

Community College District 509
Elgin Community College
Request for Institutional Change to Offer
Degree Programs through
Distance Delivery Methods

January 2008

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Elgin Community College Request for Institutional Change

Elgin Community College (ECC) believes that the best community colleges use technologies to assist their collective efforts to realize their vision. ECC's vision is to be the best comprehensive community college in the United States by providing tomorrow's education today. With the current ubiquitous nature of computers and access to the Internet, the flexible opportunities afforded by distance learning modalities can provide increased access to higher education. Based on information provided through student and community surveys, ECC is expanding its offerings of distance learning courses.

Summary

ECC is committed to the development of distance learning degree programs to meet the expectations of the community and the needs and interests of its students. Through strategic planning, the dedication of staff, and financial resources, ECC has started the process of expanding online learning opportunities through a three tiered approach:

Support for Instruction

Faculty need to update their skills so as to feel comfortable using distance learning technologies and developing online learning environments. Support includes technology and pedagogy training for developing and managing online learning environments. Currently, instruction is supported through the Center for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL) and an instructional designer. Support will expand in FY 2009 with the addition of a part-time instructional designer focusing on rich media and interactive content.

An integral component of the support is faculty professional development workshops from CETL and the Distance Learning Department. The two departments collaborate in providing faculty with professional development opportunities focusing on pedagogy/andragogy and instructional technology. Topics have included training on the course management system, developing and managing online classes, online pedagogy, learning outcomes assessment, and games in education. The course management system user group, a faculty support mechanism, also meets regularly to discuss issues related to the online platform, new and emerging technologies, and techniques for online learning. ECC partners with the Illinois Online Network (ION) and Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO) to provide faculty professional development and networking opportunities with other community colleges within the state.

Current endeavors for faculty professional development include training and implementation of the ION Quality Online Course Initiative (QOCI), a rubric for assessing best practices in online classes, the development of podcasts with course content for students, and the exploration of virtual classrooms utilizing the virtual world Second Life.

Support for Learning

ECC believes that all students in distance learning courses and programs shall receive the same quality of services their counterparts in traditional classrooms enjoy. All student services—including academic support, financial aid, and the bookstore—can be accessed from a distance through both the telephone and the Internet. These services will expand in the coming years, and are addressed by a strategic goal for FY 2008 to create a plan for the expansion of online student services. Although online tutoring services have experienced a reduction in the past year because of the closing of IVCTutor, expansion of tutoring is included in the plan.

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One of the college's strategic initiatives is to improve student retention. Therefore, a major focus on student retention began in FY 2007 to address the low success and retention of students in telecourses. A pilot program began and is expected to expand to online courses for FY 2009. As part of these student retention and student success initiatives, new orientation programs were created for online classes and telecourses. Another aspect of the retention initiatives focuses on helping students become aware of the skills needed for success in distance learning. The information and a self-assessment questionnaire, which are referenced in the printed schedule, are accessible from the campus web page and the distance learning brochure. This information is also provided in communications to all distance learning students. Furthermore the contractual definition of a telecourse has been revised to include technologies that help facilitate interaction between students and the instructors of these courses.

Students need assistance and need to know whom to contact for that assistance. A distance learning hotline was implemented so that any distance learning student with a question can call the number and get a timely response. This number is made available to students when they register for a class and in D2L. Assistance is also available through e-mail, with a more robust online helpdesk to be implemented for Fall 2008.

The college has committed to continuous initiatives to support its distance learning endeavor. As coordinated by the Assessment Committee, student learning in asynchronous programs will be evaluated as part of the overall course and program outcome assessments. Beginning in Spring 2008, all courses, regardless of modality, will be incorporated into the student evaluation of instruction process. To improve planning and development of online and distance learning, ECC created two new positions in 2004: an associate dean for instructional improvement and distance learning, and an instructional technology/distance learning specialist. A new part-time instructional technology/distance learning specialist will be added in FY 2009. ECC is also in the process of integrating ION's Quality Online Course Initiative (QOCI) into its training. The QOCI will be instrumental in the continuing improvement of distance learning at ECC. Additionally, the college included new contractual language in the 2007 faculty negotiations to enhance distance education for student success.

Support for Administration

The Associate Dean for Instructional Improvement and Distance Learning leads and manages the distance learning support programs at ECC, collaborating with deans, faculty and other service departments to develop and offer distance learning programs and services.

The budgetary planning process at ECC is deliberate in addressing issues of growth. Grant opportunities and reallocation of resources are utilized to develop new programs, which are then incorporated into the general distance learning implementation. Partnerships with outside organizations also provide cost effective means of enhancing campus programs. The organizational structure within the Distance Learning Department is continually revised to best meet the needs of ECC's distance learning program, including the adoption of new processes that streamline tasks such as implementation of a help desk tracking system. The Distance Learning Advisory Committee, with members representing the key constituents, meets to discuss all issues and provides recommendations for DL to fine tune its operations and procedures and in

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programmatic planning and development.

By focusing on these three tiers of support, ECC has ensured that it will be able to meet all the needs that may arise as it relates to the growing and expanding market of distance learning education.

Conclusion

This self-study of ECC's distance learning brought the Distance Learning Department an opportunity to review its operation and an opportunity to examine its progress, strengths, and challenges. The self-study process focused on development and improvement utilizing the criteria from Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degrees and Certificate Programs (Higher Learning Commission of the NCA, 2006). The Distance Learning Department worked collaboratively with all related departments of the college and collected input from faculty, staff, and administration. The report is comprehensive in presenting ECC's accomplishments of distance learning, in acknowledging areas for improvement, and in providing a roadmap to strategically address the challenges for future development: comprehensive degree and certificate programs offered via distance learning modalities. As a result, the strategic goals of FY 2008 and FY 2009 emphasize imperative changes in the following areas:

- The improvement and enhancement of student services via distance learning technologies;
- The improvement of retention and student success in distance learning modalities;
- The improvement of student self-assessment regarding the individual viability of distance learning as an effective environment for each student;
- The improvement and enhancement of synchronous interaction between instructors and students, and tutors and students through synchronous online learning environments; and
- The incorporation of innovative teaching and learning techniques into the online learning environment (i.e., games, rich media, etc.).

I. Institutional Context and Support

Proposed Institutional Change

The Change

Elgin Community College (ECC) is seeking approval from the Higher Learning Commission, a Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, to extend its accreditation to include Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) approved degrees comprised of Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) approved courses offered through a combination of distance learning modalities. This request is in compliance with the Commission's Policy Section 3.2(d)2 which states, "Commission approval shall be required to extend accreditation to include...degree programs offered through distance delivery methods." (Higher Learning Commission of the NCA, 2007, p 44). In accordance with this policy, ECC respectfully requests approval to offer associate degree programs delivered through distance learning modalities.

The Commission's Policy Relevant to this Institutional Change

Commission Policy 3.2 defines institutional change and identifies the need for an institution's written request and supporting documentation to assist in determining whether the request to extend accreditation to ECC, including such change, should be granted. The Commission Policy 3.2(d)2 states that "Degree programs offered through distance delivery methods" constitutes an institutional change in educational offering (Higher Learning Commission of the NCA, 2007, p. 43-45). Therefore, ECC requests Commission approval to include programs offered at a distance as part of its accredited offerings.

Expected Outcomes

ECC believes that distance learning courses and degree programs are successful if they:

- achieve the same learning objectives as traditional classroom courses;
- meet the same standards of quality (retention, grade performance, assessment review, etc.) as traditional classroom courses; and
- prepare students to adapt effectively to the online environment at other institutions.

ECC also believes we are successful in offering courses and programs if we:

- meet all reasonable student needs for access to college programs and offerings;
- provide courses that will be accepted for transfer at other institutions;
- adequately prepare students for the workplace; and
- provide distance learning opportunities in a systematic manner based on comprehensive long-term planning.

ECC is committed to offering high quality educational opportunities to address the needs of the students and employees in its district. Accredited distance learning programs are evidence of ECC meeting or exceeding its commitment to providing access to quality programs. ECC expects that these degrees will be perceived as valuable and credible by the organizations through which our students seek employment or academic transfer. Regardless of the mode of

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delivery, all courses and degree programs are designed to achieve the same learning outcomes. Currently distance learning offerings at ECC include telecourse and online courses. In addition, the coming years are expected to bring extensive growth in hybrid courses. ECC has also piloted participation in the Internet Course Exchange (ICE) system sponsored by ILCCO to expand online offerings and the IVC to provide additional learning and support services for students.

By offering distance learning degrees, ECC will better meet the needs of students in our district. Once accredited, the College will be able to market distance learning programs, providing a comprehensive product as opposed to offering a few courses that could be applied to graduation for students who also attend face-to-face courses. These degrees have potential to provide access for district residents who can not or will not come to campus to take classes, including students who face challenges with transportation, work or school schedules, childcare, or otherwise have difficulty fitting courses with set locations and times into their life schedules.

ECC is committed to meeting all reasonable needs of all students—including student services, learning resources, and academic support—with the same quality and depth, whether online or face-to-face. Accreditation helps confirm to the student that these services are available in addition to their ability to access programs and services available on campus. Other benefits of the proposed change to offer distance learning degrees include:

- Student preparation for distance learning options at transfer colleges and universities;
- Instructor enhancement of teaching and learning through the innovative use of established and emerging Internet technologies; and
- Institutional growth in enrollment for distance learning programs.

Impact of the Proposed Change

This institutional change aligns with the goals and direction of ECC, especially towards its commitment to addressing student's needs and providing alternative learning opportunities for the district. The breadth and faculty of ECC's educational program remains the same; only the mode of delivery will change. The impact of the change on support services needed to accommodate distance learning students, and plans for addressing the issues related to the change is described later in the document. Currently, all support services offer online and other distance options for students.

Vision Statement

Elgin Community College will be the best comprehensive community college in the United States by providing tomorrow's education today.

Relevant Points Related to the Vision Statement

To be the best community college, ECC needs to continue pursuing new opportunities provided by emerging technologies and instructional methods. ECC believes that the best community colleges use technologies to assist the collective effort in realizing the vision of the institution. By matching new and emerging technologies to the needs of its district residents and students, ECC will better provide the desired learning environments to meet those needs. The use of these

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technologies and methods to provide new and effective learning environments brings ECC closer to its vision.

Mission Statement

To improve people's lives through learning.

Relevant Points related to the Mission Statement

In ECC's commitment to support lifelong learning, distance learning options help address the community's higher education and workforce development needs as identified by the District 509 Community Survey 2005 (Elgin Community College, 2005). Distance learning provides district residents the opportunity to pursue and achieve their educational goals with alternative access that best meets their needs. ECC can expand opportunities to an increased number of residents by offering distance learning degree programs. District residents pursuing baccalaureate degrees also gain opportunities towards reaching their goals through ECC online courses that can be transferred to their home institutions. The variety of courses offered through multiple modalities enriches the educational, social, and cultural lives of all members of the ECC community. Students are provided with structured interaction focusing on educational objectives. Additionally, one of the FY 2008 goals is to explore distance learning technologies to enhance programmatic offerings from the Visual and Performing Arts Center, and Student Activities.

Offering degree programs via distance technologies will allow ECC to pursue its mission by providing additional delivery options to its community; more members of the community will be able to participate in higher education opportunities through such course and degree offerings. Through distance learning, ECC will provide flexible, consistent, quality programs to students allowing them to pursue new opportunities while maintaining their commitments to family, work, and friends. Accredited distance learning degree programs help ECC establish a greater presence within its district.

Institutional Goals

ECC will:

1. Prepare students to be competitively employed.
2. Prepare students to be successful in baccalaureate programs.
3. Provide students with basic academic skills.
4. Provide district employers with programs and services to develop and sustain a quality workforce.
5. Provide lifelong learning opportunities.
6. Prepare students and employees to learn, live, and work in a globally diverse society.
7. Prepare students and employees to be technologically literate or fluent.
8. Provide affordable and flexible access to programs, services, and appropriate technology.
9. Provide appropriate service and support to meet the needs of students, employees and other stakeholders.

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Shared Values

- Learning
- Integrity
- Excellence
- Fairness
- Caring
- Freedom of Inquiry
- Accountability

ECC institutional goals align with the opportunities provided by accreditation of distance learning degrees. The increased experience with technology will allow students to be better prepared for work or school. Outcomes of courses and degree programs remain the same across modes of delivery, and the increased access to educational programs will strengthen and sustain a quality workforce (Appendix A). By providing lifelong access to learning through distance learning, ECC is able to better meet the needs of a diverse population and provide these opportunities in an affordable and flexible manner. Finally, the needs of all stakeholders can be addressed through programming, services, and support opportunities.

Distance Learning at Elgin Community College

The Institution

ECC is a comprehensive public community college, one of 48 statewide. The student body represents a wealth of diversity with students of all ages and ethnicities attending classes. One out of every 12 in-district adults takes at least one course at ECC every year. Three out of every 10 graduating high school seniors makes this college their first choice every year.

About 10,000 students per semester enroll in credit classes while 4,800 more enjoy non-credit classes at the Fox Valley University and Business Center. Another 70,000 enjoy ECC's arts, entertainment and multicultural activities including those offered through the Visual and Performing Arts Center.

Founded in 1949, the college operates under the Open Door Admissions Policy of the Illinois Community College Act. ECC is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission and is a member of the North Central Association. Programs of study include university transfer, approximately 140 career-oriented, occupational degrees and certificates, and a full complement of pre-collegiate courses representing adult basic and secondary education and English as a second language. University transfer and occupational degrees carry guarantees of quality to help assure student success.

ECC is located in the southwest corner of Elgin and easily accessible from both U.S. 20 and I-90, (the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway). ECC students enjoy the academic and social benefits of a major college plus the small class size, personal attention and friendliness usually associated with a smaller, private school. The average class size is only 20. The faculty are knowledgeable about their subjects, enthusiastic and responsive. One-to-one student/teacher relationships are

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common, and the exchange of ideas comes easily.

In the last decade, ECC has experienced significant growth in both student enrollment and campus facilities. Today, 12 buildings grace a main campus set on 145 acres of gently rolling lawns and Lake Spartan, adjacent to a city-owned golf course. Learning in modern facilities is enhanced by state-of-the-art equipment, Internet and wireless access, and computer instruction across the curricula. Another campus, Fountain Square, is three miles to the east in downtown Elgin.

Throughout the development of this document, several sources of data were used to provide the most accurate picture of distance learning at ECC, and the regional distance learning industry. Unless otherwise noted, all data was provided by the department of Institutional Research at ECC.

Distance Learning: An Overview

In the fall of 1980, ECC began offering telecourses. This program has become a stable component of all offerings at ECC. In 1995, interactive television was instituted at ECC through the Regional Educational Alliance of the Fox Valley. Two years later, ECC implemented the first online course in the state of Illinois. In 2003, the interactive television classrooms at ECC were discontinued in conjunction with the dissolution of the Fox Valley Education Alliance consortium.

In 2004, a renewed emphasis was placed on distance learning. Under the leadership of the Dean for Academic Development and Learning Resources, a Course Management System (CMS) Selection Committee was charged by the Vice President of Finance and Administration with selecting a consistent platform that would provide students a familiar environment in which their courses are delivered and provide faculty with a focused and interactive environment that was intuitive and effective for both faculty and students. The committee consisted of instructional faculty and representatives from Information Technology, Distance Learning, Student Services, and the Renner Learning Resources Center (campus library). Discussions related to the best ways to support the implementation of the CMS were led by faculty, who demonstrated a high interest in providing stronger online learning with flexibility to implement innovative content delivery. As a result of this committee work, the College acquired the recommended platform, Desire2Learn (D2L). Since Spring 2005, D2L has been the standard platform for providing distance learning environments at ECC, including both fully online, hybrid and web enhanced environments.

At the same time, the position of Associate Dean for Instructional Improvement and Distance Learning was created to lead and manage the Distance Learning programs, to provide pedagogical consultation to faculty in instructional design, and to promote best practices for applying teaching and learning theories and instructional technology to curriculum design for online classes. The associate dean is responsible for leading the Distance Learning Department to explore emerging technologies and recommend possible implementation, e.g. the recent exploration of an opportunity to develop podcasts and a robust online synchronous classroom (Wimba LiveClassroom). The associate dean also serves on the college's Instructional Technology Committee, representing the Distance Learning Department; meets with the

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instructional deans regularly on program development and instructional issues in distance learning; and collaborates with CETL in planning, designing, promoting, and teaching of educational technology and online pedagogy workshops and demonstrations designed for faculty development. ECC has experienced significant growth in all areas of online development—including the following (Appendix B):

- Online Courses
Online instruction refers to courses that utilize the Internet as the source of access to the course content and communication for the student and faculty member (Elgin Community College & Elgin Community College Faculty Association, 2007, p 17).
- Hybrid Courses
Hybrid instruction refers to courses in which approximately 50 percent of instruction, evaluation and communication is provided electronically via the course management system and in which time required in a traditional classroom setting is reduced but not eliminated (Elgin Community College & Elgin Community College Faculty Association, 2007, p 18).
- Telecourses
Telecourse instruction refers to the use of commercially available/produced video-based courseware and other instructional materials as the primary source of instruction and includes enhancement of the telecourse with specific elements of the campus course management system (Elgin Community College & Elgin Community College Faculty Association, 2007, p 16)
- Web Enhanced Courses
Web enhanced instruction refers to courses in which a portion of instruction, evaluation and communication is done electronically via D2L but the traditional time spent in the classroom is not reduced.

In fall 2005, D2L went live with all online courses delivered through the course management system. ECC has experienced an increase in the number of sections using D2L.

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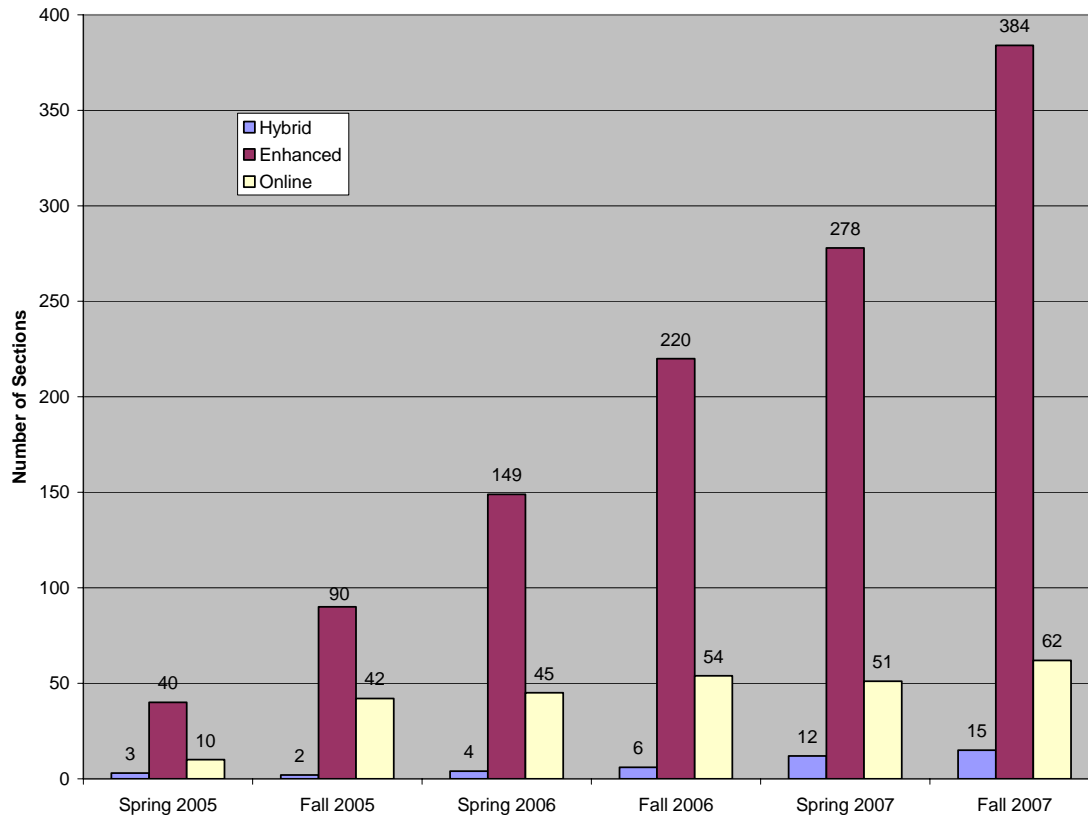


Figure 1: Number of sections utilizing online course management system (Elgin Community College, 2006b).

In Spring 2005, ECC piloted an interactive synchronous classroom environment (Wimba LiveClassroom), purchased multi-media development; distribution applications and hardware (QuickTime Server); and expanded the training for faculty to learn to use the equipment. Since implementing D2L, the number of sections utilizing the course management system has increased each semester.

ECC plans to continue expansion of distance learning opportunities for its district residents, including the development of online degrees requiring minimal contact on campus and offering the most flexible learning options to district residents. For courses requiring face-to-face interaction between students and instructors, a hybrid format will be utilized to provide flexibility; for example: speech and lab science courses.

Serving the community: A data driven decision making process

Since implementing telecourses in the early 1980's, ECC has committed itself to providing quality education through various distance modalities. With the explosion of the World Wide Web ten years ago, this commitment was extended to include offerings through the online environment. Although there was a period of slow or non-existent growth in distance learning opportunities, a renewed focus on distance learning was initiated with the creation of a new administrative position, and a committee charged to recommend the adoption of a course management system.

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As ECC began looking at distance learning opportunities for the institution, the college examined the needs of the community (the 2005 District 509 Community Survey) and compared institutional data with data from partner organizations in the state. In the process of redefining the role of distance learning at ECC and opportunities for its growth, ECC examined the function of distance learning at ECC and institutions throughout the state. A concerted effort has been made in the past few years to include distance learning into strategic plans. During this time, starting in 2004, enrollment in online classes in the state of Illinois has almost doubled (Illinois Online Network, 2007).

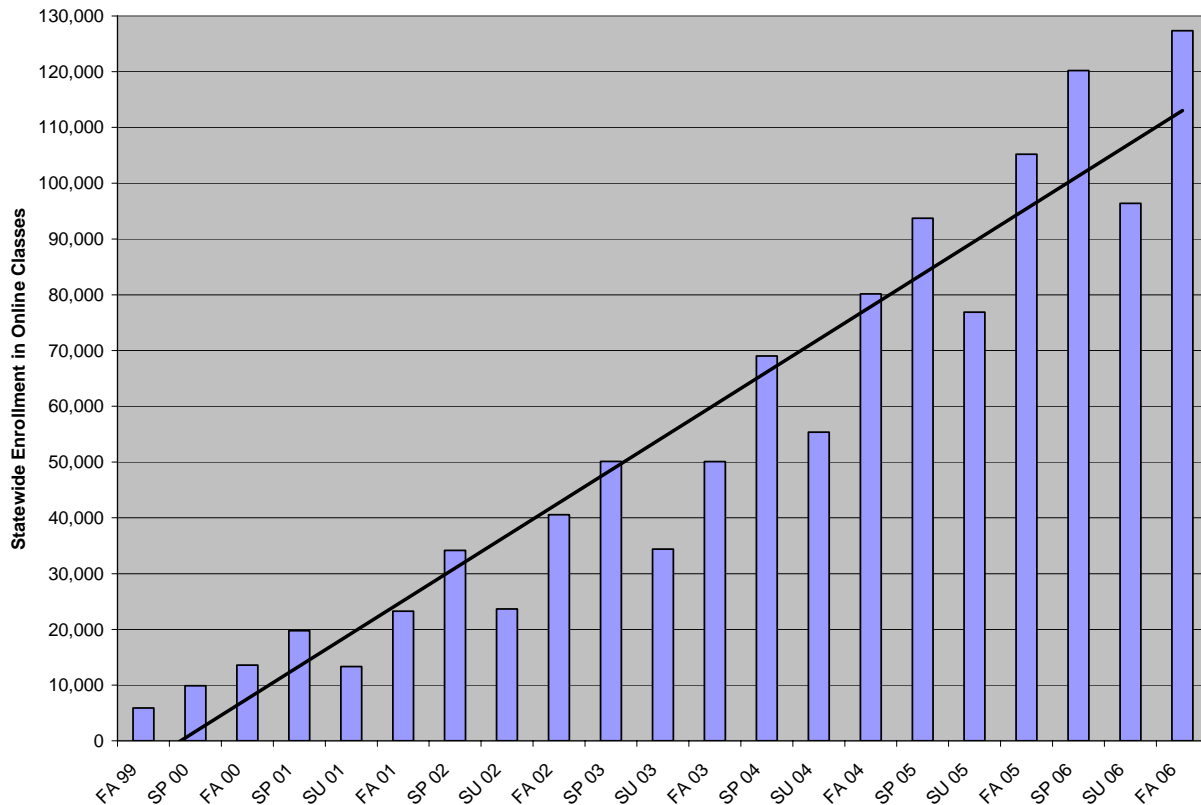


Figure 2: Illinois statewide enrollment in online classes Fall 1999-Fall 2006

Given this growth, community colleges play and will continue to play a major role in the distribution of online learning in the state of Illinois. IVC which tracks data as it relates to online learning in the state, publishes regular reports on the status of online learning in the state's higher education system. Recent reports show a continued growth in online enrollment for the State of Illinois: 34 percent of enrollments in online classes were contributed by the community colleges in the state. This same report shows that 41 percent of **all** distance learning opportunities are provided by community colleges when all distance modalities are examined, surpassing the distance education offered by for-profit colleges and universities (Appendix C).

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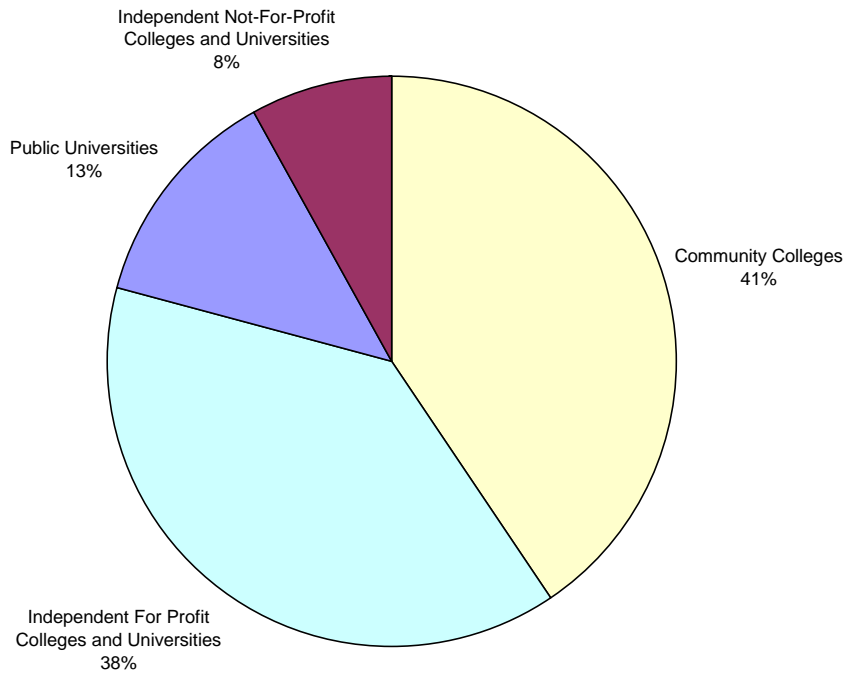


Figure 3: Fall 2006 enrollments in all distance education courses at Illinois colleges and universities (Illinois Online Network, 2007).

The growth in online enrollment at ECC reflects the trend of growth in enrollment throughout the state. The following chart shows the total enrollment for each fiscal year back to 2003. While overall college enrollment decreased, online enrollment continued to increase. Telecourse enrollment was reduced as a by-product of an effort to improve student success and retention in telecourses. This effort included a reduced number of start times and a more focused time frame for course completion. Enrollment in online courses has grown from 987 seats in 103 sections in FY 2003 to 2,141 seats in 122 sections for FY 2007.

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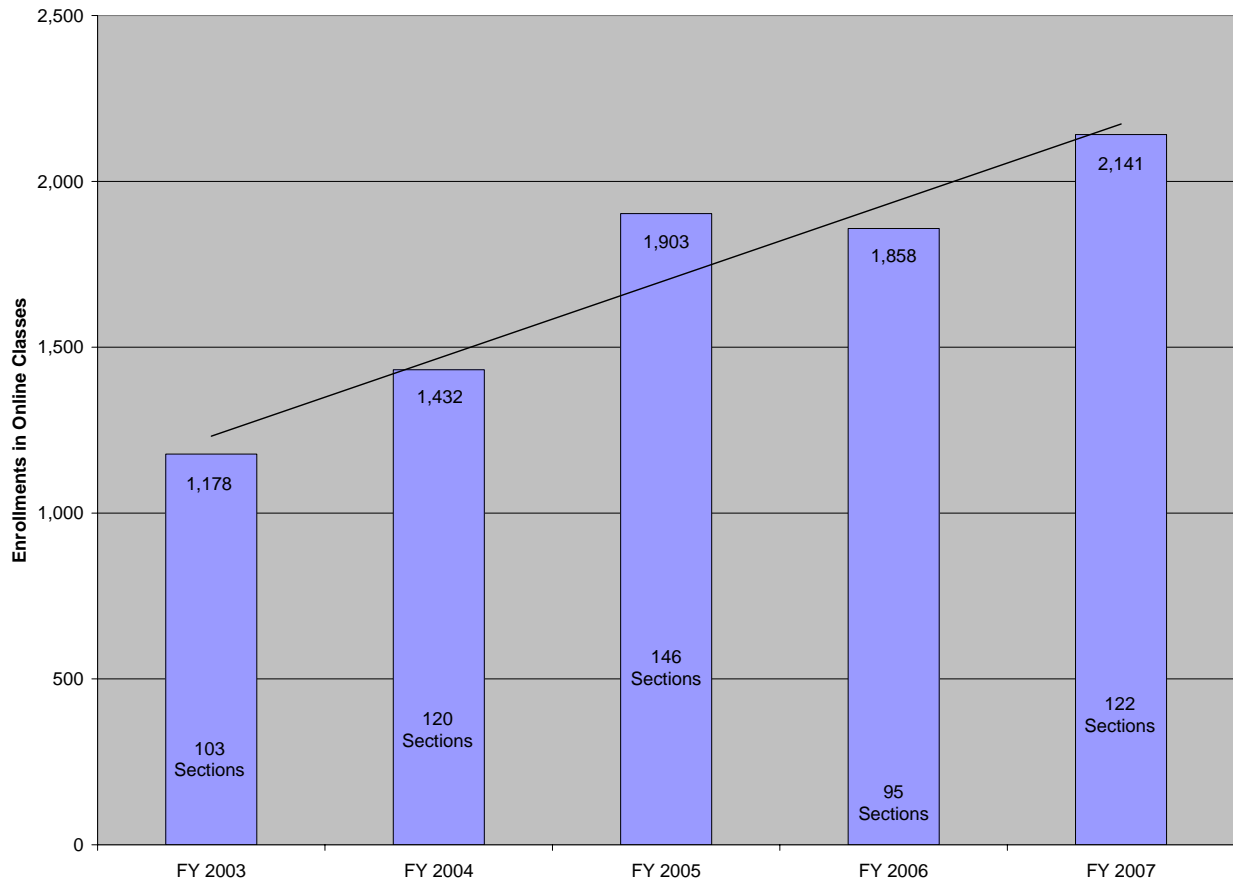


Figure 4: Enrollment growth at ECC in online classes FY 2003 – FY 2007.

In 2005 ECC surveyed district residents to determine their experiences with and needs from the college. As related to the needs of distance learning, the following findings were highlighted (Elgin Community College, 2005):

- Ninety percent of those surveyed responded that they have access to the Internet at home, with only seven percent saying that they do not have access at all;
- Seventy-seven percent of respondents state that they have made online purchases;
- 53.1 percent rated the importance for ECC to offer Internet courses as very important, with only 6.3 percent saying it is not important;
- 7.8 percent of respondents stated they had taken a class over the Internet in the previous three years. 44.8 percent stated they had an outstanding experience, while only 10.3 percent said they had a poor experience;
- Eighty-eight percent indicated that it is important for ECC to offer a variety of days and times for classes.

In addition to the potential benefits to community members, all data from the state report and ECC's Institutional Research Office point to the opportunity for ECC to develop programs and to offer degrees and certificates through distance learning modalities. Distance learning continues to grow in the state and at ECC, with increases in both numbers of sections and enrollments. Although the numbers of sections were reduced in FY 2006 at ECC, the number of enrollments

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in each section increased. This reduction in sections brought the average enrollment for online courses to the point where revenues were above the cost of instruction. As discussed later, the average number of students in each section jumped from 12.6 seats per section to 19.4 seats per section from FY 2005 to FY 2006 (p. 29, Figure 8)

Because of this increase in interest in distance learning courses, new online courses were added for FY 2007. With the addition of these new offerings, the enrollment again increased for FY 2007, continuing to confirm the upward trend in online enrollments.

The data from the 2005 Community Survey also suggests that community access to online environments is pervasive, and the ubiquitous nature of the Internet provides opportunity for community residents to participate in the online environment which offers flexibility to access education and flexible scheduling. Eighty-eight percent of respondents identified that it is important for ECC to offer flexible learning opportunities. With 90 percent of respondents reporting access to the Internet, online courses have become a significant opportunity.

With 75 percent of respondents reporting that they have made online purchases, we can infer that the majority of the district residents are familiar with the online environment in their daily lives. Thus, ECC can provide the community a comfortable distance learning environment with the technical acumen of the district residents. The orientation programs and learning support resources are available to assist students who do not feel as comfortable with the technology. In addition, their use of the Internet shows a familiarity with the technology, possibly opening up opportunities for marketing through the Internet.

The demographic data indicated that the student body of ECC is made up of 70 percent part-time students and 30 percent full-time students. Fifty-six percent of respondents to a 2006 survey work 20 or more hours a week, with 20 percent working 35 hours or more (see pie chart, page 18) (Elgin Community College, 2006a). With so many students working and attending college part-time, the option of distance learning provides them an alternative option for access to education.

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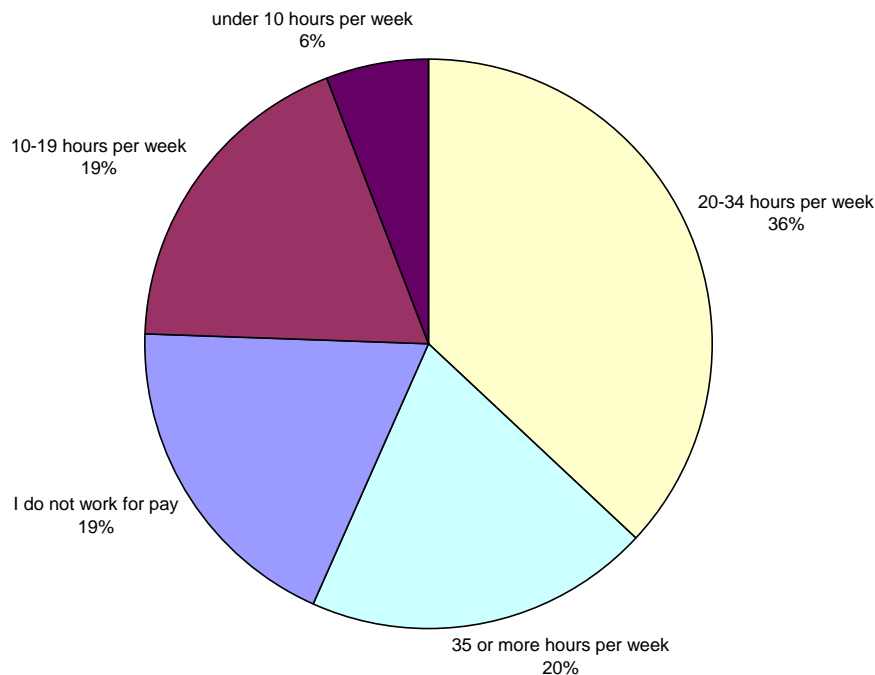


Figure 5: Number of hours students work each week, FY 2006 (Elgin Community College, 2006a).

The findings of the community survey indicate that while community members require flexibility in class scheduling, they may not be aware that online classes can help them integrate education into their busy lives. ECC has developed its capacity for distance learning and has goals to strengthen the following endeavors:

1. Educate the community on the benefits and limitations of distance learning, providing the best information possible for potential students to make good decisions;
 - The information is currently available from the ECC website and in the brochure “Learning Ideal for Today’s Busy Lifestyles” available from the Distance Learning office.
2. Implement additional quality measures into the course development process, including providing workshops on how to use QOCI rubrics to evaluate online courses at the final development stage and including providing instructors with continued training on best practices. QOCI was created with representation from community colleges throughout the state. The rubrics define best practices in online instruction;

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- QOCI has been incorporated into the development template from which all new classes are created. In addition, it has been included into the face-to-face training for faculty.
 - Best practices have been incorporated into the two online workshops that faculty take when newly assigned to teaching online.
 - In Spring 2007 and Fall 2007, Deans were provided training on how to utilize the concepts of best practices in online instruction (QOCI rubric).
3. Redesign the distance learning website with user-friendly tools; with concise, clear, and accurate information; and with links for direct access to services.

Strategic Planning and Development of Distance Learning

Planning for Growth: A Collective Effort

There were four key components recognized as the catalyst for development of online programs at ECC:

- Acceptance of online courses by students throughout the state;
- Active and innovative faculty to continue online course development and to promote such development among their colleagues;
- Appropriate support for faculty; and
- Appropriate student services and learning resources.

ECC is committed to the development of distance learning degree programs. The expectation of the community and the needs and interests of the students provide strong incentives for ECC's continued endeavor in this direction. As students become more receptive to online learning, ECC has started the process of expanding online learning opportunities through a three tiered approach:

Tier 1: Faculty Support.

Faculty need to update their skills so as to feel comfortable using distance learning technologies and developing online learning environments. For that purpose, an instructional designer/technology specialist was hired to join the distance learning staff four years ago. Major responsibilities of this position are to train faculty in the use of technology, to assist in the development of online courses when necessary, and to develop advanced technologies for incorporation into course design if needed. The support for faculty will be expanded to include a part-time instructional designer in FY 2009, whose focus will be on rich media and interactive content.

Tier 2: Student Support.

Students need assistance. They need to know whom to call. A hotline was developed so that any distance learning student with a question can call the number and get a timely response. This number is made available to students when they register for a class and in D2L (Appendix D). Assistance is also available through e-mail, with a more robust online helpdesk to be implemented in Summer 2008 utilizing TrackIt

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helpdesk software. The implementation of this software will be discussed more in depth on p. 33. A distance learning librarian position has been created for Fall 2008 and will assist the library and faculty in the development of online resources, and will also support distance learning students.

Tier 3: Administrative Support.

ECC created a new position in 2004, Associate Dean for Instructional Improvement and Distance Learning, to lead and manage the distance learning programs at ECC and to collaborate and cooperate with deans and faculty and other service departments to develop and offer distance learning programs and services.

ECC began advancing into distance education in the early 1980's when it implemented telecourses as a mode of delivery. These courses featured course content delivered through the use of a textbook, study guide, and videos for each lesson. Students interacted with faculty by telephone and mail, and later through fax and e-mail. At one time, videos were played on cable television so that students could view the videos without coming to campus. Now videotapes may be rented and viewed at home or in the library video room. In Fall 2007, a pilot program was initiated to allow students to purchase the videos with their books. The focus of telecourses is to provide a flexible scheduling opportunity for students who may not be able to come to campus for class. Additionally, new faculty contract language was added to expand the definition of telecourses to include enhancements in the online environment. These enhancements are to encourage more interaction in telecourses.

In the early 90's, as part of the Fox River Higher Education Consortium, ECC implemented interactive television courses. These courses were synchronous courses that were offered at remote locations. Students would attend courses near their locale and interact with the instructor and other students through interactive closed circuit television. This program was beneficial because students were able to take courses or programs not offered at their home institution. However, this program was discontinued in 2003 because of the dissolution of the consortium.

In the mid-90's, faculty at ECC began experimenting with the Internet and World Wide Web for the distribution of courses. ECC offered the first online course in Illinois in Fall 1996: EDP 201 Visual Basic Programming. After the initial development of a few online courses, very little significant work followed because of the lack of a standard platform and minimal opportunities for training and support. At that time, online courses were considered a flexible alternative for some of the classes that are offered to students in District 509.

Beginning with the creation of the first online courses over ten years ago and continuing through the current course offerings, innovation in distance learning at ECC has always been driven by faculty. Their interests and understanding of their disciplines provide a fertile land to foster and explore new technologies and learning environments. To support faculty in this innovation, the Vice President of Teaching, Learning, and Student Development has initiated mini-grants that help defray the costs of innovation. One requirement for the mini-grant project is that upon completion of the proposed projects, the recipients send a report to the Vice President summarizing the effectiveness of the projects and identifying the potential for further development. The faculty recipients of the mini-grant also present to their colleagues on Opening Day as part of professional development. These presentations inspire faculty in their

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pursuit of innovative projects.

In general, the process of a project usually includes the following steps:

1. Proposal
2. Pilot
3. Evaluation of Pilot
4. Recommendation for future implementation

If a project focuses on innovative use of technology in classroom or improved pedagogy in distance learning, these steps typically include input from Distance Learning and supervising instructional deans. Institutional Research assists with data collection and data analysis when necessary.

Plans and Strategies

The Distance Learning Department has developed its three-year strategic plan in support of the Academic Master Plan (2005-2008) (Appendix E). The Distance Learning Department plan envisions the development and improvement of online classes, hybrid classes, enhanced classes, and telecourses. The Distance Learning Department plan reiterates the commitment to expanding technologies and services for broader access to effective learning. In addition, the Academic Master Plan specifies various goals for distance learning. It also provides direction and perspective for the Distance Learning Department to develop the highest quality distance learning programs and defining the role of Distance Learning in Teaching, Learning, and Student Development at ECC. Both plans direct the development of distance learning programs.

Because of the rapidly changing technological environment, distance learning at ECC is continually evolving. The deliberate and planned adoption of emerging technologies to enhance the pedagogy of distance learning presents challenges for the development and implementation of online learning environments. Distance Learning staff members are fully aware of the new developments and challenges and are determined to provide the best opportunities and services to our students. The Distance Learning Department staff is fully engaged in the following:

- Online help forms will be created to help facilitate the response and tracking of issues related to students enrolled in distance learning environments.
- The distance learning website will be revised to provide quick access help for students, including FAQ's, troubleshooting guides, and tutorials for resolving common problems.
- A synchronous online learning environment will be acquired and implemented to expand opportunities for interactive online tutoring services and for classroom interactions.
- Virtual worlds will be explored to determine if the technology will enhance the distance learning opportunities provided by ECC. This endeavor encompasses the examination of implementing games in online learning environments.
- Rich media and interactive learning opportunities will continue to be explored and

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implemented to provide opportunities for multiple learning styles.

- A comprehensive plan for the expansion of online student services will be developed to provide directions for the college on how to best meet student needs and resolve learning issues through the Internet.

Focusing on the three tiers of faculty, student, and administrative support, ECC is determined to develop and implement online degree programs that are accessible and to provide appropriate support to ensure student success. ECC holds the vision that students will be successful in their endeavors for a quality education in ECC's distance education programs. To that end, the goals for the coming years are:

Distance learning strategic goals for FY 2008 are to:

- Provide faculty workshops on using games to create educational environments;
- Provide training for faculty on creating effective hybrid courses;
- Support the academic programs in their development of 12-15 online Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) general education courses with a focus on required courses for degrees and certificates;
- Apply for instructional change in accreditation to offer online programs;
- Provide training for the deans and faculty on implementing best practices in the development of online classes;
- Collaborate with the Visual and Performing Arts Center and Student Life in exploration of utilizing distance learning technologies to provide activities and programs via the Internet;
- Collaborate with Student Services in creating a plan for implementing and expanding online service. The scope of online services includes all areas of Student Services, Academic Support (tutoring and testing), Financial Aid, and other related student services; and
- Collaborate with CETL to provide instructional technology training for developing and managing hybrid and online classes with interactive content.

Distance learning strategic goals for FY 2009 are to:

- Collaborate with Academic Support to implement an online tutoring solution;
- Collaborate with Marketing to ensure general and focused marketing initiatives include distance learning options;

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- Sponsor a day-long Distance Learning Conference to focus on established and emerging technologies, and pedagogical/andragogical implementation of technology;
- Strengthen the development of rich and interactive content to enhance quality of online instruction delivery by requesting a part-time instructional designer/instructional technologist; and
- Expand retention initiative from focusing on telecourses to all distance learning modalities.

As the Distance Learning Department continues to examine goals for the future, it also maintains a clear set of guidelines for the development of new online courses and programs. Instructors who begin the process of creating online courses are required to provide a rationale for course development, explain how the change in the mode of delivery will affect learning, and identify learning activities that will need to change for the new mode of instructional delivery. Instructors are required to participate in training on the course management system (CMS) and online learning environments. This training is regarded as imperative for instructors new to online teaching by the institution and the Distance Learning Advisory Committee.

All instructors teaching online for the first time are required to take this training. The first course eases instructors into the online learning environment by encouraging the use of interactive tools to enhance face-to-face courses and discusses how these tools can be implemented in online courses. The second course focuses on online pedagogy and learning assessment techniques; and tools for assessment of student progress toward course objectives. In addition to the two online courses, a series of four face-to-face, hands-on workshops are offered as alternatives for faculty if they would prefer the face-to-face environment. However, these instructors are strongly encouraged to take one of the online courses to experience online learning from the student perspective. The face-to-face workshops provide participants with the same knowledge base and skills as the two online courses. If needed, instructors may schedule one-on-one sessions with the Instructional Technologist to cover this material or whenever assistance is needed. The Distance Learning Department schedules the workshops for department trainings, providing access to groups as needed. The Division of Continuing Education and the Criminal Justice Department have scheduled in-depth training for their instructors. Making sure that new online course developers are aware of the amount of work involved with the creation of online learning environments, Distance Learning and the Course Management System Committee (replaced by Distance Learning Advisory Committee upon completion of its charge) compiled a recommended timeline for the development of new classes (Appendix F).

Since Fall 2004, the number of online courses offered at ECC has increased 30 percent. As courses in certificate programs and IAI courses in degree programs are targeted for development, the number of online courses available for students seeking flexible scheduling is expected to grow another 30–40 percent in the next two years. Faculty are encouraged to develop online courses which are currently offered as telecourses as the online environment provides better instructor and student interactions. In the coming years, emphasis will be placed on the

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development of courses and programs identified through our strategic planning and environmental scanning processes for residents and businesses in our district.

At present, ECC has two Management Certificates available online, with four more close to implementation:

- Currently Available
 - Basic Vocational Specialist in Management – Supervisory & Administrative Management
 - Basic Vocational Specialist in Retail Management

- Available within the next year
 - Basic Vocational Specialist in Introductory Entrepreneurship
 - Basic Vocational Specialist in Data Entry Office Assistant
 - Basic Vocational Specialist in MOS PowerPoint Preparation
 - Online Certificate in Adobe Creative Suite (pending Curriculum Committee approval)

A major issue facing the development of online programs is the offering of speech and lab science courses as the IAI panels currently require face-to-face components for these types of courses. The Illinois Articulation Initiative mandates that speech classes must adhere to the following:

Students are expected to prepare and give at least three substantive speeches, including both informative and persuasive assignments delivered extemporaneously. To be substantial, these speeches should be of sufficient length to allow for careful development of thought (minimum five minutes each). All mediated oral communication classes shall require face-to-face (unmediated) performance of the three substantial speeches with the class and the instructor serving as an in-class audience (Illinois Articulation Initiative, 2007).

Therefore, a hybrid environment would be considered conducive for both speech and lab sciences classes and require minimal attendance on campus. In addition, other arrangements can be made for distance students, including the transfer of lab and speech credits into ECC from other institutions.

At the present time, ECC is short only one course for the offering of a distance learning degree. SPH 101 Fundamentals of Speech, the final course to offer as a hybrid option, is currently being explored. When telecourses are included, many course options are available for students to customize their degree program (Appendix G).

Financial Planning and Support to Distance Learning

Like most other colleges today, ECC operates in an environment characterized by limited resources. All administrative and budgetary decisions are based on a careful and thorough planning process. The decision to expand distance learning options was reached in the same way.

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We first needed to determine if there was suitable demand for these programs. Data was collected and analyzed to identify the needs for ECC's distance learning program. The student survey compiled by Institutional Research suggested that ECC students are interested in greater flexibility in course scheduling (Elgin Community College, 2006a). In addition, the survey also indicated that 78.1 percent of the students had access to a computer at the college; 81.8 percent had a computer at home. Students also responded that they could access the internet either at school (75.8 percent) or at home (76.2 percent) (Appendix H).

While many of the responses that indicated a desire for greater scheduling flexibility were focused on alternate times for traditional classroom-based classes (i.e. greater interest in night classes), the college believes that the significantly high availability of computers and the internet also indicated a potential market for online classes. This belief is bolstered by data from IVC. As a member of the IVC, ECC is part of a network of institutions that submit data for tracking the development and implementation of online courses. Every semester, IVC issues a report providing current enrollment numbers in the state and that data tends to show a growing market in online education across the state (p. 15, Figure 2). For example, according to IVC enrollment data for Summer 2007, enrollment in online sections across the state of Illinois increased by 17 percent and the number of online sections increased by 11 percent over Summer 2006. In addition, the number of community colleges offering online programs also continues to grow. As of 10/5/2007, IVC lists 11 community colleges in the state that offer Associate's Degrees focusing on 25 different disciplines, including general education and transfer degrees (Appendix I).

This data indicates opportunities exist for community colleges in general and ECC specifically, to develop online courses and online degree programs. That conclusion is further supported by current trends in ECC's own enrollment history for online courses.

While total distance learning enrollment has remained relatively flat, online enrollment has increased. The increase in online enrollment is balanced against a decline in telecourse enrollment. The decline in enrollment in telecourses is the result of a conscious decision to limit telecourses in the short term while the college addressed a number of issues, including student success and retention, and an increasing focus on online delivery of courses. Having reviewed those issues, the college has decided to implement an "enhanced telecourse" model beginning in Spring 2008, which is projected to increase retention and success for telecourses while taking advantage of the online Course Management System. Even with the enhancement of telecourses, the college's goal is to increase online offerings while continuing to decrease telecourse offerings, therefore the growth of online courses is expected to outpace the number of telecourses.

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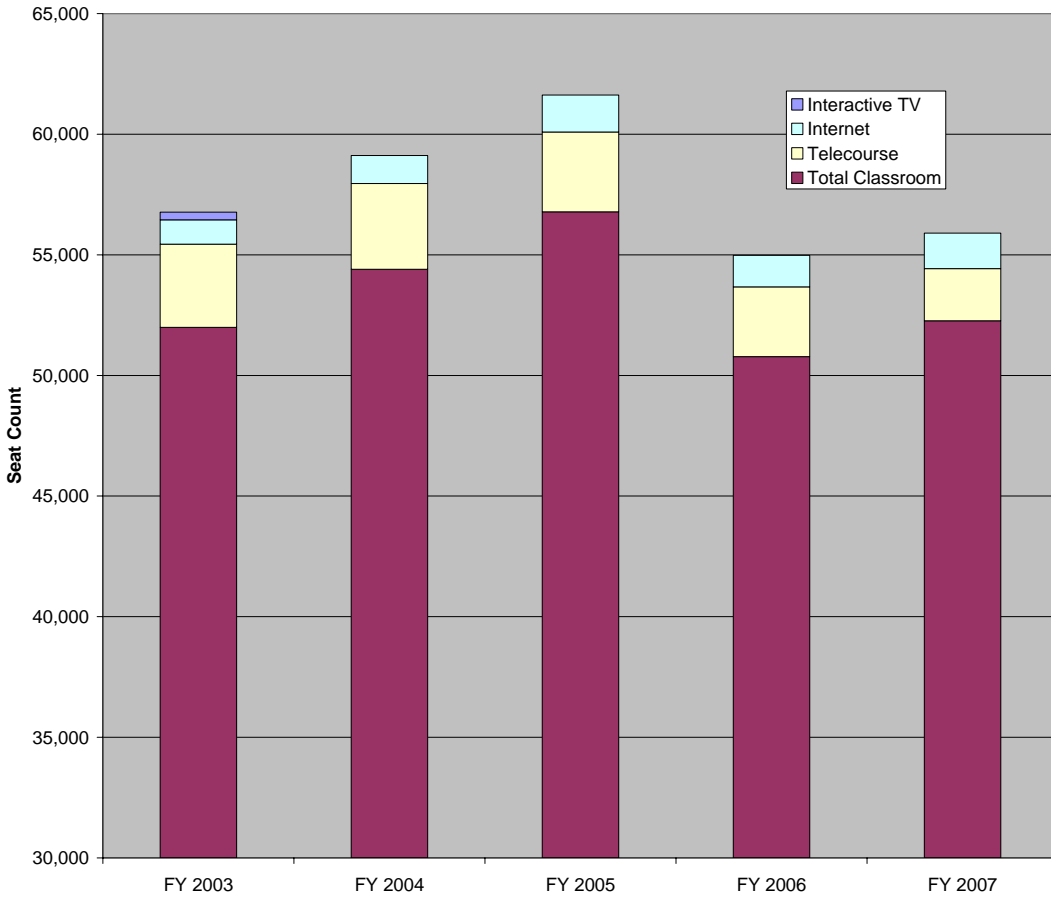


Figure 6: Seat count enrollment by instructional delivery mode.

Not surprisingly, enrollment in online courses has increased as the number of courses available online has increased. For the past five years, the number of distinct online courses offered at ECC has almost doubled. Because enrollments have increased as offerings have increased, the college is convinced that there is a market for online education in our district. If we continue to expand our course offerings, enrollments will likely continue to increase, as well.

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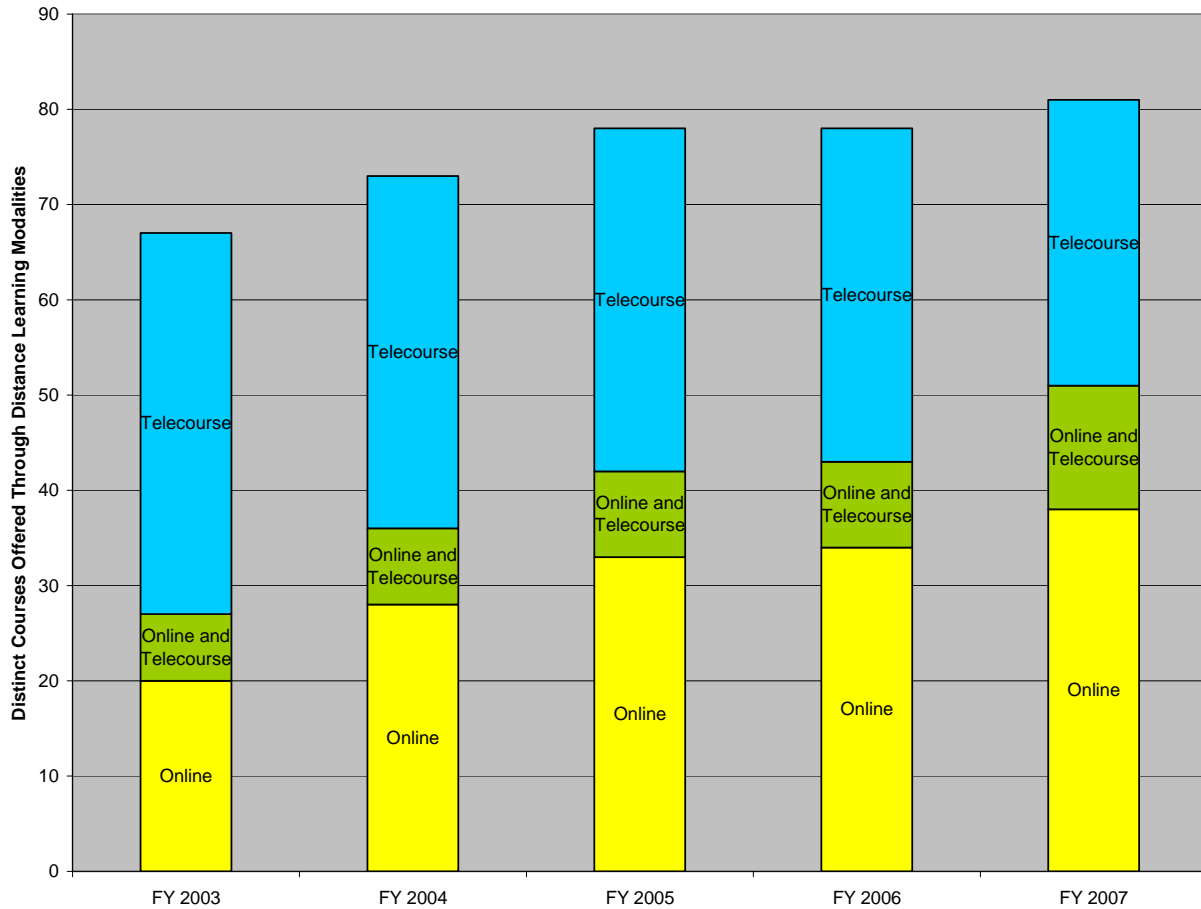


Figure 7: Number of distinct courses offered through distance learning modalities.

The one place where the data reflects declining numbers is in the number of sections offered. Online sections offered in FY 2007 are significantly fewer than sections offered in FY 2005. However, this data does not indicate a decline in interest, but rather an increase in cost effectiveness, and is, in fact, consistent with the IVC data discussed previously that showed a much greater increase in enrollments relative to the number of sections offered. As interest in online classes has increased, the percentage of occupied seats has increased and that has allowed us to be more resource-efficient in our online course offerings. So, the reduction in the number of sections is offset by an increase in the average number of seats per section. The following chart shows that phenomenon over the last five years and our goal is to continue this pattern of growth: developing new online courses while increasing average seats per section.

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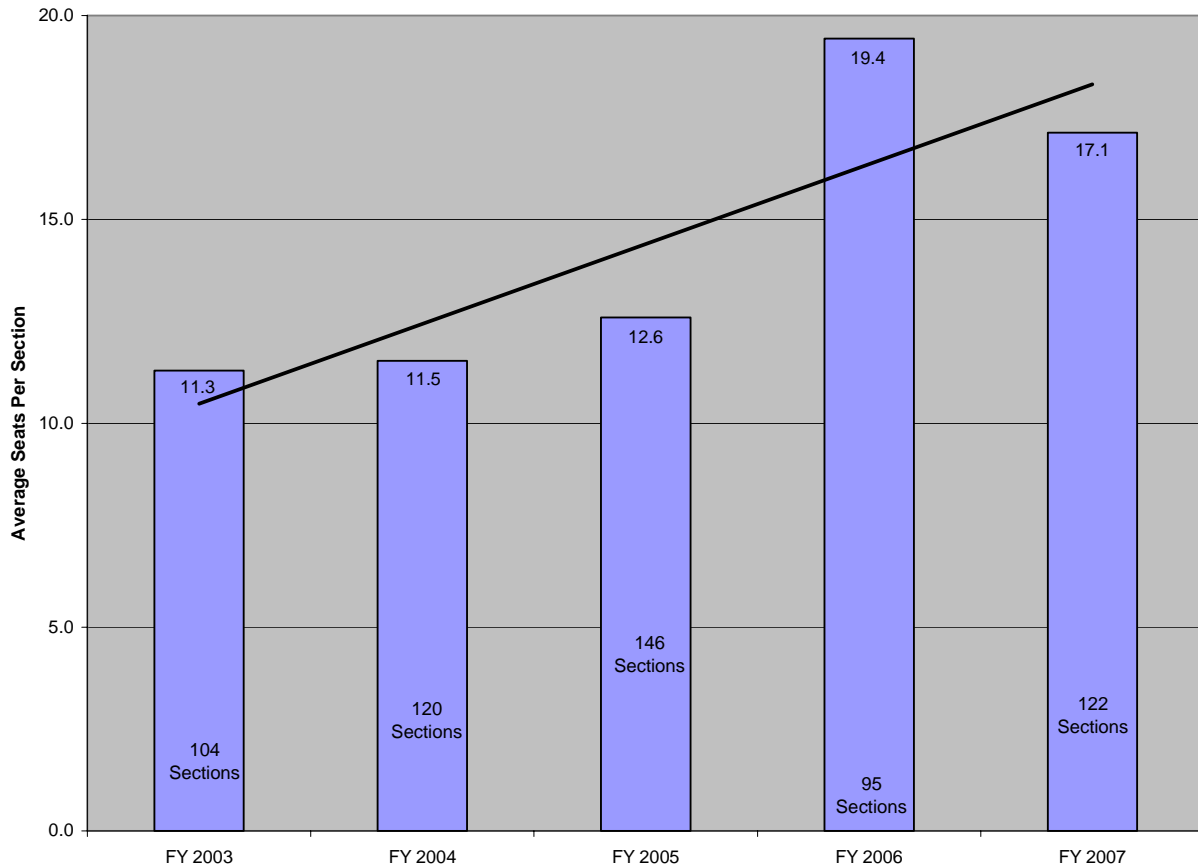


Figure 8: Average seats per section, FY 2003 - FY 2007.

The drop between FY 2006 and FY 2007 was created by the addition of ten new online courses becoming available. This drop in the average number of seats per section is expected to rise again as awareness of the online sections grows.

In summary, all available data indicates a growing need and desire for online education in our district. We believe if we move from a system of ad hoc online offerings to a systematic and comprehensive online education program, these trends will continue. However, the college is aware of many such opportunities and clearly must prioritize those opportunities. To provide guidance for program development, the college developed an Academic Master Plan based on input from faculty, staff, and administration. The plan identifies seven goals that the college is currently pursuing (Appendix J). Some of those goals and their related objectives support the development of a broad-based online and distance learning program.

Expanding our distance learning options provides access to learning for residents District 509, a strategic goal of the institution. Stated objectives for this goal include:

- Design and implement instruction and services that remove barriers and focuses on flexible and quality learning opportunities.
- Provide current instructional technology.

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- Provide a timely and comprehensive schedule of classes and services.

However, a comprehensive distance learning program would also enhance our efforts to meet our goal of ensuring curriculum currency and program relevance based on student and community goals and needs for lifelong learning and preparation for the future. Specific objectives in meeting this goal include:

- Develop new programs that meet the emerging needs in our service area.
- Provide an exceptional range of quality credit and non-credit learning opportunities for all residents of the college district.
- Optimize enrollment in programs and courses through strategic enrollment management.
- Maintain program goals in alignment with the college mission.

A comprehensive distance learning program can help the college meet each of these objectives. We have already identified distance learning as an emerging need in our service area, and addressing that need will expand our range of credit and non-credit learning opportunities. In addition, because students are indicating a desire for more course scheduling options, the addition of a distance learning program will help us optimize enrollments. Finally, as noted previously in this document, we see the development of a distance learning program as integral to our efforts to further our mission.

So we have an identified need and we have determined that meeting that need is consistent with our academic plan. While it may seem that such an analysis has little to do with the budget process, at ECC these are the first steps in our budgeting process, and we use the data from these analyses to determine appropriate budgetary support for a particular project. In the case of distance learning, the college has made a significant commitment to distance learning because it responds to our academic goals (Appendix K). This commitment can clearly be seen in the budget allocated to distance learning. In FY 2004, the college allocated almost a quarter million dollars for distance education. By FY 2008, the commitment had doubled to over half a million dollars. In addition, as seen in the following table, the portion of the college's budget for academic support that is dedicated to distance learning has increased during that period, as well (Appendix L).

Table 1: Expenditures for distance learning as a percentage of all academic support

	Expenditures for Academic Support	Expenditures for Distance Learning	Proportion of the Academic Support Expenditures for Distance Learning
FY 2004	\$3,175,259	\$247,496	7.8%
FY 2005	\$3,393,103	\$318,036	9.4%
FY 2006	\$4,063,932	\$441,203	10.9%
FY 2007	\$4,691,805	\$481,358	10.3%

While the college has provided significant financial support for distance learning, obviously with any new initiative unexpected costs may arise. When that happens, the college has provisions that allow budget officers to request additional funds. New initiatives and projects with a clear tie to the institutional goals—both standards apply to distance learning at ECC—can access funds from a number of extra sources, including budget reallocation and equipment budget.

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In addition, the college aggressively pursues grant funding to supplement its support for programs. Specifically, the college has received an SBC Excelerator grant for faculty development and is participating in a recently awarded Higher Education Cooperation Act (HECA) Innovation grant through a partnership with ILCCO focusing on increasing success and retention in online courses. Additionally, a mini grant was awarded internally for the development of training of individuals throughout campus on various aspects of distance learning technologies (Appendix M).

Finally, all academic programs also provide a self-generating source of revenue: tuition dollars. Even at our current nascent stage of development, online education is generating significant tuition revenue for the college. Revenues for FY 2007 were \$942,846. Revenues for FY 2008 are up to \$702,713, not including Spring 2008 enrollment. Based on current enrollment trends and continued growth in our distance learning program, revenue for FY 2008 distance learning courses is expected to exceed \$1,000,000 for the first time. If current enrollment trends in online course continue, revenues for online courses will pass revenues for telecourses in FY 2009.

Table 2: Tuition and Fee Revenues for FY 2007 and FY 2008

	Summer 2006	Fall 2006	Spring 2007	Summer 2007	Fall 2007
Online Courses	\$104,550	\$141,486	\$160,940	\$134,108	\$217,714
Telecourses	152,917	199,180	196,824	161,343	229,580
Total	\$257,467	\$340,666	\$357,764	\$295,451	\$447,294

One common problem with the development of new programs is gauging the initial size of the program and ensuring an adequate budget. In the case of academic programs, succeeding beyond expectations means additional students are enrolling, the college is collecting more tuition dollars than expected, and those additional dollars can be used to offset additional program costs. ECC sees growth in important programs as a “good thing” and therefore is willing in many cases to allocate generated revenues to those programs.

Based on extensive analysis and planning, the college believes it has adequately funded its existing distance learning program and has prepared for future growth in the program as well.

Marketing Effort

Distance learning options are marketed to in-district residents as flexible and accessible learning options at ECC. The 2005 Community Survey results indicate that much of the market has access to the Internet and that they require more flexible options for scheduling, which reveal a perfect market for online education. Among all ECC students, 90 percent are in-district residents, to whom we promote distance learning as a flexible scheduling option.

Current certificate programs are marketed through the semester schedules which are mailed to all residents in District 509. Within the schedule, distance learning opportunities are cross listed between the mode of delivery in the course listing and a two-page spread focusing on distance learning options. Marketing focuses on the flexibility of scheduling and of the convenience of participating in an online course. ECC intends to continue to promote all distance learning

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courses, certificates, and programs to our students as flexible alternatives for continuing their education. As degree programs come online, focus will be made to ensure that those students whose needs can best be met by online options are aware of those options.

All marketing is supported by the institutional website (<http://www.elgin.edu>) and through a newsletter to all residents in the district three times a year.

Although the institution may pursue opportunities outside the district by targeting specific discipline and program areas where needs are not met by local educational institutions, the preponderance of online focus will be in-district. The institution needs to undertake more extensive research and analysis regarding the capacity of distance learning and utilize this information to best market the distance learning programs.

II. Curriculum and Instruction

Instructional Design

Instructional design in online education at ECC is a continual and evolving process. First and foremost, individual instructors are completely responsible for the development process, which includes support from the Distance Learning Department and CETL. Support is provided by an instructional technologist, student support personnel, and a lab assistant. Once a course is developed and implemented, the instructor continually reviews the progress and success of his/her students and the accessibility of the content. Any changes or issues that arise can be discussed and resolved with the assistance of that same support structure available during development. In addition to the support provided by the Distance Learning Department, instructors assure good instructional design by:

1. Comparing the results of tests completed by those who take the online courses to those who take the course in other modalities (including telecourse and face-to-face environments);
2. Providing varied technological tools for assessment, including discussion boards, chat rooms, written assignments, portfolios, quizzes, tests, and other tools; and
3. Evaluating and improving quizzes, assignments, or presentations while maintaining the integrity of the course and curricular objectives.

Instructors also indicate that they use information gathered from online courses in making adjustments to the instructional design of face-to-face versions of the same courses.

At ECC, instructors are responsible for the entire design process, the entire content, and the various pedagogies for a given course and are responsible for the development of online courses. Working with the dean, an instructor proposes the development of a new online class to obtain dean's approval. The dean monitors the progress of the development. Once the course receives approval for development, the instructor is encouraged to work with the Instructional Design/Technology Specialist to determine the best way to proceed. Based on the Distance Learning Advisory Committee's input, the Distance Learning Department recommends at least a 6 – 8 month period for development. Prior to beginning this development, instructors are required to participate in training on the use of the course management system. This training

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combines software training with best practices for instructional design of online classes. The training currently consists of the following:

- A 120-minute overview of the course management system, including training on setting preferences and navigating the system.
- A 6-week online course “Techniques for Managing the Enhanced Classroom.”
- An 8-week online course “Online Instruction and Assessment Practices.”

In addition to the two online courses, face-to-face offerings are available for those instructors who would like more focused hands-on training. These four workshops include:

- D2L Session 2: Content
- D2L Session 3: Online Grade Book
- D2L Session 4: Communication, Email, Chat, News, and Discussion Board
- D2L Session 5: Assessment, Surveys and Online Quiz Tool

Once the course has been developed, the instructor is contractually required to deliver the course to the dean three months prior to the offering date (Appendix B) (Elgin Community College & Elgin Community College Faculty Association, 2007, p 17). The dean reviews the course with the instructor following the checklist provided by Distance Learning. If the course meets the expectation of the dean, the course is approved and is opened up for the new semester. If the course is not accepted, the instructor is encouraged to continue working with the Instructional Design/Technology Specialist to improve its development.

Throughout the development process, the Distance Learning Department is available for support and guidance from software training to instructional design with accessible one-on-one assistance available as needed. The Distance Learning Department supports the development of online classes by providing training, a development template, and the QOCI rubric for development. Distance Learning also provides feedback to the instructors by communicating student questions with recommendations of how to better meet student expectations of online learning environments. These recommendations include instructions to students on how to begin a class and discussions on how to utilize tools most effectively to meet their needs.

Technology for Teaching and Learning

ECC currently contracts with Desire2Learn (D2L) to host the course management system. This hosting agreement consists of server maintenance and software maintenance, including load balancing and redundant systems (Appendix N). In the 2 ½ years since implementing D2L, the server has gone down twice outside of planned updates; the longest time was just over 3 hours. The service provided by D2L in this context has been satisfactory.

To communicate software updates and potential down times, the Instructional Technology/Distance Learning Specialist (D2L administrator) contacts all faculty using D2L by e-mail to alert them about the potential issues. The D2L administrator also announces any downtime through the D2L News function, which allows him to communicate with all users of the server directly, including students. If the server goes down and students are unable to access the system, the D2L administrator contacts IT to post a notice on the ECC webpage to provide

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students with updates as necessary.

Updates are made to the system on a monthly basis (4th Sunday of each month from 1:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. EST), and major updates are scheduled weeks in advance to minimize potential confusion or problems. Major updates are also scheduled during down times to minimize the impact on students and instructors. Any interface changes are announced, and additional training is made available for staff.

For any changes and issues (down time, etc.) with D2L, e-mail messages, news postings, emergency notices are used to inform all the users of the system. This process is an established standard service either in the contract or in internal office procedures.

Technical Support to Teaching and Learning

The Distance Learning Department supports faculty, students and staff with a team of an Associate Dean, a Program Coordinator, an Instructional Design/Technology Specialist, a Distance Learning Assistant, a Distance Learning Clerk (part-time for evening services), and a Technical Assistant shared with CETL. Two staff members are designated to provide student support and two staff members are designated to provide support for faculty.

The Distance Learning Department works closely with the Information Technology Department (IT) to make sure that everyone using distance learning tools has the support needed. Normal support hours from Distance Learning are from 8:30 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. Monday – Thursday, and 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. on Friday. Students are provided with a hotline that they can call during and after these hours, which will prompt the student or faculty member to leave a message after hours. In order to facilitate the fastest response time, priority is given to responding to these calls at the start of the next work day by the Instructional Technology/Distance Learning Specialist and the Distance Learning Assistant.

To assure quality service to students and faculty, Distance Learning is working with IT to setup a campus TrackIt system: helpdesk software that will track all services related to supporting students and faculty. The system will help us understand what services are needed and at what point services will need to be expanded. As part of the TrackIt system, students and instructors will be able to request help through a web form, which will be routed to the appropriate support personnel. Once fully implemented, all users will have the choice to either call or fill out the online form for support. In either situation, student or faculty issues will be addressed as a priority on the next work day. The software was installed to use for Fall 2007; however, because of configuration issues, it was not fully implemented. Status of the project is being examined, with full roll-out expected for Summer 2008.

Although 24/7 support service to students and faculty is not available, by utilizing the tools discussed above and making the support to an individual a priority, Distance Learning will be able to provide service in a timely manner, with most issues being addressed within a 24-hour period.

Partnerships in Asynchronous Environments

Throughout its endeavors into distance learning, ECC has worked collaboratively with partners and sister organizations throughout the state in order to maximize its potential in distance learning. Past efforts include interactive television through the Fox River Higher Education Consortium (FRHEC) and the development of a hybrid Clinical Lab Technology (CLT) program.

Through partnering with the FRHEC, ECC offered interactive television courses until it was determined that interactive television was not a viable solution for ECC. As mentioned earlier, when the Consortium dissolved, it was no longer economically viable for ECC to continue supporting the environment.

ECC's CLT program partnered with three other programs to investigate the possibility of using online instruction to provide a more flexible learning environment for students. In 2001 this consortium of four schools received an ILCCO grant to develop hybrid online courses. Over three years, six hybrid online courses were developed on a common course management system. All six courses were shared among the four schools (Elgin Community College, 2006c). Since then, the schools began to pursue new directions. Today each school is still using online materials, but considerable revisions have been made to meet individual program needs. At ECC, the courses were reformatted to be delivered through the D2L course management system. Since moving to the online environment, enrollments and certification pass rates have improved. Students and faculty alike have commented that the courses are now more structured and provide new creative opportunities for both teaching and learning.

Current collaborating partners include:

1. Illinois: The Next Century Network (ICN)

ECC is a partner with ICN, which provides high bandwidth connections to educational institutions throughout the state. Illinois: The Next Century Network is an initiative to revisit the vision of original Illinois Century Network and to build a strategy to take the ICN into the future.

2. Illinois Virtual Campus (IVC)/IVCTutor

IVC is a statewide organization that serves as a support service for students in Illinois Higher Education Institutions. In addition to providing a clearinghouse of online classes for students statewide, IVC provided IVCTutor for a nominal fee until summer of 2007. IVCTutor was an online tutoring service that gave all students at participating institutions access to tutoring services from any computer connected to the Internet. Although the service did not have 24 hour coverage, there was a mix of synchronous and asynchronous assistance to meet the students' needs and preferences. Since the closing of IVCTutor, ECC is exploring other products for providing online tutoring services including implementing a local instance of the IVCTutor software.

3. Illinois Online Network (ION)

Part of IVC, ION, is made up of all community colleges in the state of Illinois and provides faculty development opportunities in the area of online course development and

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online pedagogy/andragogy. Programs offered by ION include:

- Faculty Summer Institute (FSI) – FSI is an early summer three-day conference that provides both hands-on and theory-into-practice workshops to faculty. The focus of FSI is to train faculty who are new to the development of online learning environments.
- Making the Virtual Classroom a Reality (MVCR) – MVCR is an online certificate program offered by IVC/ION. Upon completion of the program, participants receive a Master Online Teacher certificate. The MVCR series of online faculty development courses is designed to help faculty members acquire skills and knowledge needed to teach online. Courses include but are not limited to:
 - Time Management for Online Instructors
 - Tutoring Online: Principles and Practice
 - Synchronous Classrooms
 - Supporting Online Students
 - Copyright, the TEACH Act, and Intellectual Property Issues in Education
 - Web Design Principles for Online Educators
 - Multimedia Principles for Online Educators

At this time, 45 ECC instructors have registered for access to MVCR; 28 have taken a total of 68 workshops; with 2 completing, and 1 almost completing the Master Online Teacher Certificate.

4. Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO)

ILCCO provides support for development and distribution of Internet classes among member colleges. Approximately 20 colleges participate in the consortium, whose major emphasis is the streamlined sharing of courses and programs between schools when alternatives do not exist on the home campus. Students can take a class through their home institution, which is delivered as part of a partner school's distance learning program. Student support and financial facilitation are also part of the program. ILCCO provides our students with opportunities that have not yet been implemented on the campus.

ILCCO also provides a number of professional development opportunities for instructors interested in exploring various topics related to online learning. Some topics have included: Converting your face-to-face class to an online class; Podcasting 101; and Hybrid learning environments: Best practices. ILCCO is also a premium sponsor of the Illinois Online Conference (IOC), hosted by Lake Land Community College. All ILCCO member institutions get five free seats to the conference. IOC is a half-week online professional development opportunity for instructors, administrators, and distance learning support personnel.

5. Network of Illinois Learning Resources in Community Colleges (NILRC)

NILRC is one of our consortial purchasing agents for telecourse materials, library databases, and other proprietary and subscription learning resources. NILRC is making a concerted effort to examine its role in supporting distance learning in the future, as its

role for distributing telecourses has been declining in recent years. Its past roles (as relating to telecourse purchasing) are becoming obsolete because of the developments of digital and on demand technologies, and a task force has been initiated to identify new directions. A member of ECC distance learning staff represents the college on this task force for the coming year. ECC currently uses NILRC for the purchase of telecourse licenses and CD-ROM's. ECC library purchases several databases through the consortium, many of which are available online for student use. Those that are not available are limited because of license restrictions (Appendix O).

Agreements and Services

ECC maintains a number of partnerships and agreements in order to provide the most effective online learning environments to its students. With the collaborative partners listed above, these partnerships are the tools by which we strive for excellence:

1. Desire2Learn (D2L)

ECC has an agreement with D2L for the course management system. All courses delivered online are offered on this platform. According to the agreement with D2L, our implementation is hosted off site by the company. For implementation, D2L coordinates all system and software upgrades and monitors the load on the system. When necessary, D2L provides the support of adjusting the system, tweaking it to maximize performance, including load balancing the connection to the Internet. When updates are available, D2L works with ECC to determine the best timeframe for implementation.

In addition to the platform license, D2L also offers consulting services related to customizing the system to our needs. In Spring 2006, D2L was integrated with Datatel, our student information and course information system. This integration freed up many hours of work at the start of each semester. When and if circumstances allow, future projects will include the integration of student e-mail, single sign-on, and grade submissions.

2. Wimba

Wimba LiveClassroom is a synchronous learning environment. A pilot of class use was implemented in the middle of FY 05. The pilot was implemented for two years, and the program was discontinued because of its non-critical nature. ECC continues to explore various options for a robust synchronous learning environment, including Wimba LiveClassroom and Elluminate.

3. WebBoard

WebBoard provides a robust asynchronous discussion board environment that includes chat rooms, document attachments, and e-mail interface. WebBoard is no longer available on campus as it was officially replaced by D2L with its discussion board. At this time there are no plans to reinstate the WebBoard Server; however, opportunities related to co-curricular activities and non-credit offerings are being explored, which may result in revisiting the decision.

4. QuickTime/Apple

In order to facilitate the easy adoption of Podcasting into online learning environments, ECC purchased several Apple PowerBooks and iMacs with Podcasting software (ProfCast), and microphones. The equipment is available to instructors for check out through the Distance Learning Department. Support personnel are available to provide training at the request of the instructor and through scheduled training sessions offered by CETL.

- 5. Annenberg Media, Coast Learning Systems, Dallas Telelearning; and NILRC**
Coast, Dallas, and Annenberg provide our stored media courses (telecourses). Each year, ECC pays licensing fees for distribution rights to these materials. Currently, the Distance Learning Department is working to help streamline student access to these materials by making it possible to purchase the videos through the Bookstore. This streamlined access was not a viable option until digital versions of the videos were available. Many of the videos are also available online for viewing. In addition, distribution rights include the ability to broadcast the videos on television. Ordering for these materials is conducted through NILRC (discussed above.)

III. Faculty Support

Distance Learning Department: An Academic Support Unit

ECC provides comparable services to distance learning students as it does to students in traditional programs. All services are available at a distance. As all online courses and programs (as the traditional counterparts) are under supervision of instructional deans, ECC's Distance Learning Department is to provide support to instruction and learning in distance learning modalities. Distance Learning is responsible for training faculty to use technology to enhance instruction and training faculty to design and develop new online courses. The instructional divisions are responsible for assigning faculty to teach distance learning classes and are responsible for curriculum development, learning assessment, and faculty evaluation. Distance Learning Department has a team of an Associate Dean, a Program Coordinator, an Instructional Design/Technology Specialist, a Distance Learning Assistant, Distance Learning Clerk (part-time for evening services), and a Technical Assistant shared with CETL. A part-time administrative assistant is also designated to provide support to the distance learning team. This team is dedicated to the unique charges involved in the distance learning programs. We have planned to add a part-time instructional design position beginning in FY 2009. This position will have a focus on the development of multimedia, rich content, and interactive learning modules (Appendix P).

Academic Support to Teaching and Learning

Faculty Professional Development

As discussed earlier, a reemphasis on distance learning was established in FY 2004. Since that time, new support and administrative positions were added, a course management system was adopted, and additional support programs were implemented for online course development. With these services in place, faculty can better take the initiative in online course development. Initially, new course opportunities are explored between the instructional coordinator and the dean. (Instructional coordinators are faculty who work with the dean, faculty, and community to

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implement activities including planning, scheduling, and evaluation within their discipline). The instructional coordinator then helps identify instructors interested in developing online courses. Those faculty members then propose the development of an online course. Once the proposal is approved by the dean, the faculty member is encouraged to work with Distance Learning for technical and pedagogical assistance. If needed, the instructor participates in a comprehensive training program. The CMS Selection Committee and the Distance Learning Advisory Committee have recommended that all instructors without online teaching experience take this training when they are assigned to teach online. This training combines software training with best practices for instructional design and delivery of instruction for online classes. The training components are:

- A 120-minute overview of the course management system, including training on setting preferences and navigating the system.
- A 6-week online course “Techniques for Managing the Enhanced Classroom.”
- An 8-week online course “Online Instruction and Assessment Practices.”

The face-to-face equivalent of the two online courses is available for those instructors who would like more focused hands-on training. These four workshops include:

- D2L Session 2: Content
- D2L Session 3: Online grade book
- D2L Session 4: Communication, email, chat, news, and discussion board
- D2L Session 5: Assessment, surveys and online quiz tool

ECC is committed to development of distance learning; the compensation for online course development and delivery is specified in section 4.11.B of the ECCFA/ECC Contract:

A faculty member will receive release time or voluntary overload compensation for the approved development of an online course equivalent to the credit hours of the course to be developed (Elgin Community College & Elgin Community College Faculty Association, 2007, p 17).

Incentives are also provided for participating in professional development through CETL. Such training opportunities are designed for faculty professional development; those who participate in the training can receive lane movement credit. This professional development compensation mechanism is also specified in the ECCFA/ECC Contract and professional development handbooks. Instructors are also encouraged to develop professional training programs and deliver them through CETL. Such professional endeavors are also rewarded with monetary compensation or lane movement credit as specified in the Contract.

Once instructors are familiar with the learning and development environment, they are encouraged to join and participate in the D2L Users’ Group. The D2L Users’ Group was established to provide support for instructors and to provide an opportunity for instructors to share their experiences in their classes. A variety of topics related to technology training and technology implementation, issues of instruction and learning, and support to students and faculty are presented and discussed at the D2L Users Group. Instructors take the initiative in

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sharing their successful experiences and discussing their issues from instruction. The Distance Learning Department provides additional training and discussions as needed. Topics include:

- Using module guides in online instruction
- Implementing really simple syndication (RSS) feeds in D2L
- Training on various D2L tools
- Adding audio to PowerPoint
- Creating audio and using it on the web
- Streaming audio/video in D2L
- Wacom tablet (drawing tool)
- D2L/Datatel integration: An update
- QuickTime server
- True student view
- Wimba LiveClassroom
- Respondus and D2L
- Creating interactive learning modules: Excelsius software demonstration
- What's new in D2L – version 8.1
- Loading publisher tests into D2L
- A rubric for online instruction: The Chico model
- D2L training schedule
- Using Acrobat to expedite grading of electronically submitted assignments
- D2L course model template
- Review of E-Learning 2007
- Online packaged courses and D2L

In addition to the D2L Users' Group, CETL works with the Distance Learning Department to provide training on technology, pedagogy/andragogy, and learning outcome assessment. Workshops include face-to-face training—ranging from 60 minutes to one day in length—Webinars, and online courses. While many training opportunities are facilitated by ECC faculty to their peers, outside experts are brought on campus a few times a year for new perspectives in teaching and learning.

The Distance Learning Department and faculty also work closely with other departments and personnel on campus to determine ways to best support distance learning students. Key supporters include academic computing, IT programming services, retention, counseling, registration, testing, tutoring, academic deans, and others. ECC strives to develop all degree and certificate programs online; therefore, student services, learning resources (including the library and academic support), and the IT Department are vital partners in ECC's distance education endeavor to provide quality services to both faculty and students.

Copyright Compliance

In 2007, ECC updated its copyright administrative procedure. A committee was formed to review the current administrative procedure including compliance with the Digital Millennium Copyright and the TEACH Acts. The committee was led by the Associate Dean of the Library and included representation from the library, distance learning, faculty, and administration. The Associate Dean of the Library also serves as the copyright officer for ECC as per the job

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description. The Committee was later chaired by a librarian when the Associate Dean left the College. The Committee collected information from various parts of campus related to intellectual property and combined that information into the updated administrative procedure. These areas included the Library, Visual and Performing Arts Center, Copy Center, and Instruction and Student Services. Copyright law related to the use of multi-media and digital information are included in the update. The committee compiled a copyright handbook that can be used by staff and students as a guide. Once approved, the handbook will be distributed throughout the college and be made available on the campus website. (Appendix Q).

ECC has completed the update of the copyright administrative procedure. As part of the update, the Copyright Committee will continue to review the procedure as new laws are implemented, and will also provide guidance to the college community. The Committee will continue to collaborate with CETL, Human Resources, Student Life, and the ECC Library on educational and procedural implementation. The library is responsible for educating the college community about copyright laws.

The Distance Learning Department and CETL provide workshops regarding copyright issues through various media: satellite, web and audio conferences. These programs are provided by various vendors including STARLINK, Magna Publications, and others. Distance Learning staff members are conscientious in maintaining compliance with copyright laws and incorporate discussions of copyright issues into training related to the delivery of content on the Internet, and do not hesitate to point out any possible violation of copyright laws when they work with instructors and students. All instructors are encouraged to put class materials in a D2L course shell if using the technology. The secure access to D2L provided to students helps ECC be in compliance with the component of the TEACH Act that requires materials be provided through limited access only to students enrolled in the specific class.

IV. Student Support

Student Access to Services

In the Fall of 2006, Distance Learning began an initiative to increase student retention and success in distance learning courses and created a brochure to highlight distance learning opportunities at ECC:

1. The courses available through distance learning modalities;
2. The support services for students and how to access those services; and
3. The skills needed to succeed in distance learning environments.

The material in the brochure is also available online and can be accessed through the ECC website. The Distance Learning Department began the initiative focusing on retention and success in telecourses and expects to expand the program to online courses as a pilot in Spring 2008.

Even as ECC looks ahead to improving its online course retention initiative in the coming semesters, numerous resources already exist for online students, and the college is committed to making services available to students for easy access at a distance. For example: the following

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services available to all students online, through e-mail and phone:

- Academic Advising
- Admissions
- Bookstore
- Career Services
- Enrollment
 - Registration
 - Schedule
 - Add/drop classes
 - Student Accounts
 - Pay for classes
- Financial Aid
- Library Circulation
- Library Reference Desk (also has instant messaging access)
- Student Life
- Student Records
- Students with Disabilities
- Testing
- Tutoring

Information about these services is available through the campus website and as part of the “Distance Learning: Learning Ideal for Today’s Busy Lifestyles” brochure. Access to library and tutoring services are provided through the D2L interface. As part of the FY 2008 academic goals, Distance Learning and Student Services are collaborating to create a plan to enhance these services. The plan will include analysis of current services and an exploration of how services can be expanded and improved. The timelines for implementation will also be determined. The plan will also identify potential technologies that might better facilitate these services. Incorporated in that plan, and addressed separately in the FY 2008 Academic Master Plan, Student Life is exploring new ways of providing co-curricular activities utilizing Internet technologies, including the opportunity for distance learning students to participate in Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.

As ECC looks forward to improving services for online students, the library is developing and modeling services that can be provided online. Library staff members have created learning modules for online courses that provide an orientation to library services available on the Internet. There is also a process for getting a library card online without having to come to campus. The card is needed to access resources at the library from off-campus. Library professionals and reference services are accessible through instant messaging (IM) during normal business hours, and the IM application is also embedded into new course research guides as they become available on the library wiki. In FY 2009, the newly created distance learning librarian will focus on library services for distance learning.

As distance learning enrollment grows, it will be imperative to allocate/reallocate funds and other resources to provide support for distance learning students. Discussions related to student support have led to the adjustment of job responsibilities in the Distance Learning Department to

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ensure adequate and satisfactory support for students and instructors.

In addition to the Distance Learning support staff, the faculty teaching online are themselves key in helping students succeed in the courses.

Instructors are encouraged to maintain high visibility in their classes by participating in course discussions and by communicating with students via e-mail discussion boards and chat rooms. Some instructors utilize chat rooms for online office hours to provide consistent and timely access. A distance learning staff member serves as liaison between instructor and students if there is an issue related to communication, if needed.

Until Summer 2007, online tutoring services through IVCTutor, were available for ECC students through IVC. Unfortunately, the service is discontinued. We are piloting in-class tutoring for online classes and are evaluating systems that could replace IVCTutor. Because we intend to facilitate synchronous tutoring, we are re-examining synchronous learning environments to support tutoring. The synchronous learning environments examined are Wimba LiveClassroom, Elluminate, and D2L's LiveRoom. D2L's LiveRoom is no longer considered as it lacks audio communication support.

Synchronous communication has been identified as one of the areas for improvement in D2L. While the text chat works as a synchronous communication tool, there is currently no whiteboard, nor is there audio communication, both of which having been identified by instructors as important to synchronous communications with students. ECC aspires to implement a synchronous tool to enhance instructor and student interaction, including a whiteboard and audio functionality. A 10-seat license for Wimba LiveClassroom was purchased in late fall 2004, with training offered several times.

In order to increase interest, LiveClassroom was incorporated into several D2L training programs as a component of using online technologies. The intention was to present the tool while instructors are developing their materials for online classes, so they will be more likely to incorporate the technology. Unfortunately, the endeavor was not fruitful. Several instructors received training in the tool, but none continued using the tool after the initial implementation in the class. Because of time constraints and the long learning curve for the new technology, Distance Learning stepped back to focus on promoting use of the asynchronous environment. However, the focus has come back to the synchronous environment as ECC explores the use of the technology to enhance and expand student services, specifically tutoring.

Currently, the tutoring center at ECC is using a general e-mail address (tutoring@elgin.edu) to connect students to online tutors. This e-mail address makes a base level service available to students. In Summer 2007, the tutoring center ran a pilot program connecting students to a tutor through their online English writing classes. There was a guest tutor in two sections with two different instructors. The students were instructed numerous times that the tutor for their coursework was available through email, discussion boards, and office hours scheduled in the chat rooms. Despite encouragement from the instructors, only one student actually used the tutor. The tutoring center will continue to use the general e-mail for other courses, and will continue to pilot the in-class tutoring program. Academic Support Services plans to have a tutor

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available for all subject areas that have online classes by the end of the 2007-2008 school year.

When a proctored exam is needed for a distance learning class, the Testing Center is available to assist the student in making mutually beneficial arrangements to ensure that the student has a quiet, secure examination. Distance students can contact the Testing Center through e-mail or telephone. Arrangements can also be made for any required testing related to the campus minimum competencies policy (Appendix R).

In addition to academic support, ECC also provides technological support to online students using our Desire2Learn course management system. D2L support is available through the Distance Learning Hotline. The Distance Learning Department has designated a staff member for student support so that student calls received by the hotline will be answered in a timely fashion. As discussed earlier, for incoming calls after business hours, the hotline will prompt the student or instructor to leave a message. The messages receive priority attention the next business day. As the program grows, expanded hours for support will be explored.

As ECC is a member of ILCCO, ECC is able to offer to its students additional distance learning courses that have not yet been developed at the institution. This membership benefit provides increased opportunity and scheduling flexibility for students to pursue their interests. Another service ILCCO provides is OASIS, an online assessment tool that helps students understand the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in online learning environments. OASIS is one of the resources for information available to students in the "Learning Ideal for Today's Busy Lifestyles" brochure. It is also available as a link from the ECC website.

Initiative to Improve Retention and Student Success

Student retention data is available through Institutional Research and Datatel. Section Four of the FY 2006 Databook was created specifically to present all course data as it relates to mode of delivery. The data is examined from institutional level to course level and are available for all members of the institution. Institutional Research prepares an annual report of all data captured and provides the data in the Databook.

Within semester retention is defined as the number of students enrolled in a course who do not receive a grade of W or AW. Students can withdraw from a class up to approximately 2/3 of the way through the scheduled term. Retention rates for distance learning are tracked the same as traditional classes, i.e., from 10th day to the end of the semester. Effort has been made to ensure that instructors comply with campus policies of attendance and enrollment. If a student has not logged into their course by the 10th day, and the instructor is unable to determine if the student intends to continue in the course, then the student may be withdrawn. If a student has not participated in the class by mid-term, then the instructor notifies the registrar who withdraws the student from the class. Distance Learning personnel are available to assist instructors in determining the status of the students.

Retention and success data is examined in two ways: first by grade distribution, and then by success. Success in classes is determined by earning an A, B, or C in the class. Students receiving a D or F are considered unsuccessful.

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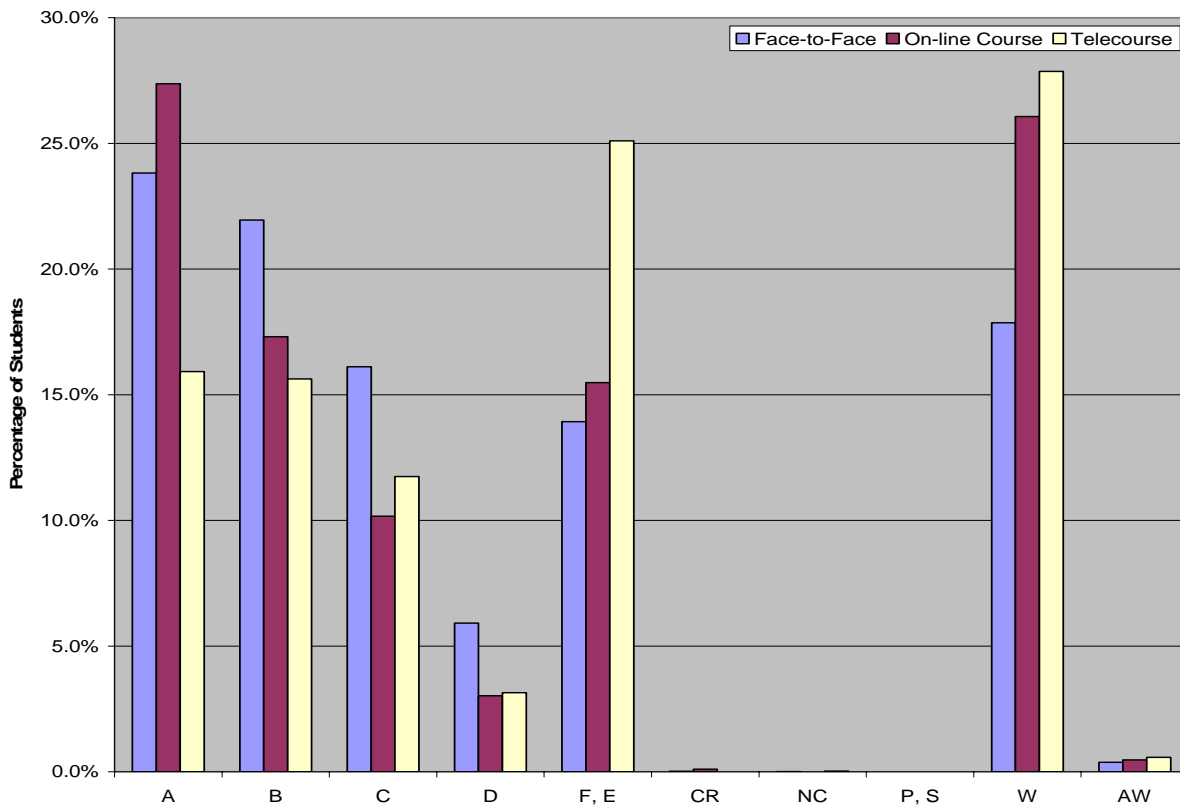


Figure 9: Grade comparisons between modes of delivery, FY 2006 - FY 2007.

Figure 9 shows the grade distribution for face-to-face classes, online classes, and telecourses. For this chart, only those face-to-face courses that are offered through either online or telecourse modalities are used.

The higher number of A's in online classes may indicate that those online students whose skills are suited for online classes may be more likely to succeed at a higher level than others. This phenomenon is also observed in the lower number of D's earned in distance learning modalities. The jump in withdrawals over the face-to-face modality also shows that students might be more willing to drop an online class than a face-to-face class. The ease with which one can drop a distance learning course could be part of the nature of distance learning. It may be easier to drop a distance learning class because of the perceived anonymity students might feel as it relates to fewer interactions with the instructors. Students in a face-to-face class have significant interaction with the instructor which may help discourage students from withdrawing from class. Research findings have shown the influence of student/teacher interaction to student success.

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When looking at general success rates as they compare to face-to-face classes, the differences between various modes of delivery become apparent.

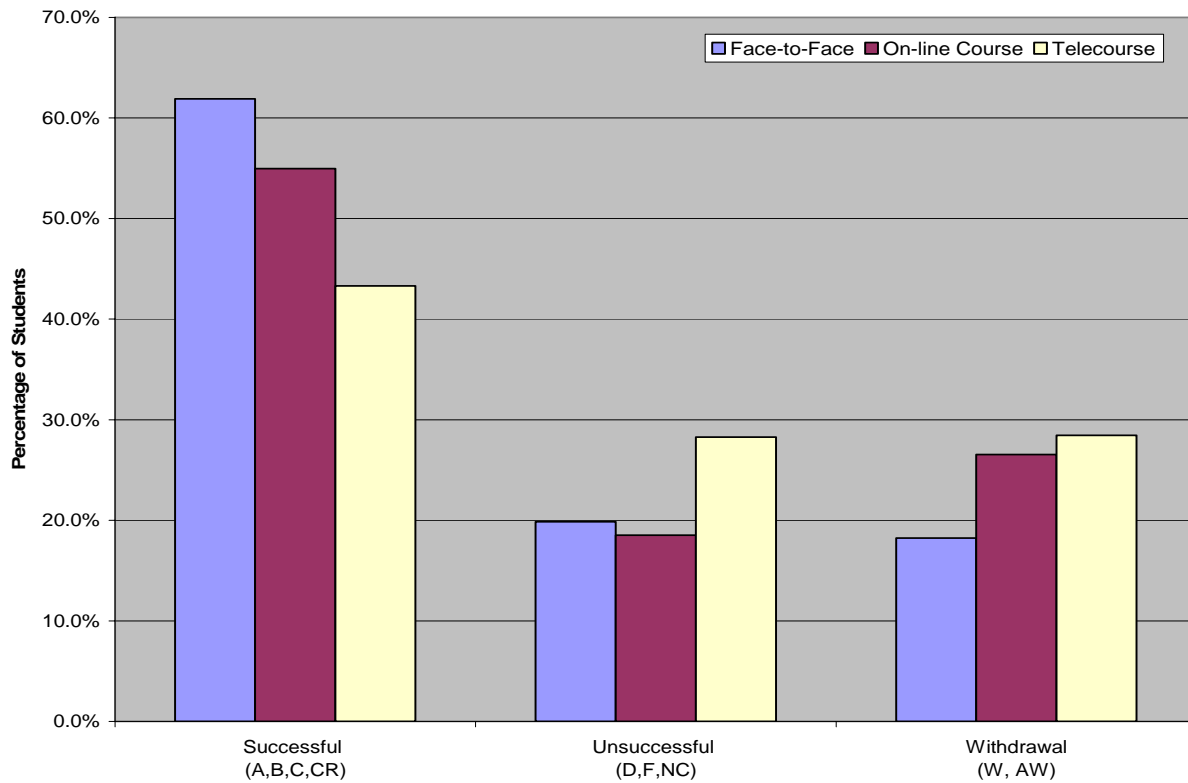


Figure 10: Student success rates by mode of delivery, FY 2006 - FY 2007.

This graph shows that distance learning students are less successful in completing their courses. However, the difference of student success rates between online courses and the face-to-face equivalents is not because of failing, but withdrawal. If retained, online students are less likely to earn an unsuccessful grade than students in face-to-face classes.

Of all modalities, telecourse students are least successful. Instructors have observed that these students tend to be students who do not keep up with their work. A pilot program began in Fall 2006 to address the higher withdrawal rates in telecourses. This retention initiative focuses on contacting at-risk students enrolled in telecourses and encouraging them to keep up with their classes, and reminding them of the skills needed to succeed. For the purposes of this program, “at-risk” is defined as students who have taken telecourses previously and were not successful and those students identified as “at-risk” by instructors through the early alert process developed by the Retention Department. These efforts will be expanded to include online classes if they prove successful. Future efforts will focus on assisting students in determining if distance learning is a modality that would be conducive for student success. A self-assessment tool is currently available to students on ECC website and in the brochure “Distance Learning: Learning Ideal for Today’s Busy Lifestyles”.

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Distance Learning has also developed a student orientation program, which has been offered to distance learning students at the beginning of each semester. Online orientations have been available since Spring 2003, and telecourse orientations since Spring 2007. Students participating in the orientation are encouraged to use the self-assessment tool to determine if distance learning modality is suitable to them. In Spring 2008, the distance learning student orientation was made available online, so students who cannot come to campus for orientation could go through it at a click away.

Protection of Student Identity

As part of the campus-wide initiative to secure student information, technological steps are taken to secure the student information transferred over the Internet. ECC takes any step necessary to maintain compliance with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The college has instituted a campus ID and secure password to access student information. Students can access their information through AccessECC with their student ID and password. They are encouraged to choose their password to include over 8 characters, using capital and lowercase, and including letters, numbers, and symbols. In addition to the protection of student information, login to the D2L system is through an encrypted server. The D2L system is setup to time out after 60 minutes of no activity.

Plans for expansion of online student services along with future development of distance learning programs will consider mechanisms for preserving the privacy and security of student information. Such mechanisms will include a student e-mail system that will be implemented by Fall 2008. While the e-mail function will begin as a service, it is expected that the e-mail service will grow to become a main conduit for information between the student and the institution.

V. Evaluation for Continuous Development

Outcome Based Assessment for Programs and Courses

The college has established the Assessment Committee to coordinate college efforts on assessment issues. The Assessment Committee has been conducting systematic learning outcome assessment testing for data to help determine learning outcomes for courses and programs beginning with the development of general education outcomes. So far the committee has successfully established the learning outcomes for general education and assisted faculty in developing course level learning outcomes. As distance learning classes are offered by each academic discipline, individual classes of the asynchronous mode observe the same sets of learning outcomes for traditional classes in the discipline. Therefore, student learning in asynchronous programs in distance learning will be evaluated as part of the overall course outcome and program outcome assessment.

According to the newly-negotiated contract between the Elgin Community College Faculty Association (ECCFA) and ECC, student evaluation of instruction is carried out in all classes each semester beginning in Fall 2007. Courses in non-traditional formats (i.e. online courses, telecourses, and others) will begin semester assessment in Spring 2008. Details of the implementation for distance learning courses will be determined by the Faculty Evaluation Handbook Work Group to finalize this component of the new contract.

Assessment of Student Learning and Support

The college has established the outcomes for general education, programs, and individual courses. The learning outcomes and expected competence acquired through learning apply to any modality of learning in the college. The difference exists between outcome-based learning assessment in asynchronous programs and that of the traditional programs is the design of the measurement tools (assessment techniques), which must be developed within the capacity of available technology we apply for instruction.

Assessment techniques identified and utilized by instructors (including subjective and objective assessment) are as follows:

- Providing discussion questions to focus students' study and to assess students' analytical, evaluative, and critical thinking skills
- Requiring proctored exams (utilizing sister institutions as necessary)
- Requiring a portfolio and/or special projects demonstrating mastery of concepts and/or skills
- Providing self-quizzes to help review information
- Requiring participation in online discussions and noting the quality of student responses
- Requiring submission of creative work for review, comparing this work to the assessments of the student's other work in class to determine progress and understanding
- Requiring reflection papers and journals to assess student understanding and application of course content
- Requiring profile introductions to facilitate connection between students

Specifically, differences in testing and discussions are noted by instructors as the differences relate to distance learning and face-to-face classrooms. As it is difficult to control cheating in distance learning environments, online quizzes and tests are mostly open book and are timed. Proctored exams are used when a focused snapshot of student understanding is needed, with arrangements for proctoring made for those students who do not reside within the district. Online discussions replace face-to-face classroom discussions. Instructors note that students seem to be more likely to participate in an online discussion than in face-to-face classes once the students acclimate to the technology. Overall, instructors indicate that they maintain the learning outcomes for all courses through all modes of delivery.

As the institution has committed to develop online degree programs, it has also committed to the support structures needed to make that development successful. Cost effectiveness of adopting online technologies is not determined by revenue generated by enrollment in asynchronous programs. The satisfactory experience of instructors and students using the technologies is the key indicator. When adopting new technology, the college considers its multiple uses on campus. For example: the course management system is not acquired merely for the development of online programs, but also for the development of enhanced and hybrid environments throughout various academic disciplines on campus. The course management system is also used for other activities, such as student groups and faculty development.

Our experiences have shown that developing and maintaining distance learning programs is not an inexpensive endeavor. The college mandates that resources be shared on campus for maximum benefit. Thus Distance Learning practices the following:

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1. Identifying those services and programs that would benefit from distance learning technologies;
2. Training those individuals associated with these services and programs in using the technology by incorporating best practices and campus policies into the implementation; and
3. Providing support for those individuals who need assistance in developing new services and programs and for those who revise existing services and programs.

In addition to general practice by Distance Learning, the Distance Learning Advisory Committee (DLAC), a committee consisting of faculty and representatives of student retention, academic support, and information technology, has met on a monthly basis to provide input to distance learning staff with new technologies, to evaluate the current status of distance learning programs and new initiatives, and to discuss directions for future development. DLAC has resumed bimonthly meetings in Fall 2007.

Continuous Improvement

The college's mission is to improve people's lives through learning, and the college has made its commitment to distance education as it provides the district residents a viable alternative in seeking education. Hence, ECC made the decision to revitalize its distance education in 2004. Two positions were created: an associate dean to lead, manage, and promote the development of distance learning; and an instructional designer to assist instructors in developing and improving online class design and pedagogy. A new position of a part-time instructional designer with skills in the development of rich and interactive content has been approved for FY 2009. Funding is allocated to support distance learning's operation and development—an average of annual increase of 20.4 percent from FY 2004 to FY 2008. Part of the project revitalizing distance learning in 2004 was to research and select a course management system. A committee was formed which subsequently made the recommendation to acquire Desire2Learn. D2L is used at ECC as the platform for delivery of distance education. Other equipment, such as the QuickTime server and Macintosh PowerBooks, was acquired while implementing the course management system.

In the process of revitalizing ECC's distance education, the college recognized the need for faculty professional development for upgrading their skill levels utilizing instructional technology to enhance instruction and learning, and for updating their knowledge of development in pedagogy and current best practices in education. In 2004, the College established CETL to provide training opportunities to instructors. CETL collaborates with Distance Learning to provide professional development opportunities. Topics include:

- Art of teaching
- Basic awareness of personality in the classroom
- D2L training:
 - Part 1: Navigating D2L
 - Part 2: Course content
 - Part 3: Gradebook and dropbox
 - Part 4: Communication tools
 - Part 5: Quizzing/testing

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- Effective listening for effective teaching
- E-portfolios for learning and assessment
- Faculty evaluation workshop
- Games and virtual worlds as learning environments
- Learning communities
- Learning outcomes and assessment
- Online instruction and assessment practices
- Reaching & teaching generation Y
- Teaching students with disabilities
- Teaching students with diverse backgrounds
- Techniques for managing the online classroom

The college emphasizes quality instruction and promotes continuous faculty professional development, so a healthy incentive system for faculty participating in professional development activities has been established. These benefits to faculty are delineated in the ECCFA/ECC Contract and in the Faculty Professional Development Handbook. The college also values faculty and staff initiatives in exploring new technology and educational methodology to enhance student learning experience. The most recent faculty initiative is an instructor's pilot of a synchronous virtual classroom through Second Life, an immersive online 3-dimensional world. To further the exploration, the college sent the instructor, the Associate Dean of Distance Learning, and the Technology Assistant for Distance Learning to Second Life's three-day annual conference in late August 2007. One expected outcome was to identify a well-known expert in educational games and invite him/her to school for a workshop, thus to expose our faculty and staff to the concept of how educational games can enhance the interaction between instructor and students and the interaction among students, thereby to enhance the learning experience.

The college's determination to continuously improve distance education is manifested in staff efforts. Soon after the adoption of the course management system, the distance learning staff, with the recommendation of the Course Management System Committee, made the decision that D2L would be the standard platform for delivery of instruction so as to provide consistency to our students. The staff, with recommendations from the Course Management Committee and later the Distance Learning Advisory Committee (which replaces the former), have also developed materials to assist faculty in their online course development and to ensure quality implementation and delivery of their courses (Appendix S). These materials include best practices for telecourse delivery, QOCI documents, recommended timelines for development, and other training materials. Besides the effort made to standardize the development process, the staff members of Distance Learning are working together with individual instructors, assisting them in resolving any issues related to design and technology. This work relationship develops into a rapport between the staff and faculty, thus enabling the staff members to introduce to faculty the emerging technology and new perspectives in distance education.

Distance Learning Advisory Committee (DLAC) consists of faculty, Distance Learning staff members, and others, whose charge is to provide recommendations to the development of distance learning support programs. The DLAC has met on a monthly basis to provide guidance to the Distance Learning Department on new directions and opportunities, and is currently moving to a bimonthly meeting. DLAC also provides input to the department on policies and

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course implementation to make sure that the department provides quality services to all stakeholders.

The Distance Learning Department embraces faculty initiative and supports both their new concepts and their drive for results. A specific example of continuous improvement is a module template (an initiative of an instructor) that allows instructors to annotate the requirements of a given module and provides students with a single resource for examining course expectations and the work needed on given modules (Appendix T). Students' daily interactions with instructors provide instructors with feedback. Student questions to distance learning support staff generate suggestions for improvement to instructors, who then evaluate the issues and implement the changes in their course.

Distance Learning is determined to promote the development of distance education programs and to improve the quality. In March 2007, Distance Learning invited a staff member of ION for a one-day workshop to introduce the Quality Online Course Initiative (QOCI) to the campus (Appendix U). The morning workshop was designated for instructors and what they could do to create quality courses. The afternoon workshop was designated for instructional deans who would review the courses with the instructors prior to the offering of the course. QOCI was also incorporated into a base template for instructors new to the development process. The D2L course template includes a copy of the rubric to guide developers with best practices in distance learning, along with recommended structures for content and communications tools.

To ensure quality development and continuing improvement, Distance Learning will continue the implementation of the QOCI rubric. Distance Learning will offer workshops for developers to evaluate their class in the process of development and implementation. In addition, QOCI rubric workshops will be offered to the instructional deans to assist them in their evaluation of the courses in FY 2008. Finally, the QOCI rubric will be reviewed by the Distance Learning Advisory Committee. We expect input and recommendation from the committee to customize the evaluation instrument to our own needs, with total implementation expected by Fall 2008.

Conclusion

This self-study of ECC's distance learning brought the Distance Learning Department an opportunity to review its operation and an opportunity to examine its progress, strengths, and challenges. The self-study process focused on development and improvement utilizing the criteria from Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degrees and Certificate Programs. The Distance Learning Department worked collaboratively with all related departments of the college and collected input from faculty, staff, and administration. The report is comprehensive in presenting ECC's accomplishments of distance learning, acknowledging areas for improvement, and providing a roadmap to strategically address the challenges for future development: comprehensive degree and certificate programs offered via distance learning modalities. As a result, the strategic goals of FY 2008 and FY 2009 emphasize imperative changes in the following areas:

- The improvement and enhancement of student services via distance learning technologies;

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- The improvement of retention and student success in distance learning modalities;
- The improvement of student self-assessment regarding the individual viability of distance learning as an effective environment for each student;
- The improvement and enhancement of synchronous interaction between instructors and students, and tutors and students through synchronous online learning environments; and
- The incorporation of innovative teaching and learning techniques into the online learning environment (i.e., games, rich media, etc.).

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