

Responding to Change

Online Education at the College of Central Florida

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HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the mid 1950s when a group of community leaders and citizens began to envision a way to provide educational opportunities to three counties in Florida they had no idea what would happen in the decades to follow. In 1957 Central Florida Junior College was established to provide educational opportunities beyond high school to Marion, Citrus, and Levy counties. The following year Hampton Junior College opened and was one of the first Black 2-year colleges in the state. In 1966 the two colleges merged and in 1971

their name was changed to Central Florida Community College (CFCC). At this point in the history of the college all students attended classes on what is now known as the Ocala Campus; located in Ocala, Florida. Communication between students and the college was mostly accomplished via mail or students coming to the campus.

The college offered courses in Citrus County on a limited basis until 1984. To meet the continuing demands of the community for educational opportunities the Citrus County School Board partnered with the college and an educational complex was established in 1984; high school facilities were provided to accommodate the college classes. In 1996 a free-standing campus was opened—now called the Citrus Campus—and in 2009 a new building was opened to accommodate more classrooms and a new Learning and Conference Center.

To meet the growing needs in the Levy County area the Bronson Center was opened in 1987. In 1993 the Levy Center moved to a storefront in Chiefland, Florida where it is currently housed. In 2008 the college was able to procure a site for a permanent center in Levy County and when funds are available construction will begin (College of Central Florida, 2011).

In the fall of 2010 CFCC underwent another name change to the College of Central Florida (CCF). The name change came about because beginning in the spring of 2011 CCF began offering the community the opportunity to earn a



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bachelor of applied science in business and organizational management; in August 2011 a bachelor of science degree in early childhood education was also added to the curriculum.

RESPONDING TO CHANGE

According to Allen and Seaman (2008), "Over 3.9 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2007 term; a 12% increase over the number reported the previous year" (p. 1). Community colleges reported an increase of 11.3% in distance learning enrollment during this period; this increase accounted for the majority of the overall growth (Instructional Technology Council, 2008). As a result of this growth in distance learning on the community college campus, the institution has to look to new ways to engage both faculty and students in the learning process.

Community colleges and their faculty have been known for their ability to respond to both change and the needs of their students and the community; CCF is no exception. With the advent of the Internet and the introduction of personal technology that was more affordable the community college student began to expect and demand a different approach to education. To respond to this demand CCF not only brought more computer access in to the classroom they also developed courses that could be taught online.

EVOLUTION OF A PROGRAM

In the fall of 1997 a group of instructors, who Rogers (2003) would most likely label innovators, developed and taught the first 13 online courses for CCF. The instructors were self-taught in regard to course development for online learning and their e-learning platform was WebCT 4.1. As a response to the growing demand for online education the E-Learning Department was established in 2004; this depart-

ment now provides training for faculty and technical support to both faculty and students (J. Strigle, personal communication, November 16, 2010). According to CCF's *E-Learning Handbook* (2010-2011) e-learning at the college "involves any formal delivery method in which the majority of instruction takes place via the internet or other electronic means, such as video-conferencing, pod casting, educational software, etc." (p. 11).

The target population of the e-learning courses is primarily students who live within the tricity area; Marion, Citrus, and Levy counties. Even though these students may not be geographically distant, e-learning courses may make the difference between completing a degree and dropping out of college. Geographically distant students are also accommodated and since the fall of 2002 CCF has been able to offer an Associate of Arts degree totally online.

The E-Learning Department continues to provide technical support; however, it has taken on the additional responsibilities of faculty training and the development of specific protocols for course development. To assist in the development of courses and training, a committee comprised of faculty from multiple disciplines serves as an advisory body for e-learning. In the early development of online courses, a faculty member presented the idea to the college curriculum committee and then the course was taught. It was not until 2010 that the *E-Learning Handbook* was published with definitions of online, hybrid, telecourses, and ITV courses and a protocol concerning the development of new courses (J. Strigle, personal communication, November 16, 2010).

The protocol involves: (a) decisions regarding the need for online courses are made within each department based on both departmental and college goals; (b) the faculty member completes an application, the deadline is one month after the start of each term; (c) the application is signed by the department chair and then submitted to the dean of learning resources; (d) the dean

forwards the application electronically to the e-learning advisory board for discussion and approval; (e) when the faculty member is notified of approval he or she will sign up for a series of workshops that assist in the development of the course. This training involves technical training on the ANGEL LMS as needed, instructional design training, criteria for effective online courses, assistance with converting traditional class materials and activities into online format, utilization of learning object repositories, and software designed for the development of online courses (*E-Learning Handbook*, 2010-2011).

As the program grew it was necessary to define the differences between the different online learning courses. Online courses are defined as those courses distributed through the Internet, allowing flexibility in time and/or place (*E-Learning Handbook*, 2010-2011). Hybrid courses are defined as a combination of online and traditional face-to-face courses (*E-Learning Handbook*, 2010-2011). Telecourses are defined as those courses offered in videotape/DVD formats and these are checked out from the CCF library (*E-Learning Handbook*, 2010-2011). ITV courses are defined as interactive television courses allowing distribution of live

classes through video conferencing equipment (*E-Learning Handbook*, 2010-2011). The growth of the E-Learning Department, in regard to the number of sections taught for both online and hybrid courses, is reflected in Table 1.

The types of courses being offered either online or using the hybrid format include: English, Spanish, algebra, calculus, statistics, speech, art history, several psychology courses, criminal justice, micro- and macroeconomics, wellness, environmental sciences, chemistry, and world civilization. It is anticipated that several courses using the hybrid format will be used for the two new bachelor degree programs (J. Strigle, personal communication, November 16, 2010).

In the 1950s, having a computer in a classroom or office was not considered. Standard procedure was for the professor to stand in front of a class, size determined by the number of desks, location determined by where the physical college was located, write instructions on a blackboard, and sometimes provide paper handouts. Now, a professor can sit at his or her desk, communicate with any number of students located in many different geographical areas, use virtual tours, and use creative

Table 1. E-learning Enrollment

Academic Year	Number of Online Sections	Online Enrollment	Number of Hybrid Sections	Hybrid Enrollment
1998-1999	54	712	0	0
1999-2000	71	1,065	0	0
2000-2001	65	1,094	0	0
2001-2002	78	1,373	0	0
2002-2003	82	1,724	0	0
2003-2004	103	2,460	3	54
2004-2005	135	3,120	10	213
2005-2006	173	3,812	20	251
2006-2007	206	4,451	32	509
2007-2008	240	5,288	54	841
2008-2009	299	6,886	83	1,509

programs to act as a catalyst for learning. Intermediate algebra and statistics is now being taught online using a program produced by Pearson called Course Compass; face-to-face students also use this program to practice math skills and ask questions of their professors via email.

FUTURE GOALS

The E-Learning Department has developed several goals in anticipation of an even higher demand for online education at the community college level. The E-Learning Department and the advisory committee have defined a number of goals for the next 5 years. Goals that impact the student are: increasing reliable and accessible technology support and developing courses that meet graduation requirements. Goals for faculty include: increasing reliable and accessible technology support and providing more training in regard to the development of, online, hybrid, and ITV courses. Beyond the environment of CCF the goals are to increase collaboration with other institutions, initiatives, and consortia involved with e-learning (J. Strigle, personal communication, November 16, 2010).

THE FUTURE

What will happen beyond the Internet and what is currently happening in online and face-to-face courses? According to the

Horizon Report, 2009, we can expect an increase in the use of mobiles in the academic environment, the addition of cloud computing, geo-everything, the personal web, semantic-aware applications, and smart objects. This same report suggested that students are different, there is a need for both innovation and leadership in academia, institutions are pressured to prove students are learning, and higher education is expected to utilize technology.

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND THEIR FACULTY HAVE BEEN KNOWN FOR THEIR ABILITY TO RESPOND TO BOTH CHANGE AND THE NEEDS OF THEIR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY.