Creating a Virtual Learning Community

Winter 2002-2003 Volume 4, Issue 2

Online Learning Continues Amazing Growth

Tallies have been made for 2001-2002, and online learning continues rapid growth in the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS).

Overall, 75,415 distance learning enrollments were tracked in 2001-2002, up from 50,916 enrollments in 2000-2001 and 35,587 enrollments in 1999-2000, a growth rate around 48%.

For online enrollments in particular, numbers are even better, with 50,422 counted for 2001-2002. This is up from 28,262 online enrollments in 2000-2001 and 15,463 in 1999-2000. That's over 75% growth each year. And these numbers don't reflect continuing education face-to-face courses that have significant online components.

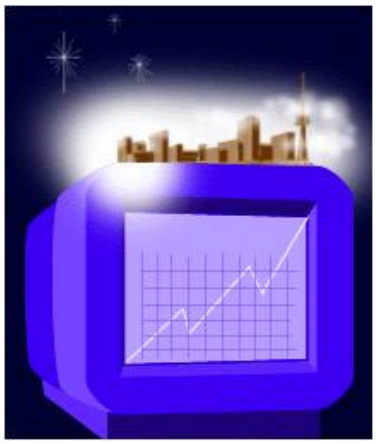
The average NCCCS college has now tried 59.5 unique curriculum courses online (not including repeat offerings.) That's a total of 3,463 courses that colleges have tried collectively, including 905 different courses from the Common Course Library from 129 different subject headings.

In 2001-2002, distance learning went from 4.3% of all curriculum FTE (full-time enrollments) to 5.8%. Online learning accounted for 4% of curriculum FTE in the NCCCS. Most colleges report that online courses fill faster than other sections.

In 2001-2002 Fayetteville Tech CC led distance learning enrollments with 6,465. They were followed, in order, by Central Piedmont CC, Forsyth Tech CC, Pitt CC, Guilford Tech CC, Central Carolina CC, Catawba Valley CC, College of The Albemarle, Rowan-Cabarrus CC, and Piedmont CC. For online enrollments only, Western Piedmont CC, Coastal Carolina CC, and Wake Tech CC crack the top ten.

Calculating online FTE as a percentage of all FTE at a college gives a measure of distance learning that does not favor large colleges. Measured this way, the top online program in the NCCCS is the College of The Albemarle, which generates 9.46% of FTE from online courses. Western Piedmont CC, Fayetteville Tech CC, Pitt CC, Carteret CC, Forsyth Tech CC, Roanoke-Chowan CC, Randolph CC, Stanly CC, and Craven CC round out the top ten.

Four NCCCS colleges had over 1,000 telecourse enrollments in 2001-2002. They are Central Carolina CC, Central Piedmont CC, Catawba Valley CC, and Wilson Tech CC.



Four colleges have over 500 NCIH and other two-way video course enrollments. These are Wilkes CC, Piedmont CC, Beaufort County CC, and College of The Albemarle.

Colleges that grew online enrollment by over 120% between 2001 and 2002 are, in order of growth: McDowell Tech CC, Cleveland CC, Martin CC, Bladen CC, Brunswick CC, South Piedmont CC, Sampson CC, Mitchell CC, Rockingham CC, Southwestern CC, Roanoke-Chowan CC, Gaston College, Nash CC, Randolph CC, Surry CC, Asheville-Buncombe Tech CC, Forsyth Tech CC, Cape Fear CC, Haywood CC, Robeson CC, Southeastern CC, Blue Ridge CC, and Craven CC.

A full set of distance learning statistics will be distributed to the colleges in the near future.

An Emphasis on Hybrid Courses

In addition to supporting online courses, the VLC now emphasizes "hybrid" or "web-enhanced" courses: those that mix face-to-face classroom learning with distance education methods.

Regional events are being planned to train instructors in skills of hybrid instruction. Dates and locations of workshops will be announced soon. Training will focus on faculty who have made limited use of online elements in instruction.

This training will cover topics such as:

- General orientation to hybrid instruction
- Building an online syllabus
- Creating a course FAQ
- Making existing documents available over the Internet
- Using discussion forums in the classroom
- Collecting, grading, and returning assignments with the computer
- Guiding student research on the Internet
- Evaluating and using web sites in instruction
- Building an online gradebook
- Using email to improve student results
- Adapting a VLC course for use in a hybrid classroom
- Sharing best practices used by NCCCS colleges in hybrid education

Why does hybrid instruction merit this attention? Increased use of hybrid courses will accomplish many important goals:

1. Mixture of the advantages of face-to-face and distance instruction.
2. Increased interaction of students, particularly those reluctant to participate in a classroom.
3. Reduction in the crowding of classrooms and other campus facilities.
4. Faculty preparation for online instruction through the "bridge" of hybrid instruction.
5. Reduction in paper use and photocopying costs through online documents.
6. Reduction in lost documents and assignments through online exchange.
7. Course advertisement and improved student course selection through online preview.
8. Easier on-going evaluation and improvement of courses through central posting of documents.
9. Smoother access to free online resources.
10. Increased flexibility in scheduling and reduction in commuting for students.

The NCCCS encourages colleges to document the number of students taking hybrid courses, particularly when the extent of online activity reduces face-to-face meeting time. In the new information system rolling out in the NCCCS, hybrid courses are included in methods of instruction tracked by the database. By tracking such enrollments, the NCCCS can document savings in building use created by hybrid learning.

Our previous newsletter also included articles about how to get started with hybrid instruction. Those articles, along with the full archive of past VLC newsletters, can be found online at http://www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/Distance_Learning/vlc_newsletters.htm.

Online Learning College Showcase

This article is part of our ongoing series about distance learning at colleges in the NCCCS. In this issue, we feature Guilford Technical Community College.

Hybrid Instruction Soars at Guilford Technical CC

Connie Cerniglia, Distance Learning Coordinator, Guilford Technical CC

Guilford Technical Community College has seen growth in **online instruction,** as have other colleges. In the last five years alone, our number of online students has more than tripled going from about 1,000 students in 1998-1999 to more than 3,000 during 2002-2003.

In addition, we have seen tremendous growth of **web-supplemented classes**. Instructors take advantage of a Blackboard site to extend teaching beyond the classroom. To begin, most instructors post their syllabus and course sched-

ule, reducing duplicating costs. Then instructors use the online grade book to communicate grades to students, protecting the integrity of grades and student information. Finally, instructors begin using the web as an extension of their classroom. Small group activities, Internet assignments, supplemental web sites, and practice quizzes all add to classroom instruction.

Students have responded very positively. Those that do not have home computers use computers in open labs. In fact, students now encourage faculty to have a Blackboard site. They like using the portal to see grades for any class or find up-to-date announcements all in one place.

However, our fastest growth has occurred in **web-enhanced or hybrid** courses. These courses combine some required face-to-face instruction with online instruction. In most cases, about 60%-75% of the instruction occurs online. These courses have evolved for a number of reasons described below and may be a solution for other colleges as well.

Course Development Needs About three years ago, when course development funds dwindled, faculty did not have the release time or financial incentive to develop totally online classes. Starting with a web-supplemented site and then adding materials to develop a hybrid class gave instructors a graduated approach to course development. Over two semesters, materials were added, tested, and refined, resulting in higher-quality materials than might have been developed in one semester without student feedback.

Lecture/Lab Needs Many of the hybrid courses developed naturally because of the need for a lab component to the course. In many cases (Biology, Electricity, Blueprint Reading, Welding, Networking, Information Systems), the lecture portion of the class—covering theory, history, and background information—can be taught online. However, students attend a weekly lab to get hands-on experience.

Student Retention In some classes, we found that students wanted the convenience of online instruction, but did not have the discipline, background, or study skills to succeed without instructor contact. Especially in English, Introduction to Computers, and Computer Programming, student retention increases when they come to class once a week. Instructors explain assignments aloud, demonstrate techniques, and conference with students as needed.

Instructor Time Web-enhanced classes also saved instructors a great deal of time compared to teaching regular online classes. During the face-to-face class, assignments are exchanged, general feedback shared, and instructions reinforced, reducing the amount of time that an instructor might need to do this individually online.

State-Requirements Basic Skills and Adult High School classes have been able to take advantage of web-enhanced instruction to increase student instructional hours in a limited calendar. Instructors use a Blackboard web site for structured out-of-class assignments or virtual instruction after hours, increasing instruction time.

Classroom Space Utilization Peak time periods require maximum classroom space. Some of our first web-enhanced classes overcame space limitations by maximizing use of classrooms at busy times—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 9 and 10 a.m. Using a web-enhanced concept, we put three sections into the same classroom since each only met once a week. On alternative days, instruction occurred online.

In two years, we have tripled our number of hybrid classes, from 20 in 2000-2001 to more than 60 in 2002-2003. More importantly, we offer students a full range of distance learning options from cassette courses to two-way video to online to web-enhanced to web-supplemented. Instructors choose the delivery-mode that best fits their course content, and students choose the technology that best suits their learning style.

Online Exchange of Assignments --Making it Work for You

Here are hints for collecting and responding to assignments online. Take advantage of them to make this task both easier and more productive.

Be specific about your expectations
Take the guesswork out of assignments by being specific about what you expect to receive. Be clear about the format and length of what will be turned in. Be specific about what the assignment file should be called and how it should be submitted.

Choose the right submission option for the assignment
Online assignments can be submitted via email message, files attached to an email message, Blackboard's Digital Drop Box (or its equivalent in other software), discussion forum posting, web site creation, or even older methods like fax or postal mail.

Generally, a method that can be completed over the computer at a distance is best. In choosing a method of submission, consider the likely format of assignments, the appropriateness of public access to the assignment, the extent of interaction there will be about the assignment, and other factors in setting submission requirements.

Set and follow deadlines.
Include a clear deadline for every assignment. This is critical for keeping students from getting bogged down. Consider offering rewards to students who turn the assignment in early to spread out grading. For interactive work, don't let every student complete the assignment on the last day, or meaningful interaction can't occur.

Make the policies for late work clear. Enforce the deadlines for some early small assignments closely, and students will get the message that you mean business when it comes time to turn in larger assignments later.

Use naming conventions.
Receiving a dozen files or messages called "Assignment 1" is a big management problem for an instructor. This will especially be true if some students forget to include their names inside the documents as well. Instead, you should be able to tell which student is turning in which assignment from the file name or email message title.

A good approach is to provide a short code that students can use in naming files or messages. This should include a brief assignment name or number and the student's initials or last name. If you are teaching multiple sections of the same course, include section numbers. Use a method that precludes redundant titles. In addition, instruct students to include complete title and contact information inside each document.

Store assignment files or messages in folders organized either by assignment title or student.
Whether this requires new folders on your hard drive, your email program, or somewhere else, keep assignments organized in a consistent pattern as they arrive. Rename the files as they come in if needed so that you can identify the assignment and the student from the file name.

Encourage students to save copies.
Many things can, and do, go wrong when files are sent over the Internet or stored on computer media. Encourage students to save copies of work and correspondence on their computer until final course grades have been assigned.

Provide examples of good quality work.
A great way to drastically reduce the number of assignments that do not meet specifications is to include an example of top work as a model. In this way, students will know what is expected to receive a top score. At the minimum, try to

include some of the criteria that you will use to evaluate assignments.

Use rubrics for major assignments.
A rubric is a chart that lists the criteria for an assignment. For each criterion, different performance levels are described and assigned a point value or grade.

Rubrics are especially useful in online classes because they make standards crystal clear. Students know in advance what kind of performance will achieve what grade. Providing them will improve the quality of assignments.

Creating a rubric takes time, but the results save time when grading begins and improve the consistency of scores across students. For more on rubrics, see http://webquest.sdsu.edu/rubrics/weblessons.htm, a site from the San Diego State University Education Department.

Acknowledge the receipt of assignments.
This doesn't have to be anything more than an email which says "Thanks for turning in assignment 2" or "Received!" If you consistently acknowledge receipt, students will recognize when there is a problem and not fret or bother you when there is not.

Use software to help you grade.
In addition to Blackboard's help in grading quizzes and assignments, other software can help you when grading. Try typing comments directly into the student's word processing document and returning it. Reply to assignments submitted by email, quoting the student message and interspersing comments.

Microsoft Word has advanced features under the "Tools" menu that allow you to make a word count or to suggest changes in a document that students will see as highlighted text they can then choose to accept or reject.

You will lose the advantage of online assignments if you do not learn to correct them and respond to them online as well, so learn the software skills you need to handle assignments on the screen.

Take advantage of online tools to build interaction into grading.
Instead of receiving an assignment and immediately providing a final grade, use online communication tools and interaction to incorporate revision into student work. Students will gain real world skills in responding to critique and learn how to fix their errors during revision.

Create small student groups which exchange and critique papers before turning them into the instructor. Require a round of drafts followed by revision before final papers are submitted. Use discussion boards, email, or chat in working through case studies, problem sets, or other student work.

If multiple students submit incorrect assignments, determine what went wrong.
Don't assume that fault always lies with the students. If mistakes are repeatedly made, the problem often stems from faulty communication. Take another look at the assignment instructions and see if you can identify sources of confusion.

Consider asking students directly about why they decided to do the assignment as they did. When needed, offer opportunities for revision.

Don't rely too much on multiple-choice tests.
Multiple choice testing is very tempting for online instructors because it can be graded by software. Unfortunately, objective tests are best at measuring rote memorization of facts, not application of knowledge, making them a questionable instructional method for many courses.

In addition, multiple-choice tests can never be completely secure when given online. Many techniques can reduce cheating, but deriving too much of the final grade from multiple choice is risky.

However, tests and quizzes can be used for many other useful instructional applications besides final assessment. Use them to drill students on new vocabulary and concepts that they will need. Build pre-tests to introduce new topics. Build problem sets or vocabulary assignments as short answer questions in quiz software. A good online principle is to use objective testing software to *prepare* students for

assessment instead of using the software for the assessments themselves.

Take a more flexible approach to grading in general.
In particular, consider more extra-credit opportunities, more choices between various optional assignments, and more chances for students to replace a course assignment with a project of their own design.

Remember, the online environment encourages student-driven learning, so it's only natural to consider the possibility that students will want more input into their assignments as well.

Be consistent in posting grades.
Try to decide in advance how long you will need to grade an assignment. Either make this a consistent period of time for all assignments or list the grading time in each assignment. If you keep up with the task of posting grades in a timely fashion, you will save yourself many email questions from students.

Connecting Online Students with the Real World—Facilitating Experiential Assignments

Although distance learning students cannot all meet together, you can still use "real world" educational opportunities in online classes. Such assignments provide a break from staring at the computer while helping a course appeal to a range of learning styles. Five major kinds of real world activities are common in online courses:

1. Print Materials
The simplest non-computer experience is use of print materials. While this is not a dramatic departure from the computer or an enormous step into the real world, it can provide a welcome break from screen reading.

Most online students can still visit a local library, and it is good practice for them to do so. Knowing how to use reference materials from your field is important. Introducing students to popular books and magazines on your subject is a good way to cultivate a lifelong interest.

2. Films
A further step toward the real world is the use of films. Popular movies and major PBS series are available on cassette at many libraries and video stores. Prepared with questions to answer or information to collect, students can have a fine educational experience while viewing.

3. Observations or Events
Observations can take the form of visiting workplaces, learning skills, participating in cooperative education, attending events, or simply observing behavior. If students can access the appropriate place, person, event or thing involved, they can complete these activities at a distance.

4. Interviews or Meetings
You can also send students to talk to particular kinds of people, especially those who work in fields related to the course. These people can also be met in virtual ways, but sometimes a physical meeting can be much more meaningful.

5. Student Interactions
While all students cannot meet face-to-face, some will be geographically proximate. Optional activities like study groups or test preparation might prove beneficial, especially to students with a social learning style.

OK, you're starting to get the idea of how the real world can connect with the virtual classroom, but how are such activities managed?

Real world activities should not be assigned thoughtlessly. Sending students to real people or events is unethical if nothing has been done to prepare the student. You risk embarrassing, annoying, or endangering the student or contact. The privacy and function of those they meet or observe should be respected.

In addition, some online students have very difficult schedules, live in remote places, or face limitations that keep them out of regular classrooms. This may be why they took an online class in the first place. To accommodate restrictions, real world activities must be facilitated carefully. Hints for how to plan and implement these activities follow:

Choose commonly available options.
Send students to find one of a broad class of people, places, or experiences, not a specific instance. A good rule of thumb is to think of what would be available to a student in a small town with limited transportation options.

Always allow options when assigning real world activities.
There will always be students who cannot access a particular real world situation. For them, think of the best equivalent opportunity that could be completed at a computer. While this may not be a perfect substitute, you should be sympathetic to students with geographic limitations, care-giving responsibilities, night jobs, physical disabilities, or mental health difficulties.

Prepare students for the experience.
Don't send students haphazardly into the real world. When making these assignments, consider the situation you are putting them into and prepare them appropriately.

Encourage good citizenship.
Give guidelines so students are as unobtrusive as possible. Make sure they ask permission or introduce themselves and their goals when interacting with people. Suggest appropriate etiquette. Avoid secret evaluation of working professionals or asking students to lie to people, as such activities display questionable ethics.

When appropriate, get feedback from those the student meets.
After sending students to an activity and then processing the results, invite an organizer or participant online for a question and answer session. If the student will demonstrate a skill, supply an evaluation form and ask the student to find someone to rate their performance.

Give students an assignment that will require them to process the experience.
Your students should have particular tasks to perform, information to collect, or questions to answer as they experience real world events. Encourage critical thinking, not mindless viewing of media or empty conversations. Relate the real world event to what is going on in the classroom.

Open doors for students when possible.
Through the Internet, help students track down the people, places, things, and events they will need for your assignment. When people are involved, provide a letter of introduction and intent that the student can share. Contact peers at other educational institutions that may be in the student's geographic area.

Send thank you messages.
When all is said and done, encourage students to thank anyone who helped in their studies. You might ask them to email a thank-you message and copy you as the instructor for extra points. Send thank-you notes yourself to pave the way for future classes.

Blackboard Update

Version 6 Available; When to Upgrade?

Blackboard Version 6 is now available. However, colleges should plan an upgrade to the new version carefully.

New features in the software include:

- Ability to copy or move documents or folders within a course or between courses
- Improved linking within courses
- Improved assessment engine, including math and science notation support
- Enhanced gradebook capabilities
- Improved collaboration tools
- Improved Digital Drop Box and other assignment exchange
- More robust architecture, with broader scalability

Early reports, however, indicate that the new version is a challenge to implement and that early releases still have a significant number of bugs. For these reasons, it is recommended that colleges wait to upgrade in the upcoming summer or later. The System Office server, including the VLC course library, will not be upgraded before this time.

Upgrade to 6.x may require increased hardware specifications at some colleges. In particular, the LINUX/UNIX Basic version of Blackboard will now run on the small-scale Oracle database instead of the SQL database.

One option to consider, if resources are available, is to set version 6 up on a secondary server while retaining the 5.5 server until it is confirmed that version 6 is fully ready for use.

Update on Negotiations for System Pricing on Blackboard

Negotiations continue with Blackboard to obtain a new contract for software pricing. The old agreement expired at the end of 2002.

Goals of the new negotiations include a package deal that will benefit both small and large NCCCS colleges. Another goal is to negotiate prices that will make purchase of products beyond the basic edition of Blackboard, such as the Enterprise version of the Learning System and the Community Portal System, a possibility for NCCCS colleges.

Negotiations are being led by college presidents on the Virtual Learning Community Steering Committee. A final agreement will be shared with the Presidents Association.

Colleges that have contract renewals due soon are strongly urged to contact Neil Hollands at hollandsn@ncccs.cc.nc.us for an update on the status of negotiations before renewing, as interim costs are part of negotiations.

Blackboard and Accessibility Compliance

Several colleges have expressed concern about the ability of online learning to pass accessibility requirements.

Currently, key regulations for Internet content are found in Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. A discussion of how Blackboard implements these regulations is available online at the site http://products.blackboard.com/cp/bb5/access.

NCDLA Welcomes USDLA Executive Director at Upcoming Meeting

Dr. John Flores will present *Partnerships: A National Perspective* at the April 9, 2003 N.C. Distance Learning Association membership meeting in Greenville, NC. Dr. Flores is an authority in the field of education, technology, and telecommunications. As Executive Director of the United States Distance Learning Association, he leads a global association focused on support, development, and application of distance learning.

Prior to this, Dr. Flores was President and CEO of Global Learning Network, a Seattle-based company focusing on development and broadcast of educational programming in partnership with the Direct Broadcast Satellite industry. In addition, Dr. Flores served as Executive Director of the Massachusetts Corporation for Educational Telecommunications (MCET).

A panel will offer comments concerning distance learning partnerships throughout the state following Dr. Flores' presentation. Panel members include Diane Lucas, UNC-TV; Dr. Cecilia McDaniel, Winston-Salem State University; Dr. Delores Parker, NCCCS; and Sue Scott, DPI.

The membership meeting concludes with the installation of 2003-04 officers and recognition of award winners. The NCDLA meeting will be held in conjunction with the Distance Learning Institute (http://www.ecu.edu/elearning/dli).

VLC Courses On Track for June Delivery

Over 40 courses remain on track for June 15th, 2003 availability from the VLC. Thanks to those who are working every day to get them ready!

ACC 129	Individual Income Taxes
ART 115	Art History Survey II
BIO 140	Environmental Biology
BIO 165	Anatomy & Physiology I
BUS 135	Principles of Supervision
BUS 217	Employment Law & Regulations
BUS 252	Labor Relations

BUS 256	Recruitment & Personnel Planning
CIS 113	Computer Basics
CIS 153	Database Applications
CIS 174	Network Systems Manager I
CIS 246	Operating Systems--UNIX
CJC 113	Juvenile Justice
CJC 212	Ethics & Community Relations
CJC 231	Constitutional Law
COE 111	Cooperative Work Experience
COM 231	Public Speaking
CSC 239	Advanced Visual Basic Programming
EDU 116	Introduction to Education
EDU 119	Early Childhood Education
EDU 146	Child Guidance
EDU 221	Children with Special Needs
EDU 261	Early Childhood Administration I
EDU 262	Early Childhood Administration II
ELC 128	Introduction to PLC
ELN 133	Digital Electronics
ENG 232	American Literature II
ENG 241	British Literature I
ENG 242	British Literature II
FIP 124	Fire Prevention & Public Education
GEO 111	World Regional Geography
HIS 222	African-American History I
HOR 160	Plant Materials
HUM 160	Introduction to Film
ITN 130	Web Site Management
INT 150	Internet Protocols
ITN 160	Principles of Web Design
LEX 240	Family Law
MAT 070	Introductory Algebra
MAT 171	Precalculus Algebra
MKT 225	Marketing Research
PSY 237	Social Psychology

A list of the courses already available from the VLC is available at http://www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/Distance_Learning/vlc_course_list.htm.

Degrees Available at a Distance in the NCCCS

A list of the degrees available at a distance through NCCCS colleges is online at the site http://www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/Distance_Learning/degrees_at_a_distance.htm. This list currently includes degree programs for which all required coursework is available through distance education courses by one college by July 31, 2003.

Degrees that are currently available include:

Associate in Arts Degrees

College Transfer (A10100)
- Bladen CC
- Caldwell CC and TI
- Central Carolina CC
- Central Piedmont CC
- Craven CC
- Forsyth Technical CC
- Piedmont CC
- Sandhills CC
- Southeastern CC
- Surry CC

General Education (A10300)
- Central Piedmont CC
- Craven CC
- Fayetteville Technical CC
- Gaston College
- Guilford Technical CC
- Piedmont CC

Associate in Applied Science Degrees

Accounting (A25100)
- Fayetteville Technical CC

Business Administration (A25120)
- Bladen CC
- Catawba Valley CC
- Central Carolina CC
- Central Piedmont CC
- Coastal Carolina CC
- College of The Albemarle
- Craven CC
- Fayetteville Technical CC
- Guilford Technical CC
- Piedmont CC
- Pitt CC
- Southeastern CC
- Surry CC
- Wayne CC
- Western Piedmont CC
- Wilkes CC
- Wilson Technical CC

Business Administration-Human Resources Management Concentration (A2512C)
- Fayetteville Technical CC

Business Administration-Marketing and Retailing Concentration (A2512F)
- Fayetteville Technical CC

Business Administration-Operations Management Concentration (A2512G)
- Johnston CC

Business Administration-Electronic Commerce Concentration (A2512I)
- Catawba Valley CC
- Piedmont CC

Computer Programming (A25130)
- Catawba Valley CC
- Pitt CC

Global Logistics Technology (A25170)
- Lenoir CC

Healthcare Management Technology (A25200)
- Catawba Valley CC
- Pitt CC

Information Systems (A25260)
- Guilford Technical CC
- Piedmont CC
- Southeastern CC
- Surry CC

Internet Technologies (A25290)
- Coastal Carolina CC
- Fayetteville Technical CC

Paralegal Technology (A25380)
- Western Piedmont CC

Health Information Technology (A45360)
- Central Piedmont CC
- Pitt CC

Medical Laboratory Technology (A45420)
- Southwestern CC

Criminal Justice Technology (A55180)
- College of The Albemarle
- Fayetteville Technical CC
- Gaston College
- Haywood CC
- Nash CC
- Stanly CC

Early Childhood Associate (A55220)
- Haywood CC
- Stanly CC

Early Childhood Associate/Teacher Associate (A5522B)
- Haywood CC

Library and Information Technology (A55310)
- Central Carolina CC

Many other degrees at a distance are available through a combination of coursework at two or more colleges.

For colleges that are working to develop capacity to offer degrees at a distance, required coursework for the following degrees is already available from the VLC:

- Associate in Arts (College Transfer)
- Business Administration AAS
- Information Systems AAS

At the end of this year's VLC development cycle (June 15, 2003) coursework for these degrees will also be available:

- Accounting AAS
- Business & Marketing Education Pre-Major AA
- Early Childhood Education AAS
- Elementary Education Pre-Major AA
- Internet Technologies AAS
- Middle Grades Education Pre-Major AA
- Office Systems Technology AAS
- Social Science Education Pre-Major AA
- Special Education Pre-Major AA

Distance Learning Alliance Virtual Conference Recap

From January 21 to 30, 2003 participants went online to visit the Distance Learning Alliance Virtual Conference, the first virtual conference pro-duced in North Carolina. Over the 10 days of the conference, 431 participants browsed the 22 workshops and presentations available. Though most participants were North Carolinians, 25 states and two countries—Taiwan and Austra-

lia—were represented. As befits our thriving distance learning programs, NCCCS presenters and participants were among the most active.

Because of the online format, participants were able to "attend" every session if they wished. In many cases, presentations were more detailed than a typical one-hour face-to-face conference session would allow. Through discussion forums and chat, potential for interaction was high. The Parks Todd Award for best conference session went to Michael and Evan Ruiz for "Multimedia E-Texts and K-12 Teachers Earning CEUs."

Participation grew as the conference continued. In fact, the web site was left open after the event officially finished and the final number who enrolled swelled to over 500. The stage seems set for future conferences of this kind. The savings from doing the event online instead of paying for meeting facilities makes such events especially attractive. The Distance Learning Alliance has committed to another virtual conference in 2004.

Special thanks to Conference Chair Bill Randall of Forsyth Technical CC, and Pat West and Monty Gearhart, consultants who led work on the conference. Thanks to the conference committee, workshop-support volunteers, and other participants. Finally, thanks to Blackboard for providing server space for the event.

Available from the Virtual Learning Community

The following materials and services are available from the VLC. There is no charge for use by North Carolina Community Colleges. For information, contact hollandsn@ncccs.cc.nc.us.

Courses

Preview these at http://bb.ncccs.cc.nc.us:1677 by clicking "Course Catalog," then "Preview," and then searching for the course number or browsing through the folders. Click "Preview" next to any course name to get in. Contact your DL administrator or Blackboard server administrator to transfer the course to your college server for local adaptation and use.

Online Course Template (OCT)

The course you need isn't available from the VLC? No problem. Start from the OCT when writing your own course to save development time with pre-built materials and templates, to access valuable design advice, and to guarantee baseline course quality. Two versions are available on the server above in the "Support Courses for Online Educators" folder. Use OCT2 for individual course development. Your DL Administrator can set a copy of the OCT up for your use.

Principles and Techniques of Online Instruction (PTOI) Course

Also in "Support Courses for Online Educators" on the server above, this course covers major topics of online course administration, design, and pedagogy. It is designed for flexible use as either a semester-length group course or an individually paced tutorial.

Newsletters

Past issues of the "Creating a Virtual Learning Community" newsletter are archived online at http://www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/Distance_Learning/vlc_newsletters.htm.

NCCCS Distance Learning site

Use materials here to connect with others, find online courses for students, learn about online teaching, or get VLC news. The site is located at http://www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/Distance_Learning/.

Training Help

In addition to the PTOI course, the VLC has other kinds of training in development. The VLC coordinator can help connect your campus with needed trainers. Conference presentations can also be arranged.