

# TACC Distance Learning Advisory Committee

## Summer Meeting June 15, 2006

Texas Association of Community Colleges, Austin

### Attending

John Ray, Chair, Brazosport College	Robert Bermea, Austin Community College
Donnetta Suchon, Past Chair, Lee College	Dani Day, Cisco Jr. College
Lee Sloan, Del Mar College, Chair-Elect	Debra Rockefeller, North Harris Montgomery CCD
Danette Toone, Temple College	Anne Morris, Panola College
Pam Quinn, Dallas Co. Comm. Col. District	Rey Garcia, TACC
Lance Zimmerman, TSTC Waco	Henry Hartman, STARLINK
Dwight Chaney, Paris Junior College	Scott Brookins, STARLINK
Richard Jolly, Midland College	Ron Thomson, VCT
Blaine Bennett, Southwest Texas Jr. College	Aleta Garcia, VCT

### Committee Business

Donnetta Suchon initiated a discussion of the continuity of DLAC leadership. The discussion led to a motion, which passed, to amend the DLAC bylaws. Effective immediately, a DLAC Chair whose term of service as Chair ends does not leave the committee; the Ex-chair continues in the office of Past Chair. Also, the Chair Elect is to be elected two years prior to assuming the office, at the time a new DLAC Chair is elected.

**Election of Officers.** After the DLAC bylaws were amended:

- John Ray, Brazosport College, was elected Chair of the DLAC;
- Lee Sloan, Del Mar College, was elected Chair Elect; and
- Donnetta Suchon, Lee College, continued her service on the committee as Past Chair.

**Recognition of Donnetta.** The committee recognized Donnetta's service on the committee with a promissory card for flowers to be delivered to her office the following Monday. Ron stated that most are unaware of the depth of Donnetta's commitment to the SACS review process and how much she has directly contributed. Without that support, Ron said he would have found his job related to the SACS review to be virtually impossible to accomplish.

**Openness of DLAC Meetings.** The committee recognized that DLAC meetings cannot be closed, but attendance by non-DLAC members, other than invited guests, should not be encouraged. Non-invited guests would understand that they are attending to listen only. It was suggested that VCT become a regular item on the agenda of TCCIA, TACTE, and TACE to keep administrators around the state in the loop regarding VCT.

### VCT Report and Discussion

**VCT Organizational Chart.** Ron shared an observation that that Bob Jones, El Paso Community, made in the May Coordinators' Meeting: the VCT org chart resembles a flow chart, which seems appropriate for VCT. The org chart, it was suggested, is reminiscent of the concept of VCT held by Miles Eckert, a founding member of the DLAC: "VCT Inside," to paraphrase the Intel slogan. His concept has had an enduring influence on VCT.

**VCT Mission Statement.** The committee approved the VCT mission statement as it has been presented for the past several years: “The Mission of the Virtual College of Texas is to enhance access to higher education by sharing distance learning resources among colleges. These resources include instruction, student and administrative services, and technology.”

**Utilization of VCT.** The committee reviewed a list of colleges rank-ordered by their utilization of VCT, as measured by the number of annual course enrollments in FY 06 through June 1. At the top of the list was TSTC Harlingen, followed by Howard, Texas Southmost, Galveston, and Texarkana. FY 06b enrollments through VCT are down compared to FY 05.

**Annual Evaluation of VCT.** VCT continues to receive favorable evaluations from colleges. In FY 05, overall satisfaction with VCT was 5.57 on a scale of 1 to 6.

**The DLAC, VCT, and Accomplishments.** The committee shared perspectives on VCT accomplishments, which include: VCT’s ease of use and flexibility; processes that facilitate college participation; capability to create localized VCT schedules; Online Day of Record and Final Grade Rosters (well received in their implementation); common, statewide online Evaluation of VCT Instruction and Services; continued high overall satisfaction with VCT.

**Posting at VCT Website a Composite Report of the VCT Evaluation of Instruction and Services.** The committee concurred that posting the report at the website would be appropriate, but instructor confidentiality should be preserved.

### **VCT Grant-funded Projects.**

**Current Biennium:** Four colleges have been awarded grants totaling \$300,000 for development of online curriculum: Kilgore, Dallas, TSTC-Marshall, and Wharton.

**Unused Grant Funds.** Ron reported that colleges did not spend approximately \$180,000 of the grant funds that they were awarded in the past biennium, and the funds were returned to the state. To avoid that occurrence again, the committee recommended that colleges be required to submit financial reports along with their periodic review reports. If it becomes apparent that a project will not spend all funds awarded, the funds may be reallocated for other purposes.

**Status VCT’s Facilitating Access to Online Degree Programs.** This initiative has not progressed, but it has not been abandoned. Attention to it will resume when colleges are not focused upon the upcoming SACS review.

### **Motivational Letter to Colleges**

It was agreed that it would be appropriate to send a letter representing the committee to VCT-SACS Liaisons and VCT Coordinators, the purpose being to thank them and encourage them in regard to the hard work that they are investing in preparing for the SACS review. The letter would remind colleges that VCT’s reason for being: it is a service valued by students. Other advantages have accrued, also, because of VCT—such as the Internet Teachers at Every College project and the TIF grant through which colleges received three-year WebCT licenses.

## **Finalizing the Single Compliance Certification**

Ron reported that the DLAC officers would provide final DLAC input into the Single Compliance Certification at the end of July, after the colleges had provided their input from the statewide review of the draft SCC.

## **Faculty Rosters**

In discussion of faculty rosters, the DLAC emphasized the responsibility of Host colleges in regard to the qualifications of faculty teaching courses that they host. Recognizing the sensitivity of faculty qualifications, the committee concurred that it would suggest to Dr. Tom Benberg that the part of the review committee's report involving faculty qualifications should be sent to individual Host colleges and not be part of the report that is disseminated to all colleges. It also emphasized that the review committee needs to understand that it will not communicate with Provider colleges in regard to Host colleges' faculty rosters. It also was recommended that online access to each college's Host faculty roster should be restricted to those to whom the college has given passwords and to the SACS review committee.

## **Improving VCT**

Anticipating that the Texas Legislature will continue to allocate funds for VCT, the committee briefly discussed how the funds might be used other than to support program development at colleges. The idea that resonated most strongly among committee members was student services. It was suggested that the committee should meet early in the fall semester, perhaps by audioconference, to develop a plan for effective use of state funds to improve student services.

## **Continuing Education**

Tim Rocky, president of TACE, reported that interest in online courses among CE administrators is growing and use is increasing, but limited resources of CE departments impact their ability to develop online courses. TACE has a CE Distance Learning Committee that has explored distance learning options. It was pointed out that well targeted online training through CE can be effective, Austin Community College's nursing re-entry program being a prime example.

## **DLAC Review of the Single Compliance Certification**

The DLAC spent the afternoon of June 14 reviewing the draft Single Compliance Certification. The committee was divided into four work groups, and each group was assigned a set of SACS standards and related narratives. The charge was to review the narratives for each standard and to suggest clarifications, improvements, and additions. After completing its work, each group shared its suggestions with the whole committee, inviting other committee members to add further comments. Aleta collected each group's SCC draft that contained all the group's suggestion. Ron assumed responsibility for integrating the DLAC's suggestions into another SCC draft, to be disseminated for statewide review. John, Donnetta, and Lee will assess all input from the statewide review and make revisions as appropriate.

## **DLAC Consultation with SACS and Review Committee Chair, June 15**

**GUESTS:** Dr. Tom Benberg, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools,  
Commission on Colleges  
Dr. Ellen Weed, Nashville State Technical Community College, Chair of VCT-SACS  
Review Committee

### **VCT Review Report and Key Features of VCT Website**

Ron Thomson demonstrated the online VCT Review Report page. He demonstrated the Single Compliance Certification page and how the single and individual college narratives are viewed for each standard. The compliance certification is listed in the order SACS provided, and there is a narrative for each standard divided into 2-part: *VCT* (its role or lack of in regard to the standard ) and *Host Colleges*.

Colleges have been able to read what every other college has done. Colleges have been encouraged to embed links in the narrative and some have even embedded and listed them at the end of the narrative.

In addition to the SCC, each committee member will be given Superuser (Read Only) access to the entire VCT website. Dr. Benberg and Dr. Weed were pleased that such access would be provided.

### **Faculty Credentials System Demonstration**

Aleta Garcia demonstrated the online credentials system, Fortis. Each committee member will be given a username and password to view any Host instructor's credentials if they choose to do so. If a college is participating in the Substantive Change and has decided to house their credentials in Fortis, the committee will have access to those credential in the Fortis system as well.

### **Initial Comments from Dr. Benberg and/or Dr. Weed**

- Dr. Benberg thanked all for their hard work and hopes that this helps VCT as an organization to get better.
- Dr. Weed also recognized the hard work of all the colleges.
- Dr. Benberg said "we've moved in the right direction to tying this to the Host institution." Host institutions are giving rise to and being responsible for VCT policies.

### **Colleges Participating in the Substantive Change**

- Colleges participating in the Substantive Change need to be identified to the committee on their individual reports. Therefore, Dr. "Substantive Change" be placed above the narrative for each standards.
- Neither Dr. Weed nor Dr. Benberg don't anticipate needing each individual college narratives in hard copy, and both are going to discourage the committee from asking for hard. However, colleges would be required to provide a hard copy if the committee needed it for some unforeseeable reason.

### **Faculty Roster**

- Dr. Weed requested that the comprehensive roster be included under Part I: VCT Background.
- Regarding the Faculty Rosters if there is a difference between the degree and the discipline you can be sure that the committee is going to check it out. Dr. Benberg pointed out that SACS does not require this information and it would be unfair to tell colleges they must do this now.

But, in any case, it would make life easier in this situation to list the courses in the comments section, so the committee would have easy access to that information on the rosters.

- Dr. Benberg and Dr. Weed concurred that the instructors' full-time or part-time status at the Provider college should be left on the Faculty Roster so the committee has access to that information.
- Dr. Benberg reminded the group that Graduate Semester Hours (GSH) need to be documented on the roster.
- For the composite faculty roster, colleges will be listed in alphabetical order, with names of Host colleges that approve (part-time "employ") indicated.
- Dr. Weed will serve as a clearinghouse for the rest of the committee members. VCT will provide Dr. Weed with a list of the Host contacts for the SACS review.

### **Single Compliance Certification (SCC) Suggestions**

- Colleges should scan, sign, and link to the SCC signature from its ICC, and send originals to the VCT office for forwarding to Dr. Benberg.
- Dr. Benberg and Dr. Weed noted that the SCC is to get a summation of all the member institutions so therefore the committee will have some rationale to not have to look at all 41 individual compliance certifications; instead they are going to generalize from the SCC.
- Dr. Benberg stated that the committee will look at whether there is a good correlation between what is found in the SCC and double check it against the 11 sampled institutions

### **Faculty Credentials**

- Any questions from the committee regarding Faculty Credentials will go solely to the Host college and will not be part of the statewide report for confidentiality purposes.
- Donnetta Suchon informed Dr. Weed that some of the selection criteria are different for every college. Even though one faculty member might meet the criteria at one college that same instructor might not meet the criteria at another. Dr. Weed said she realized this.

### **Distinctive Characteristics of VCT**

- VCT is a voluntary collaborative.
- The overall governance is based in the Presidents association.
- Colleges participate and choose courses and instructors they want to offer.
- VCT is not a major means of community colleges for delivering DL courses. It is supplemental.
- VCT's Host-Provider model applies to the delivery of individual courses, not full programs, though greater access to courses enhances access to programs.
- Dr. Benberg felt the Distinctive Characteristics page is "an excellent piece that you've produced there as well as the MOU."
- Dr. Weed felt that if committee members are given Distinctive Characteristics, a Fortis orientation, the VCT MOU and a general orientation to the statewide review that they will be in very good shape.
- Dr. Weed requested that the Distinctive Characteristics page include a VCT enrollments number to help the committee put this information in perspective.

### **Process of the Review Provided by Tom Benberg**

Dr. Tom Benberg succinctly explained the review process that was included in the SACS Plan for VCT Statewide Review that had been disseminated statewide.

## **Q & A With Dr. Benberg and Dr. Weed**

### **Q: What do you have in mind for the debriefing?**

**Dr. Weed:** First, the purpose of the debriefing is to get everyone's perspective on the effectiveness of the process, not only to members but to the Executive Council of the commission, as well. We welcome input from individual member institutions and from TACC and the DLAC.

**Dr. Benberg:** Issues to address in the debriefing: Was it sufficiently qualitative? Did we provide a good review? Would this be something we would want replicated in another state? Was the information requested reasonable and appropriate? Was the report on target? Were any recommendations or narratives not appropriately accurate or aligned that might have been avoided with more dialogue? There is risk in this kind of design for that to happen. The focus is not on any institution, it's on the process.

**Dr. Weed:** The debriefing is not a gripe session unless it's about the process, e.g., specific question about the sampling technique.

**Dr. Benberg:** The basic question at the end of this is how did it work for the participants, SACS, and the review team? Has this process produced a quality product?

### **Q: How would other colleges who have served in the state only as a Provider become a Host after this review is over?**

**Dr. Benberg:** The process would be on an individual college basis. But the background and infrastructure of this review will be helpful to them. Any future Host college would greatly benefit from this work we are doing now.

## **Questions/Comments from Dr. Benberg**

### **Dr. Benberg: Do you anticipate any partial or non-compliances?**

**Ron Thomson:** I would be surprised for any to be in non-compliance but there may be a few cases of partial compliance.

### **Dr. Benberg: Do you have any thoughts about what you are going to put in that Single Compliance Certification (SCC)?**

**Ron T:** Extensive effort has been made to get colleges to respond to SACS standards within certain parameters. A VCT consultant has provided feedback to colleges as they completed their certifications. Writing the SCC so that it is inclusive of all colleges is a large challenge. The next reiteration of SCC is going to be distributed to all of the colleges, and they will have 3 weeks to read it, provide feedback to VCT, and to look at their own individual reports. The DLAC Chair, past Chair, Chair-elect, and Ron will meet to integrate feedback from the colleges into the SCC.

**Dr. Benberg:** Do not neglect DE policy. Committee members will have it in hand. Emphasize the importance of the consultation agenda and germane policies. This has been a good experience. Be sure we understand the institution's mission. Thank all of you for the hard work and pat yourselves on the back. Stay disciplined and keep moving to conclude this review.