STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
Allocation for Virtual Learning Community

Request: The State Board is requested to approve an additional allocation of $325,000 to Surry Community College for the Virtual Learning Community Quality and Assessment Center (VLC) to develop and edit 20 online curriculum courses with enhanced digital resources and accessibility requirements; research streaming media solutions for colleges; and add advanced database analytics to the VLC website.

Background: The Virtual Learning Community is a collaborative effort of the North Carolina Community College System to increase the quality and availability of online learning and support services for the benefit and success of distance learning students. When the VLC began in 1999, its sole purpose was to develop quality online courses that could be shared by colleges throughout the System. In 2006, the role of the VLC was expanded when VLC strategic objectives moved beyond course development to support all functions of distance learning across the state. Centers were created to support professional development, technology enhancement, and quality and assessment. The VLC Professional Development Center at Wake Technical Community College coordinates efforts to deliver the training opportunities necessary to deliver online courses and programs based on sound pedagogy and the latest technology tools. The VLC Technology Center at Fayetteville Technical Community College coordinates a vetting process for learning technologies to address the rapid changes in online course delivery. Course redesign, editing or content development, research, best practices or standards development, and needs assessment are coordinated by the Quality and Assessment Center, as are any projects that may be funded through various grant resources or state appropriations. This center is tasked with the coordination of efforts by all three centers.

Rationale: Due to permanent reductions in funding for the VLC over the past six years, new course development has been limited and the editing of existing courses has been delayed. This has diminished the refresh cycle of courses and caused many of the 350+ courses to be out of date due to changes through the Curriculum Review Committee, Transfer and Articulation Committee, Course Improvement Projects, and other content changes due to advancement in content criteria or regulatory boards. Many courses need to be updated by the VLC to keep pace with these changes, as well as content changes mandated by the state for licensed programs. In addition to content updates, federal and state regulations regarding accessibility under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in 1998, require that all websites, courses, and digital content meet compliance standards such as Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 standards. The requested funds will provide for development and editing of the following courses: AST111, BIO111, BIO112, CHM151, CHM152, COM231, ECO251, ECO252, ENG112, ENG231, ENG232, GEL111, HIS131, HIS132, MAT172, PHI215, PHI240, PHY110, PHY110A, and POL120.

Reliance on digital content and videos requires that colleges invest in streaming media solutions which often involve large allocations of funds and additional equipment purchases by the colleges. The VLC video streaming project will produce an evaluation tool to compare multiple streaming options based on research focused on the areas of integration components, license requirements, server capacity, hosting, archival provisions, and cost structure. The resulting deliverable will be a comparison matrix of streaming media solutions that could be implemented on a widespread basis in the NCCCS.

The third project will add advanced data analytics to the VLC website in order to provide comprehensive statistical reports of eLearning courses, programs, and resources.

Allocation Amount and Time Period: Surry Community College, VLC Quality and Assessment Center, will coordinate the course enhancement ($310,000), video streaming ($10,000), and VLC website analytics ($5,000) projects for a total allocation of $325,000, for the period of January 1 through June 30, 2015.

Fund Source and Availability: Funding is available from FY 2014-2015 State General Fund appropriations for the 2 + 2 E-Learning Initiative.

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