

Online System Summary

By Jim Clarke

For the past 6 years, Modesto Junior College has licensed software-based course management systems in order to support online course offerings. The system currently being used is Blackboard CE 6. Blackboard (formerly WebCT) is browser-based software that is accessible from any computer connected to the internet from any location on the globe. The District provides the hardware and system support necessary in maintaining the functionality of the software while the College provides all student and faculty training and most of the technical support for students and faculty users. The College offers approximately 136 fully online courses during the Fall and Spring semesters serving over 3200 students. Fifty-two faculty who have received training are now teaching at least one fully online course. Additionally, a small number (approximately four) "hybrid" Blackboard courses are available to students. These courses consist of a combination of face-to-face meetings and work done using the Blackboard system. Hybrid courses are defined as those courses having less than 100% of normal class meetings taking place online with at least 33% taking place face-to-face. A three unit class offered using a hybrid format might meet for two hours a week rather than the traditional three hours. The remaining one hour would be handled using Blackboard. Also, many faculty are now using Blackboard to enhance their face-to-face courses by providing enrichment materials and/or additional activities to students. There are approximately twenty faculty members using Blackboard to "enhance" their traditional face-to-face courses. All fully online and hybrid courses must be approved for delivery using the online method and are vetted using a process developed by the College Curriculum Committee. The College also provides student orientation sessions at the beginning of each semester which are designed to instruct students in how to use Blackboard and in the skills needed to be a successful online student. Additionally, the College provides an Online Help Desk which allows students to phone in or email with questions related to their online classes or in the use of Blackboard. The hours of operation for the Online Help Desk vary from a high of thirty two hours a week during the first three weeks of each semester to a minimum of 24 hours per week for the remainder of the semester.

The Coordinator of Distance Education and Instructional Technology provides group and individual training to faculty in online pedagogy and the use of Blackboard. For the past 6 ½ years, Blackboard Academies have been offered in two formats. Each semester a 10 week (30 hour) version of the Blackboard Academy has been available for faculty interested in teaching online. The 10 week iteration is designed for those with limited background in technology. Additionally, an accelerated Blackboard Academy is offered every semester. This 18 hour training is taught over two successive Friday afternoons and two Saturdays. The accelerated training is designed for those with intermediate to advanced technical skills and is taught in a "hybrid" format. Blackboard Academies typically have between three and eight faculty in attendance. Over the past 6 years, over 125 faculty have been trained in online pedagogy and the use of Blackboard. The Coordinator of Distance Education and Instructional Technology also meets with faculty individually to assist with issues related to online pedagogy and the use of Blackboard. The Virtual Classroom Committee has also sponsored periodic "brown-bag" meetings designed to provide a forum for online faculty to share their successes and to gather information regarding issues of common concern.