Distance Learning Strategic Plan

The extensive growth in distance education over the last decade provides both the opportunity for growth AND the need to provide clear strategic direction to expand the opportunity to meet community needs for access through diverse delivery models. With a focus on student success and the implementation of quality mechanisms, the College can chart a path toward innovative and effective online program development.
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**Introduction**

The advent of online learning has significantly affected postsecondary institutions by providing the opportunity for increased student access and convenience; flexible student instructional delivery; expanded facility usage and increased enrollment; and innovative designs in program development (Xu & Jaggars, 2011). The hypothesis is that economic conditions, convenience variables, and institutional growth and flexibility have contributed to the 4.6 million students who participated in online learning in higher education in fall 2008, an increase of 17% from the previous year (Allen & Seaman, 2010; Van Der Werf & Sabatier, 2009). Specifically, 2007-2008 statistics indicate that 24% of students in 2-year institutions have taken an online course (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp, & Tahan, 2011). However, despite 70% of chief academic officers identifying online education as critical to the long-term strategy of public institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2010), many organizations have not established a clear direction and conscious effort in online courses to manage growth; ensure student success; provide adequate services and support mechanisms; establish quality control processes; and provide comprehensive support for faculty development.

Recent study results indicate that nearly 50% of Virginia community college students engaged in at least one online course (Jaggers & Xu, 2010) whereas the rates of online course participation in Florida are lagging (based on 2008-2009 state data). During the 2010-11 academic year, 33% of all students in the Florida College System were enrolled in e-learning courses (State Board of Education Presentation, 2012). As a snapshot across the Florida system, Polk State College online participation rates at approximately 24% of FTE (2011) have significantly increased over the last 5-year period. St. Petersburg College has 32.8% FTE online participation rates with a dramatic 13% growth in online enrollment between 2005 and 2009. According to data provided by the Florida College System, the majority of the 28 colleges now provide entire AA degrees online (State Board of Education Presentation, 2012).

A recent report indicates that the South will be differently poised than the rest of the country and by 2020-21 needs to be able to accommodate 9.4% more graduates, which include a more diversified and older student body (Van Der Werf & Sabatier, 2009). With recent Florida guidelines mandating that high school students complete at least one online credit before graduation, it is anticipated that Florida’s higher education online participation rates will also continue to climb. Therefore, in order to leverage the dramatic increase in online enrollments, to optimally position Polk State College in the education landscape, and to proactively anticipate the conditions necessary for student academic success and program completion, comprehensive, targeted, and innovative long-term organizational planning is required.

To achieve its long-range vision, Polk State College has embarked upon a process of strategic planning for distance learning through the College Distance Learning Committee. This document attempts to intentionally align to existing institutional strategic planning as well as contribute to planning for the future by including the following elements as recommended by Seaman (2009):

- Design of effective organizational structures
- Establish funding mechanisms and institutional resources to implement and sustain the plan
- Integration of strong institutional leadership with a foundation of effective communication
- Infusion of the faculty voice
A comprehensive distance learning strategic plan should embody the three elements of the Polk State College vision: innovation, engagement, and value. The challenge then becomes to cogently integrate these framing elements throughout this document while utilizing the foundational elements developed in this plan as a guide for institutional goal setting.

Quality institutional distance learning is not prescriptive, independent, or sequential; rather it is complex, complicated, and somewhat messy. The need to prioritize, establish timelines, and identify clear outcomes with measures is critical to the operationalization and implementation of initiatives, particularly those that will require a shifting of institutional culture through the alteration of many preexisting processes, norms, perspectives, and beliefs. Therefore, the development process must be comprehensive and inclusive of the appropriate stakeholders and representative of a collective community, while also forging innovative pathways for learning.

As is inherent in any strategic plan, the vision, goals, actions, and implementation resources are presented in this document. It is essential that student success remains the focal point of all distance learning and drive the development process. The following elements should be considered as part of a model for addressing the broad spectrum of issues that are impacted by distance learning: college-wide goal setting and governance structures; resource development of organizational structures; technology tools; online course development; targeted e-learning audiences; maximization of existing and new online program packaging; ongoing continuous improvement through action research; student success services; online readiness assessments; and faculty support through training, mentoring, and collaboration (see Figure 1). These concepts can be clustered into categories and are included in the prioritization schedules defined by the committee workgroups to structure implementation. An important factor to note: the interdependent and intersecting nature of information and instructional technology is a foundation that must be cultivated at an institutional level to provide ultimate service and response for all stakeholders involved in the distance learning process.

Distance learning is a cross-institutional, interdisciplinary, and invasive endeavor. It involves all campus parties in different aspects of infrastructure, development, delivery, support, and assessment. All support services from information technology to instructional technology, student services, academic services, and libraries must be mindful and proactive in the provision of services. Faculty, the core of any academic institution, not only need a strong voice and expression of their individual expertise, but also require opportunities for technology professional development; ongoing support; mentorship; dialogue; and institutional parameters for quality, assessment, and review. Students deserve and demand not only the convenience of distance learning options, but also the integral support mechanisms to help them to succeed and guide them through the learning process. Essentially, the work put forward in this document, should be representative of the needs of all campus parties with regard to distance learning.
The title alone of this document suggests a focused context of information relating to distance learning. However, the convergence of technologies and delivery mechanisms has blurred the distinction between academic delivery for students who are at a distance of time and space and...
those who are on campus. Twenty-first century skills require technology infused and integrated approaches for ALL students. Therefore, best practices in teaching and learning for face-to-face students should include the use of LMS tools, technology integration in the classroom, and the opportunity to create dynamic multimedia products as learning outcomes; just as the online environment should include these items plus the high quality (perhaps higher quality) of instruction that is encountered in the face-to-face classroom. It then becomes difficult to segment and separate the planning mechanisms and the target audience for which best practices are intended. Information literacy stands as a common pillar of improvement for all Polk State College students regardless of academic program delivery; therefore, student support technology mechanisms inclusive of library services, the TLCC, and multimedia development are core components of this document.

The following sections of the strategic plan outline a direction and general framing for issues surrounding distance education. While the vision is listed as relating to distance education, it is appropriate to mention that the plan has the potential to impact ALL teaching and learning through the use and integration of instructional technology in all learning environments. Many distance learning tools are and should be available for enhancing traditional classroom instruction and the facilitation of course tasks and communication. Current data representing information about online courses, faculty, and students is provided to offer context to the goals, objectives, action steps, and measures that follow. The next section of the document includes the alignment of this plan to the college-wide strategic plan; organizational structure documentation, including current operating structures and distance education committee structures; and an implementation timeline. Finally, the distance education institutional and programmatic assessment and a proposed three-year budget framework are provided. This document is provided as a guide. The intention is not to prescribe to the College community HOW to go about the work of distance education; rather, the hope is that this will provide a scaffold for departments, faculty, programs, students, support services, and administration to become future focused on the next steps in distance learning and technological innovation.

**Polk State College Vision on Distance Education:**

*Polk State College delivers innovative distance learning resulting in quality education and student success in a dynamic global environment.*

Polk State College has included a clear directive in the College Strategic Plan (2012-2017) to develop an organizational structure to institutionally support the planned activities described in this document:

*Create a structured e-campus environment by 2015.*

**Current Organizational Landscape**

**Course Delivery**
The last three years of academic data reporting at Polk State College has illustrated approximately an 84% increase in online FTE (from 557 in 2008-2009 to 1027 in 2010-11), with a much higher
growth in hybrid course FTE of 149%, and a traditional course FTE increase of 13%. Despite the FTE increase in all areas of delivery, the proportion of students in online courses versus other delivery mechanisms has increased by 5% while the proportion of students in traditional courses has reduced by 7% in the same three-year time period. Despite this reduction in the percentage of students in traditional courses, the overall enrollment FTE has increased (5049 in 2008-2009 to 5720 in 2010-11). The proportional growth in FTE does not necessarily adequately reflect the FTE enrollment which almost doubled in the three-year period. Table 1 shows the total number and proportions of seats and unduplicated student headcount per academic year for online, traditional, and hybrid courses; Figure 2 displays the FTE growth across the same three-year period for the different delivery types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Face to Face</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Hybrid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/2009</td>
<td>48,168</td>
<td>11,667</td>
<td>5,674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/2010</td>
<td>52,560</td>
<td>13,020</td>
<td>7,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/2011</td>
<td>54,146</td>
<td>13,670</td>
<td>10,488</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Enrollment growth over 3-year period by delivery type.

During academic year 2010/11, a total number of 3,482 sections was offered at Polk State College. Of these courses, 777 were offered through distance education (hybrid and online), representative of 22.3% of all sections and 20% of credit enrollment. There were 12 courses that were offered in both hybrid and online format, 11 courses in traditional and hybrid format, and 27 courses traditional and
online format in Fall 2011. See Table 2 for a comparison of the number of courses that were available per year within the particular format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses Delivered in Multiple Formats</th>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008/2009 Hybrid and Online</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/2009 Traditional and Hybrid</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/2009 Traditional and Online</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/2010 Hybrid and Online</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/2010 Traditional and Hybrid</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/2010 Traditional and Online</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/2011 Hybrid and Online</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/2011 Traditional and Hybrid</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/2011 Traditional and Online</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Number of courses by various delivery formats for the previous three academic years.

Over the last three years, the number of online courses has increased from 54 in Fall 2009 to 105 in Fall, 2011, with a 42% growth in online sections in the past year. Hybrid courses have also increased in number, from 38 hybrid courses in the Fall 2009 to 75 in Fall 2011, and a similar growth of 45% in hybrid sections over the last year. Table 3 includes the data relating to semester growth in online and hybrid courses over the past three academic years, including the growth percentage per term across that period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Count</th>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008/2009</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/2010</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/2011</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Year</td>
<td>157.8%</td>
<td>159.3%</td>
<td>194.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>309.1%</td>
<td>218.5%</td>
<td>197.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Course count per term by online and hybrid delivery for the past three years.

There is no doubt that the failure and withdraw rate for online students over the last three years has been consistently and significantly higher than in the hybrid and traditional environment. In 2011, students either failed or withdrew from online courses at a rate of almost 30%. While the retention rates for traditional and hybrid courses may also cause some concern for the College, the overwhelming lack of successful completion of online courses begs further consideration and
investigation of causation variables and strategies for addressing the issue. The grade distributions from A-D for each delivery medium are interestingly within similar ranges, with approximately 33% of students in 2011 in traditional courses and 31% of online students earning a grade of A. Table 4 provides the data for the grade distributions of the last three years in online, hybrid, and traditional courses. The hybrid courses appear to have the highest grade distribution. Data substantiated by student comments suggested hybrid courses were the “easiest” to complete. Figure 3 summarizes course-success data across a 3-year average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Success</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>W</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009 Hybrid</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 Hybrid</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 Hybrid</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Student grade distribution by delivery model for past three years.

Figure 3. Student success percentages by clustered grades and delivery.

Faculty Information
Similar to the pattern of online student enrollment, the number of faculty has risen over the last three years. Faculty teach in a variety of delivery formats, with some teaching in two or three environments (online, traditional, and hybrid) and others delivering instruction in only one particular format. During
Fall 2011, 279 faculty taught in only the traditional face-to-face format; whereas 10 taught in both traditional and hybrid, 48 in traditional and online, and 7 in hybrid and online. About 13 faculty taught only online courses, 16 hybrid only courses, and 14 in all three environments. Table 5 provides the three years of data for faculty teaching the variety of individual and combined teaching environments. Figure 4 shows the growing number of faculty teaching hybrid and online courses.

There are 108 full-time faculty, 189 adjuncts, and 14 staff members that have participated in the required PAL training. An additional 26 full-time and adjunct faculty taught in online and hybrid courses when comparing the Spring 2010 and 2011 terms.

### Number of Faculty and Course Delivery Formats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>All Three Formats</th>
<th>Hybrid and Online</th>
<th>Only Hybrid</th>
<th>Only Online</th>
<th>Only Traditional</th>
<th>Traditional and Hybrid</th>
<th>Traditional and Online</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Number of faculty involved in each delivery of courses by method by term for past three years.

**Student Data**

In Spring 2011, 3578 students took online or hybrid courses, with females representing 65% and males 35% of this enrollment. These percentages have remained fairly constant over the last three years. The College’s overall gender ratios for the same time frame were 63% females and 37% males. Of last year’s (Fall 2010-Spring 2011) full-time students, 44% were enrolled in online and hybrid courses compared to the total number of 27% of full-time students enrolled at the College last year. The age of students enrolling in online courses has remained somewhat consistent over time. Approximately 44% of students were 25 or older in Fall 2010, versus 43% in Fall 2008. Table 6 includes information about the age of students enrolled in classes with non-traditional course delivery formats over the last three years.
Table 6. Enrollment by student age for each term over the last three years.

The general college ethnicity distribution can be found in Table 7, comparing it to the online and hybrid enrollment representation of the various groups. During 2010/11, the online/hybrid ethnicity distributions were as follows: 66% of students were White, 16% Black, 11% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 4.5% of other race or ethnicity. These distributions have remained fairly consistent over the last 3 years, although there have been some small increases in Black and Hispanic representation and a small decrease in White online students, which follows the patterns of overall student enrollment trajectories.
The number of students in each form of delivery has increased over the last three years (online, hybrid, and traditional). The greatest increase of student headcount is in hybrid courses with an 89% increase over 2009-2011; whereas, there was 64% increase in online courses and a 17% increase in face-to-face courses.

**General Information**

Over the past three years, almost $500,000 (on average about $160,000 per year) in instructional technology salaries was expended by the College. About $56,000 in instructional technology software and hardware was expended per year as well. Current accounting systems make it difficult to track the faculty incentives for developing and teaching online courses and for professional development relating to distance education and technologies. Example software costs in 2011 include Smarter Thinking ($28,000), Quality Matters ($1650), D2L ($53,622), and 2012 Tegrity ($22,965).

**Distance Learning Goals and Action Steps**

**Goal 1**

*Polk State College will become a leader in Florida in distance education by 2017.*

**Strategic Objectives**

I. Attrition rate from online courses will not be more than 2% higher than attrition from face-to-face courses.

II. By August 2014, a fully online AA degree (general education) will be offered.

III. By August 2014, select AS degrees will be offered in a fully online format.

IV. By August 2015, at least one bachelor’s degree will be offered in a fully online format.

V. By June 2017, 80% of students who begin an online degree offering will complete the degree online.

VI. By June 2017, 60% of online courses will be certified by Quality Matters.

**Assessment Measures**

I. Percent students withdrawing from online courses.

II. a. Listing of online courses and degree programs.
b. Percent of increased enrollment in select AA, AS, BS courses and programs.

III. a. Listing of online courses and degree programs.
b. Percent of increased enrollment in select AA, AS, BS courses and programs.

IV. a. Listing of online courses and degree programs.
b. Percent of increased enrollment in select AA, AS, BS courses and programs.

V. a. Correlate online enrollment and degree completion.
b. Percent students repeatedly enrolled in online courses.

VI. Percent QM certified courses

Associated Tasks
1. Strategically identify programs for full online development.
2. Develop a process for identifying and monitoring students who enter or transition into totally online degrees (versus those just taking some online courses).
3. Complete Quality Matters pilots with submission of courses and approval and make recommendations to appropriate College committees.
4. Develop a marketing plan for recruiting students for online programs and courses.

Goal 2
Polk State College will implement support and response structures for faculty and students to facilitate equitable, successful completion of online courses and programs.

Strategic Objectives
I. Establish a dynamic, responsive faculty and adjunct professional development model by the end of May 2017 to provide training, technical assistance, access to innovative technology, pedagogical guidance, mentorship, just in-time instruction, and collaboration on content development. (Ongoing milestones noted in Figure 7.)

II. Provide equitable, engaging, and comprehensive student support services for distance students by May 2017 with annual implementation of new student support mechanisms.

III. Provide portable technology tools for faculty use by January 2013.

Assessment Measures
I. a. Faculty satisfaction survey on support services.
b. Report of services provided.
c. Report of Teaching and Learning Innovation Center usage and project data.
II. Percent increase in student satisfaction survey results on specific questions related to equity, degree of engagement, and comprehensive services with regard to online courses and programs.
   b. Listing and analysis of student support services.

III. Equipment checkout available and data on usage.

Associated Tasks
1. Sub-committee to identify needs, develop a plan, and make recommendations to DE committee.

2. Calculate resources needed in personnel, facilities, and funds to provide needed services to support student success.

3. Work with appropriate departments to implement services to support online student success.

4. Identify technology support options to enhance student success in online courses and make implementation recommendations to the College.

5. Work with IT to develop technology check-out options and provide campus-based space for the creation of online content and technology innovation.

6. Implement a Teaching and Learning Innovation Center to support teaching and learning innovation by September 2012.

7. PAL Certification trainings redesigned and implemented by December 2012.

8. Develop and implement a comprehensive Faculty Professional Development system by Fall 2014, which includes a wide variety of workshops and professional development options for learning and engaging with instructional technologies.

Goal 3
Polk State College will implement appropriate infrastructure to increase quality review, technology implementation, organizational structure, resource development, and faculty input and guidance.

Strategic Objectives
I. Faculty will adopt standards for online testing that preserve academic integrity by December 2013.

II. Establish an initial organizational and functional structure for an E-campus by May 2013.

III. Provide seamless, integrated learning technology solutions that facilitate course content delivery.
Assessment Measures

I. Guidelines, recommendations, implementation of technology by 25% of all appropriate faculty.
   a. Online testing standards approved by appropriate faculty or curricular committee by September 2013.

II. Implemented Polk State organization and support infrastructure, December 2013.

III. Survey of faculty satisfaction about technology solutions.

Associated Tasks

1. Conduct demos and state review of other pilots to determine the most appropriate system for implementation.

2. Develop online testing solutions for identity authentication and academic integrity.

3. Implement a system for the integration of technology systems for ease of faculty and student use.

4. Design an organizational structure that will facilitate, monitor, and advocate for distance learning and instructional technologies.

5. Investigate and implement the most dynamic and appropriate learning management system that aligns to the instructional needs of Polk State College.

Organizational Alignment

The Polk State College five-year strategic plan (2012-2017) provides institutional-level support for the establishment of infrastructure to enhance distance education practices. The following major areas of emphasis, goals, and objectives support the details and tasks aforementioned in this document.

1. Innovation: Generate, disseminate, and implement new ideas for the benefit of students, staff, and the community.

1.3. Programs and Services: Promote exceptional learning and support environments.

   Goal 1.3.1 Develop an exceptional learning environment.

   Objective 1.3.1.2 Create a structured e-campus environment by 2015.

In addition, the distance education strategic plan objectives also support the following innovation goals and objectives:

   Goal 1.2.2 Leverage best practices to promote exemplary teaching, learning, and professional development

   Objective 1.2.2.2 Implement best practices principles in undergraduate education.

   Objective 1.2.2.4 Identify future needs for innovative classroom design.
Goal 1.3.2 Develop an exceptional support environment for all stakeholders.

Further, specific projects identified in this plan also align to elements of the College’s engagement area of emphasis. The planned Center of Excellence includes conceptual components to facilitate instructional best practice and advancements in teaching and learning. This includes access to and opportunities with new technologies for the development of content and multimedia objects for both face-to-face and online environments. The Teaching and Learning Innovation Center identified in this document serves as a component aligned to the following goal and objective:

2. Engagement

Goal 2.2 Staff and faculty: Enhance an environment that supports engagement in student success.

Objective 2.2.1 Design and implement a Center for Excellence and Engagement at Polk State College.

Organizational Structure

Distance Education Committee
The purpose of the committee as listed in the existing historical documents is to “provide a forum and mechanism for creating, developing, and improving distance learning experiences at the College.”

Figure 5 and Figure 6 provide a visual representation of the current organizational structure and the supporting committees that work in conjunction with the staff charged with distance education services.

The following committees will need to be developed to support the implementation of the plan.

- The investigation, adoption, recommendation, and implementation of new technologies that support learning and instruction, including course management systems and other delivery media, are critical to innovation and distance learning. A sub-committee has been established that should submit formal procedures for the College to follow to facilitate future technology development.

- Faculty issues such as incentives and agreements for online course development; online course and teaching parameters; online student perceptions of instruction; online course development and quality review; and faculty-development initiatives all require focused, collaborative structures for building consensus and bridging administrative and instructional interests. To this end, sub-committees should be created as appropriate to shepherd specific items through the faculty governance channels. Faculty training and development should be guided by the efforts of a sub-committee to assure continual improvement, innovation, and a system focused on instructional needs. Clear processes for the development of new ideas and facilitation of change on issues relating to distance learning should be established.
• Student success should remain the cornerstone of all instructional delivery including distance education. The development of student-entry guidelines for advising, assessment, and communication are critical to future distance learning growth and student retention mechanisms. In addition, student technology training, support, multimedia and digital literacy, and guidance and advising for online course success, can increase student course and program completion. Equitable options for online student services support, counseling, financial aid guidance, student learning communities, clubs, and academic support services such as tutoring, are required to extend campus based services. Committees associated with providing opportunities to further the College’s services for student success in distance learning should be formed to provide recommendations to the distance learning committee.

• A variety of College departments with technology issues and common understandings of projects and future efforts are critical to the success of this plan. To this end, the following departments should organize and convene periodically: Instructional Technology; Information Technology; Information Systems; Media Technologies; Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning; and Professional Development.

Implementation Timeline
Each goal and objective outline above is based on a time frame appropriate to the context of that work. In order to see the inter-relationships of each outlined task and the targeted timeline of the outcomes, a Gantt chart has been provided in Figure 7. Indented tasks are associated with the parent item. Linked tasks represent prerequisite completion of items. Stars on the chart indicate the completion of that particular task.
Distance Learning Strategic Plan

Figure 5. Current Organizational Structure Supporting Distance Education

Figure 6. Distance Education Committee proposed Sub-Committee Structure
Figure 7. Goal and Objective implementation timeline.
Institutional and Programmatic Assessment

There are three different assessment measures that are suggested for use to establish benchmarks and growth in the quality of distance education delivery and institutional support mechanisms. Each provides feedback and an evaluative tool for different aspects that contribute to the success of online learning.

I. Quality Matters Course Rubric

Quality Matters provides a mechanism for assessing online course design and a review process for evaluating, through peer review, the level of “quality” of the course design, including the areas of course overview and introduction, learning objectives, assessment and measurement, instructional materials, learner interaction and engagement, course technology, learner support, and accessibility.

While Quality Matters provides a standard and process for assessing online course design, it does not provide information to the institution about quality teaching in online environments nor the organizational infrastructure that is in place to support the course delivery process.

II. SREB Standards for Quality Online Teaching

The SREB Standards for Online Teaching groups a series of standards in three different areas: academic preparation; content knowledge, skills, and temperament for instructional technology; and online teaching and learning methodology, management, knowledge, skills and delivery. Within these areas are 11 standard statements with behavioral indicators that can be used to assist faculty with thinking and assessing their instructional practices within the online environment. These standards can be used as a framework for providing training, engaging faculty in peer-to-peer discussions about the components of quality online teaching, and as a tool for improved instructional practice within the context of online courses.

II. Sloan-C Effective Practices: Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Education Programs (Sloan Consortium)

The Quality Scorecard can be utilized to assess the institutions overall quality to support online learning. The original work by Sloan was based upon 5 interrelated areas: learning effectiveness, access, scale (capacity enrollment achieved through cost effectiveness and institutional commitment), faculty satisfaction, and student satisfaction (Moore, 2011). However, the scorecard includes the following areas: institutional support, technology support, course development and instructional design, course structure, teaching and learning, social engagement, faculty support, student support and evaluation, and assessment (Sloan Consortium, 2011). Components of the scorecard can be substantiated and triangulated (i.e., instructional design and teaching and learning) through the use of the Quality Matters rubric and the Standards for Quality Online Teaching.

Moore (2011) also shares a rubric for evaluating effective practices in innovation, replicability, potential impact, supporting documentation, and scope. The Sloan-C Quality
Scorecard measure can be implemented to assess progress gained on strategic initiatives on an annual basis as well as provide a target for the Polk State e-college infrastructure and organizational support mechanisms.

III. Comparative Outcomes Assessment

In addition, a set of more traditional assessment methods will complete the evaluation toolset used. The associated measures will provide course-, discipline-, and department-specific comparisons of grade distributions and student success rates among delivery formats, including the comparison of students’ withdrawal reasons gained via the College’s withdrawal survey. The analyses will also involve the assessment of differences in Student’s Perception of Instruction (SPI) and FTIC cohort-specific measures of retention and time-to-completion. Most of these analyses are designed to capture variances based on demographic characteristics and will be augmented by the results from the continuing application of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ).
References


