



# Best Educational E-Practices (BEEP)

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## Benchmarking St. Petersburg Junior College: A Report to Leadership Project Eagle Evaluation Question #2

# How Do SPJC Administrative and Support Systems Need to Change in Order to Overcome Organizational Obstacles to E-Learning Access?

## Executive Summary

*“Students should see no administrative difference when electing distance learning courses.”*  
([Course Administration Principles for Distance Learning](#), University of Massachusetts)

## Introduction

In 1999, [St. Petersburg Junior College](#) (SPJC) 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 Working Group and shaped into a [plan](#) by the project’s external evaluator. The evaluation for the second question began with an examination of the best e-learning practices, both nationwide and worldwide, related to it, using the Web as the primary source of information. The results were published in Best Educational E-Practices (BEEP), Issue 5, February 1, 2001, [Overcoming Organizational Obstacles to E-Learning Access](#).

A list of all internal practices related to issues that emerged in the external evaluation was then compiled and compared to those included in [BEEP #5](#). A [report](#) was prepared benchmarking SPJC, and the results submitted to the college leadership on May 31, 2001. This is a summary of the findings and recommendations of that report.

## Background

In January 2001, research was completed to compile a list of obstacles to e-learning access as identified by institutions nationwide and worldwide. The obstacles, detailed in [BEEP #5](#), included administrative issues, cost issues, regulatory issues, issues of access for people with disabilities, and instructional issues.

From February to the end of April 2001, steps were taken to identify similar organizational obstacles to effective e-learning access at SPJC. These steps included examination of existing access-related administrative/support/systems procedures; written and/or verbal communication with key administrators and staff members; extensive discussion with the Project Eagle Work Group; and an attempt to determine College and University Center policies (individually and collectively) regarding degree access.

## Results

The extent to which the organizational obstacles to e-learning access experienced elsewhere exist at SPJC was evaluated, with the following results:

- A. Administrative Issues
  1. Accreditation. Because the college's standards for development and delivery of eCampus courses are identical to those for traditional courses, this was not an issue at SPJC. Also, in 1997, two years before its 10-year accreditation review by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the college formed the EDGE ([Exploring Digital and Global Education](#)) Committee to do a self-study on the impact of new technology at SPJC.
  2. Course content. This also was a non-issue at SPJC, where every new e-course must be reviewed by an administrative [flexible access committee](#).
  3. Assessment and evaluation. As a partial answer to the nationwide concern about determining the effectiveness of e-learning, SPJC has created and uses a separate student evaluation document for its telecourses and [online courses](#).
  4. Academic calendar/flexible scheduling. Although previous attempts to solve the issues involved in offering open entry/open exit courses have not been successful, the matter is under active study again. This effort, plus the planned implementation of a new [PeopleSoft](#) online student system, should resolve some of the technical issues.
  5. Governance, intra-institutional and inter-institutional. Within the college, the centralization of all e-courses into an [eCampus](#) has largely resolved the issue of governance. In addition, SPJC has formed partnerships with other schools via its [College and University Center](#) (CUC). Both eCampus and the CUC are fully-formed entities in the college.
  6. Student support services. Having fared very favorably in an earlier [comparison with schools nationwide](#) in its services to e-learners, the only obstacle that has been identified since then is that of online bookstore services, the complexity of which has sometimes discouraged students attempting to purchase textbooks.
  7. Student business issues. In the informal survey that preceded the report, several concerns were expressed: timing of eCampus submission of some information to campus records' offices; confusion in the way online courses are displayed in the college catalog; difficulties surrounding online applications, which are often submitted incorrectly or incompletely; and the inability of eCampus staff to keep abreast of ongoing procedural changes that come from the college registrar's office.
  8. Technical and technological issues. Because of the influx of funds from Project Eagle, these are presently not major issues at SPJC. Discussions are already underway on determining sources of funding after the grant ends.
  9. Staffing. There is a need to enlist and train more instructors for e-courses, since a few faculty are overloaded. In addition, there is an immediate need to increase eCampus staff, specifically a full-time individual to offer advising, mentoring and counseling services.
  10. Institutional resistance to change. The obstacles are few at SPJC, and occur in areas where existing policies and procedures need revisiting to accommodate new e-learning needs.
- B. Cost Issues. Defined as one of determining the costs and profitability of e-courses, this has not been an issue at the college, which has long included technology costs in its budget plans.
- C. Regulatory Issues – Federal, State and Local. Besides the federal regulations related to financial aid that affect all e-students, SPJC has to deal with regulations that require students to be physically present for certain tests like the state's College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST). Also, the college must be conscious of any limits imposed by its geographic service area.
- D. Issues of Access for People with Disabilities. The only expressed concern was the difficulty for e-students with mobility disabilities to come to SPJC or a proctored site to take certain tests.
- E. Instructional Issues. The external evaluation of faculty concerns was done in [Faculty Issues in an E-Learning Environment](#), BEEP #8, May 1, 2001. The next Project Eagle Evaluation Question (PEEQ #3) report, due August 31, 2001, will compare external issues with those of SPJC faculty.

## Review and Recommendations

Overall, when measured against other institutions, SPJC fared very well. In developing its e-learning program, the college has planned ahead and is responsive to needs for change as they arise. Administrators were already aware of and working on most of the issues that emerged in this report.

[www.spjc.edu/eagle/BEEP/BEEP9.htm](http://www.spjc.edu/eagle/BEEP/BEEP9.htm)

For the full report, go to [www.spjc.edu/eagle/PEEQ2.htm](http://www.spjc.edu/eagle/PEEQ2.htm)