

STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

**Online Help Desk
(Contract Renewal)**

Request: The State Board is asked to approve a one-year contract with BLACKBOARD, INC., in the amount of \$600,000 for the period July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009 to provide Online Help Desk services to all online learners in the NCCCS. The original contract was for July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2008. This contract is an extension of that contract for one additional year.

Non-Blackboard institutions will also be covered by this contract. Online Help Desk services offered by Blackboard contract are Course Management System (CMS) "agnostic" and can be effectively accessed by Ucompass Educator, Moodle, and Campus Cruiser - the three non-Blackboard CMS providers used in the NCCCS. WebCT is now a product of Blackboard.

Rationale for Contract: The NCCCS has been allocated \$605,000 recurring funds to provide Online Help Desk services to students taking online courses.

Online Help Desk service is required by many distance learners for technical assistance throughout their online learning experiences. The first few days are especially critical to the future success of first time online students. Available, accurate, appropriate, and updated information and support contributes to the success of online students in general and first time online learners specifically.

An online Help Desk is designed to provide students with reliable and well managed support service deployed to meet student needs quickly, accurately, and satisfactorily. These services can be delivered at significantly reduced prices when compared to either locally supported or outsourced offerings. Such services can also protect and enhance the intellectual property and branded assets of each college. Online Help Desk resources leverage a combination of high tech and high touch approaches to enhance increased student success and achieve measurable improvements in student performance. Resources include chat, email, telephone, and personalized support portal available 24/7/365.

Blackboard Online Help Desk is customized for individual community colleges using a template of 500 items that each deal with an area of college operations important to students. These include:

- Technical information - how to login to college CMS resources, how to access library materials, what computer specs are required for optimal operations required for online courses, and access to orientations and tutorials.
- Registration information - dates, places, prerequisites, procedures.
- Tuition payments and financial aid information - how to apply, deadlines, etc.
- Schedule of events.
- Class schedules.
- Contact information for faculty and support services.
- Online access to forms, college catalogue, and other information.

Research indicates that 90% of all online student questions are satisfactorily handled via Help Desk only. This drastically cuts the number of college staff positions required to provide services and improves the quality of service to those students requiring individual assistance.

Method of Procurement: In accordance with the procurement practice of the State of North Carolina, approval is being sought by outside purchasing authorities. Approval of the contract by the State Board is contingent upon approval by the State IT Procurement Office.

Contract Amount and Time Period: The State Board is asked to approve an expenditure of \$600,000 for a one-year contract for the period July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009.

Fund Availability: The NCCCS will provide Blackboard's Online Help Desk service for 53 community colleges contracted with Blackboard and 5 non-Blackboard community colleges.

Contact Persons: Bill Randall, Associate Vice President for Learning Technology Systems, or Sandra Williams, Senior Vice President and Chief of Technology and Workforce Development.