Plan for Distance Education

2001-2002
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I. Executive Summary

The use of technology to meet the educational needs of the diverse people of Texas has evolved rapidly in recent years. Communication via emerging media enables development of curricula that can be delivered to students scattered throughout the globe, learning and interacting from their homes. Amarillo College provides means of access to quality educational programs for students who currently are separated from that education by time, schedule and distance.

The education provided these distant students will incorporate rigorous evaluative procedures. This will insure that the quality of education provided through technologically-enhanced means is at least equivalent to that provided via face-to-face instruction.

By providing quality instruction, curriculum, and interface design, as well as student and faculty support services, Amarillo College will develop a learning-centered, constructive environment in which students and faculty excel.

This plan addresses the need for provision of services, the types and depth of services that will be provided, and a framework for identification of needs and development of services in the future.

II. Vision Statement

In order to address the needs of the community, Amarillo College will provide quality education to a diverse audience, including those separated from educational opportunities because of time or place. Appropriate technologies will be employed to ensure delivery of coursework, resources and support, and evaluative procedures will be used to enhance and secure a high standard of quality for coursework delivered via technologically-enhanced means.

III. Acknowledgements

The Distance Education Advisory Committee, members of the Information Technology Services staff, and administrators and faculty within the college community contributed to the development of this document.

IV. Distance Education Committee Members

The committee was established in the fall of 2000. All members will serve a two-year term.
Tim McGee, Distance Education Coordinator; Tricia Stevens, Distance Education Support Specialist; Jeff Gibson, Director of Technology Services; Dr. David Zimmermann, Associate Professor, English; Don Abel, Associate Professor, Speech Communications; Dr. Mary Dodson, Associate Professor, English; Janet Harter, Associate Professor, Math; Sarah Mooring, Instructional Designer, First Center; Ed Hankard, Program Director/Associate Vocational Professor, Physical Therapist Assistant Program; Dr. Neil Sapper, Professor, History.

V. State Guidelines

In response to House Bill 85 of the 74th Texas Legislature, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board published its Master Plan for Distance Learning: An Evolving Technological Process. The Plan contends that continued positive development is dependent on several factors, including:

“Distance learning should be initiated and continued by institutions to the extent justified by specific needs.”

Amarillo College has identified a need in the community for improved means of access for students who are unable to meet traditional classroom scheduling demands, or unable to attend traditional classes in their areas. Distance education addresses these needs by providing access that is independent of time, place, or both.

Additionally, the Plan recommends:

“Institutions, through their respective governance structures, should address with their faculties the effect of distance learning on issues of compensation, course development release time, intellectual property rights, and promotion and tenure.”

Numerous groups at Amarillo College have addressed these issues. Compensation for distance education faculty is provided by academic departments, by grants from the First Center, and by administrative decision (for instance, some faculty teach only online.) Promotion and tenure policies for all faculty are the same. Intellectual property rights are addressed within this document.

The Plan later states:

“To increase access in rural/remote areas and by historically underserved populations, the Legislature should provide incentive funding in addition to formula-generated amounts to any public higher education institution serving those areas and population via distance learning.”
Amarillo College serves rural/remote areas with distance education programs that are selected to meet identified needs in these areas and populations. The Coordinating Board further recommends:

“Institutions should consider the broad range of technology available to support distance learning and should deliver instruction using means appropriate to identified needs and supportable on an economic basis.”

The types of distance education practiced by Amarillo College include delivery media chosen specifically for their applicability to meeting identified needs.

Concerning training, the Board states:

“Higher education institutions should seriously and formally pursue faculty and staff development for distance learning and educational technology.”

Amarillo College provides the services of both the Distance Education department and the First Center for faculty and staff development. Training will be responsive to needs, and of a scope and rigor sufficient to meet those needs.

Regarding student support services, the Board holds:

“Institutions should provide support services appropriate to student needs and at a level which supports learning and does not disadvantage distant learners.”

Amarillo College strives to provide all student services available to traditional students to students enrolled in classes provided via distance education technology. Links to student services are provided on the College’s Web page, personnel in the Distance Education department provide guidance, and appropriate forms are mailed when needed.

Regarding evaluation, the Board recommends:

“Institutions should carefully monitor the progress of students engaged in distance learning to determine the effectiveness of instruction and make any needed changes.”

Evaluation procedures including student and faculty surveys have been used to monitor progress. Additionally, grades, student satisfaction, and enrollment statistics for distance classes are compared to traditional counterparts.

This plan is built on and addresses each of the Board’s recommendations. While needs and technologies will change as populations and opportunities change, the primary goal of improving student access and ensuring quality instructional design will remain preeminent.
VI. Local Guidelines

Goal I of Amarillo College’s 2000-2001 Strategic Plan is “Maximize student access.” Distance Education, in its many evolving forms, is but one of several ways Amarillo College is addressing this goal.

Goal I, success indicator 4 a-e of the plan indicates success indicators and standards relating to distance education. Among those indicators of success are the following:

- increased annual enrollment,
- grades and course completion rates for distance education courses that are at least equivalent to those seen in traditional classes, and
- equivalent or better satisfaction with courses.

These indicators are used as primary evaluative standards for analyzing undertakings in distance education.

Amarillo College’s Technology Master Plan 2000-2001 provides a history of technological advancement for the college, and details the structure and services provided by the Information Technology Services Division. The Master Plan addresses distance education in its three extant delivery media:

- telecourses,
- courses taught through videoconference systems, and
- courses offered via the Internet.

The Plan provides background information concerning the conversion of telecourses to digital media, and delineates existing procedures for delivery of courseware and training.

VII. SACS SPECIFICATIONS

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, in its Criteria for Accreditation, provides guidelines and standards for distance education course design, delivery, and evaluation. Amarillo College will be evaluated in late 2001.
In the self-study process all aspects of distance education are scrutinized. The evaluation involves surveying faculty and students who are teaching or taking courseware via distance media, identifying revised goals and objectives for the Distance Education department of the College, and evaluating the effectiveness of existing evaluative instruments. The self-study process effects improvement in both the distance education program and in the College’s understanding of itself.

SACS Expectations:

The Southern Association offers a list of expectations for five areas affecting Distance Education:

- Curriculum and Instruction,
- Evaluation and Assessment,
- Library and Learning Resources,
- Student Services and Facilities, and
- Finance.

These expectations are listed in “Distance Education: Definition and Principles – A Policy Statement – “, which sites section citations from the “Criteria for Accreditation, 1998 Version (2000 reprint)”.

A few of the expectations from each category are listed below, with specifics regarding the College’s response to the statement.

Curriculum and Instruction:

“Programs provide for timely and appropriate interaction between students and faculty and among students.” (Section 4.2.4, p.28, lines 30-34; Section 4.3.5, p.35, lines 21-30; Section 4.8.2.4, p.46, lines 11-17)

Faculty have access to chat rooms, threaded bulletin boards, telephone and meeting rooms, but the majority of communication between students and either other students or faculty is via email. Policy regarding email communications is set by each faculty member for his or her classes. The Distance Education department maintains lists of student email addresses, and WebCT provides email within the class and to the teacher.

“The Institution’s faculty assumes responsibility for and exercises oversight over distance education, ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction.” (Section
The rigor of programs and the quality of instruction are evaluated by each academic department, by the Distance Education department, by each faculty member involved with the program(s) and by the First Center's instructional designer.

**Evaluation and Assessment:**

“The institution evaluates the educational effectiveness of its distance education programs (including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction) to ensure comparability to campus-based programs.” (Section 3.1, pp.18-19, all; Section 4.5, p. 37, all; Section 5.4.1, p. 59, lines 25-34; Section 4.1, p. 22, lines 9-12)

An action plan is being developed to help insure students in online courses receive similar grades to those in the traditional counterpart classes. Thus far, student satisfaction with DE classes has been very high.

Retention is being studied, but it appears the drop out rate may be slightly higher for DE students; if this proves to be true, an action plan will be created to address this discrepancy.

**Library and Learning Resources:**

“The institution”: “ensures that students have access to and can effectively use appropriate library resources . . . monitors whether students make appropriate use of learning resources . . . provides laboratories, facilities, and equipment appropriate to the courses or programs.” (Section 5.1.1, p.54, lines 1-25; Section 5.1.2, pp 54-55, lines 1-10 and 26-34; Section 4.1, p. 22, lines 2-6; Section 4.5, p. 38, lines 1-5; Section 5.2, p. 58, lines 3-13)

Students have access to the resources of the Lynn Library from the College’s web pages, and a proxy server for the library provides a wide range of resources, including full-text articles. Since the proxy server is new, no online training has yet been designed for students. Evaluations are designed to query students about their access to resources, and the faculty monitors their students' use of resources. Computer labs are available on campus for students to use for access resources and this equipment is capable of accessing the online courses. However, personnel in these labs are not trained to help with DE problems. To address this problem, a lab is being installed in the library (in progress, 8/2/01,) and training for employees who will attend the lab will be offered. The lab is dedicated to Distance Education students, and will be used for student and faculty access and training.

**Student Services:**
“The institution provides adequate access to the range of student services appropriate to support the programs, including admissions, financial aid, academic advising, delivery of course materials, and placement and counseling.” (Section 5.4.1, p. 59, lines 25-34)

While the web pages do have a method of access for each of these student services, the following areas still need work to be fully developed. For instance,

- It is possible to apply online, but students are not yet able to register online.
- Similarly, it is possible to request federal financial aid forms online, but not Amarillo College financial aid application forms.
- Most academic advisors are not familiar with online possibilities.

Any discrepancies between what is extant and what is needed are being addressed within this document and other similar and related documents.

“The institution ensures that students admitted possess the knowledge and equipment necessary to use the technology employed in the program and provides aid to students who are experiencing difficulty using the required technology.” (Section 4.2.1, pp 22-23, lines 1-5 and 24-28; Section 5.3, p. 59, lines 3-5; Section 5.4.1, p. 59, lines 32-34)

The Distance Education department offers an online assessment tool that students are encouraged to use before signing up for a course. This assessment tool helps identify students who are not self-driven, since online education requires a great deal of self-pacing.

Minimum computer requirements are also listed on the DE web page.

Videoconference courses include a short introductory class on use of the equipment; Distance Education department personnel train the instructors.

Telecourses require no special technical ability on the part of students except the ability to record programs on a VCR on a regular or scheduled basis.

All students can call the DE helpdesk for help with the technology at any time.

Facilities and Finances:

“The institution’s long range planning, budgeting, and policy development processes reflect the facilities, staffing, equipment and other resources essential to the viability and effectiveness of the distance education program.” (Condition of Eligibility Eight, p.12)

The institution provides the services of the Distance Education department and the First Center, and Information Technology Services (ITS) supports these
departments. Evaluations are conducted by faculty, the Distance Education department, the ITS department and other entities on campus.

SACS provides a “Handbook for Peer Evaluators” that lists questions appropriate for ensuring the quality and reliability of distance education programs (Section IV.) Examples of questions related to Distance Learning Activities include “Why did the institution choose these programs . . . ?” and “Does the technology used enhance student learning?” The answers to these questions are in this document, in the operations and activities of the College, and in the College’s Strategic Plan.

Another document from SACS is the Distance Learning SACS Compliance Report Card. This document lists requirements that must be met in order to be in compliance. The Compliance Report Card points out the need for online tutors, online academic advising, remedial and developmental courses, accurate publications, clear and explicit Distance Education goals, and clear and explicit data supporting the claim that these goals have been met.

The SACS Compliance Report Card also points out that, “Methods of instruction must be appropriate to the goals of each course and the capabilities of the students.” This is a topic of considerable debate in the Distance Education community and opinions on the subject have changed dramatically in recent years.

For instance, many courses that would once be considered inappropriate for online presentation are now taught via that medium with great success (such as Fitness Walking) and other courses that would seem to be tailored for online presentation have proven difficult in practice (such as Algebra I.)

Only experience, evaluation and redesign will, with time, show how to adapt courses, which courses work best in which media, and ways to better present existing courses. As an example, online tutoring and smaller class sizes can help with Algebra I. Some instructors encourage students who are having technical problems to contact the Distance Education Department, where they can get technical help; others have had on-campus meetings with DE personnel and students, to allow a forum for clearing up all sorts of problems.

**VIII. Demographics**

The target population of the Distance Education program at Amarillo College includes the population of the Panhandle region of Texas, which is characterized by broad expanses of rural countryside dotted by small towns and cities. Twenty-four of the 26 counties in the area can be considered rural. The region encompasses 26,000 square miles, a land area greater than that of the state of West Virginia.
The population is 77% white, 17% Hispanic, and 3.5% Black, with 2.5% comprising all other groups. 32% of households in the region made less than $15,000 in 1990, and another 29% made less than $29,999. The college’s service area encompasses nine counties, which includes Potter and Randall Counties, where about 54% of all people in the region live. The only metropolitan area in the region above one hundred thousand is Amarillo.

Access to the Internet is available in most locations throughout the area via local service providers. Region 16 Education Service Center also offers Internet access through their regional videoconference/Internet network. A variety of access options, including telephone, cable, DSL and wireless, are available in the Amarillo area (Potter and Randall Counties.) Amarillo College receives T-1 speed access (1536 Kbps) to the Internet through UUNet.

IX. Collaborative Efforts and Community Involvement

Amarillo College subscribes to two videoconference networks: the Region 16 network and the SCATE system.

The Region 16 Network connects the Washington Street, West and Moore County campuses to sites in colleges and public schools throughout the region. The system operates at T-1 speed, with ½ T-1 ATM dedicated each way.

The West Campus facility is also connected to the SCATE system. SCATE is a statewide network that interconnects community colleges, universities, hospitals and other sites, and has dial-up ISDN capability for connectivity throughout the world. The College uses the SCATE network to deliver courses to other colleges.

Amarillo College has approximately 25 online courses offered for spring of 2001. These courses are open for enrollment to all prospective students, and are offered as a service to the community. By providing people the freedom to do class work at their own choice of time of day, and without having to travel, the community is afforded a better way to access education.

In addition to online courses offered by Amarillo College, students may enroll in classes through the Virtual College of Texas. Colleges throughout the state participate in this virtual school, allowing students to take courses at distant sites in the state while the credits count toward their degree at their local college. By offering courses through VCT, Amarillo College exposes students statewide to the quality and style of courseware developed for its distance education program, and may entice students to seek ways to receive a degree from the College.
X. Distance Education Initiatives on Campus

Enrollment in online courses has increased dramatically in the past year. In the spring of 2000 a total of 78 students enrolled in online courses. By fall of the same year, enrollment had jumped to 322 and 323 more students received supplemental materials.

At the same time, enrollment in telecourses and courses offered via videoconference systems has increased moderately.

The move toward online courses underscores the convenience of interacting and learning through this medium. The number of courses offered online for spring 2001 is almost twice the number offered the preceding fall, so enrollments may double again.

The First Center provides support for faculty design and publication of courses. The Distance Education department provides support for students, training for faculty and students, and coordination, scheduling and oversight for online courses and related activities, such as proctored testing. Student support and all other services provided to students are coordinated through the Distance Education department.

Courses offered both locally and via videoconference allow both dual credit and traditional classes to be received throughout the region. Geriatric care classes and other public services are offered through the systems in the evening. Community support for these classes has been good.

Courses delivered through television reach a broad audience, and are useful for students unable to take online courses, who prefer visual media, or for courses that lend themselves to visual presentation.

XI. General Introduction

Distance education provides a method for delivery of educational opportunities by bridging gaps of time and place, freeing potential students to explore new horizons from their own home towns, and allowing them to remain within their families while growing within. These developments are at the heart of sustaining the way of life enjoyed by generations of people in the area, and may provide a means for rural and disadvantaged areas to prosper through education.

This document is dynamic, in that it will always be subject to revision, and will be used to address needs as they arise. Technology advances without notice and sometimes it leaves behind the inattentive; failure to respond quickly to changes in available solutions can leave some institutions behind the curve. The staff of
Amarillo College will strive to take advantage of developing technologies to provide the best possible product to students and faculty.

XII. Mission and Goals

Amarillo College Institutional Mission

The College, a public community college, provides educational programs, services, and resources for the residents of Amarillo and its surrounding area. With fundamental principles affirming the value of education, the freedom for teaching and learning, and the worth and dignity of each individual, the College emphasizes innovation, excellence, and leadership in its mission to be an exemplary community college.

Distance Education Mission

Through the use of appropriate and helpful technologies, Amarillo College will deliver courseware to students in the community who have problems attending traditional classes because of time constraints, as well as to students in rural, underserved populations, by providing delivery methods more nearly independent of time and place.

Goals:

1. The primary goal for distance education at Amarillo College is to provide access to quality educational opportunities to all citizens of the area.

2. All courseware delivered via technology will be of a quality equivalent or superior to that of traditional courses.

XIII. Needs Assessment

Distance Education initiatives at Amarillo College have evolved in order to meet the diverse needs of the population of the service area. Some of the reasons distance education delivery methods are employed include:

- The community of the Texas Panhandle is a rural region with about 46% of its population living in rural and/or underserved areas. These persons have need of online courses so that they can access education without having to drive long distances.
• The people of the Amarillo College community lead busy lives. Many people work days, and would be unable to attend evening classes because of children or other responsibilities. These people appreciate the access modes for online classes, because most are independent of time and place.

• Students are often unable to take classes they need because the scheduled class times conflict. Because some classes are only offered once a year, such conflicts can cause a student to have to graduate a year later than anticipated. Online courses offer a way for these students to complete their degrees on time.

A subcommittee of the Faculty Evaluation Committee has devised an evaluation instrument for all classes with additional questions for each of three major types of distance education courses: telecourses, videoconference courses, and online courses. The SACS Self-study Committee has created an additional instrument for evaluation of the Distance Education program by students and faculty involved with distance education. Results from these and other instruments will be used to provide ongoing redesign and improvement in the distance education program.

Evaluations to date have revealed several identifiable situations:

**Situation 1:** Students are sometimes slow to find resources and help.

**Cause:**

- Students are unaware of how to find help on web pages and where that help is located.
- They are unaware that help is available.
- They have received no training. There are no facilities in which to hold training.

**Solution:**

- A help desk, staffed by students trained to answer questions concerning Distance Education will be staffed on weeknights and weekend days.
- Online tutoring will be arranged when needed.
- An online course for students who are interested in taking online courses will be designed.
- The course will be created for beginners and lead to the ability to use all aspects of online courses.
Long Range Plan:

- Provide FAQ’s (frequently-asked questions) online for all courses.
- Staff the help desk 24 hours a day.
- Seek ways to increase participation in online tutoring program.
- Provide student training in a variety of media including on-campus workshops.
- Build a lab to be used for training and for students and faculty to use exclusively for distance education courseware design and utilization.
- Create public access centers where they are unavailable.

Situation 2: Online courses require more reading and time on task than their face-to-face counterparts; they can be boring, when compared to traditional courses.

Cause:

- Courseware is based too closely on traditional instructional designs. Consequently, lengthy, dense text represents what were formerly lectures.
- Online courses currently use only a minimum of pictures, video or audio clips. This results because equipment and know-how for implementing multimedia are scarce and because there has not been a support system for the few brave users of these technologies.
- Without a system for storage and retrieval of such resources, instructors have been slow to adopt or create curricula that take advantage of them.

Solution:

- The First Center will provide video and audio streaming capabilities.
- The Distance Education department will provide training for use of multimedia in courseware.
- Both departments will provide support for users of multimedia.

Long Range Plan:

- Instructors will learn ways to re-create courseware to use the full capabilities of the media involved (Internet, streaming video/audio, etc.)
- A video on demand server will be installed to provide needed server space for storage and delivery of multimedia materials.
- The Distance Education department will work with faculty to develop three-dimensional online virtual learning environments that teach specific and testable curricula.
Situation 3: Videoconferencing equipment is unreliable.

Cause:

- The systems connect to large networks that run over phone lines, which do not always allow connectivity.
- Equipment has had other problems with connectivity associated with configuration of components.
- There have been numerous problems associated with microphone and camera malfunctions.
- Because of the large number of components in systems involved with T-1 videoconferencing, such problems will probably always arise on occasion.
- There is not sufficient equipment for instructors to use to create supplementary online materials, and there are no computers (that are of sufficient quality to be used for viewing of multimedia materials) in the videoconference classrooms.

Solution:

- Utilize multiple media, especially online courseware served through WebCT, to provide a redundant delivery system for each course delivered via videoconference systems.
- Schedule some class meetings online for students, and make other uses of online resources.
- Provide training to instructors to enable these changes.
- Provide training for students to enable them to understand the capabilities and resources provided by each of the media they would be required to use.
- Install computers in videoconference classrooms and connect them to the Internet through the College’s internal network.

Long Range Plan:

- Provide videoconferencing through the Internet, so that both students in classrooms and those at home may participate, and so that the audience of potential users can be expanded to worldwide.
- Provide copies of videoconference classes online.
- Provide training for users of videoconference systems, online.
**Situation 4:** Instructors and students have not had sufficient training for use of existing technologies, resulting in low satisfaction and retention rates for a few classes.

**Cause:**

- There has been no training for students, and instructor training is often seen to be grossly inadequate for preparation to use the media.
- Especially in the case of online courses, attempts to address the problem have not proven adequate, because, though there are talented personnel available to provide training, insufficient time and resources have been allocated in the whirlwind pace of expansion of the program.
- With over 400% per year expansion in online student enrollment, student and instructor support have overwhelmed campus personnel, so that training has been provided primarily on an as-needed basis.

**Solution:**

- By providing the services of the First Center for faculty, where they can get one-on-one hands-on design and tutoring, and the services of the Distance Education Help Desk, where students can get personalized help via telephone and e-mail, the College is providing training where it is needed most.
- Further training is needed on a regular basis for both students and faculty.

**Long Range Plan:**

- Develop a training center for students and faculty involved with distance education.
- Develop a rubric for training to be utilized by distance education providers, and publish research to support the validity and reliability of the rubric.

**Resources**

**Available Resources:**

*Technology*

The ITS department provides support for WebCT and other authoring systems used, and for Distance Education and First Center computers and telephones. The department houses and maintains the WebCT
server, provides technical assistance and support for videoconference networks, and oversees installation and maintenance of computer equipment in distance education classrooms.

The College’s three videoconference sites use two existing networks. The Region 16 network establishes a connection between the three Amarillo College sites and approximately 30 public schools, 2 community colleges and a university. The SCATE network connects the West Campus to community colleges throughout the state.

**Student Support**

The Distance Education department provides help for students who are enrolled in courseware offered via television, the Internet, or videoconference systems, or who have supplemental materials online from traditional classes. The department also directs online students to student services, and provides VCT help and registration. The department provides training to online students during on-campus meetings as requested.

Labs are available for student use in the Lynn Library and in Parcells Hall, as well as in academic departments throughout the campuses. These labs provide adequate technical help for students who use computers for class work, but these computers are not specifically dedicated to distance education. Personnel are not trained to help with distance education student and faculty problems.

The Virtual College of Texas is an online collaborative of Texas colleges; it provides a means whereby students in the Amarillo area can take classes that are not offered locally, and students in other parts of the state can take classes offered online from Amarillo College.

**Faculty Support**

The Distance Education Department serves faculty by:

- providing leadership and training for course enhancement,
- providing professional development information,
- supporting the Distance Education Advisory Committee,
- reporting server problems,
- scheduling courses and meetings through the videoconference systems,
- overseeing scheduling of distance education courses in the College’s schedules,
• entering students in online courses, providing technical support for videoconference systems, and
• providing VCT registration and support.

The First Center provides support for faculty through aid in course creation, aid with entering courses in the WebCT system, and provision of equipment and stipends for the creation of courseware. The Center also provides multimedia support and training for enhancement of course design.

Both the Distance Education Department and the First Center provide training for distance education faculty, information to faculty interested in finding out more about distance education, and a variety of other services.

The Information Technology Services (ITS) division provides technical help for faculty via a help desk, maintenance and support for all equipment including workstations, access to a network, and Internet access. The wide range of services provided by the ITS division is delineated in detail in the Amarillo College Technology Plan.

**Needed Resources:**

**Distance Education Support Needed**

**Priority One**

1. Washington Street Distance Education Lab, Lab Manager, and Student Workers

Students and faculty need a distance education lab at the Washington Street campus equipped with high-speed Internet connections and 10-15 contemporary multimedia workstations. This lab would be open to both students and faculty involved with distance education classes or supplements. The lab would serve the faculty in providing support for ongoing classes, (which is different from the First Center’s mission of providing support for the development of classes) and would provide a place to receive training. The lab would serve students by establishing a physical site for the help desk to exist and a place where students can apply what they have learned from helpdesk personnel. The lab would be staffed by a Lab Manager from 8am–5pm, and by students from 5pm–8pm.

2. Full-Time WebCT Server Administrator/Lab Manager/HelpDesk

A full-time position for a WebCT Server Administrator/Lab Manager/Help Desk Manager is needed. WebCT is a complex system, supporting
hundreds of students and faculty; proper operation and maintenance of the system cannot be accomplished without personnel dedicated to its support. This person would receive training in WebCT and VCT’s Perception software and would train and oversee evening student personnel (5pm-8am.) The position should have an office adjacent to the Distance Education lab and near the Distance Education departmental offices. The position could report to either ITS or DE administration, or both.

3. Distance Education Assistant

There is currently one assistant for over 600 students enrolled in online courses and/or receiving course supplements online. Since enrollments continue to increase exponentially, additional assistance will almost certainly be needed by fall, 2002. One way to avoid adding assistants is to automate functions now performed by hand, such as input of class rosters to WebCT, inputting grades to the registrar, and performing backups. All possibilities will be pursued before requesting additional support personnel.

4. Redesign of Distance Education Offices

The offices for the Distance Education department are not designed for interfacing with the public. The department could serve students and faculty better if it were in a more public area with an area for equipment and servers located near the proposed lab. Proximity to a lab would allow distance education departmental personnel to demonstrate procedures for taking online courses to students.

Priority Two

1. Telecourse Encoding

Telecourses need to be digitally encoded and provided online. This would require an encoding station and a web server as well as high-speed Internet connectivity. This system could be used to provide video clips to any course online.

2. WebCT Server

A larger server will be needed for WebCT if enrollment continues to escalate.

3. Multimedia Workstation
One multimedia workstation is needed in the Distance Education Department for research (for instance, research into ways to reduce or eliminate network costs associated with present videoconference network systems using the Internet.) Existing stations in the department are not sufficiently quick and modernized for such applications.

Information Technology Services (ITS) Support Needed

Priority One

1. Personnel

Affected ITS Departments will need additional personnel for support of equipment proposed herein, such as the web server, lab, and workstation. New technology on campus may not be adequately served by existing ITS personnel.

Priority Two

1. Create Another Authoring System

ITS and Distance Education personnel need time and equipment for creation of another authoring system because the current WebCT has inherent problems with management and capability.

Additional Student Support Needed

Priority One

1. Online Registration

Online registration should be established. Students currently apply for admission online, but registration is accomplished during scheduled registration times via telephone or in person. Online registration would put distant students on a par with traditional students regarding access to registration services and adopting such a system would be a major step toward being able to allow registration any time, anywhere.

2. Online Forms
All forms needed for student services, including those related to establishment of residency, etc., should be available online.

3. 24 Hour Lab on Washington Street

Students need a 24-hour lab at the Washington Street campus with a “real person” at the helpdesk. See above, “Distance Education Support Needed.”

4. 24 Hour Online Registration

Students need to be able to register online at any time. Anytime-anywhere programming and registration allows students to sign up for courses at any time of the year. Often, when incorporating steps toward an anytime-anywhere paradigm, time restrictions on course assignments are loosened to allow a more student-centered environment and pace; also, coursework is sometimes broken into modules to allow assignment of peer groups for group assignments.

5. Student email Address Access

Distance education departmental personnel need access to reliable student email addresses. Student email addresses are often not reported correctly. This has been a source of recurring problems at the beginning of every semester. A method needs to be developed to either provide student email services through AC or to confirm email addresses before the beginning of classes.

6. Reliable ISP’s

Students need access to reliable Internet access services. Students have had repeated problems with their ISP’s. In many cases, students were unable to get to the Internet for long periods of time. If ISP service could be provided through the College with access allowed for up to high-speed DSL or cable modems, students could enjoy the support of the College’s ITS Division, instead of relying on the support provided by the wide variety of ISP’s in the area.

7. Web Pages for Academic Departments

All academic departments need to provide informative web pages. A large percentage of academic departments do not yet have a web page published. This confers a poor image to prospective students who would major in a program or area that appears only as a black listing instead of a link on the College’s web page’s listing of programs. All of the information in the full college catalog as published in written form should be available to online
students and prospective students, including program and course descriptions and requirements.

**Additional Faculty Support Needed**

**Priority One**

1. Laptop Computers

   Faculty working with online courses need good laptops. Unless their departments supply these, there need to be laptops available to college faculty for checkout from the First Center or from Distance Education.

2. First Center Funding Increase

   The First Center needs increased funding for faculty stipends for course design. If more funds were available, more faculty would be interested in teaching online.

3. Additional Faculty Specializing in Distance Education

   The academic departments participating in the distance education program at Amarillo College, which involves many departments and divisions, need new faculty, hired specifically to teach distance education courseware.

**Priority Two**

1. Faculty Training

   Faculty need more options and more training for incorporation of multimedia like audio streaming into online courses.

**Support for Program Development Needed**

**Priority One**

1. Regional Distance Education Collaborative

   Amarillo College may need to form a regional collaborative with other community colleges, West Texas A&M University, Texas Tech Health Science Center, area hospitals, libraries, businesses, and Chambers of Commerce, to develop educational options and seek grants together. Some major federal initiatives in distance education require collaborative applications.
XIV. Copyright Guide for Distance Education Instructors

The Distance Education department has a guide entitled “Copyright Considerations in Distance Education and Technology-Mediated Instruction.” It is a white paper published by the American Association of Community Colleges, and it provides copyright rules and regulations, fair use regulations, educational exceptions, and related topics. This document is available at the Distance Education office.

Additional copyright guidance is provided for instructors through the First Center in the Lynn Library, a resource laboratory dedicated to providing instructional design aid and graphics production for online courses and training for faculty and administrators involved with online course delivery.

The College will not condone any course of action that violates copyright law.

XV. Intellectual Property

A written agreement should be created between the College and any instructor who wishes to use courseware designed by persons in the employ of the College in an environment outside the College, including works by that instructor, and for whom remuneration of cash or release time has been awarded. This agreement should stipulate how royalties will be divided, including such conditions as when the author has left the employment of the College.

There is a detailed description of intellectual property rights in the Faculty Handbook. Among other things, it states: “a written agreement shall be entered into between the employee and the College that stipulates the management of the work, sharing of royalties, and the conditions under which the College may relinquish ownership of the copyright or patent. The College may recover any and all of its costs through the sale, licensing, leasing, or use of such copyrightable or patentable material before any division of royalties will be made as designated in the written agreement.” This statement is taken from the Amarillo College Board Policy Manual.

XVI. Access for a Diverse Body of Students

An Access Plan for Students with Exceptional Needs will be developed for distance education students. Primary among considerations for this document will be provision of services and opportunities to students with disabilities that are equivalent or superior to those provided to all students.
XVII. Curriculum Plan

Identifying Courses for Distance Education:

Methods used to identify courses for delivery via distance education include needs analysis, resource analysis and analysis of restraints.

**Needs analysis**

The need for a course to be delivered at a distance can be identified through the following methods.

- Interviews with faculty.
  
  Interviews with faculty are conducted by the First Center at First Friday meetings, by the Distance Education department through direct contact, and by academic department and division heads that report their findings to First Center or Distance Education department personnel.

- Observation of enrollments for various courses already offered
  
  Most online courses fill up quickly; waiting lists are kept for class offerings for ensuing enrollments. When numbers of persons waiting for a class are sufficient, another section or course is developed.

- Identification of a community or regional need that is not currently met by traditional course offerings.
  
  Community needs are identified through communication with a variety of departments, including continuing education, business education, real estate education, and industrial education. These departments have ongoing contact with the community at large and with businesses and organizations within the community and in the greater Panhandle area.

**Resource Analysis**

Faculty create courses with the help of the First Center, academic departments, and the Distance Education department. The First Center provides stipends from a limited pool. Requests for these stipends must be prioritized, based on the efficacy of the proposed program and its predicted enrollment potential. Other resources affecting the production of courseware are the availability of faculty, and the availability of computers for faculty to use for creation of courseware.

**Media Analysis:**
There are three available media for delivery of distance education courseware at Amarillo College: television, the Internet, and videoconference systems.

Courses are first identified according to need; only then can the most appropriate medium be chosen. For instance, *Interpersonal Communication* is very popular as a course offering via interactive videoconference systems; however, it is more difficult to adapt such a course to delivery online. Other courses may be best delivered by a combination of presentation options. *Astronomy*, for instance, is taught online, but conducted with several on-campus labs.

Recent efforts in distance education at Amarillo College have combined delivery media for added value. Many telecourses, for instance, now have an online supplemental component. This cross-platform support model provides a variety of options to instructors who are adapting a course to presentation via the Internet. By adding media such as video and streaming audio to online courses, students with a variety of learning styles are able to understand the material, thereby making the courses more interesting and accessible.

**Course Development:**

Faculty develop online courseware with the guidance and help of the First Center and the Distance Education department. Academic departments provide additional pedagogical support and the library, the ITS division, and other local sources supply research resources. Additional resources include computers and equipment for encoding video and audio in the First Center and in academic faculty labs.

Telecourses are developed by faculty with the help of distance education personnel, academic departmental support, and other sources of aid. Telecourse web sites are created and maintained by Distance Education departmental personnel, faculty, and the coordinator for telecourses. All telecourses are pre-prepared, complete courses, but additional coursework and resources provided online and in the library are important aspects of developing a positive educational experience for students.

Faculty, with training and assistance from the Distance Education department, develop courseware for delivery via videoconference sites. The unique responsibilities of adapting a course to delivery by interactive video and audio delivery requires dedicated faculty who are willing to experiment, practice, adapt, and evaluate. Training for development of videoconference courseware is available on a one-on-one basis through the Distance Education department and group training is provided at least twice per year.

**Course Delivery:**
**Faculty Load**

Academic departments set policy regarding faculty loads. Departments compensate faculty for online course delivery at the same rate they compensate traditional courses.

Overloads are handled differently within different departments. Some departments set strict class limits. Others allow unlimited enrollment but compensate faculty at the rate of one class hour for each additional seven students. Some departments open new sections for each twenty students above the amount predicted and keep a waiting list for ensuing semesters’ enrollment.

**Class Size Considerations**

Academic departments set class sizes. In most cases, class size is limited by the same restrictions as are used in traditional counterparts. In a very few cases, much larger classes can be accommodated online than in a traditional setting.

This philosophy is subject to evolution. Class sizes in many colleges online are much larger than their traditional counterparts and faculty are compensated on a per-student basis. These larger class sizes are possible because a large part of the curriculum has been used successfully and repeatedly and there are sufficient (and exemplary) resources, such as technological support, that enable faculty to spend more time in direct contact with students and less time managing, grading, and analyzing performance.

At the same time, a shift toward student-centered learning has opened a wide range of possibilities in which analysis of learning can take place that requires less direct interaction from faculty. Student-centered learning promotes the faculty role as research advisor instead of instructor, enabling more student independence.

**Support for Online Courses**

The Distance Education Department provides support for online courses including a helpdesk, training for instructors and students, management of online resources, reporting of problems with technical equipment, and help with course redesign and enhancement.

The First Center provides ongoing faculty support, support for the WebCT server, and graphics design for online courses.
The ITS division provides support for equipment and networks used by faculty and students for distance education and a help desk for faculty experiencing problems with equipment or networks.

**Support for Telecourses**

The staff of KACV-TV, the ITS division, and the Distance Education department provide technical, pedagogical, and design support for faculty and staff working with telecourses. The coordinator for telecourses provides scheduling, coordination, and a variety of other related services. All telecourses are purchased from the Public Broadcasting System and are of very high quality. On their web page, PBS offers a broad range of support materials for each course. The Distance Education Department designs, maintains, and updates WebCT supplemental designs for telecourses.

**Support for Videoconference Networks**

Amarillo College interfaces with two large networks to conduct classes via videoconference systems. The network vendors, Region16 Education Service Center and the statewide SCATE network, provide support for connectivity. Equipment in the rooms is under contract to an equipment vendor who provides support for major equipment failures. Support for faculty working on the networks is provided by the College’s ITS division for technical problems, the Distance Education Department for scheduling courseware and coordinating events, and the originating academic department for pedagogical design support. The Distance Education department provides training that includes enabling faculty to contact the appropriate persons in cases of equipment failure.

Instructors may apply for stipends, usually in the form of release time, for course design. Courses are provided as a community service and do not necessarily provide a full program for any area of study.

In order to identify ways to improve pedagogical design processes, the First Center holds collaborative events called “First Fridays.” During these events training, design, and service problems are identified. These “First Fridays” allow faculty a forum for discussion of needs, aspirations, successes, and failures. The First Center also provides training on WebCT, the preferred authoring system for the College.

**Evaluation**
In order to evaluate pedagogical effectiveness, grades and evaluations from course sections offered via distance education technologies will be compared to those of all sections of the same class. Additionally, academic department heads and relevant administrators will investigate the effectiveness of distance education faculty and courseware in the same manner they would evaluate their traditional counterparts.

**Delivery Mode Options**

Faculty may deliver courseware via television, the Internet or videoconference networks, or any combination of those media, with or without traditional class meetings and labs. Online courses may use print, video, audio, or graphics, and can contain any combination of those media. Three-dimensional virtual learning environments, videoconferencing, and avatar conferencing are some of the delivery mode options that will be investigated for adding to online course media design options.

Courseware is needed for delivery via videoconference systems. Faculty have been reluctant to try the media because it has often had technical difficulties in the past, and because the concept of teaching or being on camera does not appeal to all. Nonetheless, a variety of classes, including psychology, English grammar and literature, government, medical terminology, and Latin have been requested for delivery through this medium.

**XVIII. Student Support**

All services provided to traditional students are provided to online students, students in videoconference settings, and students enrolled in telecourses. In the case of online students, there are some activities, such as registration and establishment of residency, which can only be achieved via the telephone.

Books are mailed from the bookstore when students order them via telephone.

Certain restrictions apply to online students concerning student financial aid, and forms for financial aid applications are not all online yet, but progress has been made in that direction in recent months.

Special needs students will be provided resources and tools needed to retrieve information and interact at a par with other students. This is reflective of the College’s ongoing commitment to provide a quality educational experience to all students regardless of special needs associated with sight, hearing, or mobility.

Online courses bridge a gap for many special needs students that existed before the Internet evolved. A student can develop an identity based on online
participation instead of physical appearance when that participation is via electronic means.

XIX. DISTANCE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Organizational Context

The Distance Education Department is an independent subdivision under the Vice President and Dean of Instruction. The department is directed by a coordinator and supported by an assistant and two part-time student assistants. The department works closely with the First Center in the design of online courses, the ITS division in maintenance of technology systems, and with the vendors for the videoconference networks and equipment for scheduling and oversight of courses.

The First Center is organized as a part of the array of services offered by the library and operates within the library’s organizational structure. It is headed by an instructional designer and employs several part-time student assistants who are experienced with graphics design, multimedia, and technology applications. The First Center is under the supervision of the College Librarian.

The Instructional Technology Services division provides technical support and training for all equipment used for delivery of distance education courseware. The Division is headed by a dean and includes several interconnected departments that provide a wide range of communications and technology services. The division head/dean reports to the president of the college.

XX. Training Plan

The Distance Education Coordinator, the First Center’s Instructional Designer, other College personnel or hired consultants will deliver training in eight areas:

1. WebCT Training for Instructors
   a. The First Center will provide one-on-one training on WebCT as requested.
   b. The Distance Education Coordinator will provide training on WebCT for all faculty at least once per semester.
   c. If needed, outside personnel will be contracted to provide WebCT training for advanced or experimental applications.

2. WebCT Training for Students
a. The Distance Education department will provide online directions and training as needed by students, and provide training at on-campus class meetings as requested by instructors.

b. Students will be provided an online tutorial for anyone interested in taking an online course.

c. If needed, an online tutor will be provided. The student and tutor will interact in a chat room and via bulletin board discussion. Tutors are provided by the ACcess Learning Center in the Lynn Library.

3. Videoconference Training for Instructors

a. The Distance Education department will provide training at least once per semester to enable instructors to maximize their abilities to use the videoconference systems and to illustrate those capabilities to prospective instructors.

b. The Distance Education department will provide one-on-one training for any faculty using or interested in using the equipment.

4. Videoconference Training for Students

a. Faculty will train students on use of videoconference systems.

b. Distance Education personnel will train students as requested by faculty.

c. All distance education students are encouraged to use the help desk for technical questions, problems with contacting instructors, or related issues.

5. Distance Education Forum for Instructors

a. A meeting of interested parties will bring about open discussion of tried and tested methods, technology, student services issues, and related subjects.

b. Presenters will come from a broad spectrum of the college community including experienced distance education faculty.

c. Meetings will be held on a regular basis, on varying days of the week, and will be open to all faculty.

6. Distance Education Forum for Students
a. A meeting of interested students will encourage open discussion of
the nature of types of distance education courses, possible
problems that might be encountered, and solutions for those
problems.

b. These presentations will introduce students to a variety of types of
distance education.

c. Meetings will be held on a regular basis and will be open to all
students and faculty.

7. **Telecourse Training for Instructors**

   a. Training for instructors teaching via telecourse will be held at least
   once per semester and will be provided by the person in charge of
   coordinating internal operations of that area.

   b. The training will be open to all faculty.

8. **Telecourse Training for Students**

   a. Training for students taking or interested in taking courses via
   telecourse will be provided on the Distance Education web site.

   b. If requested, Distance Education faculty will provide additional
   training for students involved in telecourses.

XX. **2001 Training**

**Introduction to Distance Education Technologies**

During this presentation, participants will learn the basic formats used to present
distance education courses, the advantages and drawbacks of each medium,
and current research regarding pedagogy and best practices.

**Peripherals for Videoconference Systems**

This workshop will introduce a variety of peripherals that can enhance the
videoconference classroom setting and will include technical as well as
pedagogical aspects of videoconference systems and their use.

**Teaching Methods for Videoconference Systems**
Pedagogical considerations for teachers using videoconference systems for distance education will be presented. Hands-on group practices will include information gathering and sharing, publication of a web page, and product and research reviews.

**The Cross-Platform Support Model**

This workshop will demonstrate the advantages of using television, the Internet, and videoconference networks to support each other, thereby affording advanced multimedia distance education delivery that is superior to the products offered through any of these media alone.

**Using WebCT for Course Design**

All operations of WebCT will be discussed and demonstrated. This workshop will be geared to meet the needs of instructors who use the WebCT for online course design, class supplement, and/or records management.

**How to Design an Online Course**

Several options for course design, including WebCT and other products, will be discussed. This workshop starts at a very basic level and then builds to an advanced level of understanding for instructional designers.

**Teaching in a Student-Centered Environment on an Anytime Anywhere Campus**

This workshop demonstrates constructivism as it applies to instructional design for courseware delivery systems that are not time and place dependent. Topics to be presented include: modular curriculum design; cohort groups; remedial looping; methods for testing for understanding online; and, linking to resources.

**XXI. One-Year Plan (2001-2002)**

The following are the goals for 2001-2002:
- Develop onsite training for WebCT, Teaching Methods for Videoconference Systems, and online/local training for Basics for Taking an Online Course.

- Provide computers to distance education faculty.

- Develop a newsletter for Distance Education and First Center announcements and articles. Publish in print and online.

- Develop links and training on the DE web pages for students who need to find online library and related resources.

- Recruit faculty to teach via videoconference systems.

- Develop a marketing strategy for recruiting online students from around the world through promoting the benefits of our small class limits, the experience and reputation of Amarillo College’s faculty, and the college’s good reputation in both the educational community and in our local community.

- Look for funding to develop hybrid delivery systems, virtual learning environments, online videoconferencing, and other technologies.

- Improve access to student services from distance education web pages and work to improve availability of student services to students who are distant.

- Upgrade the furniture, computers, microphones, and seating in videoconference rooms.

- Develop an assessment system for pedagogical effectiveness of DE course offerings, as compared to their face-to-face counterparts.

**XXII. Five-Year Plan (2001-2006)**

The following are the goals for 2001-2006:

- Develop systems to allow online courses to be available any time, anywhere, free from traditional registration deadlines and schedules.

- Develop cross-platform support and enhancement, including a video-on-demand system for delivery of telecourse videos and support videos for online courses.

- Move away from traditional videoconferencing equipment and toward online means of accomplishing the same thing more effectively. Set up
a reflector to reflect >100Kbps signals and to provide workstations in labs for students and faculty to use to access the materials.

- Develop a Web Portal for student, prospective student, faculty, and prospective faculty interaction that is tailored to specified needs.

- Develop virtual learning environments in VRML or another language for enhancing student achievement and/or instructor training.

- Investigate development of an online television station that can simulcast programs for viewing through non-time-dependent means.

XXIII. Evaluation

Distance Education Program Evaluation:

The Distance Education program will be evaluated on an ongoing basis, by comparing student and faculty evaluations to previous classes, to traditional classes, and to identified norms. Effectiveness, feasibility, response to need, and practicality will be the primary considerations of the evaluations.

Evaluation of Distance Education Courses:

Appropriate academic department personnel, administrators, students, and faculty taking and teaching distance education courses will evaluate the courses based on identified criteria.

Evaluations from SACS or Other Entities:

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and other entities evaluate, from time to time, the effectiveness of the distance education program. These evaluations will be used to help develop and revise distance education practices.

XXIV. College Relations

Recruiting Efforts:

The College will use advertisements on television, radio, in the local newspaper, and on the Internet to recruit students. The Distance Education department will
work closely with the Enrollment Management department to insure coordination and maximization of efforts.

**Newsletter:**

The Distance Education department will develop a newsletter to help spread information about the quality and variety of programs available.

**Media Coverage of Distance Education Efforts:**

Personnel working with Distance Education will provide interviews or other information to the media when requested.

**Community Involvement:**

The College will work with community initiatives as requested to provide needed educational opportunities.