

Meeting Report

VCT Coordinators' Summer Meeting

June 8-9, 2009

See the attached meeting handouts for additional data and information related to items in this report.

Outcomes of the 81st Session of the Texas Legislation: Implications for VCT

VCT funding for Biennium Years 2010-2011 is sufficient to continue the licenses for READI, SoftChalk, and the Dallas Telelearning Digital Resource Repository at no cost to colleges. The requested funding for collaborative licenses for Presidium and the Turnitin Suite did not pass. VCT funding increased enough, however, to make it possible for VCT to contribute substantially to the development of an online State master science course (addressed as a separate item on page 2 of this report).

FY 2009 Accomplishments

New Mission Implementation

The Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) approved a proposed change in VCT's mission statement to include *student success* in addition to *access to higher education*.

Mission: To increase access to higher education and improve student success through sharing of eLearning Resources among Texas two-year colleges.

Licenses for the web-based services mentioned were acquired to support the TACC Two-year College Student Support Initiative.

Update of Identity

Proposed name changes for the TACC Distance Learning Advisory (DLAC) Committee and the TACC Telecommunications Committee were approved by TACC. The TACC DLAC is renamed the TACC eLearning Council. The TACC Telecommunications Committee is now the TACC eLearning Committee. *Council* implies a stronger role for this body than *Advisory Committee*, befitting the significance it has attained through the years. The use of *eLearning* rather *distance learning* and *telecommunications* aligns the names of VCT governance bodies with current terminology. The TACC eLearning Council, composed of representatives from the six TACC-defined regions, and TACC eLearning Committee, which includes college CEOs, are critical components of VCT's governance structure, headed by the Texas Association of Community Colleges

Increased Institutional Awareness

Progress has been made in increasing institutional awareness of VCT. Communication with TACC via the TACC eLearning Committee has been re-established. The Director of VCT and Chair of TACC eLearning Council participate in meetings of the eLearning Committee, and the committee Chair regularly reports on significant VCT issues at TACC's quarterly meetings. A VCT presentation on the Student Success Initiative attracted a standing-room-only audience at the Fall 2008 Conference of Texas Community College Instructional Leaders (TCCIL). A similar presentation attracted an equally large audience at the Fall conference of the Texas Association of College Admissions and Registrar Officers Association (TACROA). Dr. Bill Holda, president of Kilgore College, represented VCT in a lunch speech at the June 2009 conference of the Texas Community College Instructional Administrators Association. To further increase awareness of VCT activities among colleges, it has

been proposed that each college president appoint an individual to serve as an Executive Contact for VCT in matters that have significant statewide impact. Note: the proposal for Executive Contacts was approved by TACC in its Summer Meeting.

New Website Username and Password Management System

A new, easier-to-use system for assigning usernames and passwords for the VCT website has been developed. It will be made operational in mid July. The new system links the names of users to their website usernames and passwords.

Single Concept Modules

VCT contributed \$10,000 in matching funds to a TxPOD initiative to develop a series of brief modules, each of which addresses a discrete distance learning topic. Mickey Slimp and Terry Steward co-directed the project. The series, titled “Innovations in Distance Learning,” includes sixteen modules that will be completed by the end of Summer 2009. Topics include: SCORM compliance, GoogleDocs in online courses, recording lectures for online students, podcasting, You Tube, Web 2.0, online communities, paperless grading, faculty’s role in the online environment, course management, creating digital texts, copyright for online instructors and students, assessment strategies, retention strategies, collaborative activities, and open courseware.

Student Success Initiative

The Texas Two-Year College Student Success Initiative was launched Fall 2008. It makes available at no cost to colleges web-based services that strengthen two pillars of student success, instruction and student support. VCT purchased collaborative licenses for *READI*, *SoftChalk*, and the *Dallas Telelearning Digital Resource Repository*. In addition, an agreement with the UT Telecampus makes available to all Texas two-year colleges an online course review system, the *Course Analysis, Review, and Assessment Tool (CARAT)*. It facilitates the peer review of courses, and it may be used to support course-quality processes in the manner of Quality Matters. It will be available Fall 2009.

Most colleges have implemented READI to some degree, and they are generally satisfied with it. Only a few, however, report that they have integrated it thoroughly into their colleges’ distance learning processes and practices. It was suggested that a survey regarding implementation of collaboratively licensed web-based services should include a question about how READI has been implemented at the college. SoftChalk appears to be gathering a significant following, and faculty at colleges that have elected to support it report favorably regarding their experiences in using it. SoftChalk will conduct introductory webinars specifically for VCT colleges July 9 and mid-to-late September. In addition, it will conduct a series of additional webinars in FY 2010 on discrete SoftChalk topics. Faculty seem to be slow in adopting use of the Digital Resource Repository. It has been reported that slow faculty adoption is typical in regard to learning object repositories.

In addition to the above-named licenses, the Student Success Initiative includes *collaborative degree and certificate programs* and the development of an online *state master science course*. Interest among colleges in collaborative degree and certification programs continues to be slight. When interest increases, colleges have at the VCT website a means for making collaborative programs known and available, plus a model collaborative agreement that they may adapt to their specific needs.

A proposal that VCT contribute funds to support the development of a *state master science course* was included in VCT FY 2009 presentation and report venues throughout FY 2009. Response to the proposal was consistently favorable. A strategy will be defined for deciding which course to develop and, then, for developing it.

VCT-TxVSN Collaboration

VCT and TxVSN are on track for a 2009 fall semester pilot, involving these four two-year colleges serving as Providers:

Angelina College and TSTC-Harlingen: GOVT 2301
Howard College: HIST 1301
St. Philips: ECON 2301

The TACC eLearning Council, TACC eLearning Committee, and VCT staff will continue to work closely with TxVSN staff and other entities, as appropriate, to address collaboration issues. Key issues to address include: the legislatively mandated TxVSN review to ensure that courses cover Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and that they meet quality standards set by the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL); varying dual credit tuition policies among colleges; preservation of service areas, which may be threatened by House Bill 2480; and issues raised and/or left unresolved by House Bill 3646, which was not mentioned in the Coordinators' Meeting.

Host-Provider Operations

VCT Utilization Fall-Spring, FY 2009

As of June 2, 2009, FY 2009, VCT enrollments totaled 4,633, which is approximately 11% lower than FY 2008 enrollments. The decrease continues a trend that began in FY 2006. It reflects the composite effects of several factors: fewer Host colleges (partly because some ceased VCT participation when the SACS review was scheduled), stricter standards applied by colleges in selecting courses to host (again, a result of the SACS review), and the increasing number of locally developed online courses offered by colleges. The number of Host colleges in FY 2009 remained the same as FY 2008: 37. Provider colleges decreased by 3, to 26, a drop of almost 10%.

The number of duplicated courses with students enrolled increased to 1,066 in FY 2009 from 1,033 in 2008—a 3% increase. Unduplicated courses with students enrolled increased almost 9%, from 225 in FY 2008 to 245 in FY in 2009.

A half-dozen colleges account for one-third of Host-college enrollments through VCT, and four colleges serve as the Providers for approximately 70% of VCT-enrolled students.

Institutional Evaluation of VCT

Evaluations of VCT continue to be favorable. Evaluation items in FY 2008 that were rated 5 or above on a 1-6 scale are: Impact of VCT on Your College (5.05); Value of Resources Acquired, i.e., collaborative licenses (5.27); Clarity and Usefulness of MOU, Guidelines, and Procedures (5.33); Effectiveness of VCT Staff (5.57); Value of Coordinator Meetings (5.63); Overall Satisfaction with VCT (5.65).

Evaluation of Instruction and Services Fall & Spring, FY 2009

Students' evaluation in FY 2009 appear to be consistent with those of previous years—favorable overall. The least favorably rated items were those related to the social dimension of instruction—discussion groups, chat rooms, interactions with students, being part of a learning community.

Best Practices, Problems, Solutions, Great Ideas

An open discussion the morning of June 9 yielded a wide array of information on various topics. Since there was no note-taker for this discussion, no attempt is made here to capture fully the discussion, though here are some notable points:

First-ever Event

TSTC Harlingen graduated the first known student to complete a certificate program entirely in a virtual environment. http://www.prweb.com/releases/TSTC/virtual_education/prweb2419874.htm

Recommended reading:

Changing and Succeeding Under Any Condition, John Kotter

Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us, Seth Godin

Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies, Charleen Li and Jacques Bernoff

Recommended tools:

Rubric for assessing a course's cheatability, Jared Stine: <http://learningfield.org/cheat/>

Presentation by Jared Stine: <http://flexknowlogy.learningfield.org/pres/cheatability/>

Jing: Screen capture, including motion: <http://www.jingproject.com/>

Google Wave, Communication and collaboration too: <http://wave.google.com/>

Recommended conference:

University of Wisconsin's *Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning*:
<http://www.uwex.edu/disted/conference/>

Initiatives addressing retention in online courses:

Dallas County Community College District: integrating social networking

College of the Mainland: providing procedures for instructors to stay abreast of student performance

Austin Community College: using an early intervention system, Starfish:
www.starfishsolutions.com

Issues:

- College reluctance to host courses because courses cannot be thoroughly reviewed (no plans for making all courses fully reviewable)
- SoftChalk key not received by some colleges (Ron T will follow up with SoftChalk.)
- Inclusion of colleges in SoftChalk licenses in FY 2010 that were not included in FY 2009: (ALL colleges are included in FY 2010 SoftChalk licenses.)

Suggestions:

- To increase student response rates to the VCT Evaluation of Instruction and Services, the VCT Director will send a follow-up email to students late in the semester to encourage them to complete the evaluation.

- On Final Grade Reports, include “Dual Credit” after the student’s name so the instructor will know to include both a number and a letter grade. *Dual credit status will be noted during the space reservation process. With that, dual credit can be noted on Grade Reports.*
- Collect student feedback on their experience with VCT. *(This will be done.)*
- Show syllabi and faculty qualifications side-by-side at the VCT website. *This is available now: On the Host Faculty Roster page (accessed from VCT Credit Faculty Roster Administration) click the course number to see the syllabus. Click the faculty member’s name next to the course number to see the summary of qualifications, which includes SACS faculty roster information, plus more. Access to the Faculty Roster page must be granted by VCT.*
- Provide the ability to build a Host course schedule. *This is available now: The function for building a local (Host) schedule is found at the bottom of the VCT Credit Course Schedule Administration webpage. It’s a straight-forward process: Click the appropriate semester from the list presented. Click Add Courses to Local Schedule. Then, select courses by clicking a box at the end of the row with the course number/name. Clicking ADD at the bottom of the page completes the process. A link to the college’s Local Course Schedule is provided. Access to VCT Course Schedule Administration is required.*

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

Following the open discussion the morning of July 9, Coordinators broke into three groups to review the SWOT analysis conducted in the June 2008 Summer Meeting and/or to provide feedback to VCT on any area of topic they pleased. The results of each group’s deliberations are presented in the table on the following page.

Results of Group Breakout Session VCT Coordinators' Meeting, 2009

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create marketing around the state. - Collect student testimonials, audio or video. - Develop more awareness of VCT on campuses; overcome resistance. - Teach VCT terminology in staff/faculty orientations, impact and end result of VCT courses. Bottom line: VCT is a service for students. - Collect data on percent of completers who used distance learning. - Strength: cooperation among community colleges - Challenge: Limitation of VCT office - Yeah! VCT-funded lab course - Schools should provide good instructions for entering VCT classes. - Needed website changes: include reason for withdrawals on rosters; include faculty rosters next to syllabi to assist in course approval; track email generated by Coordinators at website. 	<p><i>Strengths:</i> (1) SoftChalk training beneficial, Digital Resource Repository, READI (2) CARAT, single-concept modules (3) Master Science Course</p> <p><i>Suggestion:</i> look into use of STARFISH.</p> <p><i>Weakness:</i> website's html editor. Find a better one.</p> <p><i>Opportunities:</i> Repository for best practices and training</p> <p><i>Threats:</i> Lack of VCT office administrative assistant; SACS requirement that Hosts are responsible for faculty qualifications; administrative approval process to host courses; faculty's lack of acceptance of online courses</p> <p><i>Recommendation for 2010 Meeting:</i> Demo online student orientations, both web-based and LMS-based, with statistical data.</p>	<p><i>Weaknesses:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing of VCT to program chairs and deans that informs of VCT's purpose and benefits. Possible: email from Ron, blog, RSS. - Need for more conscious participation in VCT following various models (Host/Provider, Host, Provider. - Complications of hosting courses—academic cooperation, misunderstanding of VCT financial model in which host gets contact-hour funding. - Program communication, training and awareness. Need "at a glance" document. - Need data on most frequently requested courses - Colleges should add hosted classes to local schedules when possible. - Secure and maintain current position. Focus on threats and weaknesses. - Focus on opportunities: collaborative degree/certificate programs, university partnerships.