

We Pride Ourselves

– Faculty are involved in all stages of development and implementation of alternative delivery of instruction.

– MCC offers a wide variety of alternative delivered courses, which are transcribed and funded in the same manner as other credit classes.

– Faculty receive support via Instructional Design Services, including development of online courses, production of videotapes, graphics and Web page development and technical support for each delivery option.

We Challenge Ourselves

– To focus on the development of online degree and certificate programs as well as courses.

– To develop a larger qualified pool of faculty availability to teach online courses.

Chapter 13

Request for Institutional Change, Distance Education

Introduction

MCC has had a long and successful history of offering credit courses at a distance. The college is now able to offer entire degree programs via alternative delivery distance education methods. This chapter presents evidence and support to request an institutional change to *“Distance Education: Degrees are offered through interactive television, telecourses, and online courses.”*

Rationale for Institutional Change to Award Degrees at a Distance

For nearly 20 years, MCC has offered telecourses and interactive television courses to students in its four-county service area. More recently, faculty have developed more than 50 courses for online delivery.

The array of courses and enrollments currently delivered by the college via distance education has warranted the development of complete support services and infrastructure to support these offerings. The logical next step for the college is to seek approval from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to award degrees delivered via distance education.

Offering entire degree programs via distance delivery will allow the college to further its mission by providing additional delivery options to its diverse student population. The MCC Board of Governors and the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE) require approval of instructional programs, but do not approve delivery methods.

The remainder of this chapter provides patterns of evidence regarding MCC’s ability to adhere to the HLC’s guidelines for distance education as well as the request for institutional change.

Alternative Learning Solutions

Alternative Learning Solutions (ALS) is available to MCC students through a variety of optional delivery systems. MCC offers students three types of alternatively delivered learning experiences.

- **Interactive TV Classes.** Interactive distance learning was introduced in the 1980s. The college was awarded a Title III grant, and one component of the grant allowed the construction of a two-way video and audio microwave/ITFS delivery system linking the college's campuses and centers. Over the years, the system grew. Today, MCC's interactive television is integrated with an Omaha cable provider to deliver classes live throughout the community. In addition, MCC's system interconnects to a statewide network offering classes at select locations throughout Nebraska, including other state community colleges.

MCC's interactive television broadcast system links five MCC locations and at-home sites. Distance learning rooms at each campus and centers are fully automated and instructors control the class. In 1999, the interactive TV system was transitioned from microwave/ITFS to an ATM backbone network delivered system. Each classroom serves a dual role as an origination or receive site. The rooms are furnished with networked client computers running classroom management software controlled through a touch screen "routing switcher." The class is viewed at MCC campus locations on television monitors.

Resources for learning activities include a networked multimedia faculty presentation computer, visual presenter, VCR, instructor and student cameras, microphones, student response panels for live quizzes and feedback to questions, fax, and telephone. Through subscribing to one of two local cable providers, a student may take a selection of courses at home. By using a home touch-tone telephone, a student communicates with the instructor and other students while viewing the instructor on television.

- **Telecourses.** Initiated in 1984, college telecourses are licensed programs from the Public Broadcasting Station and other consortia licensed telecourse offerings. These offerings followed the national textbook/videotape model and were the first of an evolving trio of options for students. Students may complete telecourses using a variety of instructional materials within a 14-week term by viewing pre-produced lessons on videotape, reading texts, and completing assignments.
- **Online Courses.** During the 2000-01 winter quarter, MCC offered five online courses with an enrollment of 87 students. During the 2001-02 winter quarter, MCC offered 52 online courses with 998 students enrolled. Students may take online courses through the Internet within a 14-week term. Instructors are electronically available to provide information, guidance, and feedback. Online course design is based on a textbook-to-online theme and a systematic instructional design model that mirrors successful on-campus learning. Courses consist of modules. Each module is composed of six standard components: objectives, readiness assessment quiz, learning activities overview, learning activities segment, summary, and homework assignment.

Multiple assessment tools and learning activities used in online courses include:

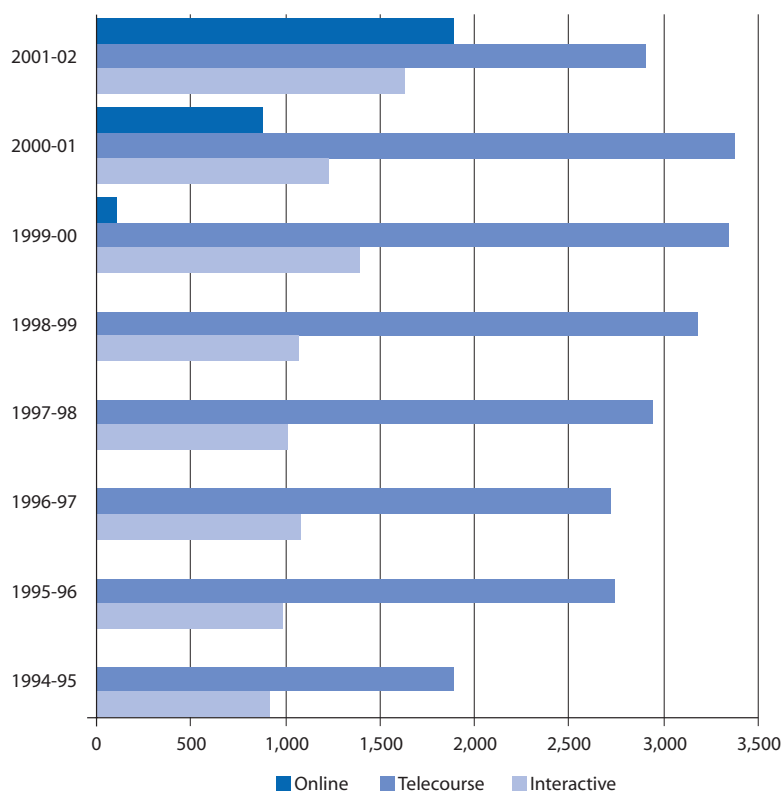
- Self-assessment quizzes and online tests that can only be taken during specified timeframes, generally a 3-6 day period;
- Teamwork and collaboration through course e-mail;
- Course discussions;
- Electronic journaling;
- Portfolio development; and
- Virtual group assignments.

The vice president of Student of Instructional Services (SIS) administers the ALS program.

Historical Data on Alternative Delivery Formats

During the last eight years, MCC has experienced a healthy growth in its alternative delivered course enrollments (duplicated headcount). In 1993-94, interactive TV and telecourses class enrollments were 2,812. In 2001-02, interactive, telecourse, and online enrollments were 6,430, a 125% increase from 1994-95. A major contributing factor to this increased enrollment is the development of online courses. From the first year of delivery, online course enrollment has increased 1,787 within the last three years.

Figure 13.1 Alternative Delivered Course Enrollments (Duplicated Headcount)



Alternative Delivered Course Development

Jumpstart Initiative

The Jumpstart initiative, implemented in the early 1990s, is a program that provides college resources and support, encouraging faculty to introduce technology-enhanced learning into the curriculum. Jumpstart is used to further pursuits in the development of alternative delivered courses. Jumpstart was the catalyst for the development of the first five online courses offered by MCC and now serves as the main vehicle to compensate faculty for the development and design of ALS courses.



Jumpstart projects include:

- Adapting and creating learning resources for teaching in the technology classrooms;
- Adapting and creating learning resources for teaching via the interactive TV system or preparation of material for instructors new to the system;
- Reviewing and preparing new telecourses (licensed programming) or revising existing telecourse materials; and
- Developing new online courses, and updating and enhancing existing ones.

In fiscal year 2000-2001, the college committed \$93,000 to the Jumpstart initiative. Although Jumpstart has been successful, the challenge remains to be intentional about which courses and programs are developed for online. The process has been very faculty-driven, resulting in the development of individual courses versus a concerted effort in the development of entire programs. Despite this challenge, all but one course has been developed for an AAS in Business Management.

Online Courses

In 1999, MCC implemented a team approach for developing a process for introducing online courses. A team of faculty and staff identified courses for online delivery and developed a tentative three-year plan for course development. This timetable was the catalyst for MCC's online courses.

After an awareness campaign sponsored by IDS through faculty and staff development activities, faculty became responsive to the excitement and potential future of online alternatives for student learning.

Faculty, deans, and IDS staff have met for the last two years to plan and strategize technology-enhanced learning projects and online course development. An annual schedule for development is determined each spring. Faculty interested in the development of online

courses complete a Jumpstart application for review by a committee composed of faculty, selected deans, and IDS staff. If accepted, a recommendation is then forwarded to the program area and the appropriate dean, who approves the project and signs off when it is completed.

Telecourses

IDS provides and circulates promotional material on new telecourse offerings to academic areas. Sample videotape segments are downlinked, duplicated, and distributed for faculty review. Faculty, working with the appropriate dean, evaluate the learning package and recommend if the college should adopt the course. At times, faculty will produce additional learning resources.

Interactive Television

In 2001, distance education faculty and Educational Services staff attended a revamped “mega meeting format” to share information and develop the fall and winter course schedule. A similar meeting is scheduled for winter 2002 to develop the spring and summer 2003 distance education course schedule. Reorganizing the operations and maintenance, the IDS team has allowed one team member to be partnered with daytime faculty users of the distance education system and one member to be partnered with evening users to incubate an IDS/faculty partner program.

Faculty Commitment

Faculty participation in the initial development of online courses is one of MCC’s strengths. From the inception of online courses, faculty members have been involved in the process. In 1999, a task force of faculty and IDS staff developed faculty responsibilities for online course development. These faculty responsibilities include:

- Previous teaching experience of the course in a traditional setting at MCC;
- Completion of the Online Course Design course;
- No additional office hours beyond the already mandatory six;
- Availability during the six required office hours to interact with online students;
- If the necessary computer hardware and software and an Internet Service Provider are available at home, a maximum of three hours per quarter/per course (for a 4.5 credit course) out of the faculty’s required 35 hours per week may be designated toward facilitating an online course at home;
- Attendance at the Alternative Learning Solutions orientation for students;
- Response within 48 hours to questions posted by students;
- Established ECH applied to online courses using the telecourse model;

- Development of online courses is worked through closely with IDS to integrate course templates, produce media, and develop interactive learning components;
- In accordance with Board Policy 64701, the college owns materials developed using college time and resources; faculty members are expected to sign off on such an agreement for each course developed; and
- Estimated development time for a course previously taught is 40-60 hours; this estimate does not include the time required to become proficient with WebCT or Web Page Editor.

These responsibilities provide common guidelines for online faculty. They are reviewed annually by faculty and IDS staff.

Faculty Support and Training

MCC demonstrates a commitment to faculty support and training through a variety of means.

Instructional Design Services

With the Instructional Design Services (IDS) staff's expertise, the department promotes and encourages the integration of technology-enhanced learning. The staff assists faculty in the design, development, production, and implementation of materials for use in distance education, technology classrooms, and online learning through the Internet.

The IDS staff is also available to consult with faculty in analyzing instructional needs, brainstorm instructional design concepts, recommend options available for delivering technology-enhanced learning, and advocate appropriate presentation technologies for desired learning activities. The IDS team includes:

- Director of Technology Enhanced Learning;
- Broadcast engineer;
- Technology delivery specialists (2);
- Audiovisual producer specialist;
- Producer/director multimedia specialist;
- Visual design specialist;
- Online courseware specialist;
- Multimedia computer technician specialist;
- Instructional media design specialist; and
- Audiovisual technician.

Online Courses

- **Faculty-Assimilated Online Course.** In addition to one-on-one IDS support, faculty members developing online courses enroll in an instructor online course, Online Course Design, to guide them through the design of their own WebCT courses. This online course utilizes the same text-to-online model used for all MCC online student courses. Each module mirrors the structure of an MCC online course and includes objectives, readiness quiz, learning activities, summary, and assignments.
- **Mentoring Program.** A mentoring plan is in place to ensure that faculty members new to online teaching are successful in their first experience. A new online faculty member is partnered for one term with an experienced online/mixed mode faculty member prior to teaching an online course. The mentor guides the new online instructor through the instructional design model and course tools. At the completion of the term, a mentored faculty member is able to effectively facilitate and manage an online/mixed mode course, make minor updates or modifications to course content, and successfully interact with students using the course communication tools.

Interactive Television

IDS staff offer a full complement of services to faculty using the distance learning system. They maintain and support the multimedia computers and standard load and the audiovisual equipment. They provide design and production support to faculty for developing technology enhanced learning modules and are available to brainstorm with faculty in developing learning activities and strategies for distance learning. The team also orients and trains users to become effective consumers of the distance education television system.

Sponsored Events for Faculty

- **Quarterly Faculty Roundtables.** Since the introduction of online courses, two online roundtables are held each 14-week term. The roundtables serve as informal forums for idea sharing, peer support, discussion of online teaching issues, assessment strategies, recommendations, and preview and exposure to new software and technologies.
- **Advanced Media Seminar.** This seminar is designed as a two and one-half day intensive workshop in which participants complete projects using Web or presentation technologies.
- **Jumpstart Show and Tell.** IDS sponsors “bring and brag” workshops for faculty to demonstrate and showcase technology based projects developed through the Jumpstart initiative. This is a rich, informal event where faculty members share ideas, discuss the uses of technology, and seek input from their peers.

ALS Distant Education Policies

Faculty and students are aware of their responsibilities to comply with the current United States copyright laws through a link in the online course syllabus to MCC’s library Web site. The procedures memorandum, *Acceptable Use of Information Technology and Resources*,

addresses privacy, safety and security. Students are advised of acceptable netiquette standards and a link is provided in the syllabus to additional resources.



Evaluation and Assessment

MCC strives to ensure that student learning takes place and that systems are available to all students so they may succeed in their learning endeavors through the Alternative Learning Solutions program.

All alternative delivered credit courses maintain the same standards and expectations as traditional on-campus courses. ALS is an umbrella for 45 plus telecourses, 20 interactive distance-learning courses, and 55 online courses (<http://www.mccneb.edu/als>).

Alternative delivered courses adhere to equivalent objectives and outcomes as on-campus courses. Regardless of the blend of delivery methods selected by students to complete programs of study, the integrity of program outcomes is maintained.

Grade distribution in alternative delivered courses appears to be equal to traditional courses, with one variation. The total percentage of students in alternative delivered courses earning each grade category is almost identical to the regular course distribution, except in the "F" category. Overall, students enrolled in alternative delivered courses tend to receive proportionally the same percentage of grades as do students enrolled in regular courses.

Figure 13.2 2001-02 Grade Distribution

Grade	ALTERNATIVE LEARNING COURSES						REGULAR COURSES	
	Telecourse	% of Total	Online Courses	% of Total	Distance Learning	% of Total	Regular Courses	% of Total
A	1,248	37.6%	1,265	51.2%	588	44.5%	69,234	46.6%
B	993	29.9%	491	19.9%	468	35.4%	41,342	27.9%
C	470	14.1%	310	12.5%	176	13.3%	20,698	13.9%
D	131	3.9%	78	3.2%	35	2.6%	5,299	3.6%
F	481	14.5%	327	13.2%	55	4.2%	11,871	8.0%
	3,323	100.0%	2,471	100.0%	1,322	100.0%	148,444	100.0%

To erase the concern that the delivery method may influence the integrity of student learning and assessment, course outcomes, and program outcomes, learning activities are not specifically designed for one mode of delivery. Faculty members who teach on-campus

courses also design and deliver interactive television, telecourse, and online classes. Many of the same activities and assessments are used in all delivery formats.

Orientation and Student Preparation

Based on self-selection, students determine if they will be successful in an ALS course experience. Orientation and training for students is focused on the concept of “one-stop shopping.”

Preceding the course start date each term, an orientation day is scheduled for all students enrolled in alternative delivered courses. Students receive study guides, a library resource handout, and course information/“Before You Begin” packet. Students are offered an opportunity to meet with their instructors and cyber classmates. Each orientation session is one hour in length, and faculty guide students through the course syllabus, student responsibilities, course design, and learning activities.

The Alternative Learning Solutions portal contains a demonstration link to an online course that students are encouraged to work through before registering for an online course. The “Before You Begin” course allows students to engage the course tools and practice the computer literacy skills needed to interact with MCC’s alternative learning environment.

Prior to the first class date, alternative delivery students are mailed an online information/orientation letter outlining the structure of the course, minimum hardware required to participate in the course, and an invitation to interact with an online orientation course. In addition, the weekly modular organization of the courses is explained, and the importance of attending a campus orientation is emphasized.

Integrity of Accomplishments

Online

Many of the pedagogical practices used for learning in online courses are the same as those used as supplements to traditional face-to-face courses. All online courses follow a syllabus template created by faculty in the program’s earlier development. The syllabus contains course prerequisites, course objectives, required materials, computer requirements, methods of instruction, assessment methods, course requirements, course communication, grievance procedures, and academic honesty policy.

Course modules contain required discussion learning activities, and online chat is encouraged as an option in courses. Students are expected to interact frequently via discussion or e-mail about course related questions. The course communication tools are always available to students for the informal exchange of ideas with the instructor and other students. Instructors respond within 48 hours to questions posted by students.

Various assessment tools are used for student assessment and faculty orientation of students. Each online course module contains several, if not all, of the following:

- Self-assessment quizzes and tests that allow instructors and learners to check for understanding;
- Teamwork and collaboration through course e-mail;
- Required conferencing discussions and optional online chats;
- Written communication demonstrations such as journaling, portfolio development, and written assignments; and
- A mix of collaborative online assignments, auto-marked online tests, and student homepages.

Telecourses

Telecourses provide the tools to present learning in a variety of ways. Students participate by viewing pre-produced lessons on videotape, reading texts, completing assignments, and communicating with instructors via phone, campus visits, U.S. mail or e-mail.

Telecourses adhere to a unique standard syllabus template. As well as the standard syllabus components, the syllabus includes a timeline correlating textbook chapters with videotapes, learning activities, and tests. Telecourse tests are administered at MCC's three campus libraries and the Fremont Center.

Distance Learning

Interactive/live TV courses provide the opportunity for a student to attend classes at their most convenient location. Distance learning courses have a standardized syllabus emulating the on-campus face-to-face model and the telecourse and online model.

Students view the instructor, course content, and other students on other campuses via TV monitors and have two-way conversations via a push-to-talk microphone. Active learning methods that incorporate fluid interactions between instructors and students, and students with students, are promoted. Instructors are encouraged to design activities that, by necessity, promote interaction, group discussion, and problem solving.

Marketing and Publications

As well as listing online courses in the college credit course schedule mailed to 270,000 households preceding each quarter, a full-page advertisement listing online courses, telecourses, and distance learning courses is placed three times a year in the *Omaha World Herald*, a regional and state newspaper.

Students can also search for alternative delivered courses through the college's Web site and locate online courses via the statewide consortium of colleges, *NEBSAT Online Distance Learning Catalog*, *Peterson's Guide to Distance Learning*, and select MCC online courses may also be accessed through Western Governors University.

Library and Learning Resources

Library Resources

MCC's library provides services to students enrolled in alternative delivered courses. The following services are offered to meet the informational and user needs for a wide variety of students and content areas, all done in conjunction with the application of fair use of copyrighted materials:

- Reliable, dependable access to various networks including the Internet;
- Computer-based services, including informational and bibliographic;
- Assistance with reference questions;
- Interlibrary loan;
- Access to reserve materials;
- Library services available during a wide range of hours and days;
- Focus on developing information literacy skills;
- Promotion of library skills through marketing as well as through the MCC library resources handbook, which is given to all students free of charge;
- Library staff available to assist; and
- Regulations and procedures in place and on the library Web site.

Monitoring of Learning Resources

In relation to learning resources, MCC does not separate students by method of course delivery. The college recognizes that it needs to do a better job of monitoring learning resources for alternative delivered learning and plans to work toward improvements.

Physical Resources for Students

Where applicable, labs, facilities, and equipment are available for students enrolled in alternative delivered courses in the same manner as for students in traditional classes.

Access to Student Services

Prior to the introduction of online courses, students enrolled in telecourse and interactive TV accessed the same range of student services offered to traditional students through full-service campus student service centers at each of the three campuses. Providing student services to online students has been a priority. The college is creating Web-based access to student services that will serve all students both on- and off-campus. The evolving service is moving from static text-based information to a flexible comprehensive service of information and electronic forms. Students can access the support services through the ALS portal Web site or from institutional links on their personalized My WebCT homepage.

Support Services

Academic Advising

Online advising is available via a link from the ALS Web site or a student's My WebCT homepage.

Bookstore

MCC contracts with Follett Higher Education Group to manage and operate the college bookstores. Follett offers an online service, which allows students to purchase books through the Internet.

Career Counseling

The Career Network centers are a no-cost service available to MCC students and the community. The Career Network centers provide a wide range of career interest inventories and assessments as well as maintain an extensive collection of career resources. Services include assistance with career exploration, education and training opportunities, and assistance with job search, including resume development and interviewing skills. Information is found at the Omaha Career Network Web site and the online virtual career center.

Financial Aid

The college's financial aid Web site allows most students to complete all of inquires and applications online through a comprehensive college Web resource site that provides extensive hyperlinks to federal and state financial aid sources.

Registration and Other

Web Advisor, a password protected interface, allows students to search for a class, register, drop and add classes, change addresses, and have read only access to individual progress reports, an unofficial transcript and grades. As of August 2002, tuition payment can be made online.

Technical Support

To ensure the consistency of all other technical support for online students, help questions are channeled through the online course specialist. Support is provided via e-mail and telephone. An extensive course help is available online within WebCT. MCC does not provide student at-home computer technical support or Internet connectivity support. Users are referred to their Internet service provider for these services.

Tutoring

Students can inquire about services from the tutor services Web site.

Facilities and Finances

Long-range Planning

In 2000, MCC selected five strategic initiatives to guide focused area planning for the institution. In the IDS area, the focus is to use technology to expand opportunities for students and employees to access learning resources and support services. IDS intends to enhance its internal support systems and prepare for expected growth. Plans relate to the offering of degrees and specialized degree options online, increase partnership activities, and provide for continued expansion of technology classrooms. In the future, the technology classroom may become the traditional classroom instead of something apart from the norm. Planning in IDS is accomplished in conjunction with faculty and staff from the Educational Services, Facilities, and Faculty Development areas.

Conclusion

Based on the information addressing MCC's distance education practices presented, the college is in a position to offer degree programs via these modalities or a combination thereof. Therefore, MCC requests an institutional change and seeks approval from the Higher Learning Commission to award degrees delivered via distance education.