

## **Report of the Joint Ad Hoc Committee of the Provost and Faculty Council on Distance and Online Learning**

### **Background**

In October 2007, the Provost and the Steering Committee of Faculty Council invited a group of faculty members to serve on an ad hoc committee to formulate policies and procedures related to distance learning at Brooklyn College. The committee, established in consultation with CAP liaison, consisted of four faculty members charged to draft resolutions establishing those policies and procedures:

Bonnie Gustav, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology  
Keith Harrow, Department of Computer and Information Science  
Sharon Anne O'Connor-Petruso, School of Education  
Mariana Regalado, Library

The committee was asked by the Provost to:

- Review the findings and recommendations in the following documents: the Preliminary Report of the Faculty Council Ad Hoc Committee on Distance Learning (submitted Spring 2007); the Advisory Committee on Academic Computing's Proposal for Institutionalizing Online Courses, Course Sequences, Majors, Certificate and Degree Programs at Brooklyn College (submitted March 2006); and other documents and sources of information on online teaching (such as those recommended in the report of the Ad Hoc Committee of Spring, 2001).
- Identify the elements that define a course as fully online or as partially online.
- Develop a procedure for the approval of courses (existing and new) to be delivered fully or partially online, presented in the context of the role of departments and the role of Faculty Council committees in existing curriculum development and approval practices.
- Address other questions that might arise, including: How will exams be administered? How will student learning be assessed? How will students be informed in the *Schedule of Classes* about the nature and any special requirements of online courses? What constitutes a suitable mechanism for peer observations of faculty teaching a full or partial online course? What constitutes a suitable mechanism for student evaluation of faculty teaching a full or partial online course?

**The Provost and the committee members agreed that the outcome of the committee's deliberations would be a series of resolutions to be submitted to Faculty Council.**

*Based on this charge, the Committee began meeting in October 2007. The committee corresponded electronically with a number of faculty from diverse departments who were teaching fully online courses. During the January 2008 intersession, committee members met with more than ten of these faculty members. Based on these meetings, the committee prepared a preliminary report in May 2008. In the summer and fall of 2008, the committee met with the new Provost and made further changes. In the report below, we present our recommendations.*

These recommendations are divided into a number of categories:

- I – Recommendations concerning the curricular review process.
- II – Recommendations to faculty members who want to teach an online course
- III – Recommendations to students who are considering taking an online course.
- IV – Recommendations on Institutional Support of Online Learning

These recommendations are an attempt to ensure that the planning and review process leads to a successful online experience, one which is clearly integrated into the total curricular offerings of Brooklyn College.

## **Preamble**

The purpose of this document is to recommend policy and procedures that will protect the quality and climate of the educational environment as academic technology extends the range of teaching options beyond the traditional classroom.

Our pivotal recommendation is that the faculty of Brooklyn College address the process of integrating “all forms” of distance learning into the curricular process. Online learning courses and programs are additions to the college’s curriculum which must be considered in a consistent and comprehensive manner

Historically, faculty members at Brooklyn College have played a crucial role in the curriculum process, and this role must be extended to include all modes of distance learning courses and programs as well. All curricula is generated by faculty and approved by a department or program based on its defined mission and how the curriculum supports and enhances the established goals. Syllabi for specific courses have objectives that speak to the goals of the degree-granting program. The curriculum is thus a faculty-generated entity.

In particular, the committee strongly recommends that the Brooklyn College faculty begin to exercise the same kind of supervision over online learning. In addition, the committee agreed that all online learning courses and programs must be shown to meet the same standards as the more traditional courses and programs they parallel or

replace with clearly defined pedagogical objectives, outcomes, measures, and assessments.

Our recommendations are based on all of the following:

1. The fact that the College has been enjoined by both the State Education Department and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education to register programs “in the distance education format with the Office of College and University Evaluation (OCUE).” The State Education Department provides two “methods of registration.” The first is “individual review which can be used to add a distance education [learning] format to an individual program.” The second is in the form of an institutional capability review for institutions that have “fully-developed distance education [learning] infrastructures, expertise, and support services, and at least one program ready to offer at a distance.” Once this review process has been completed, all registered programs must be reported to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.
2. The guidelines from these two legislative bodies, as well as NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education), employ the following criteria for defining a “distance learning program:” a program in which over half of the required courses in the program occur when the learner and the instructor are not in the same place at the same time. This includes courses identified as **hybrid, local online, and distance education** (as defined in Appendix 2).
3. A resolution from the Executive Committee of the University Faculty Senate of the City University of New York passed at its Plenary Session in March, 2006, and forwarded to the Presidents and Provosts that all “new online courses and classroom courses converted to online courses follow the same governance process as the approval of new classroom courses.” The resolution specifically stated that “departmental and college-wide curriculum committees have the authority to examine and formally approve all such online courses, followed by college governance approval.” While the criteria for such courses are more vague in definition, the resolution also clearly applies to **hybrid, local online, and distance education classes**.

This document in its entirety sets forth recommendations for foundational structures that extend the roles and responsibilities of a variety of committees and offices of the college for oversight to newer modes of teaching and learning “at a distance.” The committee recognizes the importance of these newer forms of teaching and learning and forwards its recommendations, applicable to all credit-bearing courses offered by Brooklyn College, CUNY, and to all of its degree programs regardless of the mode of delivery.

## **Part I: Recommendations Concerning the Curricular Review Process**

The committee recognizes and has paid careful attention to the fact that online teaching is not simply a change in the delivery of material. It is a new teaching environment with its own methods and pedagogy. We have based our recommendations, in part, on the standards for effective practice in online teaching and learning developed by the Sloan Consortium, to which CUNY and, by extension, Brooklyn College belong. These are described in a comprehensive and exhaustive document available online:

<http://www.sloan-c.org/effective/index.asp>. In addition, we consulted the criteria for approval of distance learning programs articulated by the State Education Department and provided on its website:

<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/ocue/ded/individualprogramproposal.htm>.

### **The committee's key recommendation:**

All existing courses now being taught as hybrid or local online courses, as well as any courses being planned to be taught in these modes or as other forms of distance education courses, must be reviewed by the same curricular process applied to traditional and web-enhanced courses.

This will ensure the following (these factors will be elaborated in the body of the report):

- That the course or program supports the mission and goals of the sponsoring department.
- That the course or program is appropriate for the online learning environment selected.
- That the course syllabus clearly spells out the distance learning or online nature of the course.
- That the mission statement and goals of planned online/distance learning programs are consistent with the learning modes selected.

Under the conditions of this recommendation, approval will be necessary for all online courses and all planned distance learning programs, as it is for all other courses and programs offered in more traditional venues. This includes all existing courses currently being offered as distance learning courses and any programs which fit the New York State Education Department criteria for distance learning programs.

If a department wishes to convert an existing course (or program), which has already received curriculum approval for a traditional mode of teaching, and offer that course in any of the defined distance learning modes, the department must submit the following additional material for approval to the appropriate committee (Faculty Council

Presented to Faculty Council on 2/10/2009

Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum and Degree Requirements or Faculty Council Committee on Graduate Curriculum and Degree Requirements):

1. An additional curriculum document that spells out how the course will compensate for the missing classroom hours, while still covering the same course content and objectives – for example, online discussion groups, posting of materials on a website or Blackboard, ways for the student to interact with the instructor and/or other students.
2. At least one unit of the online course material that corresponds to one or two traditional lectures (5-10% of course material).

Some examples of these materials are included in an appendix to this report. (Note added on 2/10/2008 – in an effort to increase visibility, this material will be moved to the Faculty Council website, rather than put in an appendix.)

If approval is granted, the course will be offered with the distance learning designation. This designation should appear in the *Schedule of Classes*, in the relevant *Brooklyn College Bulletin*, and on the student's transcript.

## **Part II: Recommendations Regarding Faculty and Departmental Responsibilities Associated with Online Offerings**

- At least one unit of the course material that corresponds to one or two traditional lectures (5-10% of course material) must be available for review by the appropriate curriculum committee at the time of course submission.
- The mandated requirement for student-faculty contact should be extended to the online environment, including a clearly defined method of contact between instructor and students, and some type of regularly scheduled online office hours, and in-person availability to the students. In addition, there should always be a way for the student to schedule a talk with the instructor, either in person or by telephone.
- We strongly recommend that a clearly defined method of contacting students be part of the planning for each online learning class.
- We recommend that the instructor contact students via email as soon as they register for the course. In addition, once the term starts, the instructor should once again contact all students registered for the course.
- We recommend that instructors of local-online courses provide orientation at the start of the term, either in-class or via online methods.
- We recommend that online courses offered for the first time, either as new courses or online versions of old courses, should be assessed during and at the end of the first semester in which they are offered by means of an ad-hoc process to be developed by Faculty Council.
- We recommend that all course materials and resources be complete and available before the start of the semester, including but not limited to availability of an expanded syllabus when registration begins.
- We recommend that departments already engaging in online education develop a set of guidelines for best practices regarding issues of student contact, orientation procedures, arrangements for the distribution and collection of assignments, and testing, as well as other issues associated with the changes in pedagogy.

NB The monitoring of requirements and recommendations rests at the department level, with its Chairperson and curriculum committee.

### **Part III: Student Rights and Responsibilities**

Students in an online learning course have certain rights and responsibilities, some of which are special to an online learning environment.

#### **Student Rights**

- We require that, **before registering for the course**, the student be told in both the *Schedule of Classes* and from the department (via verbal communication, e-mail, and/or written documentation) that this section is being taught fully online or in a hybrid form.
- We require that, **at the time of registration**, the student be told of any on-site requirements for the course, including but not limited to particular dates (and times) for on-site examinations, including the final exam, any in-person orientation session, etc. If the online class involves a calendar that does not conform to the usual college calendar, these changes will also be noted in advance.
- We recommend that the student should have a way to contact the instructor via email before the start of the semester and the right to expect a timely response.
- We recommend that once the student is registered (or even before the registration process is complete), the student should receive a complete syllabus for the course. At this time, the student should also find out from the instructor the exact hardware and software requirements for the course.
- We recommend that if the student has technical problems during the semester, the student should be able to receive help from the IT staff at Brooklyn College. (It is not the responsibility of the instructor to provide this support. See Part IV below.).
- We recommend that the student be apprised of the number of assignments, due dates for the assignments, document types (e.g., .doc, .avi, etc.), where to submit/post) assignments (e.g., Blackboard or some other system), and so on.

#### **Student Responsibilities**

- The student who registers for an online course must be comfortable working with the hardware and software required for the course.
- The successful online student must be self-motivated and willing to work on his or her own without the physical connection to the instructor or the other students in the class. The student must be self-disciplined, have good time management skills, be willing to ask questions, be aware of the learning process and know

what he or she has or has not mastered. While these characteristics are true for successful traditional students, as well as for online students, they are even more crucial for online learners. "Given the physical absence of an instructor in online learning, the ability of learners to monitor and regulate their own learning is critical" (Dabbagh, 2007).

- We recommend that all distance-learning courses encourage student interaction as there are significant benefits to having students working cooperatively. In particular, we recommend that all core courses should have at least some student-student contact, since the core course is meant to be part of the student's "common" experience at Brooklyn College.



## **Part IV: Institutional Support of Online Learning**

### **1. Administrative Structures and Policies**

Successful online learning programs have clear institutional policies for online instruction as well as a strong organizational commitment (Tallent-Runnels et al, p.113; NYSED “Organizational Commitment”).

In order to effectively expand course offerings to include online instruction, significant planning needs to start at the institutional level. To date the Brooklyn College experience with online learning has been at the course and section level, and based on the interest and expertise of individual faculty members. For online instruction to fulfill the suggested promise of expanding our student population and helping to alleviate space issues during heavily utilized time periods, strategic institutional efforts need to be made.

#### **Key elements to consider include:**

- Ensure that online learning activities are consistent with the institutional mission.
- Show through our stated goals, policies, infrastructure, and strategic plans that we value and support online learning.
- Commit sufficient resources to online learning programs and support services, including but not limited to faculty development, learner support, and infrastructure, in order to ensure their effectiveness.
- Treat online learning equitably in all policies and procedures and provide necessary resources (human, fiscal, and technical).
- Establish clear policies for online learning. This should include support for evaluation of online courses as well as for curriculum and course development.
- Consider what existing or new administrative structures will be necessary for leadership and oversight of continued, programmatic development in online learning. NYSED Office of College and University evaluation Distance Education recommends that a single office be charged with responsibility for assuring the quality of all online learning.
- Develop student evaluation mechanisms for online learning courses, which may involve a somewhat different set of questions to be asked of students.
- In conjunction with the PSC faculty union, develop methods of faculty observations in online learning courses.
- Review, evaluate, and update where necessary the College’s Technology Master Plan to assure effective structures and policies, strategic goals, procedures, faculty qualifications, student pre-requisites, and “Information Age” infrastructure.

## **2. Technical and Infrastructure Support**

Technical problems and the lack of support to address them are major obstacles to success for online courses (Tallent-Runnels et al, p.114).

**To ensure student retention and success, as well as faculty satisfaction, in online learning, these key elements need to be addressed:**

- Ensure ample bandwidth for online courses, with the understanding that current bandwidth is not sufficient. Bandwidth must be structured to grow as the College's commitment to online learning grows.
- Develop a **plan** for improved technical support structures as additional online courses and programs are added.
- Ensure an adequate budget to provide and maintain an Information Age infrastructure.
- Seek faculty and student input on and provide access to current and emerging technologies, and provide access to proprietary and open source software and online teaching and learning tools, including video, audio, and multi-media.
- Consider specific support enhancements such as:
  - dedicated email/phone/chat for online technical support
  - increased after hours and weekend support
  - expanded remotely accessible library resources
  - expanded remote access to college resources, e.g., online advisement, etc.
  - monitor on-campus lab usage by "online students"
- Provide assistance to students and faculty in the purchase of hardware/software.
- Develop effective mechanisms for faculty and student input into decision-making processes so that technical support policy and practice address the most pressing current and anticipated future needs.
- Review, evaluate, and periodically update the College's Technology Master Plan to assure effective technical support.

## **3. Training and Pedagogical Support**

Students and faculty alike want and need training and support for online learning. Students with prior experience and training in computer-related activities are more likely to be satisfied with online learning (Tallent-Runnels et al, p. 108, 115-7). Good training and support for students and faculty is critical to online learning success.

**To this end the College should:**

**Students**

- Provide in-person workshops and online tutorials to orient students to online learning, and provide ongoing learning opportunities to support online course pedagogies. While the Library Café and the Learning Center already provide much of the framework necessary to deploy this kind of support, additional personnel to develop online instructional materials must be considered.
- Give priority to the development of student technology (hardware and software) and information literacy competencies as specified in Middle States Standard 12 *General Education*. Implement a program to ensure student achievement of these competencies.
- Provide adequate library and information resources, services, and support for academic programs, including training in information literacy competency. These resources and services must be accessible at a distance on a timely basis.
- Provide distance learners adequate academic support, including academic advisement, technical support, and other student support services normally available on campus. Program materials must clearly describe how students obtain these support services. One notable success in this area is “24/7 online chat” reference service from the library.

**Faculty**

- Develop a coordinated program of faculty orientation to and continuing professional development for online teaching and e-learning – such as consultations, workshops, and online tutorials that can be accessed by faculty on an as-needed basis. Develop benchmarks for training and ongoing support. Consider offering an extensive faculty development workshop such as the DIAL program offered at the New School University (NYSED “Good Practice”). Support online course development, including reassigned time for faculty, increased faculty development staff to implement faculty courses (i.e., to set up courses for/with faculty), etc. The college must support the two main sites for faculty training and development, Academic Information Technologies and the Center for Teaching, which should coordinate faculty support efforts.

*The committee would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following people: Fabio Girelli-Carasi, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, Peter McAliney, Department of Economics, and Assistant Deans Colette Wagner, Provost’s Office and Geraldine Faria, Office of the Graduate Dean. Their comments and suggestions have helped greatly in our deliberations. In addition, many of the faculty currently teaching online courses have shared their materials with us; their help is greatly appreciated.*

## References

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<http://www.citejournal.org/vol7/iss3/general/article1.cfm>

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<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/ocue/ded/practice.html>

## **Appendix 1: Online Resources**

In the course of its research, the committee found a number of resources that should prove helpful for those continuing to work in this area.

### **Online Course Development Guidelines**

Augsburg College (Minneapolis)

<http://www.augsburg.edu/etteam/onlineapprovalguide.pdf>

UC Davis

[http://ccfit.ucdavis.edu/comm\\_wkgrp/2004-05/courseapprov\\_tskgrp.cfm](http://ccfit.ucdavis.edu/comm_wkgrp/2004-05/courseapprov_tskgrp.cfm)

UC Santa Cruz

<http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:DFKgo7nK9eEJ:reg.ucsc.edu/forms/onlineSupp.doc+online+courses+%22approval%22&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=14&gl=us>

Missouri State

<http://msonline.missouristate.edu/faculty/courseapproval.htm>

<http://msonline.missouristate.edu/pdf/ProposalSample.pdf>

SUNY Stony Brook

<http://www.sunysb.edu/senatecas/Distance%20Learning.htm>

### **How to teach online and to help students learn online:**

#### **Faculty-oriented:**

[http://www.ulv.edu/ctl/online\\_teaching\\_cert.phtml](http://www.ulv.edu/ctl/online_teaching_cert.phtml)

From University of LaVerne, Center for Teaching and Learning, “the CTL certification is a two part process wherein faculty persons learn basics of using Blackboard and advance to designing hybrid, or fully online courses based on best practices in online course design and delivery.”

Standards from the Southern Regional Education Board:

<http://www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/PDF/StandardsQualityOnlineTeaching.asp>

#### **Student-oriented**

[http://technologysource.org/article/effective\\_student\\_preparation\\_for\\_online\\_learning/](http://technologysource.org/article/effective_student_preparation_for_online_learning/)  
to allay high drop-out rate in online courses, recommends the creation and implementation of a student orientation course

#### **Both:**

<http://www.humboldt.edu/~jdv1/TrainingTableofContents.htm>

#### **A model for off-site proctoring:**

<http://www.outreach.washington.edu/ol/handbook/exams.asp#locate>

## Appendix 2: Recommendations on Terminology Regarding Online Learning

The committee recommends that the college adopt the following definitions and forms of course identification:

1. Academic technology refers to the subset of telecommunication, multimedia, and information technology that is dedicated to supporting teaching and learning.
2. A course refers to an approved unit of curriculum that appears in the Brooklyn College *Bulletin*, *Schedule of Classes*, or Course Scheduling System (CSS).
3. Supplemental tool refers to the use of a special medium such as academic technology to disseminate course materials or to conduct class activities in or out of the classroom. The use of supplemental tools may have a significant impact on the learning experience without changing the scheduling of classes.
4. Distance learning is defined as a formal educational process in which the major portion of the instruction occurs when the learner and the instructor are not in the same place at the same time through virtually any media, including printed materials, videotapes, audio recordings, facsimiles, telephone communications, web-cam links, Internet communications through email and/or other means, and web-based delivery systems. Distance learning can be differentiated in a number of ways. One way is to distinguish between synchronous (real-time) or asynchronous (delayed time) systems. The nomenclatures or categories, synchronous and asynchronous, refer to the type and speed of information or communication delivery; these terms provide a classification system for electronic communication tools. Educators throughout the world utilize and value this type of e-learning (electronic learning) and the benefits of the communication tools each type of system provides. There are potentially significant advantages to the use of each of these technologies for Brooklyn College.
5. Asynchronous learning refers to the provision of learning opportunities and support that can take place or be accessed at any time. Asynchronous instruction does not require the simultaneous participation of all students and instructors. Students do not need to be gathered together in the same location at the same time. Rather, students may choose their own instructional time frame and actively participate, according to their schedules. Common asynchronous communication tools include email, electronic media, discussion boards or bulletin boards, blogs, wikis, podcasts, interactive and non-interactive web sites, and distance learning/virtual schooling. A course that uses asynchronous learning can also include use of the synchronous environments described below.
6. Synchronous learning refers to highly structured learning environments (such as audio- and video-conferencing, synchronous chat or instant messaging), reminiscent of traditional education and training. Synchronous distance learning is particularly appropriate when learners and instructors in different locations can

work collaboratively or conduct discussions within a fixed time frame. Common synchronous collaboration tools include synchronous text chat (IM), audio- and video-based communication, and Multi-user domain Object Oriented environments (MOOS).

7. Instructional mode of a class refers to the structure of the class that influences how it is scheduled. The established rubrics for instructional mode at Brooklyn College have included seminar, colloquium, lecture, recitation, discussion, laboratory, field supervision, and studio. We recommend the introduction of the following five rubrics for instructional mode: traditional, web-enhanced (as a subset of traditional), hybrid, local online, and distance education.
8. A traditional class is a course offering that depends on face-to-face contact, including lecture, discussion, recitation, laboratory, studio, or field supervision. When a course is offered in a traditional format, the established class-scheduling pattern is adhered to for the entire semester.
9. A web-enhanced class is considered a subset of a traditional class, with the additional requirement that students be informed of and ready to handle the use of e-learning materials that are available solely online (e.g., an instructor tells a class to go to a website, interact with a wiki, or read a blog).
10. A hybrid class is a course offering that depends on both academic technology and face-to-face contact as significant components of communication between the students and the instructor, as well as among the students in the class. In a hybrid class, somewhere between one-third to two-thirds of the student/faculty and student/student contact time uses academic technology to structure remote e-learning activities, while at least one-third of the communication is face-to-face (on-site) as is found in a traditional class. (Brooklyn College currently uses the term "hybrid" for a course that is partially online and we have followed that convention in this report; however, the term "blended" is more common in the literature.)
11. A local online class is a course offering in which more than two-thirds of instruction occurs when the student and instructor are not in the same place. A local online course uses academic technology to mediate most teaching and learning. Local online courses are expected to require a specified number of hours of face-to-face (on-site) meetings during a semester to facilitate orientation to the course, special in-class presentations, exams, or other in-class proofs of competency.
12. A distance education class is a course offering in which communication between faculty and student occurs exclusively off-site via academic technology. This includes all proofs of competency such as exams. Currently, Brooklyn College has no arrangements for off-site exams. Until such time as secure distance exams can be provided, this form of course offering should be carefully

considered by Brooklyn College. Specific recommendations are not included in this report.

We recommend that the definitions of these categories (synchronous, asynchronous, traditional, web-enhanced, hybrid, local online, and distance education classes) be:

1. Made part of the Manual for the Preparation of Curriculum Documents to aid departments in planning courses and in their curricular development in the future.
2. The basis for identifying courses offered for credit by the college: in the *Bulletin*, in the *Schedule of Classes*, and in the *Course Selection System (CSS)* utilized for online course planning and registration.