

IV. FACULTY SUPPORT STANDARDS

Support provided to faculty takes account of the demands of teaching in the online medium and promotes effective online instruction.

The College implemented a certification protocol for first-time online faculty ([APPENDIX 14.b.](#)).

IV.1.

Instructors are prepared to teach online courses. The institution requires faculty training, and/or participation in mentoring programs for both online instruction and the use of the learning management system.

The protocol is designed to confirm the acquisition of basic skills and competencies necessary for teaching online. The Protocol features four training units:

- ▶ BB Basics with a 36-item skill set ([APPENDIX 14.d.](#))
- ▶ BB Advanced, a 40-item skill set ([APPENDIX 14.e.](#))
- ▶ Tutorial for Teaching Online ([APPENDIX 14.a.](#))
- ▶ The First Semester Mentoring Unit ([APPENDIX 14.c.](#))

The two Blackboard training units are delivered in either workshop format or as online tutorials and conclude with a self-assessment of the skills mastered. The Tutorial for Teaching Online is delivered in the format of one-on-one sessions with instructional staff in the Office of Distance Learning. This training segment is designed for a total of 18 hours. Completion time will vary depending on the degree of prior experience or the successful completion of a MOL-COAT course. The First Semester Mentoring Component was added as a requirement in 2009/10. Since then all four components are required for all first time online instructors. The mentor receives a stipend and signs off on a unit completion questionnaire including a statement that the instructor/mentee is or is not “ready to accept online teaching assignments. Twenty mentoring units were completed, 18 instructor/mentees were ready to teach online, 2 were not ready and do not teach online ([APPENDIX 13.a.](#)). A training workshop for mentors generated suggestions for strengthening the requirements for both mentors and instructor/mentees. The recommendations were implemented. While the skill sets for Blackboard Basics and Blackboard Advanced are relatively straight forward and consistent, an analysis of tacit assumptions about “Teaching Online” reveals discrepancies in the area of both faculty and mentor training. What is lacking is a set of **Competency Standards for Online Instructors**. MOL is the process of completing an “Instructor Competency” project ([APPENDIX 16.c.](#)) with the following components:

- i. An operational definition of ‘competency’
- ii. An online instructor competency rubric, segmented in 7 core competency areas, 37 standards with corresponding general performance indicators. ([APPENDIX 16.b.](#))
- iii. An annotated review of nine collections of competency standards.
- iv. An extensive literature list supporting the nine collections.
- v. A faculty survey validating an inclusive list of tasks that experienced faculty performs or deems important to perform in an online course.
- vi. A protocol showing how the instrument can be applied to faculty training, faculty peer observation in online courses, mentoring instructions, student evaluations etc.

Literature list, competency standards, and online instructor activities have been updated in 2011.

▶ **Action Item (IV.1):** Explore how the competency rubric can be usefully applied to design faculty training and to both the mentoring and the Peer Observation protocols.

IV .2.

The institution provides timely and effective technical support.

In cooperation with the IT Department and the Office for Learning Technology, BBassist ([APPENDIX 12.a.](#)) was updated as a comprehensive online support system with 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 service and recommendations see section (V.13.d.) in this audit below.

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IV.3.

The institution provides up-to-date learning management tools.

Blackboard has served as the College's Learning Management System since 1999. The version updates from CourseInfo to Blackboard 5.1 and from there to Blackboard 9.1 has been consistent and timely

([APPENDIX 5.c.](#)). The transition to the Enterprise Edition of Blackboard was a pivotal achievement for automating the link between PeopleSoft and Blackboard and has provided faculty and staff with new easy-to-use features such as the automated import and real-time update of class rosters and the possibility to create template courses. Both the transition to the Enterprise Edition and the transition from Blackboard 7.3 to version 9.1 required sustained efforts in training full time as well as adjunct faculty in the use of the new versions with a minimum of interruptions.

Version 9.1 has expanded Blackboard's usefulness by offering the inclusion of more sophisticated 'Building Blocks', i.e. third party software packages that seamlessly integrate with the Blackboard platform, examples range from Google Apps Integration to INTELECOM to MERLOT Search.

While Blackboard has proven itself as a stable course delivery platform, it is expensive, and the College has experimented with the alternative use of **Moodle** in a limited cohort of course sections.

The project has continued through the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011 and ended with an evaluation by both participant faculty and students ([APPENDIX .5.k.](#)).

Since the fall of 2010 FCC has provided faculty and students with an automated course and instructor evaluation system. The College's subscription to **EvaluationKIT** allows students to submit their course evaluation from within their Blackboard course website. Instructors have online access to the evaluation results for their courses immediately after the end of the evaluation period.

In 2010/11 the Center for Distributed Learning in collaboration with the Library began to offer access to three **Learning Object Repositories** (INTELECOM, Discovery Education, and DCCCD Dallas TeleLearning). Both, instructional design teams as well individual instructors, use the repositories to enrich their courses.

Other learning management tools such as Softchalk and Respondus are offered upon request.

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IV.4.

Faculty receive training and/or tutorial materials related to College policies, e.g. Fair Use, plagiarism, student conduct and other relevant legal concepts.

FCC requires new **full-time faculty** to participate in a rather rigorous orientation program ([APPENDIX 20.h.](#)). The program runs through their first academic year with mandatory monthly meetings. A full range of topics is covered ranging from FCC's governance structure to Office Technologies and from Outcomes Assessment to Student Services including College Policies. In addition

to the orientation at the time of hiring, each semester **Adjunct Faculty** is offered an on-campus orientation which covers some of the policy issues. Section FH - 4.00 of the Faculty Handbook provides an introduction to relevant policies ([APPENDIX 13.b.](#)). The full text of all FCC Policies and Procedures is available online¹ and can also be accessed from within each Blackboard course website.

¹http://www.frederick.edu/employees/Policy_Procedure/policy.aspx



The most regular of the feedback protocols are the Student Evaluations ([APPENDIX 16.a.](#)). Student Evaluations are collected in all online courses every semester on a regular basis. The evaluation

instrument provides feedback in three areas:

IV.5.

Regular feedback protocols regarding faculty performance are in place.

- ▶ Instructor Evaluation
- ▶ General Education Evaluation
- ▶ Student Self-Evaluation

In order to maximize data comparability between online and F-2-F courses, the instruments used for each share a majority of questions, but they differ in the formulation of a number of questions that are specifically tailored to the online environment. The number of questions and their formulation is identical to the one used for F-2-F courses in the area of the General Education Evaluation.

Toward the end of each semester students are asked to submit their evaluation forms electronically from within their Blackboard course website; the EvaluationKIT software provides the instructor with access to the results immediately after the close of the evaluation period. Instructors have welcomed the switch from a manual to an electronic reporting system as it allows them to adjust course design and instructional methods before the start of the new semester based on student feedback. (See section V.5. in this Audit Report for more on faculty performance).

Another window for monitoring faculty performance is opened by student complaints. 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. A number of complaints are either trivial or can be resolved with one phone call or email to the instructor. In 2010/11 fourteen complaints involving more than a single 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. All complaints are discussed with instructor and, if warranted, provide feedback and suggestions for adjustments in course design or instructional methodology. (See also section III.11. above).



IV.6.

Faculty are provided with access to professional development opportunities related to online teaching and learning.

The College offers a wide variety of professional development opportunities for its online faculty. While the distinction is somewhat fluid, skills needed to do the job are usually listed under “training”; skills or knowledge that enrich but are optional fall into the category of “professional development” which is targeted

in this section. (See also sections I.7. and IV.4. of this Audit Report for related examples).

For **full-time faculty** promotion to Full or Associate Professor without an earned doctorate the College (Personnel Procedure 3.12b) requires a master’s degree plus 60 graduate credits for Full Professor and 30 for Associate Professor. Faculty may earn one half of those credits (30 respectively 15, depending on academic rank) as Alternative Credits through educational activities other than graduate course work.

Beginning in the spring of 2010 the Office of Distance Learning offered three Alternative Credit packages for a maximum of six credits for professional development for full-time online faculty. ([APPENDIX 15.a.](#)). The purpose was to recognize and acknowledge the substantial time and effort faculty commit to when designing online courses and preparing to teach online for the first time. These packages detail the professional development process that faculty must complete in order to (a) produce new online/hybrid or companion-site courses, (b) teach online for the first time, and (c) become Quality Matters peer and master reviewers. The three faculty alternative credit units were pre-approved by the College’s Promotion and Equivalency Committee (PEC).

Adjunct faculty is invited to complete the *Certificate for Online Adjunct Teaching (COAT)* course. The COAT course was developed in 2009-10 by a team of experienced online faculty, instructional designers, and/or distance learning administrators from MD 2- and 4-year institutions. Funded by a grant from MarylandOnline (MOL) the course was piloted April-June 2010 and continued without grant funds as a nine-week online course with a \$300.00 course fee. Twenty one FCC adjuncts and one FCC full-time faculty member have completed the course. The Offices of Distance Learning and Workforce Development and Professional Preparation are providing partial stipends to help cover the cost for successful completion of the course.

The Center for Teaching and Learning offers a rich professional development program for both adjunct and full-time faculty. Within that framework numerous lab sessions related to software packages (Adobe, Photoshop, Impatica, Respondus etc.) are offered every semester by the Office of Learning Technology ([APPENDIX 15.b.](#)). For additional examples of faculty professional development see sections (I.4.d.) and (I.7.c.) above.

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