

Theme: Balancing Quality and Quantity: The Global Challenge for Tertiary Education

Subtheme: E-libraries and E-learning Resources

Title of Paper: Tooling for Success in Distance Education

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Abstract: In January 2005, Bermuda College hosted a group of 200 individuals + various sectors of the community to chart a future direction for the institution. These discussions led to the development of the 2005 Bermuda College Strategic Direction Initiative: Charting our Course for the Future which included several action steps relating to distance education. As a result, in September 2005 an ad hoc committee was established and charged with investigating distance education for Bermuda College.

A pilot programme was launched in fall 2007 offering five hybrid courses. Adequate technology and support services from the requisite departments were needed in order for the initiative to be successful. The number of online courses has doubled since the pilot.

In order to have success, Bermuda College had to ensure that lecturers and students had the necessary tools that would undergird this venture. Additionally, policies and procedures have been established.

Students are required to do a Readiness Quiz and attend general and class orientations before classes begin. IT help is also available. Lecturers attend conferences, watch webinars, attend meetings, have their courses evaluated, and take courses toward certification.

Because the required steps are in place to ensure that the College goals are realized, the distance education initiative has realized measures of success thus far.

### Tooling for Success in Distance Education

The *2005 Bermuda College Strategic Direction Initiative: Charting our course for the future* included the following action steps relating to distance education.

- Integrate computer technology, including online instruction, in the curriculum to enhance student learning (Strategy IV).
- Establish distance education (online delivery) training programmes for workplace delivery (Strategy VI).
- Establish the broadband that would allow attendance to our classes via remote connections (Strategy VII).
- Undertake the necessary steps to provide Smart Classrooms (Strategy VII).
- Ensure more classroom space and resources for distance education courses as the needs grow (Strategy X).
- Continue to explore the use of audio-video teleconferencing that allows students to engage in face-to-face class sessions with international audiences (Strategy X) (Bermuda College 2005 Strategic Plan)

As Bermuda College's Strategic Plan dictated movement into the distance education arena, Black (2003) noted that change is inevitable. Staying informed with the literature, integrating technological enhancements, collaborating with others in the field and aligning the strategic plan are some of the approaches employed to build on a strong foundation to move into the future with confidence.

In 2005, an ad hoc committee began its investigation into distance education at Bermuda College and produced several recommendations, one of which was to begin the process of offering courses through distance education that will afford the institution the opportunity to better serve the non-traditional student population who were not able to commit to attending classes at a set time every week. This would also be an option for inmates and others who can't physically attend the college for whatever reason. The committee, however, stressed that distance education courses are not for everyone, and they should not be a replacement for traditional classes but seen as another option for students. A number of other recommendations were made, including the following:

- Establish a steering committee that will implement distance education at Bermuda College.
- Conduct a needs assessment for faculty and staff development and develop a professional development budget.
- Establish policies and procedures for distance education.
- Work with student services, library, and bookstore to ensure services are adequate for distance education.
- Work with the communications department to establish a marketing plan.
- Conduct a pilot programme using one or two courses.
- Evaluate the results of the pilot programme.

The committee also recommended that contact be made with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) to access information from schools that have successfully made the online transition. Likewise, this important step to online education must be carefully planned so that faculty, staff, and the College's infrastructure are ready for the transition (Ad Hoc Committee 2006 Report on Distance Education). As reported in Gabriel (2002), technology can enhance instructional delivery e.g., increase writing output in English courses, but there have also been poorly thought out attempts to implement distance education (Phipps and Merisotis, 1999). There were some real concerns about low retention rates and the requirement of student characteristics to suggest caution as decisions were being made on where to put the considerable resources required for developing online courses. Although this was an initiative to reach more of the non-traditional students as well as traditional students who have the appropriate skills and characteristics, a rush to simply put courses online could be problematic. The Distance Education Report (2006) supports this: Willis, Associate Vice President for Educational Outreach at the University of Idaho, wants people to think about it long and hard before they set out to build a program. The premise of one of his four guidelines is plan to make it [online courses] last.

The steering committee began its work in February 2006 to implement the offering of distance courses at Bermuda College and to ensure that the infrastructure and tools were in place to begin a pilot programme. It was vitally important to be certain that online learning environments provide adequate levels of interaction with human assistance as well as social connectivity with the campus community so that students would not feel isolated or disconnected. To facilitate the parameters of online learning, several mechanisms needed to be operational. An implementation plan was formalized (Appendix 1).

The outcomes from the surveys done by participants from businesses and current non traditional students indicated a population who would benefit from the introduction of online courses at Bermuda College. This is supported by Daniels (2002) who suggests that the lure of being able to study at home in front of their computers may lead learners to enrol in a distance education course. Interested faculty members, as well as administrators, attended overseas conferences and visited several comparable colleges that offered online courses. This was to ensure that the College was heading in the right direction; their observations and reports revealed that there was no need to begin from scratch since several institutions were willing to share their successes and challenges. This proved to be a worthwhile venture. The plans to introduce a pilot programme in fall 2006 were moved forward to fall 2007 to ensure that all necessary preparations were completed and in place for the launch.

Once the decision was made to proceed with online blended learning, several publishers were contacted and faculty met with them to determine appropriate texts. Likewise, initial policies and procedures were developed to manage cost of courses, teaching load, retention strategies, attendance, alert procedures, class size, semester start and end dates, week beginning and end dates, intellectual property, and testing.

A frequently asked question sheet was developed and prominently displayed on the College's Website for easy access. This was a meaningful exercise because individuals could be referred quite easily to this document. Additionally, a Readiness Quiz was developed and all students who desired to take an online course were mandated to complete the quiz before being enrolled in an online course at Bermuda College. The results were vetted and, if any students' answers were questioned or showed inappropriateness for doing online courses, these individuals were contacted and not allowed to enrol in the course of choice. The

Readiness Quiz is still in place as of fall 2009; however, a large percentage of students have been allowed to enrol in online courses without taking the quiz. This has been problematic because many of these students are ill equipped to be in an online course. The College is currently reviewing methods to correct this.

Although the College has an Academic Resource Centre (ARC), it is not open seven days a week. In order to properly cater to the students taking online courses, the College secured the services of a seven day, twenty-four hour service where students could receive tutorial assistance in any subject area. This service is also available to Bermuda College students in face-to-face courses.

Additionally, twenty-four hour technical service was available at the College if students were experiencing problems accessing material from the course. This proved to be an expensive venture that was not needed. Students rarely called in for the service, so the decision was made to terminate.

Adequate support services from the Academic Resource Centre, Library, Bookstore, and Student Services are available. During the mandatory orientation, representatives from these areas are present to inform the students know about available services.

The mandatory orientation is important because students hear from their peers about the successes and challenges involved in taking distance education courses. They are also given information about the surveys that must be completed during week twelve of the semester. An important part of this orientation is meeting with the course lecturers (Appendix 2). Moreover, students who are currently enrolled in distance courses give their testimonials relating to their successes and challenges.

It is also necessary that mechanisms are in place to facilitate the needs of faculty. An Instructional Resource Centre (IRC) has been established, and an Instructional Technology and Curriculum Specialist is located there to meet the needs of all faculty and staff, not just lecturers who teach online. This individual supports the lecturers with the development of online courses, with technological support to enhance delivery, and by offering select workshops such as “How to Use Blackboard,” Bermuda College’s course management system.

Meetings are held with lecturers at the end of each semester for reflection and to finalise plans for the next semester. Lecturers also come together to watch appropriate Webinars. Some of them have proven to be extremely useful. Likewise, if lecturers intend to develop a course, they are given a schedule for design and development (Appendix 3). They work in conjunction with the Curriculum Specialist in the IRC to meet the deadlines. The goal is to have courses completed at least three months before they go live. This gives opportunity to make changes as noted by the Curriculum Specialist or members of the Distance Education Committee.

Bermuda College also subscribes to Quality Matters: Inter-Institutional Quality Assurance in Online Learning, an international organisation that certifies the quality of online course and online components. All lecturers teaching online are given the Quality Matters Rubric which will assist them in organising their courses for delivery. Lecturers also have the opportunity of becoming course reviewers with this organisation.

In order for the distance education programme to be credible, lecturers are asked to become certified. The certification can be a minimum of three courses or a maximum of nine courses. This is financed by the College and can be done at a variety of institutions. Also, lecturers interested in teaching online are encouraged to attend a conference before making a final decision to commit to distance education delivery.

At the end of each semester, students and lecturers complete surveys; the data from them are used for decision making. The Special Projects Department also produces reports at the end of each semester and at the end of the academic year. These reports show retention or persistence percentages, allocation of grades by course, lecturer comments, and comparison of the distance education courses against their face-to-face counterparts.

The Distance Education Policy outlines the criteria for faculty members wanting to teach online courses and for students wishing to take online courses. These policies also reference some of the following areas: course format, including time lengths, registration, examinations, and withdrawal from online courses.

Finally, a distance education committee meets once a month to ensure that the initiative of offering online delivery is running smoothly, vet any new courses, and to make plans to move this programme forward.

#### References

- Answering the tough questions about distance ed. *Distance Education Report*, 2006, 7-9.
- Bermuda College Report on Distance Education (2006). The Distance Education Ad Hoc Committee.
- Black, Nancy E. (2004). Going the distance: Library service for the distant student. *Feliciter*, 4, 159-161.
- Daniels, Terry. (2002). Using face-to-face tools for success in distance education. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 3, 321-326.
- Gabriel, G. (2002). Postsecondary distance education: Issues of student outcomes, access, cost and quality assurance. *Research Report No. 01-02 Office of Institutional Research*, Northern Virginia Community College.
- Phipps, R., and Merisotis, J. (1999). What's the difference? A review of contemporary research on the effectiveness of distance learning in higher education. *The Institute for Higher Education Policy*, prepared for the National Education Association.

Appendix 1

**BERMUDA COLLEGE**  
**DISTANCE EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

<b>GOALS/OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>LEAD COMMITTEE &amp; TIME LINE</b>
Survey current and potential students to determine demand and format.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine goals and objectives of survey</li> <li>• Develop and circulate survey</li> <li>• Analyze results of survey</li> </ul>	Survey April 15, 2006  May 1, 2006   August 31, 2006
Survey adjunct faculty to determine level of interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine goals and objectives of survey</li> <li>• Develop and circulate survey</li> <li>• Analyze results of survey</li> </ul>	Survey July 1, 2006  August 1, 2006   September 30, 2006
Conduct a pilot programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek faculty volunteers</li> <li>• Choose 2 or 3 courses to be used in pilot</li> <li>• Conduct a needs assessment for faculty/</li> </ul>	Division Chairs Division Chairs & Faculty May 31, 2006

	<p>staff professional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite textbook publishers to present online resources to faculty</li> <li>• Review and select online course providers</li> <li>• Customize courses for BC use</li> <li>• Make course available to potential students</li> </ul>	<p>Faculty/Staff Development September 15, 2006</p> <p>Course Development August 1, 2006</p> <p>September 30, 2006</p> <p>November 30, 2006</p> <p>Registrar's Office &amp; Academic/Admin. Computing November 30, 2006</p>
<b>GOALS/OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>LEAD COMMITTEE &amp; TIME LINE (TBD)</b>
Ensure adequate technology to support pilot programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure relevant bandwidth</li> <li>• Secure help desk assistance</li> </ul>	<p>Academic and Administrative Computing November 30, 2006</p>

	for technical problems	January 2, 2007
Ensure adequate support service to support pilot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online registration and payment</li> <li>• Instructional help desk</li> <li>• Tutorial services</li> <li>• Exam/test supervision</li> <li>• Library services</li> <li>• Bookstore extended hours</li> </ul>	Administrative Computing October 31, 2006  Support Services TBD August 22, 2006 January 2, 2007 January 2, 2007 January 2, 2007
Establish policies and procedures to support distance education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of courses</li> <li>• Teaching load</li> <li>• Retention strategies</li> <li>• Faculty and student alert system</li> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Enrollment in courses</li> <li>• Single or multiple starts (pilot will be one start)</li> <li>• Establish start and end of week times</li> <li>• Minimum systems requirements</li> </ul>	Policy Academic VP and JCC September 30, 2006
Establish a marketing plan for distance education courses using the theme access and opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an internal marketing campaign</li> <li>• Determine media to use</li> <li>• Establish a marketing budget</li> <li>• Develop marketing materials</li> <li>• Evaluation of marketing efforts</li> </ul>	Communications August 31, 2006



<b>GOALS/OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>LEAD COMMITTEE &amp; TIME LINE (TBD)</b>
Evaluate the pilot programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a student survey to include demographic and student satisfaction information</li> <li>• Distribute surveys towards the beginning and at the end of the pilot</li> <li>• Conduct a focus group with students at mid-point of pilot</li> <li>• Meet with faculty at least 3 times during the pilot</li> <li>• Analyze all results and make recommendations for improvements</li> </ul>	Survey May 31, 2007

## Appendix 2

### **BERMUDA COLLEGE ORIENTATION FOR STUDENTS DOING ONLINE COURSES**

Wednesday, August 26, 2009

6:00-7:00 p.m.; North Hall Lecture Theatre G301

#### **A G E N D A**

1. DE Students' Testimonials
2. Introduction of Faculty and Staff – L. Woods
3. Remarks – Dr. Duranda Greene, President
  - a) Readiness Quiz
  - b) Distance Education Fact Sheet
  - c) Distance Education Student Survey
4. Bermuda College Library – J. Alleyne
  - a) Library Services
  - b) Hours of Operation
5. Academic Resource Centre
  - a) Services Offered
  - b) Arranging to see a Tutor
  - c) Subject Areas to Receive Assistance
  - d) Smarthinking
  - e) Location and Hours of Operation
6. Information Technology/Help Desk – M.J. Filson
  - a) Hours of Operation

- b) Online Student Resource Centre
  - c) Student Access to Software Tutorials
  - d) Blackboard Resources
- 
- 7. Any Other Business
  
  - 8. Thanks & Words of Encouragement – Dr. Larita Alford, Vice President & Chief Academic Officer
  
  - 9. Meetings with Course Lecturers

**NOTES**

**BERMUDA COLLEGE**  
**SCHEDULE FOR DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT OF ONLINE COURSES**  
**2009 SPRING**

Lecturer: \_\_\_\_\_

Division: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Number \_\_\_\_\_

Course Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Lecturers intending to develop or teach online courses for 2009 spring semester must follow the outline and timelines below.

Put a check mark beside each item when it is completed. This form must be handed in to the Special Projects office by November 26, 2008.

**Step One: Due Date – September 30, 2008**

Confirm textbook

**Step Two: Due Date – October 10, 2008**

Course Description

Learning Objectives

Resources & Materials

**Step Three: Due Date – October 17, 2008**

Course Overview & Introduction

Course Outcomes

Assessment

**Step Four: Due Date – October 24 , 2008**

Learner Interaction

Instructor Response & Availability

Course Technology

Learner Support

**Step Five: Due Date**

Course Syllabus:

- First half of syllabus - **October 31, 2008**
- Second half of syllabus – **November 7, 2008**

Dates on Campus: **October 31, 2008**

**Step Six: Due Date – November 18, 2008**

Revision:

**Step Seven: Due Date – November 25, 2008**

Final Check: