III.   LEARNER SUPPORT STANDARDS

Support for online learners provides a foundation for student success. Support services are accessible in a format appropriate to online delivery.

III.1.
Institutional support ensures learner access to the technologies required in the course.

FCC's Learning Management System, Blackboard, is required and access is supported in all online courses through BBassist (APPENDIX 12.a.). The same is true for instructor and course evaluations delivered in Blackboard through EvaluationKIT.

In the trend line student satisfaction survey students responded to the statement (Q16) "I had no difficulty in using Blackboard for my online course". From 2003/04 to 2010/11 the combined total of "Agree Strongly" and "Agree Somewhat" declined somewhat from 90.6% to 86.5%, however, in the category "Agree Strongly" the decline was indicative and worth noting from 63.6% in 2003/04 to 52.1% in 2010/11. The combined total of "Disagree Somewhat" and "Disagree Strongly" rose from 9.4% in 2003/04 to 12.6% in 2010/11(APPENDIX 11.a.).

In the same trend line student satisfaction survey students responded to the statement (Q19) "I have experienced technical difficulties mostly in.... (Choose two)".

"Technical Difficulties"	03/04	04/05	07/08	09/10	10/11
getting my computer to work properly	33.2%	38.6%	26.9%	24.8%	38.3%
receiving or sending e-mail	21.8%	25.9%	22.9%	27,6%	27.9%
connecting to my Internet provider (AOL, earthlink, etc.)	34.4%	31.7%	15.9%	15.8%	25.4%
accessing online tests	25.2%	29.0%	18.0%	18.7%	21.6%
accessing the CD-Rom or downloading files that come with the course	34.4%	30.2%	25.1%	20.5%	33.8%

For most of the time students do not experience technical difficulties, but when they do it is predominantly in areas external to the College. A combined total of 63.7% (2010/11) and 67.6% (2003/04) of technical difficulties groups two problems: computer problems and Internet access. Problems with accessing tests have declined slightly from 25.2% to 21.6%, however, the issue needs sustained attention.

All course specific technologies such as software packages in computer courses or spreadsheet application are tested when the course goes online, and continued student access is supported mostly on the instructor/department level.

To ensure student access to premium course materials that are password protected by publishers is as important as it is difficult. The Office of Distance Learning and the instructor make every effort to identify mismatched pass codes in advance and ensure student access to the full range of materials on the first or second day of class.

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> **III.2.**
> *Accurate and complete information about skills needed to succeed in an online course is provided.*

The Office of Distance Learning offers an on-campus and in-person orientation for first-time online students for every semester period. Attendance of the ninety minute event varies from highest in the fall semester (150-180) to lowest in the summer term (50-70). In 2009 the Office of Distance Learning redesigned the content of the orientation with the aid of three student focus-groups which prioritized 'most needed' information. The orientation continues to cover all aspects of 'taking a class online' and provides the opportunity for individualized questions. See section (V.13.e.) for an analysis of student satisfaction with the orientation. In addition, FCC's online student services website has a special set of orientation pages for distance learning students where they can watch a screen-capture video, access FAQs, and email the dedicated BBassist Helpdesk.

The College Home Page also provides direct access to a section called "About Learning Online".[1] In its present form the section provides information about skills required for using the Internet and Blackboard as well as a discussion of relevant topics such as time management, academic support for online learners, and computer basics. An interactive self assessment tool provides students with a glimpse on skills and attitudes most likely needed for the successful completion of an online course. If applicable, the course syllabus will articulate specific skill requirements for a course. Any description of skills needed to succeed in an online course rest on the articulation of prerequisite knowledge and competencies in the discipline as stated in QM standard 1.6 (2008/10 rubric).

The related issue of whether students bring the needed computer skills to the course is addressed in the trend line student satisfaction survey (APPENDIX 11.a.). Students responded to the statement (Q17) "The computer skills I had before enrolling in this online course were sufficient for completing it". From 2003/04 to 2010/11 the combined total of "Agree Strongly" and "Agree Somewhat" declined slightly from 98.9% to 95.8%. The combined total of "Disagree Somewhat" and "Disagree Strongly" rose from 1.0% in 2003/04 to 3.1% in 2010/11. The College is in the process of developing a computer literacy assessment which would test the 99% self-reported student confidence to the reality shown in the assessment items of the test.

[1] http://www.frederick.edu/courses_and_programs/distance_learning.aspx

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> **III.3.**
> *Information about required face-to-face elements of the course, if any, is provided.*

The syllabus of all online courses (APPENDIX 20.a.) contains the information about on-campus meetings and on-campus exams. In addition, the section "FCC on the Web" in the printed course schedule for the semester lists on-campus as well as technical requirements, if any, for each course. The schedule is available online in both flipbook and PDF format.[1] The orientation reminds online students to check for on-campus and technical requirements for their courses.

[1] http://www.frederick.edu/register_now/classschedules.aspx (page 54)

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> **III.4.**
> *Information about instructor or course policies, including the course grading policy is provided.*

The syllabus of all online courses (APPENDIX 20.a.) contains information about the instructor, Evaluation Methods, Student Services, Participation Policy, Communication Policy and compliance with the College's Academic Integrity Policy. Alongside the syllabus the

"General Information" template (APPENDIX 20.c.) loaded into each online and hybrid course section repeats all information that is not specific to a section. In a "Welcome" email (APPENDIX 14.a.page 13) the instructor lists detailed instructions relevant to the proceedings of the course.

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III.5. *Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they possess the self-motivation, time and commitment to learn at a distance.*	FCC has three degree programs "online", Business Management, Emergency Management and General Studies. "Online" means that the student can meet all requirements of the program by taking only online courses and be awarded the exact same degree as his or her on-campus counterpart. The factual information about degree requirements and a list of online courses that are available

to meet the requirements can be found on a designated website[1]. The descriptions of the Degree Programs convey an idea about the amount of work involved. There is a link to a section on the College Home Page called "About Learning Online".[2]The section is currently under re-construction. In its present form the section provides information about skills required for using the Internet and Blackboard as well as a discussion of relevant topics such as time management, academic support for online learners, and computer basics. An interactive self assessment tool provides students with a glimpse on skills and attitudes most likely needed for the successful completion of an online course.

[1]http://courses.frederick.edu/Degrees/index.htm
[2]http://www.frederick.edu/courses_and_programs/distance_learning.aspx

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III.6. *Students have access to timely, effective technical support.*	In cooperation with IT and the Office for Learning Technology BBassist was updated as a comprehensive online support system (APPENDIX 12.a.) with the following four basic features:

- It serves all Blackboard users in both online and F2F classes
- It centralizes helpdesk functions previously scattered across various units/offices
- It cuts down on response time
- It serves both students and faculty

The system can be accessed at http://courses.frederick.edu/bbsupport. Direct links to this website can be found on all FCC websites as well as in each course. BBassist offers two services: (a) tutorials, Q&As, written instructions etc. that provide answers to most questions; (b) The system provides an email form to submit for speedy answers from a support team. A response will come from a team of nine staff members within 4 or 5 hours during normal FCC business hours; after hours and during the weekend responses may take a little longer. For an evaluation of the servive see section V.13.d. below.

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Students have online access to a number of administrative services including Online Registration**:**.
(1) Pay **tuition** bill online using a credit or debit card.
(2) Using the "FACTS" online payment plan, students can apply for **deferred tuition** payments (2-6 payments), and pay the installments with a credit or debit card online.

> **III.7.**
>
> *Students have access to academic and administrative services,including tutoring, to address their academic and developmental needs.*

(3)Each student enrolled at Frederick Community College has an official **student email account** with 150 megabytes of online data storage to store class assignments and other course related material. Students can access the 'myFCC' site both on and off campus[1]. (4)A variety of resources are available in the online **Career Center**[2] to assist students with career counseling and job searches. Students can "Ask a Counselor" (email), consult tutorials, and post their resumes.

(5) While textbooks are available for purchase about three weeks before the start of each semester, the **Bookstore** website[3] offers as early as possible the most current, accurate textbook information needed for each class. The site is secure so students can use their credit card to order books and have them held or mailed to them. Students are reminded that shopping early gives them the opportunity to search the open marketplace, including the FCC Bookstore, for the best price and availability of new and used textbooks.

(6) The FCC **Transfer Center**[4] offers a variety of resources online to help the student through the process of transferring to a four-year college or university. The following topics are covered in some detail: Searching for a College, Transferring Credits, FCC's Transfer Articulation Agreements with four-year colleges and universities, Financial Aid/Scholarships. There is email access to a transfer advisor as well as a schedule of dates when representatives of select colleges and universities are on campus to meet with prospective students.

(7) The **Online Writing Center**[5] offers a host of rich online resources covering Grammar and Punctuations as well as how to write a research paper or develop an essay. The website for the Online Writing Center does not offer remote access to the Writing Center staff for review or discussion of student essays. The unduplicated headcount in 2010/11 shows 3560 students enrolled in online courses (APPENDIX 9.a.). Of those students 60% took both online and F2F courses and presumably can access Writing Center services on campus. However, 40% took courses only online and need electronic access. Overall about 7% of all FCC students take only online courses during the regular spring and fall semester; the percentage for the summer is more than three times higher: 23% of all FCC summer students do not come on campus for their classes and benefit from electronic access to Online Writing Center services.

(8) **OnlineTutoring**[6] is offered to all FCC students in a number of subjects through a password protected Blackboard site. Students call or email the Tutoring Office to find out more about online tutoring and to request that they be enrolled in the online tutoring program in Blackboard. Tutoring staff ranges from professional tutors with a Master's degree in their subject area, to FCC students who have received at least a B in the courses they are tutoring and come highly recommended by their instructors. All tutors attend training and are eligible to be certified as Regular, Advanced and Master tutors through the College Reading and Learning Association's International Tutor Certification program.

[1] http://www.frederick.edu/myfcc/index.aspx
[2] http://www.frederick.edu/student_services/CareerCenter/index.cfm
[3] http://bookstore.frederick.edu/home.aspx
[4] http://www.frederick.edu/student_services/TransferCenter/index.cfm
[5] http://www.frederick.edu/student_services/writingctr_Onlinecenter.aspx
[6] http://www.frederick.edu/student_services/tutoring.aspx

►**Action Item (III.7.**[8]**):** Explore options to extend Online Writing Center services to remote one-on-one staff-student contact by email, telephone, or video conferencing.

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> **III.8.**
> *Students using online learning have electronic access to learning resources, including library resources and services.*

The FCC Library offers a Virtual Library Orientation[1] with an introduction to select topics such as "Research Methods" (including an interactive self-test on "What do you know about Libraries and Research Methods?", "Evaluating and Using Information", and "Why and How to give credit to Information"). The Virtual Library is always open: Faculty and students currently enrolled for credit can consul ta Reference Librarian, reserve a book, or get other kinds of help from the Library staff by using the appropriate online Request Form. Under the category "Library Resources" the Library provides students with access to a substantial list of online data bases[1] both academic, e.g. EBSCOhost, Facts.com etc, and News Papers like The NewYork Times and Washington Post as well as local papers.

During 2010/11 in collaboration with the Library the Center for Distributed Learning purchased access to three learning object repositories. In a number of courses, for example, in Economics, Social Sciences, and History, instructors have used video content from these repositories to enrich the weekly units of their courses.

[1]http://www.frederick.edu/student_services/library/orientation/orientation2/index.html

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As a matter of policy, Frederick Community College makes every effort to accommodate individuals with disabilities.[1]APPENDIX 2.k.). What kind of accommodation FCC has to offer and when is

> **III.9.**
> *Accomodations for learning disabilities are provided.*

detailed in "Web Resources for Persons with Disabilities".[2]FCC's Grievance Procedure for Students with Disabilities demonstrates compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act 5.18c. (APPENDIX 2.m.). For details

see section (I.7.d.) of this Audit Report).

[1]http://www.frederick.edu/student_services/disability_statement.aspx
[2]http://www.frederick.edu/student_services/disability_web.aspx

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> **III.10.**
> *Counseling services for individual learner needs are offered.*

The College offers a full range of counseling and advising services to its students from advising new students to assisting veterans to providing counseling for students in crisis. All services are provided on campus and partially online, including a 12/7 email service. They are essential for the Online Course Program. To put the need in perspective: The unduplicated headcount in 2010/11 shows 3560 students enrolled in online courses (APPENDIX 9.a.). Of those students 60% took both online and F2F courses and presumably can access counseling and advising services on campus. However, 40% took courses only online and need electronic access to those services. Overall, about 7% of all FCC students take only online

courses during the regular spring and fall semester; the percentage for the summer is more than three times higher: 23% of all FCC summer students do not come on campus for their classes and benefit from electronic access to counseling and advising services.

Many of those services can be accessed online, particularly in the area of academic planning. A PeopleSoft report called "My Planner" gives students, among other options, online access to their degree requirements as well as to best options for their transfer or career goals and online enrollment options (APPENDIX 12.c.). An Advisor Contact List[1] extends advising resources beyond the Counseling and Advising Office to designated faculty advisors in various disciplines; their telephone numbers are included. Faculty advisors are trained in a 9-module course (FAC ADV 101) and are supported by an extensive advising manual. The Counseling and Advising Office also makes Email Advising available to all current FCC students using their myfcc.frederick.edu email accounts. Intended for one or two short questions, the Counseling & Advising staff will respond as quickly as possible on a daily basis (Monday – Sunday). Typical response time is 24-48 hours depending on the information requested.

[1]http://www.frederick.edu/student_services/counseling_advisor_contact_list.aspx

►**Action Item (III.10.):** Explore options to add video conferencing to email and telephone contact.

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III.11.
Student complaint processes are clearly defined and can be used electronically.

The College has a Student Grievance Policy and Procedure[1] that allows a student who reasonably believes that "an improper, unfair, or arbitrary action has been taken by a member of the faculty" to file a complaint for resolving instructional grievances in three areas, grade disputes, non-grade related complaints, and ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) related grievances. The burden of proof rests with the student. Retaliation of any kind taken against a student filing a complaint is prohibited. Section (I.7.d.) in this Audit Report deals with the ADA issues and affirms that the College has an ADA grievance procedure in place[2].

Policies for both Grade Disputes[3] and Non-Grade Complaints[4] stipulate that the student and faculty member involved in the student's concern or disagreement must first try to resolve the dispute through informal discussion. If the informal discussions assisted by a member of the counseling staff or, in the case of online courses, by the Director of Distance Learning are not successful, the complaint is elevated to a formal level of procedure with forms to be filled out online etc.

On the informal level student complaints from online courses regarding either Grade Disputes or Non-Grade related issues usually arrive first in the Office of Distance Learning and are handled by the Director of Distance Learning. In 2010/11 fourteen complaints involving more than one simple email response for resolution were recorded. Four complaints were Grade Disputes of which three were resolved informally, and one went to committee for resolution according to formal procedures. Ten complaints revolved around instructor response time and/or clarity of instructions for assignments. All of them were resolved informally. Two Admissions and Academic Policy cases for 2010/11 involved online courses and went to committee with withdraw requests.

The complaint procedures described above are internal to the College suggesting that the final decision about the merits of a complaint is internal to the institution. The new MSCHE requirement regarding student complaints reads as follows (Hallmark 7, Item 8):

"Student complaint processes are clearly defined and can be used electronically."

While the FCC procedures seem in compliance with the MSCHE wording, they are not in compliance with the implications of the wording as "*student complaint processes*" are subject to HR §668.43 (b)which requires that

> *"the institution must also provide its students or prospective students with contact information for filing complaints with its accreditor and with its State approval or licensing entity and any other relevant State official or agency that would appropriately handle a student's complaint."*

►**Action Item (III.11.):** Identify state regulations regarding student complaints in Maryland and other states where FCC online students may reside.

[1]http://www.frederick.edu/employees/Policy_Procedure/Policy_manual/5.18pmn.pdf
[2] http://www.frederick.edu/employees/Policy_Procedure/Policy_manual/5.18cproc.pdf
[3] http://www.frederick.edu/employees/Policy_Procedure/Policy_manual/5.18aproc.pdf
[4]http://www.frederick.edu/employees/Policy_Procedure/Policy_manual/5.18bproc.pdf

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III.12.
Studentshave access to information about institutional policies with which the student is expected to comply.

FCC publishes an online Student handbook[1] complete with an academic calendar as well as information about anything from student email accounts to the use of microwave ovens. The Handbook contains the full text of all policies relevant to being a student at FCC. Access to relevant policies is also provided from within each online course under "General Information" (APPENDIX 20.c.).

[1]http://www.frederick.edu/download/student/studentplannerhandbook2011_12.pdf

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