Online Steering Committee

March 8, 2002

The meeting was called to order at 10:15 a.m. in the Carriage House with committee members Melanie McClellan, Kathy Kral, Matthew Clay, Tom Padgett, Janet Gubbins, Tom Beggs, Barbara McKenzie, Melanie Clay, Diane Williamson, and Elizabeth Bennett, in attendance.

1. Melanie Clay started the meeting and briefly reviewed the Agenda. Clay (Melanie) stated that were two main items on the agenda for today’s committee meeting:

   1. Develop a set of institutional distance learning goals that are comparable to the university's goals and mission, per the UWG DL SACS committee self-study recommendation.
   2. Review the results of the faculty's DL Course Evaluation Summaries for Fall 2001 and address any issues that arose within the results.
   3. Discuss options for increasing online student-testing security.

1. Melanie Clay led the group in brainstorming a set of DL institutional goals, beginning with listing the DDEC's mission and functions as a starting point. Ms. Clay also read off some other institution's DL goals, as examples. Dr. Bennett clarified the exact SACS "must" statement that the goals should fulfill. Mathew Clay typed and edited the DL goals on the projector screen, as the committee suggested edits. The following DL goals were drafted, voted on, and approved by the committee:

   Plan and create distance learning environments that encourage and support excellence in a personal environment.

   Maintain the human and technical resources and network infrastructure necessary to successfully support and deliver distance and distributed learning.

   Provide academic and student services appropriate to meet the needs of distance and distributed learners.

   Conduct continuous evaluation of distance and distributed learning and support services to ensure the advancement of the university’s mission.

   Support research, scholarship, and creative endeavors which promote knowledge of distance learning.

2. Melanie Clay handed out a document summarizing the results of the faculty's DL Course Evaluation Summaries for Fall 2001 (linked here).

Under the "What was problematic or should be improved"category, firewall problems (noted as item 1) were discussed at length. Kathy Kral and Matthew Clay explained why many K-12 school networks use firewalls and why the school's administrators may refuse to open the ports necessary for their staff to access our WebCT and HorizonLive ports. Elizabeth Bennett noted that last term, while we were using the BOR server, there were less firewall problems with the BOR WebCT port 80. Kathy Kral explained that our WebCT server can't use the more user-friendly port 80, because the UWG central server is already on 80 and two servers cannot use the same port and be on a redundant system. Thus, the only way that we could use WebCT on port 80 would be to do away with the redundant system or set up an entirely separate redundant system, at a cost of around $20,000. In addition, even if we chose to do the latter, the firewall problems with the WebCT chat port and HorizonLive would still persist.

Dr. Bennett and Ms. Clay discussed the necessity of warning students ahead of time, through the bulletin, in the course syllabus, and through any other means possible. Janet Gubbins verified that there is a "Vital Info" page
located at http://www.westga.edu/~distance/vitalinfo.html that warns of firewall problems and that this page is now linked into every distance course, is linked on the login page, is printed in the bulletin, and is sent out to faculty to be given to students.

Matthew Clay suggested that we seek out regional libraries, ensure they provide access, and list them as alternate sites for students who cannot access through their own networks. Dr. Bennett offered to explore that Clay's idea, since she has many connections within the state library system. Bennett suggested, similarly, that we could look to establish partnerships with the county board of education's, theorizing that if we get the superintendent's office on-board then their IT people will open their ports for our courses - possibly this could be a grant project.

Bennett also noted that students in North Georgia often have ISPs that will not or cannot handle the access needed for HorizonLive. Gubbins suggested that as a last resort, faculty burn a CD of the archived presentations and mail them to the students. Committee agreed on the latter, as a last resort only, due to administrative costs. Tom Beggs agreed to make multiple copies if necessary.

3. Under the "What was problematic or should be improved" category, item 2 "Some students aren't taking advantage of available WebCT training sessions, help guides, or support" was discussed. Gubbins suggested that students be required to take a pre-test of basic vital WebCT info, before being allowed to enter the course. Dr. Bennett explained why this would not be a good idea for her course. The committee did not have any other suggestions; all promised to help "get the word out." Melanie Clay noted that the Student Services sub-committee is coming up with lots of ideas and perhaps they will have some suggestions on how to address this item in the next meeting.

4. Under the "Biggest adjustments required for distance instructors", item 1 "Finding ways to test students securely" was discussed. The idea of setting up regional testing center agreements with libraries was offered as one solution, by Melanie McClellan. Janet Gubbins noted that there is an online service that does this already and that students pay for the service directly, when they arrive at the testing center. Gubbins also introduced the possibility of online secure testing, using a new software application called QuestionMark. Gubbins promised more info at a later date.

5. Under the "Biggest adjustments required for distance instructors," item 1 "Getting students engaged and participating in the GSAMS" was discussed. Gubbins suggested that experienced faculty mentors teaching the newcomers. Melanie Clay said that Stacey Rowland in the DDEC, would work with faculty to develop a HorizonLive demo illustrating good interactive GSAMS behavior.

6. Since all "Level of student services, DDEC, and instructor support" items were generally positive, the topic was discussed only briefly. Barbara McKenzie noted the success of the College of Education's DDEC "Teach from the Beach" gala and asked if more would be planned in the future. Melanie Clay said that the DDEC would be happy to work with any college who wants to sponsor a similar event. Ms. Clay also noted that in the future the DDEC would like to sponsor some type of event to recognize all distance faculty for their contributions. Melanie McClellan suggested that the DDEC set up a booth outside of the all-faculty meeting that occurs at the beginning of every term.

7. Melanie Clay adjourned the meeting at 11:20am.