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Benchmarking St. Petersburg College: A Report to Leadership Project Eagle Evaluation Question #4 <http://www.spjc.edu/eagle/PEEQ4.htm>

How Can St. Petersburg College Leverage Technology to Increase Access to Courses and Programs for An Expanded Pool of Learners?

Executive Summary

www.spjc.edu/eagle/BEEP/BEEP16.htm

"Today the world is an open market..."

(Nazmi Ulutak, Anadalu University, Turkey, in [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), 9/22/00)

Introduction

In 1999, [St. Petersburg College](#) (SPC) received a multi-year federal grant ([Project Eagle](#)) to build a national model for increasing access to four-year degrees and workforce training for students attending community colleges. Access would be enhanced by increasingly flexible educational opportunities – with courses, programs and support services delivered at a time and place, in a way and at a pace, best suited to the needs of the individual learner.

Part of Project Eagle is an evaluation of e-learning practices at the college, using a series of six critical questions formulated by the Project Eagle Action Committee (previously known as the Project Eagle Working Group) and shaped into a [plan](#) by the project's external evaluator. The evaluation for the fourth question began with an examination of the best e-learning practices related to that question, both nationwide and worldwide, using the Web as the primary source of information. The results were published in [Best Educational E-Practices \(BEEP\), Issue 11, August 1, 2001, Broadening the Base of E-Learners.](#)

Then a list of all practices related to the question currently in use at SPJC was compiled and compared to those included in [BEEP #11](#). A [report](#) was prepared benchmarking SPJC and the results submitted to the college leadership. This is a summary of the findings and recommendations of that report.

Background

The fourth question to be evaluated was one of how to expand an academic e-learning initiative. In August 2001, findings were assembled on the elements identified nationally as most important to the successful growth and marketing of e-learning programs. The results appeared in [BEEP #11](#) and stressed the need for planning, creating individual initiatives, collaborating with other organizations, and retaining e-students already enrolled.

From November to the middle of December 2001, SPJC's efforts in those areas were examined. Current policies were analyzed; selected staff, administrators and faculty were interviewed; specialized workforce programs were examined; and online faculty were polled for their suggestions.*

*This report was originally scheduled for completion on November 30, 2001, but was postponed one month because of a previous delay in the publication of Project Eagle Evaluation Question #3.

Results

Four components of successful e-learning expansion were identified, and SPC's performance in each key area was assessed, with the following results:

A. Planning an E-Learning Expansion

The college has a history of careful planning before undertaking new ventures. In the case of developing and expanding its e-learning efforts, it has produced a [Technology Plan](#), an [Electronic Campus Plan](#) and a [Strategic Planning Model](#), created by a specially formed [Exploring Digital and Global Education](#) steering committee. In addition, the college's eCampus produced a comprehensive "Plan for Distance Education at St. Petersburg Junior College" (not online) in early 2000.

B. Individual Initiatives

SPC has initiated a number of successful strategies already to enlarge its base of e-learners:

1. The development of teleweb courses that combine televised and online instruction.
2. The capability of getting an A. A. degree entirely online by Fall 2002, when the last required course - Speech - will be offered. (Presently Speech is offered as a telecourse, allowing students to obtain the A. A. at a distance already.)
3. The creation of a full-time [CyberAdvisor](#) position to advise and assist e-students.
4. A series of "laptop classes" that combines on-campus attendance with online textbooks.
5. A fully online A. S. program in [Medical Laboratory Technology](#) and a fully online certificate program in [Emergency Administration and Management](#), with others under construction.
6. State-of-the-art video distribution and control equipment to support interactive classes.
7. A marketing campaign with press release kit sent to national newspapers and magazines.
8. A nearly completed online video clip and model course for students to try.

C. Collaborative Efforts

The college is involved in major collaborative efforts of two kinds:

1. Collaboration with other colleges and universities. Through its [University Partnership Center](#), SPC has developed one of the largest academic alliances in the country. Presently the college partners with twelve other institutions, both within and outside the state of Florida.
2. State and regional collaboration. SPC participates in statewide efforts like the [Florida Virtual Campus](#), [Florida Community College Distance Learning Consortium](#), [LINCC](#) (online library services), [FACTS](#) (a counseling and tracking service), and [eChoices](#) (a career guidance service.) It is also part of the [Southern Regional Education Board's Electronic Campus](#).

D. Retention

Although it has developed no formal plan yet for improving retention of its e-students, both the eCampus and the college as a whole have recently begun efforts to collect retention data on students. In addition, SPC has taken steps to improve retention by ensuring the quality of the courses offered, particularly those in an online format, by the following:

1. The choice of [WebCT](#) software to provide a consistent online learning environment, with an [eCampus opening page](#) that offers students tutorials in the use of the software.
2. The [eCampus Web site](#) and its many one-stop online services to students.
3. A comprehensive training program for prospective e-structors in the form of an Electronic Learning Journey (ELJ) developed by the college's Instructional Technology department.
4. A variety of techniques developed by individual e-structors to increase the success and satisfaction of students who enroll in their classes.

Review and Recommendations

The remarkable growth in students enrolled in the college's eCampus, from 619 in Fall 1999 to 2911 in Fall 2001, attests to the success of the college's efforts. Compared to institutions nationally, SPC gets high marks for its approach to the development and growth of e-learning.

There are still some areas that need additional attention: the development of the Speech course to make the A. A. online program a reality; putting the college's admission application online; an expansion of collaborative efforts beyond academic institutions through partnerships with organizations like business or government; improved data collection on its own e-student body; and an investigation into the use of additional staff as faculty assistants in online classes to handle the mundane matters of course management. As has been pointed out in previous reports in this series, it will also be very important to insure that the college's e-learning momentum continues after Project Eagle funding ends.