1. CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

In-process

Original start date: Oct 2012

Original projected end date: June 2014

Anticipated completion date: December, 2014 (as an AQIP project). This project will continue as a Department Action Project in the Distance Learning area.

Briefly describe the current status of project:

We have had to slow down the Master Course project to assure good process development and appropriate faculty support of the standards. There is a plan to proceed with the project with greater faculty leadership from the Distance Learning Faculty Advisory Board and continued support from administration in the implementation of the project. Other aspects of the project are proceeding as planned.

Relationship to other strategic initiatives:

In the new 2014-2017 GRCC Strategic Plan we have a College Action Project (CAP) to increase the readiness of students taking on-line courses. The purpose of this project going forward is to increase the success of distance learning (DL) students by addressing four activities:

- Improving systems and processes that prepare students for distance learning,
- Improving student support systems and processes related to distance learning,
- Improving the overall distance learning student experience, and
- Identifying and addressing other factors that contribute to success.

Consistent with the purpose outlined above, the goals of the project focus on three phases of the distance learning student experience—1) taking steps to ensure distance learning is a good fit for students prior to enrollment, 2) effectively preparing students for distance learning once enrolled, and 3) effectively support students during the distance learning experience. These are reflected in the following specific goals...

- Get the right students in distance learning courses
- Increase student readiness
- Increase online student support
Increase student success

**REVIEWER’S RESPONSE**

The project is significantly detailed and described in a way that clearly connects it to the "Helping Students Learn" AQIP category. It is clear the institution sees the project as having both a defined set of goals and outcomes initially, as well as an ongoing focus within the overall strategic planning being conducted for 2014-2017.

**2. ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES**

List the project goals as stated in the original project declaration along with the metrics/measures for assessing the progress for each goal.

- Increase the quality of experience and academic outcomes among students who take distance-delivered courses.
- Increase the quality of teaching experiences among faculty who use instructional technologies.
- Increase the quality of student support services that are provided online.
- Ensure adherence to internal and external policies and standards pertinent to distance-delivered education

The following measurable criteria will be used to confirm this project’s success:

- The achievement gap between students enrolled in online courses and those enrolled in face-to-face courses will be decreased.
- The presentation of online and hybrid courses and student support services will be consistent and uniform.
- A system for tiered faculty professional development that ranges from basic online/hybrid certification to master online/hybrid certification will be developed and implemented.
- Student support services will have a 24/7 online presence.
- Recommendations from accreditation and other governing bodies that monitor distance-delivered education will be implemented.

**REVIEWER’S RESPONSE**

The project goals are well-articulated. The project’s measurable criteria are solid at times, such as 24/7 support services being available, but in other cases more difficult to demonstrate. Specifically, the institution should strive to more clearly define exactly what “achievement gaps” it intends to measure. These could be course grades or scores on standardized assessments completed by students in both online and on-campus courses, or still other learning measures. As well, recommendations from accreditation bodies geared toward improving distance education should not be considered a measurable output that is the result of having achieved the stated goals. Measurable criteria need to be things the institution can measure before and after, and then compare.

**3. ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR**
1. Help desk hours were expanded, as planned, to 24/7 Monday through Friday, and 2:00 PM to 10 PM on Saturday and Sunday. The service was not being used very extensively, so we did more communication to students about the availability, and hope that will increase the usage of the service. As a result of the usage data, we chose not to expand the weekend hours. (This addresses goal #3, and measure #4)

2. We piloted Respondus Monitor to assure student identity. There were several issues to resolve and the team worked on those. Respondus Monitor is being fully implemented this academic year. The next steps are to develop a policy requiring its use. (This addresses Goal #4 and will affect Measure #5.)

3. We have implemented a new SARS Early Alert System. This new Early Alert system works in collaboration with the counselor/advisor scheduling system to promote a faster, more comprehensive response to alerts that are raised by faculty, it is accessible on-and-off-campus to faculty via Blackboard, and it is much more intuitive in terms of its ease of use and functionality. The SARS Early Alert System was piloted in Summer, 2014 and is being fully implemented this Fall semester. (This addresses goal #3, and measure #4)

4. The Center for Teaching Excellence, Distance Learning and Instructional Technologies, and the Academic Tutoring Labs have collaborated so that a more effective student support service is now available.

5. Faculty members were sent information on On-line Tutoring to include in their syllabi, as well as directions for students on how to use the Blackboard Instant Messaging tool to access on-line tutoring. The service has been available through the last year, we have sent out this communication to encourage broader use of the service. (This addresses goal #3, and measure #4)

6. We created and piloted a Master Course Development process based on the Quality Matters standards during the Fall, 2013 semester. Seven Master Courses were developed during the pilot phase. One of these courses won a Blackboard Catalyst Award for being exemplary. The pilot created a great deal of controversy. The Master Course project came about through contract negotiations. The launching of the pilot was being done at the same time as the launching of a new Faculty Evaluation System. The controversy centered on the required training for Master Course development, which was the course design process, and the use of the Quality Matters standards, a decision that had been made without sufficient input from faculty members. At the time, the use of the standards made sense – they were consistent with the standards we had been using for years with the additional benefits of being somewhat better organized in rubrics and more clearly defined. Following the pilot, we felt we needed to go back to the drawing board and assure faculty ownership of the standards. The task went to the Faculty Distance Learning Advisory Board, who began work on developing revised standards in the Winter, 2014 semester. The standards are scheduled to come to AGC this Fall for their endorsement. In the meantime, the Dean of Instructional Support will be meeting with departments to discuss their Master Course development needs and plans. We will resume the projects as soon as the standards are in place. (This addresses goals #1, 2, and 4. When fully in place it will affect measures #1, 2, and 5.)

7. Universal Design principles and Copyright compliance have been integrated into the Master Course Development process. We also passed a policy on the accessibility of course materials and revised our copyright policy for clarity. (This addresses goals #1 and 4, and contributes to measures #2 and 5)

8. The Faculty Distance Learning Advisory Board is also developing a proposal for AGC related to required student preparation for taking online courses. (This addresses goal #1 and when fully implemented will affect measures #1 and 5)

9. The Associate Dean of Instructional Support has been working through the Winter and Summer semesters to frame a planning process for the future of Distance Learning and Instructional
Technologies at GRCC. He has been meeting regularly with IT to discuss collaboration between instructional support and IT, has been benchmarking how other institutions organize their Distance Learning programs, has been doing research on Distance Learning infrastructure, and is participating in the \storage.grcc.edu\shared\Units\DLT\PMS\Distance Learning\coil.su.edu\ielol\Institute for Engaged Leadership in Online Learning. The work of our current action project is addressing the recommendations from our HLC Distance Learning visit in 2012 and we will make all the suggested improvements. The new planning process we are undertaking will help us look even more systematically at our systems and develop the structures we need to build for the future.

REVIEWER’S RESPONSE

Lots of solid progress is described in this update of accomplishments over the past year. The institution appears to have utilized a collaborative process to navigate the design and development of standardized master courses, which can greatly enhance an institution’s assessment efforts; with standardized design and common assessments, longitudinal studies can be conducted to aid in the evaluation of student learning, and also help to drive design enhancement cycles into the future.

4. INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

The overall project was planned by a cross-college team of faculty and staff. The student support services enhancements involved IT staff, tutoring staff, instructional support staff, counseling administration and staff, testing staff, and faculty members.

The master course process involved Distance Learning Faculty Advisory Board, the Distance Learning staff and an implementation team consisting of Faculty Professional Development staff, Associate Deans, Deans in the operational support team. (As described above, the faculty involvement and leadership was increased after the pilot phase of the project.)

REVIEWER’S RESPONSE

AQIP Categories 5, 6, 8, and 9 appear to have been driven the design and development of this Action Project. The cross-functional nature of the planning effort and team involved demonstrates a commitment to improving student learning while valuing the input of multiple institutional stakeholders.

5. EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

1. We learned that our Early Alert tool has to be integrated with our counseling scheduling tool—this led us to changing to a new system, which we are fully implementing this fall.
2. We learned not to rush implementation of a new process—we would have saved a lot of time had we gone more slowly in the pilot phase of the master course development process. We needed more faculty involvement in the design of the pilot and more time to assure the pilot was well-designed before we launched.
3. It’s important to communicate in multiple ways and various time with students when new services are available.

REVIEWER’S RESPONSE
The institution describes learning that while the major thrust of this Action Project, that being the creation of processes and systems, as well as initial master course redesign efforts, can be completed in a year (or so), that the project is complex and must be ongoing. Assessment cycles, in order to provide significant insights into student learning, must be performed consistently and repeated several times. Only then can an institution make accurate statements about their data and use the data to inform redesign of courses or assessment within courses, as well as to refine support structures and processes. It appears the institution has built a solid foundation for ongoing assessment and continuous improvement in its distance learning efforts.

6. ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

The project was slowed last year because of the problems with the Master Course pilot. This part of the project will be more delayed, but it will be able to be accomplished, as soon as the standards are validated. We will continue to work on all aspects of this project, but are going to narrow our AQIP action project to focus on increasing the readiness of students taking on-line courses as well as continuing to integrate the various elements of this work into college action projects and department action projects.

REVIEWER’S RESPONSE

The institution acknowledges that the overall project is too far-reaching and significant to be perfectly suited for an AQIP Action Project, and has, accordingly, identified a portion of the overall project to isolate from the overall picture. This increased AQIP Action Project focus, on measuring online student learning readiness, should allow the institution to make certain support system and process adjustments that improve the learning experiences of new online students. As suggested earlier in this report, the institution should expend some effort identifying clear, measureable outcomes for this effort as those presented could still be sharpened.

7. PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIME LINE

1. We have a College Action Project (CAP) in our new college strategic plan to increase the readiness of students taking on-line courses. The purpose of this project going forward is to increase the success of distance learning students by addressing four activities:

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- Increase student readiness
- Increase online student support
- Increase student success

Criteria are based on measurement of the goals above. While additional criteria may be added, the initial set includes...

- Students demonstrate required competencies before enrollment in first distance learning course
- Increased online student support services
- Increased student utilization of online support
- Increased distance learning course success rates (percent of A-C grades) each academic year

The timeline for this phase of the project is:

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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>July, 2014</td>
<td>- Begin benchmarking with other institutions who demonstrate best practices in online student support and increased online student success rates.</td>
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<td>- Investigate internal data available (e.g. number of new DL students for SmartMeasure Licensing and orientation, Blackboard Learning Analytics, etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>August, 2014</td>
<td>- Continue benchmarking.</td>
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<td>- Launch online student success survey.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Review current online student support.</td>
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<td>- Begin review and revision of grcc.edu/online.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September, 2014</td>
<td>- Complete and gather data from online student success survey.</td>
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<td>- Bring issue of mandatory DL orientation to AGC for consideration and approval of policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Begin preliminary design and development of mandatory DL orientation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October, 2014 – August 2015</td>
<td>- Using benchmarking data, determine what resources are needed, what tools have been used effectively.</td>
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<td>- Develop the process</td>
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<td>- Pilot the process</td>
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<td>- Plan for full implementation</td>
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<td>- Request budget support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Implement</td>
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2. The Master Course Process is a departmental action project of the Center for Teaching Excellence, supported by the Dean of Instructional Support. Work will include finalizing the standards with the leadership of the Distance Learning Faculty Advisory Board (DLFAB), meeting with Department Heads and Program Directors about the courses to be developed, and refining the support structures to be used by the Instructional Designers. The goal is to have the process functioning by January, 2015.

| September, 2014 | • ISIS Dean meets with departments and programs to create a plan to meet their needs for Master Courses  
|                 | • DLFAB finalizes proposal for standards  
|                 | • Example course is developed  
|                 | • Standard template is developed  
|                 | • Instructional design staff incorporate template into process |
| October, 2014 – December, 2014 | • Standards are taken to AGC for endorsement  
|                 | • Plan is finalized – faculty developers are identified  
|                 | • Support materials are revised and ready for January course design work |
| January, 2015 – April, 2015 | • Master Courses developed  
|                 | • Process evaluated |
| May, 2015 – August, 2015 | • Next round of Master Courses are developed  
|                 | • Process evaluated  
|                 | • Plan for next year developed |

3. Increasing the use of online tutoring is in the Tutoring department plan.

The results of this project will provide new and perspective online students with resources that will help them evaluate their readiness to take online classes and promote the resources that are available once they are taking an online class.

| July, 2014 | • Establish review cycle for content and resources |
| August - December 2014 | • Review content and resources  
|                 | • Evaluate Usage  
<p>|                 | • Gather staff and student feedback |</p>
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| January - April 2015 | - Adjust processes as needed  
|                   | - Review content and resources  
|                   | - Evaluate Usage  
|                   | - Gather staff and student feedback  |
| May 2015          | - Make recommendations for continued use and review for changes  |

4. The overall Distance Learning and Learning Technologies planning is part of the Provost Office department plan. The plan will be both strategic and tactical and will assure responsibility for maintaining processes and standards is clearly assigned in the organization.

| July – December, 2014 | A comprehensive literature review of best practices, standards, and emerging trends in instructional technologies in higher education will be completed. This will include a review of the history of supporting online teaching and learning at GRCC.  
|                       | AD of ISIS will complete the Sloan Institute on Distance Learning.  
|                       | From the research and training, questions to guide planning and a framework for the plan will be developed.  
|                       | Background information from work with IT, information from DLFAB, information from student support areas, inventory of current resources and structure, history of DL at GRCC, data on student success and dl offerings will be compiled.  |

| January, 2015 – April, 2015 | - Using the background information and questions, meetings will be held with leadership and stakeholders across the college to develop a vision that clearly outlines the shared organizational values, goals, responsibilities, and expectations of online programs at GRCC.  
|                            | - A strategic plan for administrative support structures; policies; student services; technology support; schedule of maintenance, upgrades, purchases, discontinuation of technologies for teaching and learning; and faculty training and support needs will be created.  |

| June, 2015 – August, 2015 | - Plan will be communicated and presented for endorsement to Deans and Cabinet.  
|                           | - Upon approval, the implementation will begin  |
REVIEWER’S RESPONSE

The overall project framework and details presented here are clear, as is the separation of the student readiness aspect from the overall strategic institutional initiative. Goals articulated for improving student readiness are spelled out with slightly more clarity, such as improving the number of students who earn A, B, or C in courses, or increasing the numbers of online students who utilize support services, however the institution is encouraged to develop additional, ideally quantitative metrics, that allow for longitudinal comparisons of student readiness and success in online courses. If a readiness assessment is used, perhaps a pre and post-test approach could be useful, for example. If a new readiness process is implemented perhaps an assessment in one of the student’s first courses, aimed at measuring the effectiveness of the new readiness model, could be implemented.

8. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS

Reviewer’s Comments:

The institution has done well to navigate this AQIP Action Project to date. A significant step forward in the life of the project was the decision to separate part of the project out for greater focus, with an acknowledgement that the overall project is too large, strategic, and important to be regarded as a fit for an Action Project.

Great progress is being made, however the institution is encouraged to sharpen its stated project goals around measuring online student readiness and success.