPP grant was to provide online services including registration, career planning; a transfer center; and access to the student educational plan and the college schedule and course catalog. The program would provide interactive, real-time counseling sessions via the Internet,

Coastline's Edu-Cable channel, and high school and industry-based videoconferencing systems. The college planned to use e-mail, including e-mail subscription lists, to provide personal or group counseling and advisement services, and to adapt existing counseling and orientation videos for Internet and cable delivery for asynchronous viewing.

Coastline held cablecast and Webcast events that gave students the opportunity to call in or fax questions. An online chat accompanied the Webcast. Students could later access the archived material from these live events on the Coastline Web site and use the accompanying contact information to schedule a virtual advisement appointment.

To give students another way to contact counselors and advisors, Coastline installed desktop videoconferencing equipment in the college's counseling office and made videophones available at the college center and at community locations, such as at the local police and fire department.

The project also piloted ways to incorporate Internet streaming video to deliver advisement and counseling services to distance learning students. Using cameras, a computer, and special software, students and advisors met in real time by sending and receiving live motion video images. Since many distance learning students prefer asynchronous communication, Coastline recorded streaming video sessions that answered general admission, advisement, or procedure questions and made them available on the Web site. Review sessions for telecourses, classroom classes, and library tutorials are also available via streaming video.

As the project progressed, instructors and counselors found ways to use streaming video to enhance online courses and advisement. For example, Coastline is using the equipment to advise military students and those who work for the Los Angeles fire department because they cannot physically meet with a counselor or advisor.

## **Project Advisory Committee and Task Force**

Coastline first developed an advisory committee and task force to complete the project objectives. The dean of students, who is also the grant's project director, assembled an advisory committee that included one member from each college department.

The committee members looked at other college Web sites to get ideas for navigational tools and other online services. Many students expect to be able to choose and enroll in classes, access their records, transfer between colleges, and contact an advisor or counselor from the college Web site. Coastline will eventually integrate the online student services center into the college's main Web site, with the support of every department.

The task force included people from computer services, student services, distance learning, the student advisory council, and the office of instruction. The group worked with the college's district office to ensure that the project's online forms and processes would complement the college's new computer system.

## **The Storyboard and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

The task force held several sessions with counselors to develop Web site content and scripts for the orientation videos that would be delivered via the Web. The college hired a Web designer and technology trainer to implement this process and develop the OSSC site. Ongoing training sessions helped the counselors learn how to use e-mail, the Internet, videoconferencing, and online forms.

The counselors crafted the outline for the Web site, using index cards to help organize their ideas and create a storyboard. They listed the topics they deal with when advising students face-to-face, and developed a

concept map to show how the Web site would flow and how the links would interact. They established a table of contents and used a simple Web page template to create individual contact pages that included a welcome message and each counselor's name, phone number, e-mail address, contact or office hours, location, counseling specialty, and educational background.

The next step was to write and gather information for the career center, transfer center, and special programs such as Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOPS) and California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWorks). The project team decided to use a frequently asked questions (FAQ) page to address questions about advisement and counseling and to link the site to Coastline's distance learning department, where they could get information about course offerings and learn about what they needed to be successful distance learning students. The Web site also links to the college bookstore and to the California Virtual Campus catalog so student's can quickly see what other distance learning opportunities are offered in the state.

Coastline's financial aid department provided information for the FAQ page, including Web addresses for local, state, and federal student financial aid opportunities. Many of the necessary forms are available online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

Since the target audience for the project included student's who are not native English speakers, the Web site includes sections with Spanish and Vietnamese translations of instructions and other pertinent information. Application forms were left in English to help identify students who need translation services or who should register for an English as a second language (ESL) class.

The Department for Students with Disabilities (DSPS) created content

that describes services and programs students can access online. The counselors were aware of the need to develop the site for universal access. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has guidelines Web designers can follow to make sure their sites are accessible. The consortium suggests three steps for evaluating Web sites: necessary criteria for all users, elements a developer should incorporate, and items designers can include to ensure more users can access the entire Web site. (See [www.w3c.org](http://www.w3c.org); and [www.cast.org/bobby](http://www.cast.org/bobby)).

Coastline's Web site was also designed to include a personal message from and picture of the dean of students, with information about the school's code of conduct, student discipline, and grievance procedures.

Decisions about future additions to the content and the site's maintenance are a major part of the college's Web site development plan and an integral part of the project's future.

### **Online Registration Prototype**

The college hired a Web designer to create an online registration form and student educational plan (SEP). The registration form replicates the print form, and issues students a login ID and password for correspondence.

The student application form is designed to create a record that synchronizes with all other forms, including the SEP and registration form, to help the college track students for graduation, transfer, and matriculation and to identify at-risk students. Students complete working copies of the SEPs online. Once a counselor receives a student's SEP, he or she can initiate a dialogue with the student via e-mail, phone, fax, or other means to help the student finalize a preliminary course of study.

Coastline used Microsoft Access to create the database and Allaire's

Cold Fusion to connect the HTML forms with the database, building in access levels for students, counselors, the admissions office, the registrar, and the dean. Students can request a password, register, submit a proposed SEP, and view the SEP later, but they cannot change a SEP after it has been submitted. A counselor can review the working copy of the SEP and contact the student to recommend modifications, but cannot change the student's registration information. The registrar can accept a registration form and process it. Depending on the structure of the institution, the dean can access and edit all documents, such as by entering information for a new counselor.

Electronic or digital signatures are an important part of the online registration and application process. Until recently, most colleges' application and registration forms had to include an original signature. Many states are now considering accepting digital signatures to validate electronic forms, which would facilitate the registration and application process.

Following a beta testing period with the counselors, distance education students, administrators and others, Coastline will make the necessary revisions to the Web site and submit a final recommendation and evaluation to the chancellor's office.

### **A Home for the Online Student Services Center**

One of the project's earliest challenges was finding computer space to house the OSCC, since server space is a scarce commodity at the college. The computer services department located a temporary server to host the prototype Web site, while the registration database was hosted off-site during its development and beta testing period. Planning for a secure server with sufficient backup capabilities is a number one priority. From the

outset, the college must consider security and confidentiality issues, and the need for a functional reliable Web site. Some institutions prefer to outsource this function to a company that specializes in maintaining servers. These services can be expensive, but the advantage is round-the-clock support, maintenance, expertise, and backup. Colleges that would like to include online student advisement and counseling services must plan in advance for more robust servers and backups with reliable access. If the services are available, more students will access the site and impose greater server demands.

### **Conclusion**

Although the grant project period ended, it was a beginning for Coastline Community College in many ways. Experience shows that each segment that plays a part in the online student services center needs to be carefully planned and integrated into one system. Distance learning students need access to these services, to ensure a more successful and profitable educational experience.

Some of the information in this chapter was previously published in *Telecommunication Infrastructure Project Statewide (TIPS)*. June 1999. 3 (6). ed. C. Palmarini. Butte-Glenn Community College District.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Colorado's Consortial Approach to Providing Disability Services**

*By John Schmahl, Director of Student Services, CCCOnline*

CCCOOnline is a consortial management team that provides instructional and student services support to online students at the Community Colleges of Colorado (CC of C). While enrollment at CCCOnline grew more than 300 percent from mid-1999 to January 2001, there has been a limited need to provide disability services. CCCOnline has created a model of shared responsibility by working closely with its partner colleges. It is apparent to CCCOnline's administrators that it is now time to develop a structured approach for serving students with disabilities.

#### **The Beginning of CCCOnline**

The CC of C created the Colorado Community Colleges Online (CCCOOnline) in 1997. The presidents of the 13 Colorado colleges looked at the complexity and cost of developing an online distance education program and decided a consortial approach was the best way to incorporate the Internet into its mission to "contribute to Colorado's economic growth and vitality" and "develop Colorado's human resource potential."

Seven of the 13 colleges in the CC of C system are located in

metropolitan areas where students tend to have a greater opportunity for attending classes. Since these seven colleges are larger than the other six and have higher enrollments and more resources, they were able to develop their own online course offerings. The six rural colleges did not have the same opportunities or resources. The presidents determined that combining the resources of the entire system would allow the students attending the rural colleges to take advantage of the opportunities offered throughout the system. The presidents also thought that students in metropolitan areas could benefit from the expanded course offerings.

### **How It Works: Organization**

The 13 college presidents make up, CCCOnline's governing board, which supervises the CC of C system office and CCCOnline operations. The ready response team (RRT) includes educational services personnel and the vice presidents, deans of instruction, and deans of student services from the 13 colleges. It is responsible for formulating CCCOnline policy. The CCCOnline dean of faculty and director of student services report to the RRT.

The CCCOnline dean of faculty hires, trains, and fires faculty and oversees the program chairs. The program chairs are responsible for hiring, training, and supervising faculty within their respective disciplines. The CCCOnline management team includes the chief academic officer, dean of faculty, director of student services, and program chairs. This team is responsible for implementing the policies formulated by the RRT and passed by the educational services council.

The CCCOnline management team operates with a small staff and relies on the support of the system colleges. The team's offices are on the campus of the Higher Education and Advanced Technology (HEAT) Center, which

supports a variety of technology-related vocational programs and aims to help develop online programs among two- and four-year institutions and business enterprises.

## **Faculty**

Instruction at CCCOnline gains considerable advantages from the consortial approach. Since the program chairs can choose from instructors at all the participating Colorado colleges, they can select the best faculty to teach online courses. Each faculty member who teaches for CCCOnline goes through a training program on developing, administering, and facilitating online courses.

Although faculty are responsible for the quality of instruction in their courses, the dean of faculty and the program chairs make sure all courses maintain a high standard. An academic review team, composed of volunteer faculty and vice presidents of instruction, also reviews course quality and provides feedback to instructors. Instructors also receive periodic peer reviews and see the results of student surveys.

## **Instructional Software**

A third-party vendor, eCollege.com, helps build the online courses. This vendor provides instructional software that lets students participate in asynchronous chats, complete assignments, and communicate with their instructors and classmates. ECollege.com works with the dean of faculty and the program chairs to correct problems in the software and provide continuous quality improvement. ECollege.com also provides a technical help desk that students can contact by phone or e-mail 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This resource is important for a successful online course, but extremely costly and time consuming to provide.

## **The Courses**

Students use a college ID and PIN to log into the system to view their home pages and access their courses. They can also access an online writing laboratory (OWL) for additional guidance. Students receive administrative messages and other important information on their home pages.

Administrators found the discussion forum to be the most useful, and most widely used, tool for students since it allows them to post messages that the instructor and other students can read and react to. This allows for asynchronous communication and provides students with a sense of being in the classroom. Instructors often prefer this type of discussion, since its ease and convenience lead students to participate more frequently than they would in a traditional classroom. Instructors also use the discussion forum to set up work groups and teams.

Students can e-mail instructors and other students, share documents, and create online notebooks and journals. They can check their progress in an online grade book. Instructors can use video and audio clips, and other interactive programs in small doses, since not all students have the technology necessary to access them.

CCCOonline uses a traditional 15- or 10-week semester. This schedule alleviates some of the anxiety students feel about online learning and makes administering CCCOonline less complex since it's in sync with the rest of the college system and with its partner colleges. CCCOonline is likely to move away from the semester schedule as students and administrators become more familiar with online learning.

## **Student Services**

The CCCOonline student service office is located at the HEAT Center.

The office oversees the registration process, provides students with basic information about the program, develops student services policies, and helps coordinate services among the colleges, eCollege.com, and the CC of C system office.

Students register to take CCCOnline courses at their home institution. Registration information is transmitted to a student information system (SIS) and to eCollege.com. Centralizing the SIS created a single reporting structure and better coordination for student services. It also made it easier for the central office to spot problems or patterns that might need a quick solution.

### **Developing a Disability Services Policy**

One of the major challenges CCCOnline faced was developing policies for online students in the 14 member colleges. Due to the low enrollment numbers for CCCOnline in the first year, there was little immediate need to develop a separate policy for students with disabilities. Few students required special accommodations and the colleges felt their staffs could handle the additional workload on an individual basis and coordinate with faculty to ensure that any special requirements were met.

The RRT believed that this approach wouldn't continue to work, due to the anticipated growth of CCCOnline, and that a more collaborative approach could provide the necessary services without sacrificing the college's authority. CCCOnline staff proposed a shared model for administering disability services for online students. This shared model would give faculty and students a single point of contact for questions about serving students with disabilities. The RRT also thought that since some colleges have had more experience dealing with distance learning students, the combined experiences of the whole would provide innovative

solutions.

The CCCOnline staff recommended that their student services office coordinate and receive all student requests for special accommodation, then inform the student's home college about the request, find out what accommodation the student required, and inform the student's CCCOnline instructors. The student services office would maintain a record for each student in order to make any future accommodation, and would help inform the student's home college about the online course structure, technical requirements, and any other information the home college's disability services personnel might need.

The RRT accepted the CCCOnline staff's proposal in December 2000. The policy will be presented to the Educational Services Council for approval at a future meeting. Although the policy is not yet formalized, two students and colleges used it during the past year. The colleges found that the necessary accommodations were easy to handle and the students were very satisfied with their experiences.

CCCOOnline's enrollments have more than doubled since we first began to craft the disability services policy. We have had little experience with the complexities of providing disability services online, but that will soon be changing. The need for such services will only grow. As we enact our new policy, we will be able to draw on the experiences and expertise of 14 colleges. We can work on developing new tools and new processes for handling disability services. As complex as CCCOnline is, it is a valuable model for building on the strengths of the colleges and for providing a fresh look at student services in all areas.

While CCCOnline is far from perfect, it has been a great learning model for the students, faculty, and staff at the participating colleges. With the faculty and staff from 14 colleges to work with, CCCOnline has a never-

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ending supply of great ideas and innovative thinking. As we develop new policies, we will see the true advantages of the model.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Flexible Starts to Serve Time-Constrained Students**

*By Karen L. Mills, Ed.D., Senior Associate Dean of Instruction, Rio Salado College*

Many articles in professional journals and other periodicals tout distance learning as the right thing for higher education. However, these articles refer to the college's technology plans, budgets, staff, and traditional components to program planning, as a linear *process*. Educational institutions should break away from relying on "seat time" and instructor-focused methodologies to support independent learning and to use technology to address individual learning styles and schedules, increase enrollments, and decrease costs.

Linda Thor discusses the lessons Rio Salado College, located in Tempe, Ariz., learned from its experiences with distance learning in her 1999 article, "Keeping Up with the Joneses." Although technology is a tool for spanning distances, the real success factor is providing students with the appropriate institutional infrastructure and the organizational means to achieve their distance learning goals. Technology should be a means to an end, but not an end in itself. "True distance learning success begins from within, rather than from without."

As Rio Salado began to offer more diverse, sophisticated distance

learning courses, it added the appropriate infrastructure to support them. For example, the college established a comprehensive word processing center, and later a full-service print shop, for developing and producing printed course materials. As technology use among students and faculty became more widespread, the college added a computing services department with Web technicians and a comprehensive help desk to respond to hardware and software questions seven days a week.

Steady growth in enrollment from 1978 to 1990 proved that distance learning courses were popular and suggested that students viewed distance learning courses as a convenient and viable alternative to in-person classes. Enrollment was stable from 1991 to 1995 and since the numbers were not growing at the previous pace, the college suspected it was not effectively addressing additional barriers to learning.

Until 1995, students could enroll in distance learning classes only at the beginning of each trimester, in September, January, and May. In 1995 the college targeted a specific aspect of access with a pilot “flex start” program designed to give students the opportunity to begin a few selected classes on five different dates, (one every other week) in the first 10 weeks of each trimester.

Enrollment in distance learning classes grew 18 percent during the 1995–1996 academic year. Because all other aspects of the distance learning program remained fairly constant, the college attributed the increase to the flex start option. During the 1996–1997 academic year, Rio Salado expanded the flex start option from 15 percent of the distance learning courses to 90 percent. The college experienced a 34 percent enrollment increase in distance learning during 1996–1997. While some of this growth was due to adding online courses, the greatest contributing factor was the flex start option.

During the summer of 1997, the college implemented a standard 26-start schedule. Increasing the number of online course offerings and giving students the ability to register and begin classes every two weeks throughout the year helped Rio Salado quintuple its annual enrollment in distance learning courses between 1995 and the 1999–2000 academic year, when more than 25,000 students enrolled in distance learning classes at the college.

Art Levine, president of Teachers College at Columbia University, said distance learners are “bargain hunters, time-strapped shoppers who value convenience and flexibility over prestige” (1996). They do not want to stand in lines—they want education at their own time and place. Rio Salado’s flex start scheduling added an open registration dimension to the “anytime” concept that continues to be unparalleled by the offerings of most postsecondary institutions.

### **The System That Supports Flexible Starts**

The flex start option at Rio Salado College works because the entire administrative infrastructure supports it. One way to describe how the option functions is to compare it to what occurs on most campuses at the beginning and end of a traditional semester. Students register. The college hires and schedules adjunct faculty to teach certain class periods. Students add and drop classes. The college issues refunds to students within a set time frame. Faculty members send welcome letters, facilitate student orientations, disseminate media materials, provide student assistance, schedule tests in testing centers, submit their grades to admissions and records, and mail grade reports.

At most colleges, these activities happen at set times each semester.

Rio Salado College conducts this cycle of operations on a daily basis so students can experience the convenience of flex starts. Students can register online on any given day. They must be registered on the Friday before a Monday start date or they will have to wait two weeks to begin the next class. This ensures that students receive class-specific materials before the first day of class. Meanwhile at the end of the semester, students also finish classes every two weeks, unless they have the instructor's permission to accelerate their completion.

While this system may sound cumbersome, its benefits for students and college staff far outweigh any limitations. Since student enrollment is spread over the entire year, admissions and records staff do not need to gear up for a deluge three times a year. The same is true for testing, advising, and student assistance staff. The processes have become standard operating procedure and do not demand sporadic bursts of time and effort from college personnel.

### **Benefits and Lessons Learned**

The greatest benefit to flex starts, in addition to giving students more control over when they begin classes, is that the college never has to cancel a class. Because new students register every two weeks, it is reasonable to begin a class with a low enrollment knowing it will grow. On the other hand, not every class can begin every start date. The college needs to monitor classes that do not grow appreciably over several starts and limit their scheduling to specific start dates or semesters.

The college also learned a lesson about hiring and scheduling adjunct faculty. Since most of Rio Salado's distance learning classes are designed to be completed in 13 weeks, the college has to limit the number of starts a faculty member can be scheduled for if a class does not reach its maximum

enrollment in the first or second start. Otherwise, the instructor might not finish teaching a course he or she began teaching for the fall semester until late April. Consequently, most faculty are not scheduled to teach more than four starts during any given term.

Rio Salado College must follow its nontraditional approach to course enrollment and delivery within the parameters of a traditional, semester-based district. While the district used to run audits to pay adjunct faculty once or twice a semester, it now runs them weekly. Since Rio Salado is open year-round (even during the holiday break from December 25 to January 1), the district has had to determine how to provide the electronic data that allows the college to process student information for mailing, grading, etc., without interruption.

The college considered allowing students to register on a daily basis, since using 26 starts (one every other week) was so successful. Before jumping into this ambitious plan, the college held a focus session with several student groups and learned that students were satisfied with being able to begin classes every other week. They thought beginning class every day was excessive.

### **Student Achievement, Satisfaction and Retention**

Thomas Russell found through exhaustive research that the academic achievement of students who learn at a distance is not significantly different from that of students who attend courses in traditional classrooms (1997, 1999). Student satisfaction may be another matter. In 1999 Michael Simonson found that while distance learning students want to learn when and where it is convenient, “They wish they could learn in the classroom, lecture hall, seminar room, or laboratory.”

A survey of the distance learning students at Rio Salado College found

that the percentage rates of “general sense of satisfaction” for the online students (88 percent) and the classroom-based students (89 percent) were close enough to be considered equal (Mills 1999). However, the satisfaction rate for mixed media students (83 percent) reflected a difference between students’ expectations (for example, that they wouldn’t be driven by a set class schedule) and reality (for example, their pace was affected by delays in postal deliveries).

The retention rate for distance learning students at Rio Salado ranges between 75 and 80 percent. In two semesters of classes that had 9 and 10 starts, fewer students seemed to drop out if they began their flex start program in the early fall or closer to the time that other students were beginning their traditional semester. Erratic drop activity became apparent when students began their coursework in the late fall or early winter. Conflict with the holidays could be the reason.

Perhaps a better measure of success is to examine whether Rio Salado College’s distance learners are more likely to be repeat customers than classroom-based students are. Of students enrolled in the 1997–98 academic year, 32 percent of the distance learning students took subsequent courses, compared to 28 percent of the classroom-based students. Of those enrolled in the 1998–99 academic year, 20 percent of the distance learning students took subsequent courses, compared to 18 percent of the classroom-based students (Mills 1999).

Rio Salado believes that providing students with the convenience of being able to begin classes 26 times a year and offering more online courses were responsible for the tenfold growth in enrollment between 1997 and 2000, a 35 to 40 percent growth rate per year. The college will continue to grow and adapt as it fulfills its mission to create convenient, high-quality learning opportunities for diverse populations.

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## **Chapter 8**

### **Online Library Services: Elements of Style**

*By Judith M. Olsen, Library Director, Burlington County College*

Distance learners need and deserve the best education possible in all aspects, not only in course content, but also in student services. Virtual students are entitled to complete educations from their home campuses.

The heart of student services is the traditional and online library. Although online libraries are rapidly becoming the norm, most lack consistency in terms of format and information presented. The best virtual libraries let students access them from various points on a college's Web site. Key elements of a high-quality virtual library include:

- A direct link to the online library from the college's home page.
- Links between the online library and the college's distance learning page.
- User-friendly online orientations and virtual campus tours.
- An online form students can fill out to ask a librarian a reference question and get a timely response.
- Off-campus access to interlibrary loan services and electronic reserves.
- Off-campus access to online renewal of books and other materials.
- Timely delivery of books, documents and library materials to

students residences.

- Access to online full-text databases, electronic books, full-text journals, and Web sites.
- Access to online curriculum and study guides.
- Online tutorials on how to access information on the Web site or conduct online research.
- Specific services that are available to off-campus students and distance learners.

Access to library services should be transparent and easy. It shouldn't take students more than two mouse clicks to locate the online library. Not being able to locate the library is frustrating, especially when the online services that are available to students once they get there are inadequate. While students understand that some resources are best used on-site, the Web-savvy browser and researcher wants to be able to access a considerable amount of information online. Using the online library should be as easy as it is to speak with a reference librarian, and it should provide the same level of accuracy and quality of information.

Making an online library accessible to distance learners begins with the college's home page, which welcomes the Web user to the college. It should be easy to navigate and have direct links to the library and the distance learning department, since the average Web searcher will spend only 20 seconds searching before moving on to another site. Many college Web sites have only one of these elements.

Located in Portland, Ore., Portland Community College's home page (<http://www.pcc.edu/>) includes links to both the distance learning page and the online library. The distance learning page (<http://www.distance.pcc.edu>) includes a link to the library and gives an overview of the library system. The college's site also features an orientation to the institution and a virtual

tour.

Students at Fort Hays State University in Fort Hays, Kan., can use a drop-down menu on the college home page (<http://www.fhsu.edu/>) to get to the Forsyth library and the virtual college. Students can access student services and library resources from the virtual college page, but they cannot link to the virtual college from the library site.

Most online libraries offer links to the Internet and access to other Web-based services, such as online databases, electronic books, and full-text journals. Librarians should keep in mind that electronic databases can be frustrating to distance learners if they rely on resources that students cannot access from off-campus.

Students who visit the online library at Portland Community College can access the library catalogs for other colleges in Oregon, in addition to online magazines and newspapers, Internet references, and Web-searching tools. Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio, provides access to the OhioLINK central catalog and electronic books, and links to other libraries, periodical databases, electronic journals, and selected Web sites (<http://library.sinclair.edu/>). Lee College in Baytown, Texas, has a link to the Texas virtual library, TexShare ([www.lee.edu/library/](http://www.lee.edu/library/)), and students at Fort Hays State University can link to Blue SkyWays for a list of Kansas library catalogs.

Atlantic Cape Community College's online library in Mays Landing, N.J., offers links to other New Jersey libraries, college catalogs, periodical abstracts, EbscoHOST, the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL), ABIinform, PsychInfo, Newslibrary, Lexis-Nexis, ERIC, and PubMed ([www.atlantic.edu/library/](http://www.atlantic.edu/library/)). The site also includes a link to the New Jersey Union List of Serials with a form to request interlibrary loan of magazine articles. The "Proxy Server" provides a link to a page that

explains how distance learners can access the databases from home.

Many libraries include services such as e-mail references, interlibrary loans, access to electronic reserves, and the ability to renew books online. None of the colleges studied offer document delivery.

Although not every college or university Web site features online tutorials, there are some notable exceptions. The online library at Lee College includes a variety of guides on how to navigate the Web. Rio Salado Community College in Tempe, Ariz., has an online writing lab, online tutorials, and a guide for writing papers ([www.rio.maricopa.edu/services/student/support/library/](http://www.rio.maricopa.edu/services/student/support/library/)). Sinclair Community College offers curriculum and study guides with research tips and instructions on how to cite electronic sources and evaluate Web resources. The library Web site at Austin Community College in Austin, Texas, includes links to subject-related sites, regional sites, electronic reference sources, and electronic study guides (<http://irt.austin.cc.tx.us/>).

The Lee College site includes a “Writing & Style” section that provides links to online style manuals. The RATS (remote access to students) link is particularly engaging and helps distance learning students feel welcome and a part of the college community.

Austin Community College provides searching and other tips that are especially useful for distance learners. A “how to” guide helps students set up their home computers so they can access all of the databases on the library Web site. “Get Research Help” explains how off-campus students can get help with research questions, use electronic study guides, and access online tutorials.

Like other colleges with good online libraries, Genesee Community College in Batavia, N.Y., has designated an off-campus librarian for its Web

site so students can get answers to their questions and concerns via e-mail. Such personal contact is often more important to distance learners than it is to on-campus students. The Genesee site includes clear, systematic instructions to help students access the library databases ([www.sunygenesee.cc.ny.us/Library/](http://www.sunygenesee.cc.ny.us/Library/)).

A link to off-campus services at Portland Community College provides distance learning students with information on how to access magazine articles online, check resources by subject, configure their browsers, research databases, contact a librarian by e-mail or phone for research help, or obtain a barcode to check out books from the library.

Links to search engines and reference sources are helpful to distance learners. Brevard Community College in Cocoa Beach, Fla., has a particularly good link to Internet search engines with multiple or mega-search engines with links to related resources, newsgroups, and links to Internet evaluation and use (<http://web2010.brevard.cc.fl.us/library/>). Genesee has a link that connects students to 19 search engines.

Wherever they are, distance learners deserve quality library services, and they will go to institutions that provide them.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Tutoring Online to Retain Students and Promote Success**

*Sandra Miller, Ed.D., Director, Learning Assistance Center and Support,  
Atlantic Cape Community College*

Tutoring is an academic support strategy that has existed throughout human learning and has long been a fixture in American higher education. Its use in community colleges has grown in the last 20 years. Sixty-five percent of community colleges offered tutoring services in the 1970s (Cross 1975); by the 1990s, 71 percent did (Boylan, Bonham, and Bliss 1994). “Tutoring is perhaps the oldest and most common component of academic support programs” (Kowal and Shaw 1998).

Many researchers have found that tutoring is effective and enhances students’ attitudes toward instruction in addition to their persistence, final grades, and graduation levels (Boylan et al. 1995). These are the standard criteria used to measure the quality of a tutoring program. Some researchers also look at factors that are relevant to the particular type of tutorial service.

Most colleges deliver tutoring one-to-one or one-to-a-few in a face-to-face setting in a quiet room with tables and chairs. Tutors and students must arrange their schedules to allow for the time it will take to travel to the meeting place and for the tutoring session itself. The set-up includes a tabletop space so tutors and students can see the written work and make

changes to the material.

Tutors traditionally provided students with the personalized system of instruction (PSI). The tutor's role is to help students understand the course content and work assignments. This individualized type of tutoring has evolved so the tutor is now a supplementary facilitator while the class professor assumes the role of the judge of learning.

According to Maxwell (1990),

In American colleges, tutoring has endured ambiguous connotations. On the one hand, it is negative, associated with failing and needing a tutor. On the other hand, having one's own private tutor implies that one is wealthy and special.

The fact that students persist in seeking tutorial help demonstrates the need for this type of support.

Colleges offer many quite diverse tutoring programs. Training programs can emphasize the tutor's role in helping students with cognitive, affective or metacognitive learning (Hartman 1990). Tutors base the way they work with students on the program's philosophy of learning theory. For example, tutors will encourage collaborative learning with their students if the tutoring program at the college promotes this style of learning.

Beyond the traditional one-on-one model, tutoring can take place in small groups with a professional or peer, in the form of supplemental instruction. Topping (1996) says colleges have increased their amount of peer tutoring due to a "dual requirement to improve teaching quality while 'doing more with less.' "

The costs of personalized tutoring should be weighed against the

results. Peer tutoring is more cost-effective than traditional remedial programs (Topping 1996). Consequently, peer tutoring has thrived in community colleges where professional staff usually take higher positions within the college.

The peer tutor has traditionally served as an alternative teacher. After the teacher has transferred his or her knowledge, the peer tutor explains the material in a different way to help the student understand it (Topping 1996). However, peer tutoring is now much more than a mere transmission of knowledge and experience. The process is more interactive and concentrates on the gains for both tutor and student.

Tutors always play several different roles. They are coaches, supporters, directors, facilitators, guides, counselors, and mentors. Hartman (1990) and Maxwell (1994) suggest,

Peer tutors should be extra and nonthreatening resource personnel who could encourage students' skill development, independence and confidence and thereby complement the teaching endeavors of their mainstream unit lecturers and tutors.

Beasley adds that peer tutors should help students develop approaches for effectively dealing with course content and expectations (Beasley 1997).

## **Setting**

Established in 1974 in May's Landing, N.J., Atlantic Cape Community College's (ACCC) tutoring program offers academic support in various subjects in order to

- Improve students' educational achievement.
- Enhance students' self-image through a caring, positive, and nonjudgmental attitude and provide students with opportunities

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for success.

- Widen students' horizons through sharing personal and academic survival skills and experiences.
- Foster students' connections with faculty, staff, and various college services.
- Help resolve the problems that cause students to seek help, and help make students more independent learners.

The program uses peer tutoring, with at least one professional overseeing the process. Students sign up for discipline-specific tutoring and are matched with an appropriate peer tutor. They meet on campus in a quiet area designated for tutoring.

AACC soon offered students a walk-in tutoring skills lab to help them with basic skills, such as reading, writing, and math. The college enlarged its reading and writing skills labs to accommodate its large number of English as a second language (ESL) students. These walk-in labs give students immediate help that they don't have to schedule ahead of time. ACCC then began to offer supplemental instruction (SI) tutoring.

The tutoring support services are staffed by peer tutors and paraprofessionals. Many community colleges cannot afford to hire full-time tutoring staff. Despite the need to accomplish "more with less," AACC has established an extremely successful traditional tutoring program. The College Reading and Learning Association's (CRLA) International Tutoring Certification Program certified ACCC's tutoring program in May 2000, and 20 tutors achieved level one certification by fall 2001.

AACC's distance education program grew from 1998–2000. In spring 2000, the college offered 75 online courses with eight full degree programs. ACCC has also taken a leading role in implementing distance education throughout New Jersey and has helped create the New Jersey

Virtual Community College Consortium (NJVCCC).

ACCC's traditional and online students, and the entire NJVCCC, needed an effective tutoring support model. To create one, in fall 1999, ACCC piloted a program in which online tutors provided students with a supplementary resource to the course instructor. Students could request an online tutor through the online tutoring Web site, linked from ACCC's home page, or directly from the online class. Online peer tutors provided students with a nonjudgmental resource, since they could request help without worrying that their grades would reflect the trouble they were having understanding the course material. Online tutors tried to play the same roles they did in person. They retaught, expanded, coached, facilitated, and helped students understand how to get through the course. They participated in online classes and held online review chat sessions.

How does tutoring fit into the online environment when academic support for traditional classes has always taken place in a face-to-face format? At AACC, open online access to professors did not diminish the need for tutors. Roberts (1994) asked whether the tutor's role as coach, counselor, mentor and information-giver will change if students continue to turn to online tutors for help.

### **Distance Learners Needs as Potential Barriers**

Distance learners need to overcome a sense of alienation and isolation. The institution should aim to lessen these feelings by providing a sense of personal involvement between students and the institution. Student-to-student connections can foster a sense of personal involvement, and distance learning students must often rely on an interactive course design to connect with other students.

If the type of contact is only within the realm of cognitive exchange,

students will think that distance learning is a “cold” educational environment. In a 1991 survey, although three-quarters of the learners wanted overt encouragement, only-one third got that support from responses to their assignments (Burge, Howard, and Ironside 1991). Online communication provides a channel, but the instructor, students, or peer tutor must offer the support.

### **Retention of Distant Learners**

Alienated, isolated students tend to drop out of their classes. Many educators have studied the issues and possible causes for attrition. Several have applied Tinto’s theory of *cognitive affiliation* (1975), which emphasizes the importance of integrating distance learning students both academically and socially (Sweet 1986; Kember 1995). Kember broke this model down into further components (1995). Educators can improve academic integration by “developing collective affiliation or by ensuring normative congruence between student expectations and course procedures.” *Collective affiliation* refers to the quality and amount of contact between the student and the college. *Normative congruence* describes the extent to which the student’s and the institution’s expectations of each other match. Online tutors play an important role in both connections.

Collective affiliation is more likely developed by sustained contact with an individual than by a succession of short contacts with diverse people (Kember, 1990). Personal e-mails from an online tutor can strongly contribute to a distance learning student’s academic integration and narrow the gap in normative congruence. For example, when an online tutor helps a student understand what the professor is looking for, or what it will take

to get an A in the class, he or she is bringing the student closer to the professor's expectations. The tutor is providing an interpretation the student, because of lack of experience or a background with different expectations, couldn't decipher from the syllabus. Another example is when a tutor helps a student determine how much time to spend on each topic or how to strategize completing all the assignments.

It is important to look at the quantity and quality of online interactions between tutors and students, which can directly affect students' feelings by reducing anxiety and increasing motivation. Part of the student's collective affiliation and normative congruence with the college will reflect how effectively the tutor and student communicate online.

### **Computer Mediated Interaction Between Tutor and Student**

Educators should provide student support to distance learners for two reasons: to help learners seek knowledge and to encourage their personal search for independence. Support services should include methodological, metacognitive, emotional, and administrative support (Carrier and Schofield 1991). Peer tutors support students in all of these areas at some time. Providing individual support services is as important to effective distance education as the increasing need to emphasize student learning rather than institutional teaching (King 1982). The "student-centeredness" of distance education is enhanced by online communication.

Colleges have handled the increased need for student support in various ways. They are using new technologies, telephone tutoring, and face-to-face mentoring. They are helping to schedule counseling sessions, contract learning, and self-help and study groups. King (1982) concludes that "support services in distant education should be of a varied nature to provide optimal learning situations in the individualized mode of distance

education.” Although it is not the only support service colleges should make available, peer tutoring offers much support and is a viable enhancement to other support services.

The online environment changes the power dynamics of tutoring (Coogan 1994). Time is boundless because the session has no set beginning, middle, or end; the atmosphere is more egalitarian; and the text does not have a context (Harasim 1989; Sproull and Kiesler 1996). Coogan (1994) suggests that “the goal of an online tutorial must never be to fix meaning on the page, but to engage meaning in a dialectic.” Coogan; Graddol (1989); and Trushell, Raymond and Burrell (1998) believe the cuelessness of online communication leads to a lack of social context. Half the job in a face-to-face tutorial is reading the student, but tutors can read only the words, not the individual who utters them in an online context. Coogan (1994) asks, “A challenge for the 21st century: How can we shape our e-mail instruction to elicit response and create a scene of learning?”

Walther (1996) looks at online communication within the framework of sender, receiver, channel, and feedback. Online communication is free from the “noise” that comes with appearance or behavior features and can lead to hyperpersonal communication through extended interaction. Eliciting further responses from students and extending the time for tutoring can lead to communication that exceeds what can be accomplished in face-to-face interactions.

### **Other Online Tutoring Offerings**

Colleges have taken various approaches to online tutoring. Purdue has a famous online writing lab (OWL) (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>), as does Washington State University ([www.wsu.edu:8080/~wlab](http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~wlab)). Also see <http://departments.colgate.edu/diw/NWCAOWLS.html>. El Camino Community

College ([www.elcamino.cc.ca.us/library/tutoring](http://www.elcamino.cc.ca.us/library/tutoring)) and Citrus College ([www.citruscollege.com/lc/entrypage.html](http://www.citruscollege.com/lc/entrypage.html)) offer more than just writing labs. America Online offers homework help free to its subscribers. Commercial tutoring services include Tutornet ([www.tutornet.com](http://www.tutornet.com)) and SmartThinking ([www.smarthinking.com](http://www.smarthinking.com)).

### **Ready, Set, Go!**

There are various approaches to online tutoring. Will the college outsource or provide in-house tutoring? Will the Web site provide more than informational resources? Will the interaction be delivered by e-mail, streaming video, online audio, or another means? Here are some things to consider.

Step One: Decide which students you want to serve. Who is the audience? Do you have enough resources to serve students from other colleges? (Purdue's OWL offers a half-hour of tutoring to non-enrolled students.) State the college's policy clearly on your Web page.

Step Two: Ask online course professors if they would like to offer tutoring services from their courses' Web sites. As in SI tutoring, the tutor will be familiar with the course syllabus, class assignments, course schedule, due dates, the teacher's expectations, and the items that are important to the course point weighting system. Tutors can help students plan for the effort they should put into each assignment and determine what the professor is looking for.

Step Three: Will the college offer students a tutoring Web site? Some students need online tutoring help in courses that lack an in-class tutor. AACC found that the relationship between students and tutors lasts longer and reaches greater depth when the college offers the tutoring service within the online class. This could be because students find it easier to sign

up, or because using in-class tutors is approved by the instructors.

Step Four: Consider whether you would like to offer services the college is already offering, but in an online format. Tutors can conduct one-on-one sessions asynchronously via e-mail or in real time via chat. Students and tutors seem to favor e-mail because they do not have to meet at a specified time and place, have high typing skills, or be able to read quickly to follow the conversation. Students and tutors often end up calling each other on the phone to continue the dialogue without having to type in an online chat.

Step Five: Do you want to incorporate bulletin boards or chat rooms into your tutoring program? Bulletin boards are a great way for students to get together to “talk” or help each other. The tutor becomes a moderator and should be able to make “meta-weaving comments” (Feenberg 1989) that weave students’ thoughts and tie the concepts together.

Step Six: When designing an online tutoring center, be sure to talk with everyone at the college who will be affected. Working with the technology support department is important, but self-sufficiency should be the goal: keep the technology as simple as possible or work within the college’s existing technological capabilities. Explain your plans to both online and traditional faculty. Having their input and buy-in will set the tone and help create an online learning community. Finally, make sure the tutoring Web site complies with collegewide guidelines for Web sites.

Step Seven: You must decide how tutors can continue to play in cyberspace the roles they play in person. Look at the various delivery formats and how an online environment can promote tutors’ roles. For example, chat or e-mail will work well if guided discovery is a favored tutoring methodology. If your tutors use role-modeling, interactive television with a document camera may be best. If the tutor is a counselor,

chat or telephone tutoring would make it possible to pick up students' vocal cues. Remember that the medium is the channel of communication. Determine what type of message a tutor will communicate and choose the medium that will work best to support it.

Step Eight: How will you train online tutors? According to Cassaza and Silverman (1996),

Although tutor training programs are necessarily diverse and specific to individual institutional settings, the core topics of all tutor training are the tutor's role, referrals, policies and procedures, special populations, ethics and academic integrity, supervision, and tutor recognition.

You need to consider all of these issues when developing tutor training, regardless of the type of tutoring you offer. How can we implement the same quality of tutor training online as in person? The debate rages on, but distance learning is growing and we should look at all of the constructive, productive aspects of online education and use the medium to its fullest advantage.

Step Nine: Timekeeping documentation can be a problem. Although hard copies of e-mail transcripts show what transpires between tutor and student, they do not indicate the amount of time spent producing or thinking about the exchanges. Tutors are on their honor when reporting their tutoring time.

Step Ten: Personnel issues are important. Applicants for tutoring positions will often respond to requests posted on your Web site and you may have to interview them online. How will you verify their information? A telepresence is important. Read applicants' e-mails carefully to detect their tone, level of empathy, etc. Look for the same features you would in a face-to-face tutor, but emphasize the ability to communicate in writing.

Step Eleven: How much time, energy, and money do you need to develop a tutoring Web site? Do you have enough personnel to handle additional requests for online tutoring services? Offering in-class online tutoring eliminates having to match students up with a tutor or schedule tutoring sessions.

Step 12: Finally, develop an evaluation process for your online tutoring program. It is extremely difficult to get feedback from students through online surveys; you may have to offer prizes to elicit responses. Study e-mail tutoring transcripts on a regular basis to see if students and tutors are responding with cognitive, affective, and metacognitive questions and answers. Have they developed a rapport? Have the students who get tutoring stayed in their courses and had passing grades?

Although ACCC still has concerns about such issues as verifying online tutors' time, finding online tutors from outside the college, and evaluating the program's effectiveness, online tutoring has proven its value. Many of these issues will be resolved through the very technology that makes them possible in the first place. The dialogue has just begun.

### **Best Practices in Online Learning**

This list of best practices is based on feedback from tutors in ACCC's online tutoring program. Best Practices in Online Tutoring.

1. Tutors should establish contact with students immediately and reply to them as soon as possible. Tutoring personnel should check their e-mail and bulletin boards every day.
2. Tutors should introduce themselves and talk to students about their problems rather than just answer questions. They should respond to the tone of an e-mail. Is it a complete call for help or just one question that needs answering?
3. Tutors should use as many illustrative examples as possible

since they cannot explain concepts by drawing on a blackboard. For example, one math tutor explained a problem that was expressed in numbers by translating it into words, then showing how it made sense to solve it using the right mathematical formula.

4. Offer ways for tutors and students to meet other than by e-mail, such as through bulletin boards or chat rooms. Tell students that others will be able to read, and learn from, their questions and responses on bulletin boards.
5. Advise students and tutors to print their assignments out so they can access and discuss them easily.
6. Tutors should encourage a guided discovery learning process online by giving students direction without completely telling them how to do an assignment.
7. Tutors should encourage students as much as possible since they often feel lost, alone, and discouraged. Let students know the online procedure is new and will get easier.
8. Tutors should encourage students to discuss their questions, ideas, and problems with them and with each other.
9. In-class tutors should contact professors to learn what their expectations are and how they envision the role of the tutor in the class.
10. Tutors should post personal introductions to themselves.
11. Tutors should use the textbook and hard copies of the syllabus and assignments to make sure students are doing the correct assignment.
12. If tutors are available to meet face-to-face on campus, the college should let students know they can work with a “live” person.
13. Tutors should give some positive feedback when returning

essays or other written work to students and should use a certain symbol to represent a change that needs to be made repeatedly throughout the assignment.

14. When making suggestions, tutors should try to be as neutral as possible, remembering that students cannot see their facial expressions or hear their tone of voice.
15. Tutors should avoid using words that might be interpreted negatively.
16. Tutors should let students do some of their own corrections, referring to certain sections or pages of the textbook they are using.
17. If students do not respond to a tutor's question or offer to help during the first week, tutors should post a follow-up in the main conference site or bulletin board and invite them to send assignments to the tutor. A tutor should try to turn work around in 24 hours. Tutors who will not be available due to health or other reasons should post a notice on the bulletin board and contact the professor.
18. Tutors should let students know how to contact them and how often they will check for questions.
19. Tutors should tell students they look forward to questions and are disappointed to find an empty mailbox. Many students feel they are a burden if they ask for help.
20. Tutors should advise students if they are on the wrong track with assignments. This reminds students that the tutors read online class discussions and are available.
21. Tutors can stimulate thought and discussion by sending students private e-mail messages, especially to those with diverse opinions, advising them to comment on the opinions of others who have indicated disagreement.

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## **Chapter 10**

### **Providing Student Life, Bookstore, and Health and Wellness Services Online**

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and D. Barry Lumsden, Ed.D., Professor, Collin County Community  
College*

Providing online student services is a challenge to college administrators and practitioners. Since more college and university students are taking online courses, the demand for efficient, effective online student services is growing. Accrediting associations are also concerned with the way colleges provide services to students through their off-campus facilities and online courses. If we value online curricula, we must value essential online student support services.

Many community colleges serve students who work, have families, and must find ways to continue their education through programs that are convenient, accredited, and maintain high academic standards. What role does the Web play in providing student life, financial aid, bookstore and health and wellness services?

To provide student services online, administrators must first determine what technological support is available in terms of technology infrastructure, Web specifications, designs, and delivery capabilities. After the staff is in place, administrators should determine the services they can

immediately deliver to their students. Most colleges offer Web-based admissions applications and online registration. High school students expect to find detailed information about colleges and universities on the Web, and the Internet plays a critical role in marketing colleges to prospective students.

### **Online Student Life Services**

Student life administrators are becoming increasingly innovative and creative. Although online student life and student activities were not readily available in 1998, many of the “most wired” colleges and universities are beginning to recognize the need to offer those services.

For example, in 2000, *Yahoo Internet Life's* “America’s Most Wired Colleges” ranked SUNY Morrisville College of Agriculture and Technology as the most wired two-year college. A unique campus credit card, MAC Plus, offers students quick access to personal funds and can be used throughout the campus. Students can also make online deposits, an appealing feature.

Many student life and student activities offices give student organizations the opportunity to promote their Web pages with information on their mission and goals, membership requirements, and other services. At some colleges, students can submit online forms to reserve club meeting space on campus. Southeastern Louisiana University offers an online carpooling service.

Students at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, can request online tutoring services and receive general advice from students who have taken online courses at the college. Atlantic Cape Community College in Mays Landing, N.J., has an excellent online tutoring program that provides solid learner support systems. Students at many colleges and universities can e-

mail academic advisors about assessment, course selection, and program and transfer information.

Community college educators should be aware of the need to constantly update the college calendar because events and programs change on a daily basis. If a college's Web site is not up-to-date, students will be misguided or ignore important information.

## **Financial Aid**

Facts and figures about financial aid and related subjects abound on most college and university Web sites. The financial aid section is often the most frequently visited part of a college's Web site, since financial aid plays a pivotal role in students' decisions about attending college. Providing accurate and timely financial aid information online may be one of the most effective ways to recruit students. The online source of such information must be accurate due to the complex nature of financial aid, and timely so students can meet application deadlines.

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (1999) gives several recommendations to help colleges develop a well-rounded financial aid Web site. They suggest providing as many forms, pieces of information, policies, and procedures as possible online.

- Include general knowledge about financial aid.
- Identify and describe the various types of financial aid available.
- Detail the costs of attendance.
- Describe the application process.
- State all institutional financial aid policies.
- Provide your Federal School Code for the Federal Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application.

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- List deadlines and other important dates.
- Link to the online FAFSA application.
- Supply other applications and relevant forms.
- Link to related sites.
- Offer online student loan entrance and exit counseling.

Minot State University in Minot, N.D., provides online student loan entrance and exit counseling through its financial aid Web site. The application takes only 30 minutes to complete.

Thomas Edison State College's Web site ([www.back2college.com/library/finad.htm](http://www.back2college.com/library/finad.htm)) in Trenton, N.J., is tailored to nontraditional and adult students and provides a comprehensive list (with service online) of financial aid Web sites, including general information and application forms, tools, tips, worksheets, general scholarship and funding resources, online loan counseling, student loans, and tax credits and other tax information. The site also provides specific information for graduate and professional students, those enrolled in women's programs, reentry students, minorities, students who seek army and veteran's benefits, those in the health professions, students with disabilities, and distance learning and international students.

Students at Collin County Community College in Dallas, Texas, can check the status of their financial aid paperwork and awards and learn which items may be missing from their file. Students at Bellevue Community College in Bellevue, Wash., can retrieve tax information for the upcoming year from the college's online services page. Many colleges and universities also offer information about the Hope Scholarship Credit and the Lifetime Learning Tax Credit online.

## **Bookstore Services**

E-commerce has prompted a dramatic change in the way many college bookstores conduct their business. According to a 2001 Student Watch survey from the National Association of College Stores (NACS), nearly 75 percent of students “would most likely shop online at their local college bookstore’s Web site if one were available.” NACS research also indicates that students make an average of five online purchases annually, spending \$330 per year, and state that their last online purchase occurred in the past two months.

These statistics show there is a definite market niche for online college bookstore services. The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (1999) recommends the following “good practices” for online bookstores:

- Show merchandise.
- State any relevant policies.
- Offer an online method to look up course textbooks and materials.
- Identify and describe each method available for ordering books.
- At a minimum, provide an order form to assist in placing orders via fax or phone.
- Accommodate online textbook orders.
- Deliver purchases to an off-campus address.

Many community colleges offer textbook reservation systems so students can order textbooks online then pick them up at the bookstore or get them by mail. Most faculty would be happy if they could also submit textbook adoption requests online, since that process is often repetitive,

timely, and cumbersome. In addition to ordering textbooks, many students would also like to purchase college bookstore merchandise online. Items with college colors and logos are popular with students and alumni.

The ideal online bookstore is seamless and directly tied to online or on-campus registration. Students can purchase textbooks at the same time they register for courses, with the computer system informing them of what books are required for those courses. Many community colleges have a long way to go before they can provide this type of seamless online delivery service. Kvavik and Handberg (2000) discuss transforming student services to create an ideal system that allows students “to bypass the desk by going directly to the electronic source of information.”

The SUNY Morrisville College of Agriculture and Technology in Morrisville, N.Y., lets students reserve textbooks online, then purchase them on-campus. The online bookstore at Mt. Hood Community College in Gresham, Ore., divides items into three categories: textbooks, merchandise, and trade books. Its Web site is easy to navigate and organized with students in mind.

## **Health and Wellness**

Service to the community is the cornerstone of the mission of community colleges. What better way to serve constituencies than to offer online health and wellness services? Community colleges have done a fine job of providing valuable information about AIDS, sexual assault policies, first aid, immunizations, drugs, alcohol abuse, and other important health-related matters.

The “Ask a Nurse” Web site at the Pennsylvania College of Technology (ranked four among *America’s Most Wired Colleges* in 2000) lets students fill out a form online to submit health-related questions, then wait for a

response from the nurse. Students at the University of North Texas can refill prescriptions online, while those at Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H., can register for upcoming vaccinations. “The Healthy Devil Online” site at Duke University in Durham, N.C., offers a wide variety of health services information and an impressive array of health-related programs and services.

Many colleges and universities provide a wealth of dietary and nutrition information, which is in great demand by students. They often encourage students to submit questions online to receive nutrition information.

Students at SUNY Morrisville College of Agriculture and Technology can fill out an online pre-admission form if they plan to receive care at the student health center. Although few services are available online through the university health services Web site, the University of Texas at Austin provides online information on medications, adult medical conditions, illness prevention, nutrition, and general health-related topics.

## **Conclusion**

One-stop online student services like those offered by the University of Minnesota are becoming more readily available at colleges throughout the United States. The 2000 National Survey of Information Technology in U.S. Higher Education shows that more institutions are offering online students services. Community colleges must be at the forefront of this transformation.

According to the 2000 survey, 76 percent of the participating institutions provide online undergraduate applications, up from 70 percent in 1999 and 55 percent in 1998. Eighty-three percent offer online course catalogs, compared to 77 percent in 1999 and 65 percent in 1998.

Colleges will probably take longer to provide the breadth and depth of

online services in the areas of student life and health and wellness than they do in other areas. Financial aid and bookstore services must continue to meet the ever-changing demands of community college students.

Student service practitioners and administrators who are responsible for online services at community colleges should evaluate the look and feel of their Web sites on a regular basis, keeping students' needs in mind. Web sites should provide efficient services even though students may also need to contact a "real person" via e-mail. Web sites should be student-friendly and student-focused, and should provide as many online services as possible. All student service areas must be accessible to students with disabilities. With all this in mind, institutions will serve the new "millennial student" well by providing solid student support systems in engaging, exciting online environments.

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