Report on Existing Academic Programming Offered through Distance Education

Descriptive Information:
a) Name, title, email address of the following individuals:

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   programming:
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b) URL(s), including passwords where necessary, where information about the institution's
    distance education activities is available and where online services can be accessed by both
    students (prospective and current) and faculty; include brief descriptors as appropriate:

   Mount Wachusett Community College Web site (www.mwcc.edu)
   The ***distance learning website*** (http://www.mwcc.edu/distance/default.html)
   offers prospective students information on the nature of distance learning, course listings,
   and registration procedures.

   At the site students will find a list of Frequently Asked Questions
   (http://www.mwcc.edu/distance/FAQs.html) and advice from student and instructor
   perspectives on what it takes to succeed in online courses.
   (http://www.mwcc.edu/distance/faculty.html;
   http://www.mwcc.edu/distance/student.html)

   The ***resources*** section includes both academic and technical resources for current and
   prospective students. Students can access a demonstration course site that explains the
   Blackboard learning management system by using the username = "demo" and password
   = "demo" (http://dl.mass.edu/sub_pages/webct/orientation/index.html). Also posted is a
   PDF of the college's "Guide to Distance Learning" brochure that is mailed to each
   student registering in an online course
   (http://www.mwcc.edu/PDFs/OnlineLearningGuide.pdf), in which technical requirements
   for computer access are explained (http://www.mwcc.edu/distance/computer.html).

   Contact information for the ***distance learning staff*** is available via email
   (lll@mwcc.mass.edu; dbrennan@mwcc.mass.edu; vialenti@mwcc.mass.edu). Contact
   information for Mount Wachusett Community College ***faculty and staff*** is available via
   the campus directory (http://www.mwcc.edu/info/directory.html).

   MWCC ***library services*** are available for online students (http://www.mwcc.edu/library/),
   and a link to the library is included in the course content menu of each Blackboard course
   site. Each semester the library staff updates a description of its services for inclusion in

online course syllabi. The copy explains how students can access from home the varied content of 55 online databases that cover trade, academic, legal, popular, government, and press content (http://www.mwcc.edu/library/login.html).

Online reference assistance for students is available via "Ask-A-Librarian" services that use instant messaging and email links. The service is available Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Online reference assistance is usually provided within 24 hours to students (http://www.mwcc.edu/library/ask_librarian.html). In addition, MWCC's library participates in the MASSAnswers program that offers an online, real-time reference service that provides students with answers to questions from reference staff at some of the best libraries across Massachusetts and the nation. MASSAnswers is available to students 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The college's *online writing lab* provides online tutoring for students with a two- to three-day turnaround on tutoring services (https://bb.mwcc.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/common/course.pl?course_id=_603_1).

MWCC bookstore services are available online for students at http://mwcc1.bkstore.com/bkstore/content. Students may also purchase books online through the college's arrangement with MBS books (http://direct.mbsbooks.com/mwcc.htm).

c) Description of technical infrastructure that supports the institution's distance education activities (include bandwidth, details of connectivity, network maintenance and support, course management software, help desk services, and staffing, security, backups, etc.):

Campus Network: The backbone of the campus network, installed in summer 2006, consists of a DS3 line. Each desktop PC has access to a 10/100 switched network port going back to the distribution closet(s) of that building. For students who do not have Internet connectivity from home or work, there are computing facilities available at campus locations. There are approximately 700 computers available for student use.

Distance Learning Servers: MWCC hosted the Blackboard learning management system (LMS) for the first six years of the LMS's adoption beginning in 1999. For the spring 2005 semester and the 2005-06 academic year, the hosting was outsourced to Bridgewater State College. Beginning May 25, 2006, the learning management system is hosted by Blackboard subsidiary ASP.

Blackboard uses a Tier-1 data center in northern Virginia named AboveNet. Blackboard and its Tier-1 data center provider employ comprehensive security systems including visitation access lists, identification badges, and security cameras. Seven days a week, around the clock, Blackboard data center facility security personnel superintend the operations center. A digital surveillance camera monitors all sections of the network center and all installed equipment to help ensure that no unauthorized entry to protected areas occurs. The single point of entry to the location is guarded 24 hours a day with

access controlled by an access database and video surveillance. Guards monitor all areas within the location area, and only those persons authorized by a client's access list are allowed past a central point. Inside the data center, Blackboard's network equipment is guarded inside cages; only Blackboard personnel have keys to enter these cages. The data center is also protected by four levels of redundant power systems and first-rate fire detection and suppression systems. The facility is fully air-conditioned for optimal data center operations.

Application Security

From the end-user to the application server, security is accomplished by purchasing and configuring an SSL certificate on the web server (128-bit recommended). The web server is the same as the application server. Once the user logs in and is interacting with the system, all sensitive information is stored in Java beans. These beans are serialized and saved in the database as serialized objects that would not be re-constructible without the proper version of the bean class itself. In summary, data is stored in Java beans; and handles for those beans are stored in the database.

Network Security

For network security, all remote administration is done via secure encrypted sessions (including SSH2 protocol). All ports on hosted servers unnecessary for the Blackboard product or for remote administration are closed. All connection attempts are logged at the server. All hosted clients have randomly generated passwords for administration accounts; no two servers have the same password.

Blackboard also manages a firewall to further ensure secure delivery of the Blackboard applications. With the Blackboard-managed firewall service, clients work with their existing security policy to specify and limit who may access their Blackboard installation. For example, it is possible to restrict the application so that it is only accessed from a client's campus network during the day and accessed from other network sources during the evening.

In addition, Blackboard runs an Intrusion Detection System (IDS) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on the Blackboard ASP infrastructure to prevent any intruder or hacker from gaining access to the Blackboard ASP network.

Server Security

Blackboard proactively manages all of its servers, including updates, upgrades, and proactive health checks and troubleshooting. Blackboard ASP maintains a software monitoring system to provide real-time information about the Application Service Provider (ASP) environment to the Blackboard Network Operations Center (NOC). This ensures that Blackboard system administrators are made aware of system failures as soon as they arise.

Security, performance, and availability monitoring are performed by Blackboard ASP. The following are some examples:
- Connectivity Ping: Check performed periodically

- CPU Monitors: CPU utilization
- Disk Monitors: Disk utilization
- HTTP: HTTP request for the hosted server
- H-Check: Monitors web page content
- Memory Checks: System memory utilization
- MSGS Checks: System log files for instances of Warning, Fatal, and Notice
- Process Checks: Critical processes to ensure they are running
- Ports: Monitors for the use of unnecessary system ports

To protect Blackboard's network, Blackboard runs a firewall, an Intrusion Detection System, and anti-virus software. For clients, Blackboard also runs McAfee virus protection on an as-needed basis. Per a client request, Blackboard will perform a virus check on all course documents and will send a report of any infected and repaired files. Currently, Blackboard runs the McAfee software on all files stored on our network file storage hardware.   Due to the enormous processing power that is required, Blackboard does not currently run instantaneous virus scans on all uploaded content.

Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plans
With regard to data/content recovery, Blackboard implements three levels of backups. First, Blackboard takes advantage of a Snapshot utility that stores read-only versions of a file system and provides the ability to recover lost or deleted files, without assistance or recovery from tape. Snapshots are performed daily.   Blackboard also performs daily backups of all databases. Both the file system snapshots and the database backups for the last two days are stored on a high-availability, central file storage system.

The second layer of backups uses a separate set of high-availability filers. This second set of filers stores up to 30 days of file system backups and database backups. Storing all such data on filers affords Blackboard easy access to data accidentally deleted by users.

The third layer of backups uses a tape system.   Each week, file system and database backups are transferred to tape and rotated offsite for disaster recovery purposes. Since 30 days of backups (Blackboard's standard data retention window) are stored in the first and second layers of backup architecture, the tapes should never be required unless a true disaster occurs. All relevant data on the Blackboard network is backed up. This includes application files, databases, and operating system environments, where needed (http://www.blackboard.com).

Course Management Software: MWCC's course management software migrated from a basic edition to Blackboard's Enterprise Edition 7.1 in September 2006. The current license supports an unlimited number of users and course designers.

Blackboard was selected because of its ease of use for faculty and students and the wide range of robust features that it provides. The learning management system provides faculty with customizable course sites with: integrated email and communications; auto-corrected advanced assessment tools; integrated and adaptive content release; email,

synchronous chat and whiteboard for graphical class interaction conferencing; and asynchronous discussion board communication tools.

Blackboard supports the importing of video, audio, images, Microsoft PowerPoint presentations, Adobe PDF documents, and HTML. Installation of publisher-provided material in Blackboard courses allows faculty to take advantage of the sophisticated learning tools designed by textbook instructional design teams.

The Enterprise version of the LMS allows MWCC to incorporate Blackboard Building Blocks to add student and faculty functionality to Blackboard, such as access to Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) online resources. Blackboard conforms to such industry compliance and interoperability standards as IMS, SIF, SCORM, and NLN.

Technical support for Distance Learning and Blackboard is available in several modalities. MWCC's institutional helpdesk is available for students and faculty by phone or email. The services of the assistant dean of distance learning, Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development Division, and MWCC helpdesk system have been the traditional sources to provide student and faculty online support. In June 2006, MWCC contracted with Presidium Learning of Reston, VA to provide 24/7 multi-channel toll-free phone, web self-help, and e-chat customer support. The web support site is available at http://supportcenteronline.com/ics/support/default.asp?deptID=4061. MWCC's Presidium Online Support Center's number is 866-818-1242.

d)   A list of any consortium partners or contractual relationships that support the institution's distance education activities and a brief explanation of the nature of each relationship.

Blackboard
An annual license for course management software is contracted with Blackboard. The annual license includes free upgrades to future Enterprise versions, all software patches and hot-fixes for current supported versions, and documentation. Additionally, Blackboard subsidiary APS has been contracted to provide hosting, maintenance, and security for the courses and student data.

SCT Banner serves as the college's student information management system. MWCC hired a Blackboard integration team and programmer to design a process that allows Banner to automatically create a Blackboard course site for each course registration number (CRN) and enroll students registered for each section. Banner's WebConnect provides students with online registration capability and access to grades, schedules, and transcripts.

Massachusetts Colleges Online
MWCC is an active participant in the Massachusetts Colleges Online (MCO) consortium consisting of six of the nine state colleges and fifteen community colleges of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in cooperation with the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. Initiated by MWCC President Asquino, the consortium facilitates the

provision of state and community college online courses and programs to students across the Commonwealth through a website and portal. MCO's primary mission is to increase access to a wide variety of high quality, low-cost college courses and certificate programs for Massachusetts residents at the time and place of their choice.

MCO is governed under a memorandum of understanding endorsed by the Community College Presidents Council and the Council of State College Presidents. The executive director reports to the MCO Steering Committee comprised of the executive directors of the State and Community College Executive Offices, one state and community chief academic, financial, distance education officer, and a chief information officer and a representative of the Board of Higher Education.

The MCO Liaison Team is made up of members from each of the colleges in the MCO consortium who serve as an advisory group to MCO for policies, procedures, and programming. Team members are the primary MCO contact representing the interests and concerns of their campus to the MCO community. Liaison Team members are responsible for collaborating with the appropriate offices at their respective colleges to ensure that students enrolling in MCO classes receive quality services. Mount Wachusett Community College's Liaison Team member is the assistant dean of distance learning. Each member college pays an annual membership fee to support MCO's operation, portal, web environment, and technological infrastructure. Currently, the fully functional portal site lists 1200+ online courses and 31 online certificate and degree programs.

Since MCO's inception, MWCC has had its courses adopted by other state community colleges and, on a semester-by-semester or as-needed basis, has made available to its students courses from other MCO institutions. Prior to making courses available from other Massachusetts community colleges, the courses and syllabi are approved by the appropriate MWCC academic deans to determine if the courses are equivalent to MWCC offerings.

Central Massachusetts Regional Library System (CMRLS)
MWCC is a member of the Academic and Research Collaborative of the Central Massachusetts Regional Library System. The college pays an annual membership fee to connect to the library network which is a consortium of academic, public, and special libraries working together to facilitate the sharing of resources and services for the benefit of their collective users. The member libraries include Anna Maria College, Assumption College, Atlantic Union College, Becker College, Clark University, Holy Cross, Fitchburg State College, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy, Nichols College, Quinsigamond Community College, Worcester State College, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute. As members of this group, MWCC students, faculty, and staff are granted the privilege of borrowing from libraries within the collaborative.

NARRATIVE

This section provides an overview and analysis of MWCC's current online courses and programs and its plans for future development.

STANDARD ONE

Mission and Purposes

Mount Wachusett Community College created distance learning in response to the college's mission "…to meet the education, training, and lifelong learning needs of an educationally, economically, and culturally diverse population living and working in North Central Worcester County…The college provides open access to affordable, high quality programs and services that are relevant and responsive to the changing and dynamic needs of the students and residents we serve." The service area for the college has changed considerably over the past few years. Many people travel into Boston for work, and the population east of the college has grown considerably. Distance learning provides a mechanism for students who cannot find transportation or time to earn a college degree, gain skills needed for career advancement, or take courses for personal enrichment. The college offers eight degree and two certificate programs in which over 50 percent of the courses can be taken through distance learning. Students can also choose from 82 courses taught by MWCC faculty that can be taken as part of a land-based degree program or for personal enrichment or skill attainment.

MWCC's distance learning efforts began online in 1997 with a consortium with Fitchburg State College named The North East Distance Learning Consortium (NEDLC). The intention of this effort was to provide students with flexibility in their education scheduling and the opportunity to progress from an associate degree to a baccalaureate degree program. This activity pre-dated course management system software and offered its first courses with Lotus Notes software. In 1999 both institutions adopted the Blackboard LMS, but the NEDLC dissolved in 2000 when MWCC received approval as a Defense Activity for Non-traditional Educational Support (DANTES) college and needed to increase the pace of its course development.

This activity and strong administrative support have led to the creation of 82 online courses. Faculty quickly saw that the distance modality was a viable approach to teaching and one that provided scheduling flexibility to current and potential students. Students now have the choice of selecting online courses to supplement their traditional course offerings or can elect to complete a degree or certificate fully online. The use of the learning management software for online courses has created a faculty realization that the software can enhance teaching and learning in on-campus courses. The institution has responded by building 52 computer/video projection system classrooms on the MWCC campuses and developing a culture in which 65 percent of faculty request "smart classrooms" for their courses.

As stated in the college's mission statement, "We offer a broad and focused array of credit and noncredit pre-baccalaureate learning opportunities that facilitate: transfer to a four year institution of higher education; acquisition of occupational and workforce knowledge; skill sets, and credentials for entry and lifelong maintenance of skill currency in an ever changing world of work; and development of fundamental academic and learning skills essential for underprepared

students to successfully transition to college and the workplace." Offering students the option to obtain a degree through distance learning helps the college meet its mission as well as the mission of Academic Affairs which is "…support the college mission by developing, providing and evaluating comprehensive, high-quality educational opportunities and academic services that are responsive to community needs and meet the intellectual, personal, and professional needs of a diverse student body."

Institutional Effectiveness
Distance learning is a teaching modality that resulted from the need of community members to be able to obtain an education without having to travel to a campus location. The college's mission is to serve the community and provide members with skills, training, and education. The need for and quality of distance learning courses are evaluated each semester through student evaluations, course enrollments and student retention data. The growth of distance learning will be dependent upon the community members' needs for the modality and the college's ability to provide quality courses and programs.

STANDARD TWO

Planning and Evaluation
In 2004, under the direction of a new vice president, the college community engaged in a systematic process for the development of a three-year strategic plan. The assistant dean of distance learning was a member of the team that developed the college's strategic plan: "Reaching New Heights of Excellence, Impact, and Performance 2005-2008".

"Teaching and Learning Responsiveness and Excellence" is one of the five goals of the college. The five objectives to meet this goal are as follows: responsiveness to new need; strengthening of curriculum and instruction; strengthening developmental education; learner focused instructional delivery; and academic quality assurance. Distance learning key strategic actions are planned to meet the responsiveness to new need; strengthening of curriculum and instruction; learner focused instructional delivery and academic quality assurance objectives. Each year the assistant dean of distance learning must provide new key strategic actions if need be and evaluate progress on existing actions.

In the fall of 2006 the college engaged in a new budget planning process. Strategic Planning Online (SPOL) requires creating a budget based on key strategic actions. The assistant dean of distance learning uses SPOL to build annual plans and budgets for distance learning as well as update strategic goals and objectives and create multi-year budgets. Planning for distance learning is done in conjunction with all other academic planning.

MWCC's first distance learning courses predated accrediting agency or national quality guidelines and rubrics. Initial guidelines used to model online courses were based on Blackboard "Tip Sheets," and the 24 benchmarks of successful online distance learning programs from The Institute for Higher Education Policy's April 2000 report, "Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-Based Distance Education." Issues of academic freedom, personal preference, and course subject matter make it challenging to dictate specific guidelines for the inclusion in all online courses. Attempts to outline necessary elements of what

should be included in a course have come as close to formalization as possible in Forms DE-1 and DE-4 as agreed upon by the Massachusetts Community College Council and the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. (See attached.)

These early guidelines were incorporated into the April 2002 "MWCC Distance Learning Course Checklist and Good Practice Recommendations" and became the basis for the college's online course proposal form that is used to guide faculty in the creation of online courses. The 2005 publication of online course guidelines, such as "The Sloan Consortium Quality Frame Work and the Five Pillars" and "Quality Matters (QM)," the Maryland Online consortium's 40-part continuous improvement rubric for assessing and assuring the quality of online courses, have been used as touchstones against which current and in-development online courses should be designed and measured. Both quality measures are featured prominently on the MWCC online learning and Blackboard information website and the Center for Teaching and Learning website that is designed to support faculty in their course development. http://bb.mwcc.edu (username = faculty; password = faculty246*8) http://ctlmwcc.com. It is strongly suggested that the QM rubric be used as a guide as MWCC faculty design new online courses and strive to improve established courses. The QM rubric will be used as a guide to assess course quality.

The MCCC DE-1 Distance Education Course/Instructional Materials Checklist Form specifies areas that contractually must be included in online courses. This has been the traditional and minimal approach to institutional assessment of the courses.

The Massachusetts Community College system's student evaluation of Distance Learning faculty is governed by a 2001 Massachusetts Community College Council Memorandum of Agreement that is part of the statewide distance learning contract. Pursuant to the contract, online courses are evaluated by students on the third offering of a course and each semester thereafter. With the support of the college's information systems and services department, MWCC now implements the evaluation form online. The vice president of Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development evaluates the student assessments and, if necessary, brings any issues to the faculty member's attention.

Institutional Effectiveness
Distance learning initiatives exist in all divisions of the college. The divisions of Academic Affairs; Student Services and Enrollment Management; Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development and Data Management and Institutional Assessment have some level of responsibility in the successful delivery of distance learning. Each division measures the impact and success of their component of distance learning. Annually, each division shares their evaluations of their part in providing distance learning; collectively the impact of distance learning on the college is evaluated by the college's Executive Council.

STANDARD THREE

Organization and Governance
The assistant dean of distance learning reports to the vice president of Academic Affairs and is responsible for supporting course development, program development, student services, faculty recruitment, and professional development for distance learning students and faculty. The

importance of distance learning to MWCC is manifested by the fact that the assistant dean of distance learning serves on the Academic Council with the college's other academic support managers and on the president's Executive Council, the college's principal administrative advisory group. The assistant dean of distance learning serves as a liaison to enrollment services regarding online student support services. Additionally, the assistant dean of distance learning supervises the publication of marketing and promotional materials for distance learning. One full-time clerical staff member provides support for distance learning in the Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development Division. Information services and systems provides support of the technology infrastructure including maintenance of the college-wide network, Internet connectivity, email system, SCT Banner, and as the technical liaison with the Blackboard host ASP.

Communication regarding distance learning issues with the local chapter of the Massachusetts Community College Council (MCCC) occurs through the Distance Education Management Association for Employee Relations (MACER) Committee. The distance education committee includes three faculty representatives and three management representatives. The distance education committee meets periodically to maintain communication with the union, to address questions pertaining to distance education, and to provide recommendations and suggestions about distance learning practices at the college.

Institutional Effectiveness
The change in status of the director position to assistant dean meant a significant emphasis on the importance of distance learning as it is a venue for degree attainment. As a member of the president's Executive Council, the assistant dean of distance learning works with the college's vice presidents to move the college forward in the accomplishment of the mission.

STANDARD FOUR

Programs and Instruction
In the fall 1997 semester, MWCC offered its first three online courses. Since then, the number of courses offered has continued to grow. During the fall, spring, summer semesters of the 2005-06 academic year, MWCC offered 255 sections of 75 MWCC-developed online courses. Approval to offer an existing course in the online format must be received by the assistant dean of distance learning. New courses that are offered online must go through the college's approval process for new courses that requires approval at the division level and by the academic affairs committee. The syllabi for an online course must be approved by the division dean. When a course has not been previously offered online, faculty are compensated for the development of the syllabi and the educational materials.

Online courses are also offered in collaboration with participating Massachusetts Colleges Online institutions. Through Massachusetts Colleges Online, courses from other institutions are offered to Mount Wachusett Community College students provided that approval of the appropriate academic department and divisional dean is secured. Once approved, these courses are included in Mount Wachusett Community College's master schedule. Courses offered through Massachusetts Colleges Online have instruction provided by another institution and appropriate credit granted at the home college, thereby eliminating transfer credit for students

taking the courses. MWCC serves as both a "home" college and "provider" college for Massachusetts Colleges Online courses. All Massachusetts Colleges Online institutions are accredited by NEASC and must be in good standing in order for their offering to be given to Mount Wachusett Community College students.

Since the number of online course offerings has increased, students are now able to complete most of their requirements for a degree through distance learning. During the 2005-06 academic year, there were eight degree programs and two certificate programs in which students could take more than 50 percent of their courses through distance learning. The programs are as follows: Business Administration Career option, Business Administration Transfer option, Computer Information Systems, General Studies, Liberal Studies, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Human Services, Paralegal Studies, Business Administration Certificate, and Paralegal Certificate.

Currently, there is no mechanism for approval for these programs being offered online. Students enroll in the program and take the required courses. Since students can take courses offered through other colleges, they can complete a large portion of the coursework via distance. The college does not indicate courses as being online so the institution has no way of knowing what percentage of courses the student takes online. As stated previously, all courses offered are from NEASC accredited institutions. The college does market the option of completing most courses online for degree programs where it is possible to do this.

All degree and certificate programs go through the college's program review process. The program review document does not include specific questions related to distance learning but such questions will be added starting with the programs that are to be reviewed in 2007. The program review process assures that each program provides students with the needed general education and program requirements.

Institutional Effectiveness
The rapid growth of online learning requires the institution to put in place policies that address quality control for online courses and measure the impact online learning has on program completion. The college also needs to collect data on students taking courses online to measure program enrollment and student retention. Also, evaluation of online courses and their impact need to be included in the program review process.

STANDARD FIVE

Faculty
Full-time faculty teach online courses through the Division of Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development. In certain circumstances, a full-time faculty may teach an online course as part of their regular workload as assigned by their division dean. Adjunct faculty are also hired to teach online courses. All faculty teaching distance learning courses are compensated on a scale set by the MCCC Memorandum of Agreement.

In cooperation with the media services department and the information systems and services department, the assistant dean of distance learning and a part-time instructional design staff person use the college's faculty development laboratory to assist and train faculty in the use of

Blackboard and instructional technology. In January 2007, a full-time director of instructional design was hired to assist the assistant dean of distance learning with faculty and staff training and support.

The faculty development laboratory is slated to move to larger quarters in the fall '07 semester. The lab will feature six computers for faculty training, scanners, and the necessary software to meet faculty development and training needs.

When the learning management system Blackboard was first introduced, faculty training began with 10-12 member group sessions. Blackboard introduction sessions were scheduled at the beginning of each semester. Follow-up workshops were conducted individually or in small groups. For example, departmental training was done to introduce nursing faculty to Blackboard.

At the beginning of each semester, students are invited to visit the campus and receive instruction on how to use Blackboard. As the software's design has become better and easier for students to use, attendance at the sessions has decreased despite enrollment increases. As a result, the college stopped offering the sessions and replaced them with online tutorials, the 24/7 helpdesk, and print and website instruction. These appear to provide sufficient student training.

Faculty technical training needs change as new software versions are introduced. MWCC's migration from V.5.5 to version 6.1 in January 2005 was done with the offering of 26 workshops in December and January prior to the start of the spring '05 semester. The migration from the Blackboard Basic version to the Enterprise version in May 2006 was done with only four sessions. Faculty stated they did not need the training sessions and adapted easily on their own to the software changes.

The migration to Blackboard Enterprise v.7.1 was conducted on August 18, 2006. Ten faculty workshop sessions were offered for faculty who felt additional training was needed. The new version features animated tutorials for students and faculty and, coupled with the 24/7 faculty/student helpdesk, transition issues were minimal. Individual and group Blackboard instruction is offered continually during the year. Pedagogical instruction in developing online courses is ongoing. Faculty proposing a new online course work one-on-one with the assistant dean of distance learning and director of instructional design in preparation for submitting the course proposal form. Guidelines and best practices are presented, and access to current courses is given.

As part of an MCO initiative in May 2005, five MWCC faculty participated along with 35 colleagues from other community and state colleges in the state-wide online Web Camp training program that concluded with live sessions at the MCO Sharing Best Practices Conference. MWCC's assistant dean of distance learning served as one of the training program's expert facilitators. Ongoing faculty training takes place on a walk-in or scheduled basis to meet the needs of online faculty.

Institutional Effectiveness
As the need for distance learning continues to grow, the college may need to allow more full-

time faculty to teach courses online, particularly upper-level courses in programs where students can take the majority of their courses online. Professional development for faculty teaching online will need to continue, as will evaluation of course content and teaching.

STANDARD SIX

Students
Student success is a strategic priority for the institution. The following is a related strategic objective: "Mount Wachusett Community College will enhance students' opportunities for access and assure student success and persistence from the point of inquiry through graduation by implementing a proactive and well integrated system of student relationship management *(i.e. student centered policies, business practices, and responsive support services)*" (Mount Wachusett Community College Strategic Plan, April 2005, p. 30).

The strategic objective applies to all students who take courses and/or are enrolled in programs offered by the college including students who take courses at a satellite location or through distance education. Efforts are ongoing to ensure that students taking only online courses have access to the same services as students taking courses at the college's main or satellite campuses.

All students must complete an application to the college and submit the required materials. Applications are accepted in person or via mail. Effective April 2007, students are able to complete an application for admission online. Students who are taking courses through distance learning enroll in the college's degree programs or select non-matriculation. The application does not have students indicate the location where they plan on attending classes.

Students admitted to the college in degree programs are required to complete placement testing, unless they have previous, appropriate college course work. Advisors interpret test results and place students in the appropriate courses to address their learning needs and program requirements. For students geographically distant, the college will make arrangements with another institution (conveniently located for the student) to administer placement testing.

Student preparedness for the rigors and demands of online courses is a major concern. The assistant dean of distance learning has worked with the enrollment management staff to make sure that they understand the nature of online courses as well as the dedication and time management skills that are necessary for a student to succeed.

Students may register for online courses via the college's standard registration procedures using fax, mail, online, or in-person registration. Once a student has successfully registered for a distance learning course, the student is mailed a brochure with instructions detailing how to access the online course. For late registrants the same brochure is also available on the college website. The assistant dean of distance learning and the Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development staff answer student phone and email inquiries about distance learning courses, and their contact information is listed in all of the course web and print materials.

Students taking courses that MWCC brokered from other MCO institutions are notified by MWCC about the details and contacts pursuant to that arrangement, and that the login information will be sent to them by the providing institutions.

The primary support mechanism for online course tutoring is the instructor and the ancillary materials that are often embedded in online courses and provided by the textbook publishers. The MWCC Online Writing Lab (OWL) has been available for the past three years. The writing lab allows students who might not be able to come into the Academic Support Center to work with a writing tutor. The tutors read the essay and respond to the student within two to three days, excluding weekends and holidays.

Beginning in fall 2006, MWCC participated in an MCO pilot project that will make synchronous and asynchronous online tutoring available 18 hours a day, 7 days a week to MWCC students in English, mathematics (developmental through college calculus), statistics, accounting, chemistry, biology, and anatomy and physiology. Eight of the MCO institutions contributed to the tutoring pool staffed by 24 colleges and universities under the coordination of the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (http://www.etutoring.org).

Student and faculty distance learning technical assistance is available through a variety of resources. The college's help desk is available via phone and email Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The college's assistant dean of distance learning and Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development staff are available during that same timeframe.

Blackboard customer support is now available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through MWCC's contract with Presidium Learning of Reston, VA. Support is available via synchronous toll-free telephone and e-chat services, and asynchronously through an interactive web self-help support site (http://supportcenteronline.com/ics/support/default.asp?deptID=4061). MWCC Online Support Center's number is 866-818-1242. MWCC's catalog and website outline the institution's information technology acceptable use policies, which apply to online as well as on-campus students (Mount Wachusett Community College Catalog 2006-2007, pgs. 221-226).

College bookstore services are provided by Barnes and Noble. The main bookstore is located on the Gardner campus. The bookstore provides extended hours prior to the start of the semester for students purchasing textbooks. The MWCC bookstore management has been cooperative in shipping texts to online students. Bookstore services also are available online for students at MWCC bookstore site (http://www.whywaitforbooks.com). Students may also purchase books online through the college's arrangement with MBS books (http://direct.mbsbooks.com/mwcc.htm).

Distance learning students who have concerns or complaints follow the same procedures as students enrolled in land-based courses. *The Mount Wachusett Community College Catalog 2006-2007"* defines the step-by-step conflict resolution process for student issues and suggests that "before invoking the student grievance procedure, a reasonable effort shall be made by those involved in a dispute to resolve it amicably. A dispute is most effectively handled and resolved by those closest to the problem, having the best understanding of the issues, and having the ability to formulate a mutually acceptable solution...Throughout all phases of the student

grievance procedure, all reasonable efforts shall be made to maintain confidentiality in accordance with applicable law." The above informal and formal processes and other student disciplinary policy and procedures are described in the catalog and apply to online students as well as to distance learning courses (Mount Wachusett Community College Catalog 2006-2007, pgs. 227-234).

Institutional Effectiveness
The college has come far in providing student support services to distance learners; however, more services need to be made available such as career and personal counseling. A mechanism to get students engaged in the college community also needs to be developed. Evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of student services provided to distance learning needs to take place.

STANDARD SEVEN

Library and Other Information Resources
The MWCC library supports the teaching and learning activities of the college and the lifelong learning activities of the extended college community by providing quality information resources and services in a supportive learning environment. The Leo and Theresa LaChance Library is housed at the Gardner campus. The library contains over 50,000 volumes and subscribes to 156 print magazines and 12 newspaper titles. Distance learning students have access to the college's print, video, and audio collections through mail or delivery of materials to a central Massachusetts library closer to the student's home.

Remote access to the more than 60 online databases is available to all students. In addition, MWCC's membership in the Central/Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing consortium (C/WMARS) gives students online access to the catalog holdings of over 100 area libraries. C/WMARS, combined with the Central Massachusetts Regional Library System, provides daily deliveries of interlibrary loan items to member libraries closer to a student's home.

A link to the library appears when a student logs in to Blackboard. Faculty can have students use the library services online for courses. Information literacy is taught through the Computer Technologies course that is required in 80 percent of the college's degree programs. This course is offered online and in the classroom.

Institutional Effectiveness
The college administered the LibQual (Library Quality) survey to all students taking courses at the college, faculty, and administration. The survey was distributed through email. The college has received the raw data from the survey and it needs to be analyzed. Improvements in library service will be based on the results of the survey.

STANDARD EIGHT

Physical Resources
The administration of distance learning takes place at the Gardner campus. Administration and support staff provide services to students who take courses online as well as the entire student

population. One staff member in the Division of Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development provides administrative support for distance learning initiatives.

The server and network that support distance learning software are housed at the Gardner campus. The MWCC helpdesk is physically located on the Gardner campus in the Information Support and Services Center. The helpdesk is staffed 40 hours per week. Students can contact the helpdesk via email or phone. At any time during the day or evening, students can contact The Presidium Blackboard phone service which is located in Reston, Virginia and is available at 866-818-1242. Students taking online courses that experience problems with home computers have the option of using one of the college's multiple computer labs located at the Gardner, Leominster, and Devens campuses.

Institutional Effectiveness
The college needs to monitor the technological and personnel needs to support distance learning as long as it is a teaching modality. The college also needs to continually evaluate the quality of the technology and provide resources to keep up with advancements.

STANDARD NINE

Financial Resources

Distance learning courses are administered through the Division of Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development. Courses offered through distance are not state-supported. Faculty salary and overhead costs are covered by the students' tuition.

MWCC offers five to eight courses each semester that are brokered through Massachusetts Colleges Online NEASC-accredited institutions. Mount Wachusett retains 20 percent of the tuition for these courses. In addition, MWCC courses are offered at three to five MCO colleges each semester for which the college is reimbursed 80 percent of the fee collected by the offering institution.

Institutional Effectiveness
If the number of students enrolled in distance learning courses increases, students will need to be notified that these courses are not state-supported since tuition waivers and state-supported scholarships do not apply. Resources needed to support distance learning will need to be budgeted.

STANDARD TEN

Public Disclosure
Mount Wachusett Community College uses a wide variety of publications to inform the communities that it serves of its programs and offerings. Print publications are generally available electronically. The college catalog, the student handbook, and the course brochures are all available electronically; and students taking courses through distance learning are directed to the college's website to reference these documents. In addition, the college provides information through on-campus open house events, brochures, flyers, reports, radio campaigns, TV spots,

news releases, newsletters, electronic signs, in-house video monitors, and bulletin board presentations. Students are also mailed college policies.

Students taking courses through distance learning are sent emails that provide them information on college policies/procedures, events, registration, and financial aid information. Online students are also sent "What's Up at the Mount" via email. On a weekly basis, this publication provides the college community with information on events that are taking and have taken place at the college. Students are also contacted via the automated phone system. The phone system provides time sensitive information to students regarding registration, bills, safety, etc.

Institutional Effectiveness
Students taking courses via distance learning are provided with the same college information as students who are taking courses on-site. The lack of student incidences or complaints indicates that distance learning students are receiving the information that they need. An evaluation instrument needs to be distributed to assess the amount and quality of the information that are distributed. Results of the instrument will be used to improve communication with distance learning students.

STANDARD ELEVEN

Integrity
The MCCC contract provides full and adjunct faculty and professional staff academic freedom as well as a process for a fair resolution of grievances brought on by faculty and staff. To comply with the MCCC Memorandum of Agreement, faculty interaction plans (MCCC Form DE-2) are posted on the Distance Learning Demonstration website in the Course Information area.

The college has a formal grievance procedure for students. Students enrolled in distance learning courses follow this process. The college also has a policy on plagiarism for faculty and students. All college policies are reviewed annually and are updated in the college catalog and the college's website. The human resources office communicates with all faculty and informs them of federal, state, and college policies. Faculty teaching distance learning courses are invited to attend all college functions and meetings.

Requirements and procedures for hiring adjunct faculty who teach online courses are the same as hiring adjunct faculty for land-based courses. The college tries to hire faculty from diverse backgrounds. During the fall semester of 2006, the college went through a civil rights audit by the Department of Education. All college publications were examined, including those sent to students enrolled in distance learning. The college successfully met the requirements of the audit.

Throughout the academic year, the college hosts meetings for Massachusetts Colleges Online as well as workshops on academic subjects. When speakers are brought in, the college requires them to sign a contract.

Institutional Effectiveness

Having a decentralized approach to working with students who are taking courses online has simplified the college's communication with all student populations. If the college decides to formally enroll students in distance learning programs, then there will need to be a system in place to make certain that they continue to receive required information.

FUTURE PLANS

The new MCCC faculty distance learning contract contains a revision that incorporates the use of the University of Washington Instructional Assessment System's Student Evaluation Form for online courses, which will be implemented in the near future. This should provide MWCC with fresh insights into student perception of the online learning experience.

Now that the college has finalized its core competencies for its academic programs, the distance learning courses will need to follow the same assessment mechanisms to ensure that all courses and programs meet the learning based outcomes developed on a program and course-by-course basis.

As part of the college's effort to clearly communicate with all students about course selection, the office of distance learning will continue to work with information systems and services staff, the registrar's office, institutional research, and Academic Affairs staff to identify possible strategies to clearly identify distance learning courses within the web registration environment.

The college plans to increase the number of online programs and courses based on needs assessments and student and faculty interest. It is hoped that MWCC can continue to work with ongoing MCO initiatives to pool the resources of member institutions to support state-wide programs in early childhood education and other areas of interest.