

V. EVALUATION STANDARDS

Ongoing evaluation of online offerings and the use of evaluation results for improvement are integral to the Online Program.

1. The institution/program regularly collects and analyzes data based on national, state, and/or program metrics and principles of good practice.

V.1.

Regular collection and analysis of data based on national, state, and/or program metrics and principles of good practice.

A FCC document from January 2000 entitled “Web Courses: Standards of Best Practice” presented a review of the then current literature, identified three guiding pedagogical principles and discussed sixteen pedagogical and organizational standards of Best Practice ([APPENDIX 19.d.](#)). The document served as a baseline reference in the development of the Online Course Program at FCC. Over the years peer networks such as ITC, WCET, SLOAN and EduCause have channeled research results and have helped to update FCC’s Best Practice arsenal. A series of annual reports has presented updates to both internal and external data. In addition, FCC has been directly involved in research projects: the 2007 “W” Study with 100 FCC students, the MOL “W” Study with over 3000 students from California and Maryland. More recently, the College has contributed to the completion of the “Instructor Competency” project ([APPENDIX 16.c.](#)) with an annotated review of nine collections of competency standards and an extensive literature list supporting the nine collections. A faculty survey validates an inclusive list of tasks that faculty performs or deems important to perform in an online course. The literature list, the competency standards, and the online instructor activities have been updated. In 2011 the College completed a wide ranging Environmental Scan that identifies and documents trend lines in areas such as ‘Competition’, ‘Education’, and ‘Technology’ ([APPENDIX 19.a.](#)). Eleven of these trends relate to online learning and provide an update of national, regional, and local data that will help to shape the future development of the Online Course Program.



2. Enrollment and retention are examined and reviewed on a regular basis.

V.2.a.

Enrollment is examined and reviewed on a regular basis.

Course Level **Enrollment Data** have been reviewed on a regular basis ([APPENDIX 8.a.](#)). Frederick Community College has offered Distance Learning courses via College of the Air since 1976. It began offering online courses in the spring semester of 1998 with 1 course and 7 students in addition to 16 traditional Tele Courses with a combined enrollment of 234 students. By the time FCC’s Online Course Program commenced in 2001, enrollment had grown to 314 students (duplicated) in online courses and 407 in College of the Air. College of the Air was phased out ending with the last courses taught in the fall of 2005. By 2010/11 the enrollment in online courses had grown to 5576 students (duplicated). A closer examination of enrollment statistics and recommendations (see section V.13.a.) will identify summer enrollment and a proliferation of sections from existing courses as the two main growth areas while the addition of new online courses has contributed to the overall online enrollment at a steady pace. Enrollment is monitored very closely in view of an ever precarious capacity/fill ratio. As an

enrollment management tool the Office of Distance Learning offers the instructor an “over-cap” contract when the first course section is full, and opening a second section does not seem a viable option. The contract brings the course cap to twenty nine and pays the instructor headcount for every additional student above the regular cap of twenty. Acceptance of the contract is voluntary ([APPENDIX 8.b.](#)).

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V.2.b.

Retention is examined and reviewed on a regular basis.

FCC’s course level **Retention Rates** have been reviewed on a regular basis ([APPENDIX 17.a.](#)). While reliable national course level retention data for online courses are still hard to find, there seems to be a consensus among pundits and researchers that, overall and on average, “retention” rates in online courses are lower than they are in face-to-face courses. However, definitions of “Retention” vary among different institutions. If retention is measured (unrefined) as a complement to “W”, the California Community College System, for example, shows retention in online courses between 6% and 7% below their F2F counterparts. Comparable figures for FCC under the same definition place the retention in online courses fluctuating between 4% and 7% over an eight year period ([APPENDIX 17.f.](#)). For a more detailed analysis of data see section (V.13.b.) of this Report.

Completion Rates: A variant definition of course level retention would define a “Completion Rate” as all students having received a course grade other than a “W” or a non-academic “F”, here defined by non-participation after the end of the 2nd week of classes. The 2010/11 completion rate for students in online courses at FCC stands at 83%, the same as in 2003/04, and well above the average of some 55% shown for the California Community College System ([APPENDIX 17.b.](#)).

“No Shows”: By definition a “No Show” is a “W” or “F” student who either

- (1) self-reports never having participated in any class activities, or
- (2) is identified in PeopleSoft as someone who receives a “W” dating from a time before the end of the 2nd week of class or receives a non-academic “F” with the instructor reporting no participation in class activities after the end of the 2nd week of class.

Using definition (1), in the 2010 MOL survey of 3300 “W” students in MD and CA 26 % reported that they never participated in any class activities. A 2007 telephone survey with 100 “W” FCC students identified 20% saying that they never participated in any class activities.

In contrast, using definition (2) the 2010/11 FCC data reveal a “No Show” rate of only 3.3% (down from 6.4% in 03/04) with a cut-off date at the end of the 2nd week of class and 5.1% (down from 10.6% in 04/05) with a cut-off date at the end of the 3rd week of class. The actual rate may be slightly higher because the system captures the actual withdrawal date but does not capture a last date of participation for “W” students ([APPENDIX 17.a.](#)).

The discrepancy in the percentages of “no-shows” resulting from the two measurements is staggering and needs attention.

► **Action Item (V.2.b.):**

- Investigate the feasibility of introducing a unique grade for non-academic “F”s.
- Survey non-academic “F” students on reasons for “no-show”.

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3. The institution/program use clearly articulated measures to evaluate its learners

V.3.

The institution uses clearly articulated measures to evaluate its learners.

On the institutional level the College devotes a whole page in the Academic Catalog to articulating the Grading System, the Grade Point Average (GPA), Academic Progress and Academic Standings. The catalog is available online.¹

On the course level, the syllabus template ([APPENDIX 20.a.](#)) requires the instructor to articulate the grading policy for the course including point or letter grade values for individual assignments and achievable totals. Further evidence can be found in the adherence to Standard 3.2 of the 2008/10 QM rubric. The standard required that “the course grading policy is stated clearly.” All of FCC’s QM reviewed online courses have met this requirement. Ten additional courses are scheduled for review under the same requirement in the 2011/13 edition of the QM Rubric. In addition, courses that have gone through an informal review ([APPENDIX 6.b.](#)) as well as all current master courses meet that requirement. For measurements of student achievement in Outcomes Assessment see section (II.3.a.).

¹http://www.frederick.edu/courses_and_programs/catalogs.aspx



4. The institution/program measure student achievement and satisfaction based on valid and reliable assessment techniques.

V.4.

The institution measures student achievement and satisfaction based on valid and reliable assessment techniques.

FCC does measure student achievement and satisfaction on a regular basis. One relatively reliable measure for evaluating student **Achievement** is the success rate. The term ‘Success Rate’ is typically defined as achieving transfer grades “A”, “B”, “C” and “S” relative to all students having received a grade (excludes “W” and non-

academic “F”s). FCC’s Success Rate of 68.9% (including summer) for its online courses in 2010/11 (down from 69.3 in 2003/04) compares

- favorably to the 57% Success Rate of the California Community College System in 2009/10 up from 53% in 2005/06 ([APPENDIX 10.c.](#));
- less favorably to FCC’s F2F courses with a success rate of 76.7% for its F2F courses during 2010/11 up from 76.1 in 2003/04. ([APPENDIX 10.c.](#)) The general discrepancy of 6%-7% between online and F2F course retention is reflected in their respective success rates. For more details see section (V.13.k.) of this report.

For the measurement of student achievement see also section (II.3.a.) on Outcomes Assessment.

Student Satisfaction: For the sake of data consistency students evaluate online courses with an adapted version of the instrument used in on-campus courses. The online course instrument has two components, (a) a set of questions about student satisfaction related to factors specific to the online environment and (b) a set of 22 questions common to both online and on-campus courses. Student evaluations in online courses are administered electronically through the Office of Distance Learning(c).

(a) The ‘student satisfaction’ part is unique to online courses and covers a number of issues ranging from ease of navigation to the experience of technical difficulties ([APPENDIX 11.a.](#)).

Most students continue to agree that the course management software used (Blackboard) was user friendly. Students responded to the statement (Q15) “I find the web site for this course easy to navigate”. From 2003/04 to 2010/11 the combined total of “Agree Strongly” and “Agree Somewhat” declined slightly within the range from 95.3% to 92.6%. For more detail see section (II.1.d.).

In response to (Q16) “I had no difficulty in using Blackboard for my online course” the combined total of “Agree Strongly” and “Agree Somewhat” declined somewhat from 90.6% to 86.5% during the period from 2003/04 to 2010/11. For more detail see section (III.1.).

Question (Q19) inquires about technical difficulties. 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 account for two types of problems: computer problems and access to the Internet, both external to the institution. For more detail see section (III.1.).

In (Q22) students are asked to respond to the statement “For each week of the course it was clear what I was supposed to learn”. From to the combined total of “Agree Strongly” and “Agree Somewhat” declined from 92.1% to 88.6%. For more detail see section (II.1.a.).

Students generally find that interaction with the faculty and other students in online courses is adequate; a substantial majority (85.1% in 2003/04; 79.2% in 2010/11) would take another online course and recommend it to other students.

The results for Question #25 “The instructor responded to email promptly” need attention and further scrutiny. While the overall satisfaction / dissatisfaction ratio has remained stable around (90% to 10%) for the report period from 2003/04 to 2009/10, the percentages for 2010/11 show a decline down to 84.6% in the overall satisfaction and an increase in the overall dissatisfaction to about 14%. As an initial response the Office of Distance Learning convened a Faculty Task Force to review the instructor response protocol and recommend changes for accelerated course formats. ([APPENDIX 20.b.](#)) See also section (II.2.c.) in this Audit Report.

- (b) The common part of the student evaluation consisting now of 22 revised items for both F2F and online classes has been administered for the last years. Comparing results from the fall of 09 and the spring of 10 for both on-campus and online courses do not show substantial discrepancies between the two semesters. Comparing the means for F2F and for Distance Learning in the spring of 2010, the question “Course helped to improve writing skills” stands out with a mean of 2.69 for F2F and of 3.20 for Online. A similar discrepancy is noticeable in “Studied each week two or more hours” (2.93 for F2F and 3.25 for Online).
- (c) Student evaluations are collected with the aid of ‘EvaluationKit’, a software package that serves as an integrated Building Block in Blackboard. The software places an access button to the evaluation form into each online course. The student response rate varies from semester to semester (60% for the spring of 2010 compared to 43% for the fall of 2009).

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5. The institution/program evaluate faculty to assure instructional quality, using clear, consistent policies, measures and procedures.

The Faculty Evaluation Process for full-time faculty is laid out in Section FH-3.00 of the Faculty Hand Book ([APPENDIX 13.b.](#)). The section identifies teaching as the primary responsibility of the community college faculty member. “Since teaching is multifaceted and interpersonal, the process of

V.5.

Faculty is evaluated to ensure instructional quality, using clear, consistent policies, measures, and procedures.

evaluation should reflect this in the data collected and in the ends for which they are used. Continual reflection on one's teaching is critical to professional growth as a faculty member. Reflection occurs both in private as a philosophy of teaching is formulated and modified as well as in dialogue with colleagues.... This philosophy is

an integral part of the evaluation process at Frederick Community College.”

The evaluation process examines teaching effectiveness in five formats. Each format provides a different snapshot of a faculty member's performance.

- Student Evaluation/Rating Form
- Peer Classroom Observation
- Annual Self-Evaluation
- Portfolio
- Department Chair Assessment

Details are laid out in respective forms accompanying each format.

To examine teaching effectiveness of both full-time and adjunct faculty members specifically in online courses, the College relies on two of those formats, the Student Evaluation/Rating Form (A) and a Peer Observer Protocol developed in 2008 to be used specifically for online instruction (B).

(A) Student Evaluations ([APPENDIX 16.a.](#)) are collected in all online courses every semester on a regular basis. The evaluation instrument provides specific feedback in two areas:

- ▶ Instructor Evaluation
- ▶ Course (General Education) Evaluation

Questions in both areas are tailored to the online environment but remain benchmarked against their counterparts for F2F courses. While they differ in the formulation of a number of questions in each course delivery format, the instruments share a majority of questions in order to maximize data comparability. In the area of the General Education/ Course Evaluation the questions are the same as the ones used for F-2-F courses. See section (V.13.h.) for a trend analysis of data.

(B) In line with the general faculty evaluation philosophy, the protocol serves a double purpose.

Firstly to provide the individual instructor with peer feedback and reflections designed to enhance teaching and learning in a given Distance Learning course. Secondly, to assist the College in maintaining the quality of instruction in Distance Learning articulated in the QM Standards for online courses. The protocol is based on the following principles:

1. Observing faculty performance in an online class is to be distinguished from evaluating the design of the course. The observer may not assume that the faculty member teaching the course is at the same time the course designer/creator.
2. Peer Observation in an online course resembles observation procedures for on-campus courses.
3. The ever-changing technical qualifications for online instruction make the development of competencies, professional preparation and training of online instructors an ongoing process.
4. Both the Peer Observer and the instructor should contribute to the ongoing refinement of the Peer Observation protocol.
5. The Peer Observer will record the teaching strategies used by the instructor as well as the responses of the students and the use of the online technology. The observation will be conducted in the spirit of respect for the instructor's discipline and instructional philosophy.

While the use of both evaluation formats for online courses seem solid and yield measurable results, two challenges emerge.

First, the assumptions about instructor competencies that underlie both the student evaluation instrument and the Peer Observation Protocol are not consistent. This observation supports the implementation of Action Item (IV.1.) which suggests exploring how the MOL Competency Rubric can be usefully applied to faculty training, the mentoring protocol, and to both student evaluations and Peer Observation.

Secondly, suggestions for improvement received from Peer Observers' Exit Interviews indicate that following the initial implementation period both the protocol and the observation criteria would benefit from further refinements. The major gap in the effectiveness of the faculty evaluation process for online courses is the consistency of its application. While student evaluations for all online courses are consistently required every semester, it is left to the instructor to choose either a F2F or an online course for a Peer Observation. As the Peer Observation Protocol is more involved and rigorous than its F2F counterpart, few instructors have chosen this format. For example, during the 2009/10 report period only two observations were requested for inclusion in faculty portfolios, in 2010/11 period three observations were requested for annual faculty self-evaluation.

► **Action Item (V.5):** Identify Best Practice options for a regular, periodic use of the Peer Observation Protocol for Online Courses.

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6. The institution/program periodically evaluates courses to ensure quality, consistency with the curriculum, currency, and advancement of the student learning outcomes.

V.6.

Periodic evaluation of courses to ensure quality, consistency with the curriculum, currency, and advancement of the student learning objectives.

The College has been consistent in periodically evaluating its online courses to ensure quality of design and enhance student learning. [APPENDIX 7.a.](#) shows that over fifty percent of the ninety online courses have undergone a formal QM review. Re-reviews of older courses are being scheduled and ten new course reviews are scheduled for the current period of 2011/12. The

initial outcomes of formal reviews are monitored [APPENDIX 7.b.](#) and trigger modifications in faculty training. In addition, staff conducts informal courses reviews ([APPENDIX 6.b.](#)) occasioned by textbook edition updates, textbook changes, or student complaints.

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7. Periodic evaluation of the course learning management system.

V.7.a.

Periodic evaluation of the course learning management system.

The College has been consistent in periodically evaluating and upgrading its course management system from version to version and from service pack to service pack ([APPENDIX 5.c.](#)); see also section (I.4.c.) for

checks on reliability. The evaluation continues (see section V.13.c. of this audit) as the College moves into another 3-year contract with Blackboard and continues to experiment with the alternative use of Moodle in a limited cohort of course sections ([APPENDIX 5.k.](#)).

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8. Regular evaluation of any externally developed components of the online program.

V.8.a.

Regular evaluation of any externally developed components of the online program.

The functionality of externally developed course components is reviewed at the beginning of each semester; the evaluation of externally developed course content is not on a regular review schedule.

A formal and semi-regular review system is in place for textbooks (see section II.1.j. of this report). Other externally developed course components include Publisher's companion websites and cartridges as well as so called 'Premium Content' offered by publishers or producers of learning object collections on third party server platforms. Scrutiny of both content and functionality of those components is very thorough at the design stage of a master course or with the introduction of a new textbook edition. Best Practices obligate instructors to check the functionality of all course components, including externally developed ones, every semester prior to the start of the course ([APPENDIX 20.d.](#)). The review of publisher's cartridge content for a new text edition is triggered automatically as the loading of cartridge content is centralized in the Office of Distance Learning.



9. The online program uses strategic and operational planning and evaluation to continuously improve educational programs and services.

V.9.a.

Use of strategic and operational planning and evaluation to continuously improve educational programs and services.

A planning document (see section V.1.) entitled "Web Courses: Standards of Best Practice" identified sixteen pedagogical and organizational standards of Best Practice ([APPENDIX 19.d.](#)). The document has served as a baseline for the strategic and operational planning process in the development of the Online Course

Program. The development was marked by three shifts in the conceptual focus:

1. The shift from Distance **Education** to Distance **Learning** promoting a more learner centered model while retaining the premise of the physical distance between instructor and learner.
2. The shift from **Distance Learning** to **Online Learning** highlighting Best Practices of online pedagogy which apply regardless whether a course is fully online or web-enhanced.
3. The shift from **Online Learning** to **Distributed Learning** as a learner centered model which emphasizes the distribution of learning over different media and learning environments.

The strategic planning process has been re-focused by the College's environmental scan in 2011. Eleven trend statements relating specifically to online learning ([APPENDIX 19.a.](#)) help to confirm a list of existing strategic goals as well as adding new ones. The planning process for the next 3-5 years of the Online Course Program is currently guided by nine strategic objectives:

1. Ninety percent of all FCC courses/learning units will use online technology via a course delivery platform
2. Fifty percent of all FCC courses/learning units will use emerging learning technologies (podcasting, mobile technologies, etc.) to support course delivery.
3. Each online "course" will be designed as a particular assembly and configuration of re-usable learning modules (content, exercises, assessment, etc.)
4. The same "master course" can be delivered in different modes (such as on location, online,

hybrid) and different time constraints (such as asynchronous, synchronous, 15-week, 8-week) by re-using learning modules that are either common to all delivery modes/time constraints or unique to one/some.

5. Learning modules and “courses” will be designed, taught, and redesigned by teams of faculty and instructional design specialists.
6. The present currency of academic “credit” will be rivaled by certification procedures that will require an integrated administrative treatment of credit and non-credit learning units.
7. The percentage of “online only” students will increase from 7.6% to 10%.
8. The percentage of students who take at least one online course will continue to rise.
9. As regulatory requirements for program integrity, student identity authentication, ADA compliance, etc. tighten, the ability to demonstrate quality assurance will become paramount.

The translation of strategic objectives into operational strategies is guided by a “**Smart Growth**” measurement that has been used to guide the development of the Online Course Program. The interconnection of nine program areas establishes the expectation that strategic advances in one area should be followed and matched by advances in the other areas within some reasonable time frame. The tool has been used for each of the annual reports to answer the question: Has the program developed at the right rate during a given report period and has the growth been balanced?

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 Numerical growth → | 2 Course technology ↔ | 3 Quality control ↔ | 4 Faculty training ↔ | 5 Support Services ↔ | 6 Budget Staffing ↔ | 7 Program Admin. ↔ | 8 Adverti- sing ↔ | 9 MOL Partner ← |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|

The nine program areas provide the operational format for the implementation of the strategic objectives.



10. Evaluation results are shared with program stakeholders.

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| <p>V.10.a. <i>Evaluation results are shared with program stakeholders.</i></p> | <p>Evaluation results are shared with the College community through reports to the Board of Trustees, the Learning Leadership Council, and meetings of Online Faculty. In addition, comprehensive reports are available in print for 2010, 2008, 2006, 2005 and 2004 from the Office of Distance Learning.</p> |
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11. The online program establishes a culture of continuous program improvement that is based on Advancement of the Online Program’s vision and mission, current scholarship in relevant academic disciplines as well as in teaching and learning practice, and on Student achievement.

- a. ✓ Advancement of the Online Program’s vision and mission, see (V.9.a.)
- b. ✓ Current scholarship in relevant academic disciplines as well as in teaching and learning practice, see (II.2.b.) .
- c. ✓ Student achievement, see (II.3.a.), (II.3.c.), (V.4).



12. The online program establishes a culture of continuous program improvement that includes provisions for the following:

- a. ✓ Satisfaction surveys by students. See (APPENDIX 11.a.) and sections (II.1.a); (II.1.d.); (II.2.g); (II.2.h); (III.1); (III.2); (V.13.d.)
- b. ✓ Evaluation of curriculum and instruction as they relate to student achievement see (II.3.a.), (II.3.c.), (V.4.).
- c. ✓ Regular online faculty performance evaluations, see (V.5.).
- d. ✓ Reviewing and updating policies and procedures, see (I.7.b.), (I.7.d.), (III.10.), (V.5.).
- e. ✓ Reviewing the appropriateness, effectiveness, and quality of teaching and learning technologies, see (I.4.c.), (I.7.d.), (III.1.), (IV.3.),
- f. ✓ Regular online course reviews, see (I.7.d.), (II.2.g.), (V.6.).



13. The use of data effectively drives instructional and management decision-making.

In 2010/11 the Online Course Program offered 301 online course sections with an enrollment of 5576 students. The growth rate over the last ten years has been uneven ([APPENDIX 8.a.](#)-Table 2). The comparison of the averaged annual growth rate for two five year period 2001/02-2005/06 (34.0%) 2006/07-2010/11 (7.4%) may help to identify a general trend line. Considering some of the preliminary figures emerging from the 2011 environmental scan, an annual growth rate of 4% to 5% may serve as a reasonable estimate for the next five years.

V.13.a. Analysis of Enrollment

The numerical growth of FCC's Distance Learning Program is identified as one among nine components in the policy of "Smart Growth" (See section V.9). The interconnection of the nine program areas establishes the expectation that the numerical growth rate needs to be optimized against advances in the other areas within some reasonable time frame. The question is: Has the program's numerical growth been balanced with available resources as outlined in sections (I.2.) and (I.3.)?

The general answer is affirmative and may be further supported by the following numbers.

The growth in the online summer offering is to be noted, some 23% of all FCC summer students take only online courses.

| Summer Enrollment 2005 - 2011 | | |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------|
| | Online | Hybrid |
| Summer 11 | 1121 | 71 |
| Summer 10 | 1174 | 73 |
| Summer 09 | 1076 | 49 |
| Summer 08 | 931 | 48 |
| Summer 07 | 763 | 69 |
| Summer 06 | 702 | 3 |
| Summer 05 | | 8 |

The growth in the number of courses and sections developed as follows:

Spring 2005: 67 courses ran with 74 sections

Spring 2011: 81 courses ran with 119 sections

38 courses ran in the spring of 2011 that did not exist in the spring of 2005

23 courses ran in the spring of 2005 that did no longer exist in the spring of 2011(of which 10 were in the CIS and COS area)

35 new courses came online between 2005 and 2011

Enrollment increases were also noticeable in various subcategories. The unduplicated headcount of students taking only online courses and no F2F courses at FCC during the 15-week fall semesters increased from 5.4% in the fall of 2004 to 7.2% in the fall 2010. The unduplicated headcount of students taking only online courses and no F2F courses during the summer session increased from 20.1% in summer of 2008 to 23.3% in the summer of 2011 ([APPENDIX 9.a.](#)). The percentage of African American enrollment in online courses rose from 9.1% in 2007/08 to 9.6% in 2010/11, that of Asian students increased from 2.7% in 2007/08 to 3.5% in 2010/11. A noticeable shift occurred in the enrollment pattern of over/under 22 year old students. The over-22 population increased from 68.9% in 2007/08 to 76.1% in 2010/11 ([APPENDIX 9.b.](#)).

Course Section Capacity/Fill Ratio

Except for online courses taught with a first time cap of 15, some hybrid courses capped by room size, and others capped by over-cap contracts, all regular online courses are capped at 20. On this count a capacity/fill ratio of some 83% in online courses resulted for 2010/11. Bench marked at a 90% capacity/fill ratio, some 70% of the fall and spring courses are or above the mark, 30% are below the mark and need some attention. In the summer of 2010 56.3% of the courses offered did not rise to the bench mark level. Further investigation is indicated.

Course Sections Offered and Cancelled

Calibrating course cancellations (internally benchmarked at 5%) and course capacity/fill ratio (internally benchmarked at 90%) is an art form that remains to be fully mastered.

In 08/09 20/262 sections were cancelled at a rate of 7.6%; credits cancelled 7%.

In 09/10 20/280 sections were cancelled at a rate of 7.1%; credits cancelled 6.8%.

In 10/11 26/301 sections were cancelled at a rate of 8.6%; credits cancelled 8.6%.

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V.13.b. *Analysis of Retention, Completion, and "No-Shows"*

Definitions of "Retention" vary among different institutions. If retention is measured as a complement to "W", the 09/10 FCC figures are in line with previous years and indicate that the "W" rate in our online courses is about 5% higher than in F2F courses. The 09/10 unrefined "W" rate for online courses posted at 10.3% (down from 19.1% in 04/05). For F2F courses the comparable "W" rate is 5.3%. Results from a 2009 MOL survey may help to interpret the discrepancy and identify some of the specific reasons for higher withdrawal rates in our online courses. The purpose of the survey was to find out why some 3300 students in both Maryland and California had withdrawn from online courses. Specifically, the survey was designed to test the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant overlap between the reasons why the course is taken online and the reasons why the course is dropped.

Survey results indicate that the overlap was in fact significant and that it is the aggregate of two non-academic factors that motivate a majority of "W" students to take a course online and in turn compel

about half of them to withdraw. Between 64% (CA) and 68% (MD) of the “W” cohort identified personal/family or work schedule related issues as the single most important reason for choosing the course online. 49% (equal in both CA and MD) report the same set of issues as the single most important reason to withdraw from the course. The survey results serve to distinguish particular barriers to student success by focusing attention on the impact of social systems on distance learners and online learning. Other research in the field provides strong indications that, overall, students in online courses are under persistent pressure to prioritize between home, work, and study commitments, conditions that factor heavily into students’ decision to withdraw. (Presentation and source book of the 2009 survey data are available under separate cover). For FCC we have no data to isolate some of the specific social barriers to completion, and as a consequence we are unable to suggest specific institutional interventions that could help to alleviate problems. Collecting those data seems a priority.

Completion Rates

Completion rate is defined here as all students having received a course grade other than a “W” or a non-academic “F” received prior to the end of the 2nd week of classes. The 09/10 completion rate for online students stands at 88% averaging 87.1% for the two 15-week semesters and 91.0% for the SS.

“No Shows”

By definition a “No Show” is a “W” or “F” student who either (1) self-reports never having participated in any class activities, or (2) is identified in PeopleSoft as someone who receives a “W” dating from a time before the end of the 2nd week of class or receives a non-academic “F” with the instructor reporting no participation in class activities after the end of the 2nd week of class. In the 2009 MOL survey of “W” students 26 % report that they never participated in any class activities. A 2007 telephone survey with 100 “W” FCC students identifies 20% saying that they never participated in any class activities.

In contrast, using definition (2) the 09/10 FCC data reveal a “No Show” rate of only 3.1% (down from 11.6% in 04/05) with a cut-off date at the end of the 2nd week of class and 4.9% (down from 14.9% in 04/05) with a cut-off date at the end of the 3rd week of class. The actual rate may be slightly higher because the system captures the actual withdrawal date but does not capture a last date of participation for “W” students.

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V.13.c. The Use of Blackboard.

The current contract with Blackboard stipulates a limit of 775 GB, a bandwidth of 3500 kbps and a limit of 8000 users. Data compiled at the end of the report period indicate that at the 388 **GB level** the College is well within the GB limit ([APPENDIX 5.i.](#)). However, the bandwidth usage profile ([APPENDIX 5.f.](#)) does not show the same comfortable margin of possible expansion for seasonal peak periods. While the peak from January to March 2011 at and above the 3500 kbps limit was a one time occurrence related to administrative activities, regular peak levels for courses range between 2500 and 2800 kbps. Peak periods in the use of **bandwidth** are reflected in the corresponding peak periods in the number of log-ins ([APPENDIX 5.e.](#)). Both, the use of publisher cartridges and video streaming impact the bandwidth. Any instructional plans for any substantial increase in the use of either one of them should be calibrated carefully against the current contractual limits.

The profile of **active users** ([APPENDIX 5.g.](#)) from 1/1/2009 to 11/1/2011 shows that the number hovers around the 8000 limit at peak periods rather consistently but not excessively. However, the fact merits further investigation.

The number of **enabled website/course units** ([APPENDIX 5.h.](#)) reflects the administrative policy of keeping regular semester course units in the system for 18 months so that course content needed for the upcoming semester can be copied from courses in the previous year. Course or website units like templates, tutorials, or discipline specific resources, of course, are not subject to deletion.

The use of BB is also tracked over time by course type, i.e. online/hybrid or web-enhanced companion website ([APPENDIX 5.c.](#)). From some 2600 course sections taught in 2010/11 at the College overall, approximately 53% had a BB presence, among them some 1100 web-enhanced **companion websites**. While the figures reflect sections registered in the BB system, they may not accurately reflect the number of web-enhanced companion websites that are actually used for instruction at a given semester. Nevertheless, the figures represent a critical mass in the number of BB course sections that supports the recommendation to equip all FCC course sections with a companion website. In addition to having reached the critical mass of 50%, there major advantages to implementing the change:

- A majority of students experience the convenience of BB functionality in some of their courses and expect to see it in all of their courses, e.g. grades.
- Instructor-student communication options are improved and enriched.
- Access to an online course component opens the option of moving selected elements of the student-content interaction from the on-campus classroom to a corresponding virtual classroom.
- Student work can be submitted to and stored in a secure online environment for the duration of 12 months.
- The presence of companion websites in all sections facilitates and enhances the chances of continued instruction in case of emergencies that would require the temporary shutdown of the College.
- Course Evaluations can be moved from a high resource intensive manual process to a cheap and effective online evaluation protocol that gives instructors instant access to the results after the closing of the evaluation period.
- The eventual addition of some 800 to 900 BB companion websites (requiring added storage capacity of some 67 to 70 KB initially) would leave the College well within the limits of the contracted KB ceiling. Caveat: Very likely the College would need to increase the ceiling for both bandwidth and the number of users within the next two or three years.

► **Action Item (V.13.c.):**

- Designate resources for an initial cohort of some 30 or 40 companion websites and instructors to develop templates, training materials, and helpdesk resources for implementation in 2012.
- Create a projection of increase in both bandwidth and the number of users over the next two or three years.

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V.13.d. Analysis of BBassist

For the period August 2010 - July 2011 BBassist received 1468 emails (compared to 1861 in 2009-10, 1544 in 2008-09 and 1158 in 2007-08), and sent 1569 emails (compared to 1930 in 2009-10, 1649 in 2008-09

and 1303 in 2007-08 ([APPENDIX 12.b.](#)). One of the reasons for the larger number of sent emails versus received emails was that BBassist team members followed-up on some automated responses to ensure that students received the help they needed. Of the 1468 received emails:

- 1192 (81%) were from students.
- 65% of the student emails (compared to 59% in 2009-10 and 74% in 2008-09) were replied to with an automated response (pre-set answers to common issues).
- 5% of received emails from students could not be replied to, as students had given an incorrect email address on the BBassist form.
- 35% of student emails required a “manual” reply i.e. a more detailed, individual response from a BBassist team member.

The related issue of whether students actually knew where to find help, is addressed in the trend line student satisfaction survey ([APPENDIX 11.a.](#)). Students responded to the statement (Q18) “When I experience technical difficulties in using Blackboard I know where to get help”. From 2003/04 to 2010/11 the combined total of “Agree Strongly” and “Agree Somewhat” declined slightly from 86.7% to 79.0%. The combined total of “Disagree Somewhat” and “Disagree Strongly” rose from 13.3% in 2003/04 to 14.0% in 2010/11.

Of the 1468 emails received through BBassist in 2010/11:

- 276 (19%) were from faculty.
- 100% of faculty emails required a “manual” reply, i.e. a more detailed, individual response from a BBassist team member.

The low figure for faculty use is both misleading and indicative. It is misleading because the number of faculty requests for assistance directed at the office for Distance Learning and the Office for Learning Technologies is reportedly at least twice the number that were channeled through BBassist, the rest came by telephone or personal contact with staff members in either office. The low figure for faculty use of BBassist is indicative of two problems:

- There is no record or log of the nature or frequency of these requests;
- Faculty has a tendency to rely on personal contact with the staff. This pattern has numerous advantages, but it is unreliable when immediate assistance is needed during weekend or evening hours.

► **Action Item (V.13.d.):** Convene a Faculty Taskforce “BBassist” to identify options for faculty use and make recommendations.

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V.13.e. Trend Analysis of Satisfaction with the on-Campus Student Orientation.

As the number of first time online students leveled off from 61% in 2001/02 to 34% in the fall of 2007 and 31% in the spring of 2011 ([APPENDIX 9.b.](#) – Table 4), the on-campus orientation changed function. In the beginning, all online

students, both first-time and with prior experience, registered for the upcoming semester were invited by mail, email, and online registration. As of 2007 only first-time online students were urged to attend the on-campus orientation, others were welcome but were directed to online tutorials and to BB101, an open access Blackboard course containing all relevant information for and features of a typical online course versions of which students normally encounter in FCC’s online program. Two Focus-Group sessions with first-time online students helped to reshape and prioritize the content for the orientation. Student satisfaction is captured for the previous six semesters in ([APPENDIX 11.b.](#)).

| Orientation Summary | F 2008 | S 2009 | F 2009 | S 2010 | F 2010 | S 2011 | SS 2011 |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Scale of 1 to 5 from lowest to highest | Percent #5 Highest Satisfaction | | | | | | |
| 1. Presenter’s Delivery and Rapport with Participants | 79.6% | 80.0% | 73.6% | 80.0% | 96.4% | 45.5% | 83.3% |
| 2. Presenter’s Knowledge of Subject | 85.0% | 95.6% | 83.0% | 91.4% | 96.4% | 59.1% | 79.2% |
| 3. Was the Instructor prepared/organized | 88.6% | 95.6% | 81.1% | 94.3% | 96.4% | 40.9% | 79.2% |
| 4. How would you rate the presentation content ? | 79.6% | 77.8% | 58.5% | 80.0% | 78.6% | 50.0% | 62.5% |
| 5. Were your expectations for this workshop met? | 72.7% | 62.2% | 66.0% | 74.3% | 85.7% | 45.5% | 58.3% |
| 6. Please give an overall combined rating to workshop and the instructor | 81.8% | 84.4% | 66.0% | 88.6% | 92.8% | 54.5% | 70.8% |

The figures for Spring 2011 need a further exploration.



V.13.f. Analysis of Early Alert.

The analysis covers a total of 5779 Early Alerts posted by instructors between the fall of 2008 and the fall of 2010 ([APPENDIX 17.h.](#)). Of those, 4944 (85.6%) were in F2F courses, 124 (2.1%) in hybrid courses, and 709 (12.3%) in Online Courses. Besides being given the option of making specific recommendations, e.g. seeing a counselor, the instructor was asked to recommend that the student either withdraw from or complete the course.

37% of the online instructors recommended withdrawal as compared to 31% of instructors in F2F

| Instructor: | Online Courses | | F2F Courses | |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-----|
| | 709 | | 4944 | |
| Recommended to Complete | 447 | 63% | 3413 | 69% |
| Recommended to Withdraw | 262 | 37% | 1531 | 31% |

courses. The difference of six percentage points is statistically significant. It is a matter of further investigation whether it is also a difference with

practical implications. Without implying any particular causal relationship between recommendation and outcome, in each category the “W” and Success (A,B,C,S) outcome figures are as follows.

| Recommended to Complete | Online Courses | | F2F Courses | |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-----|
| | 447 | | 3413 | |
| Student Withdrew | 151 | 34% | 788 | 23% |
| Student Succeeded | 124 | 28% | 1060 | 31% |

Overall, the figures seem to indicate that the Early Alert system is beneficial for the teaching and learning process in online courses.

| Recommended to Withdraw | Online Courses | | F2F Courses | |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-----|
| | 262 | | 1531 | |
| Students Withdrew | 130 | 49% | 623 | 41% |
| Students Succeeded | 10 | 4% | 102 | 7% |

■ First of all, it captures students who get behind early in class participation. In doing so the Early Alert system addresses a concern of both the 2007 and the 2010 “W” studies which

identified “Getting Behind” as one of the major obstacles to student success in an online course.

- Secondly, while any withdrawal after the course has started is a sign of something “having gone wrong”, the substantial withdrawal rate of 39% for both recommendation categories is actually a good indicator that students re-examine their schedules and come to a more realistic assessment of what they are able to accomplish in that given semester.
- The Early Alert has served as a wake-up call for some 19% combined from both instructor recommendation categories to get to work and succeed.



V.13.g. Analysis of Course Administration

Traditionally nine program areas have provided the operational parameters for the implementation of strategic program objectives and established the expectation that strategic advances in one area should be followed and matched by advances in the other areas within some reasonable time frame.

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| Numerical growth | Course technology | Quality control | Faculty training | Support Services | Budget Staffing | Program Admin. | Advertising | MOL Partner |
| → | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ← |

Historically, that expectation was not met during the initial period of program development prior to 2006 and the arrival of a full-time Administrative Assistant. The numerical growth in enrollment from 314 in 2001 to over 3000 in 2006 as well as the associated proliferation of course sections had by far outpaced resource allocation in the area of Program Administration. A legacy of hairline stress fractures in the administrative structure of the College’s Online Course Program remained. The stress fractures become visible when the demand for effective quality assurance for some 300 online course sections increasingly requires standardization. Four administrative challenges must be met:

- To accomplish an efficient content update (e.g. study outlines, power points, practice quizzes, online course activities etc.) for some 300 course sections with different websites and different instructors.
- To ensure and demonstrate equivalency between a QM reviewed course credited with the QM logo and subsequent sections of the same course taught by different instructors also to be credited with the QM logo.
- To ensure equivalency between a 15-week course and different accelerated formats (8-week, 5-week etc.) of the same course taught by different instructors.
- To create a coherent protocol and time frame for the selection of textbooks and publisher’s materials

The deployment of **Master Courses** will meet those challenges and ensure updates and stability of content for all sections and course formats. The design protocol for a Master Course has four basic components:

- All course materials are placed into one navigational sector in the course. The sequence of student assignments simply links to the materials needed for a particular Assignment Week or other Assignment Unit for any given semester format.
- Every course coming out of the QM review process automatically serves as a Master Course.
- Best Practice recommendations give instructors the freedom to make minor changes and adjustments to the material in the section they teach.

- Additions to the material such as a different activity or assessment for particular learning outcomes should be submitted for review to an instructional design team including instructors who teach different sections of a the Master Course.

Over time a well designed and developed Master Course will give different instructors choices in customizing course materials into different formats and in tailoring course activities and assessments for different teaching and learning styles.

The creation and maintenance of Master Courses initially require a considerable investment of resources, but over the long run will serve to assure quality and consistency

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V.13.h. Analysis of Student Evaluations

The common part of the student evaluation consists now of 21 revised items for both F2F and online classes and has been administered for the nine years. Some of the

questions have been revised to better match the online environment resulting in some gaps in the presentation of the trend data from 2003/04 to 2010/11. ([APPENDIX 16.a.](#))

The trend analysis for the evaluation of **Online Courses** shows improvement between four and twenty six percentage points in nine (items 4,5,6,11,12,13,14,15,16) out of thirteen comparable item ratings combining “Strongly Agree” + “Agree”.

| | Instructor Evaluation | 03/04 | Sp.11 |
|----|---|--------------|--------------|
| 4 | Encouraged me to participate in the learning process | 79% | 88% |
| 5 | Related to me with courtesy and respect | 89% | 93% |
| 6 | Presented subject matter clearly | 75% | 83% |
| | Course Evaluation (General Education) | | |
| 11 | Course helped improve writing skills. | 49% | 68% |
| 12 | Course helped to think critically about information, etc. | 77% | 87% |
| 13 | Course developed ability to gather information, etc. | 72% | 87% |
| 14 | Course helped understand relevance of world issues | 81% | 91% |
| 15 | Course helped with complex ideas | 65% | 85% |
| 16 | Course helped develop critical-thinking skills | 61% | 87% |

While item 16 (“The Course helped me to develop critical-thinking skills”) shows an overall six year improvement, a decline of seven percentage points, down from 94% in 2007/08 to 87% in the Spring of 2011 should be noted for further scrutiny in relation to item 12 (“The Course helped me to think critically about information, etc.”) which sustained an 87% rating over the same period. Improvement in other items remained within the range of one to three percentage points.

Apart from minor annual fluctuations, there was no overall decline in the percentages from 2003/04 to the spring of 2011 in the results for online courses.

Comparing results from both **on-campus and online** courses, a number of discrepancies show up. Combining “Strongly Agree” + “Agree” in the Instructor Evaluation for the three selected data sets, a gap between three and nine percentage points remains in the spring 2011 tabulation.

Looking at the progression from 2004/05 to the spring of 2011, however, the analysis shows a decrease in the gap between 2% and 8% in three of six data points. The one increase of +9% in line item #6 needs further attention.

| | | 04/05 | 04/05 | 07/08 | 07/08 | Sp.11 | Sp.11 | Gap |
|---|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| | Instructor Evaluation | Online | Campus | Online | Campus | Online | Campus | |
| 4 | Encouraged to participate in the learning process | 77% | 91% | 86% | 93% | 88% | 95% | - 7% |
| 5 | Related to me with courtesy and respect | 85% | 96% | 88% | 97% | 93% | 96% | - 8% |
| 6 | Presented subject matter clearly | 77% | n.a. | 91% | 90% | 83% | 92% | +9%* |
| 7 | Constructed assignments/tests fairly | 85% | 92% | 90% | 94% | 88% | 93% | - 2% |
| 8 | Graded assignments and tests fairly | 88% | 93% | 93% | 95% | 89% | 94% | same |
| 9 | Enabled me to achieve core outcomes | 87% | 92% | 90% | 93% | 89% | 94% | same |

The gap analysis in the Course Evaluation part (questions 10-16) shows online and on-campus figures in closer proximity overall. Gains in closing the gap from 04/05 to the spring of 2011 are worth noting. In the spring of 2011 Online and On-Campus data are practically identical in five of seven questions. In the case of question 13 (“Course developed ability to gather information, etc.”) the online results have been some two percentage points ahead since 2007/08. Results for question 11 regarding improved writing skills need further attention for both online and on-campus courses.

| | | 04/05 | 04/05 | 07/08 | 07/08 | Sp.11 | Sp.11 | Gap |
|----|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| | Course Evaluation (General Education) | Online | Campus | Online | Campus | Online | Campus | |
| 10 | Course helped understand basic facts, concepts, etc. | 91% | 93% | 91% | 94% | 92% | 95% | + 1% |
| 11 | Course helped improve writing skills. | 51% | 59% | n.a. | n.a. | 68% | 72% | - 4% |
| 12 | Course helped think critically about information etc. | 75% | 82% | 87% | 90% | 87% | 87% | - 7% |
| 13 | Course developed ability to gather information, etc. | 77% | 79% | 92% | 91% | 87% | 85% | |
| 14 | Course helped understand relevance of world issues | 83% | 87% | 93% | 90% | 91% | 91% | - 4% |
| 15 | Course helped with complex ideas | 70% | 80% | 92% | 89% | 85% | 86% | - 9% |
| 16 | Course helped develop critical-thinking skills | 66% | 75% | 94% | 89% | 87% | 89% | - 9% |

| | | 04/05 | 04/05 | 07/08 | 07/08 | Sp.11 | Sp.11 |
|----|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | Student Self Assessment | Online | Campus | Online | Campus | Online | Campus |
| 17 | Participated in the discussion forum(s), etc. | n.a. | n.a. | 91% | 97% | 90% | 96% |
| 18 | Completed required readings and assignments | n.a. | n.a. | 94% | 94% | 93% | 93% |
| 19 | Interacted with other students in learning process | n.a. | n.a. | 88% | 94% | 85% | 96% |
| 20 | Studied each week two or more hours | n.a. | n.a. | 93% | 73% | 84% | 73% |
| 21 | Integrated knowledge with other courses, life, etc. | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | 91% | 91% |

Results for online and on-campus courses in the category of Student Self assessment are almost identical with the exception of question 20 regarding the weekly study time. The 07/08 differential of 20% between online and on-campus courses is as astounding. Clarity will come only with a drastic revision of the question to reflect the new Federal Credit Hour requirements

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V.13.j. *MobileTechnologies*

According to the research firm CANALYS smartphone sales surpassed those of PCs for the first time in 2011.

The analysts predict that smartphones, already at the high-end of the mobile phone market, are “becoming a truly mass market proposition”¹. Beginning in the fall of 2010 the College has been tracking online students regarding the use of mobile devices in the instructional environment ([APPENDIX 9.c.](#) – Table 2). The results are indicative in their progression not only within the period

of twelve months, up from 45.5% to 55.3% in the ownership of a mobile device, but also in the progression from Q11 to Q12 indicating an interest level of almost 60% in use of mobile devices for instructional purposes among those respondents who do not presently own one.

| Mobile Devices | F 2010 yes | S 2011 yes | SS 2011 yes |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 10 - Do you own and use a Smart Phone or similar mobile device? (i.e. Blackberry, Droid, I-Phone, Tablet, etc.)? | 45.5% | 53.8% | 55.3% |
| 11 - If your answer to question 10 is YES: Would you use the Mobile Device to access your Blackboard Courses? | 44.4% | 49.2% | 45.4% |
| 12 - If your answer to question 10 is NO: Would you be interested in using a mobile device in the future to access your Blackboard Courses? | 57.8% | 59.5% | 59.6% |

The above figures support the trend statements 1, 5, and 6 provided by the “Technology Group” of FCC’s 2011 environmental scan team ([APPENDIX 19.a.](#)).

¹ <http://www.eweek.com/c/a/Mobile-and-Wireless/Smartphone-Sales-Beat-PCs-for-First-Time-Ever-Canalys-164565/?kc=rss>

► **Action Item (V.13.j):** Identify a group of faculty members to pilot the use of a mobile device in one of their courses and make Best Practice recommendations.

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V.13.k. Analysis of Success Rates

The term ‘Success Rate’ is typically defined as achieving transfer grades “A”, “B”, “C” and “S” relative to all students having received a grade (excludes “W” and non-academic “F”s). FCC’s Success Rate of 68.9% (including summer) for its online courses in 2010/11 (down from 69.3 in 2003/04) compares to the Success Rate of 76.7% for its F2F courses during 2010/11 up from 76.1 in 2003/04. The Success Rate for online female students during 09/10 at 73.8% compares to the F2F counterpart at 77% for the same year.

The Success Rate for online male students during 09/10 at 63.5% compares to the F2F counterpart at 70.0% during the same period.

By age group, only 64.5% of the online students under 22 years of age achieve an A, B, or C compared to 78% of their older colleagues during the report period. The low achievement rate for the younger age group of online students needs attention. The figures for F2F students respectively are 72% for those under 22 and 79.1% for students over 22 years of age.

The Success Rate by date of enrollment for 09/10 confirms the pattern from previous years: students who enroll before the 10-week mark post success rates at around 86-87% compared to late registrations with around or even below 70%.

► **Action Item (V.13.k.):** Initiate research regarding the lower achievement rate for the younger age group of online students.

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