

Executive Summary of Delgado Community College's Quality Enhancement Plan

Title: *Going the Distance: Improving Distance Learning
in a Climate of Recovery, Regeneration, and Transformation*

Dr. Jerry Sue Thornton, President of Cuyahoga Community College, has compared today's community college students to "sailboats diverted from course with every shift in the breeze of family life, work situation, or obstacle to learning." For Delgado students whose lives were thrown into turmoil by the winds and floods of Katrina and Rita, the analogy is grimly accurate.

Even before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck, Delgado was committed to provide its entire community with the highest standards in information technology. Following the vast destruction of the storm, the College increased both the availability of online courses and the number of instructors teaching online courses. In accordance with the College's goal to "utilize, maintain, and sustain state-of-the-art information technology to meet the needs of [DCC] constituencies," the QEP revolutionizes the way the College provides online services and instruction. Moreover, through the improvement of instruction delivered online, whether partially or completely, the College will realize its overall goals of student success, persistence, and retention.

The primary goal of Delgado's QEP is to improve student learning in distance-delivered courses; secondary goals are to improve both student success and retention in distance courses. To accomplish these goals, the QEP will address faculty development and student readiness.

1. The faculty development component consists of a two-year cycle of training:
 - Fielding Graduate University's Teaching in the Virtual Classroom provides intense training in distance delivery and instructional design.
 - MarylandOnline, Inc.'s Quality Matters provides enhanced instructional design training and the opportunity for online course certification.
2. The purpose of the student readiness component is to determine and act upon any significant correlations between (a) readiness indicators, such as students' access to and experience with technology, attitudes, study habits, learning styles, motives for choice of online delivery, and past academic experience and (b) performance outcomes, such as academic retention and success. Correlations between specific deficits in student profiles and a lack of student success or a high degree of attrition provide the Academic Deans with evidence to address and remedy student needs. Remediation may include the following strategies:
 - links to external online tutorials;
 - a basic computer literacy course;
 - computer literacy resources imbedded within online courses; and
 - student expectations clearly addressed at the onset of the course.

A student readiness instrument and the resulting continuous improvement strategies for remediation ensure the goal of improved academic success and retention in online classes.

Finally, throughout this five-year, institution-wide commitment to faculty training and student readiness, continuous assessment of the QEP will ascertain that student learning outcomes in the distance education environment are comparable to the student learning outcomes in the conventional classroom. Contact: Randy Brien, Director of the QEP, rbrien@dcc.edu.