Office of Online Programs
Dr. Shanta Goswami

- Since the inception of the Office of Online Programs in Fall of 2008, the number of fully online programs have increased from 5 to 12.

- After the Quality Assurance Process was established in the summer of 2009, 76 newly developed courses have been reviewed for compliance with Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools standards.

- 404 out of 570 faculty have been made aware of the Quality Assurance Process as a part of the Blackboard Training. All existing online courses that go through migration from WebCT to Blackboard 9.1 are being certified by the QA process before they are offered to the students in the new environment by the end of Fall 2011.

- Around 20 courses have been migrated so far. The office has made alliances with other distance education organizations, such as The SLOAN-C (A consortium of institutions and organizations committed to quality online education); Texas Distance Education (TDE); World Campus at Penn State University; Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) and Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). As a result, now all our programs will be advertised at the TDE and SREB websites.

- In order to improve the student success rate in online programs, the office collaborated with the university Student Services office and the University of Mississippi to participate in a research project to identify issues (if any) for disability students in UHCL. The data has been shared with the Associate Vice President of Student Services to be used for their ongoing efforts to improve services for disabled students.

- The office is also working with Student Services and University Computing and Technology to develop an online orientation module that will be implemented by the end of Fall 2011.

- The office is planning the second “Digital Academy” as a part of the faculty development workshop for summer 2011. The Academy will be open to all faculty for participation.

- The Office of Online Programs along with the Office of Enrollment Management was selected to participate in a grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to be one of the pilot institutions to promote undergraduate online programs.

Student Interview: Candace Lehew
When I was asked to write an article about my experience with the Instructional Technology program here at University of Houston-Clear Lake, I thought for a long time about what I wanted other people to know about this excellent program. From the perspective of a student in the program, the one word that kept coming up was opportunity. Opportunity comes in many forms in this degree program, from the opportunity it provides to its current students to get an education, to the opportunity it provides future students who will participate in the courses or training created by program graduates.

Education provides opportunity that people might not otherwise be able to access. Education is something that once earned, no one can take away. Many people cannot attend a traditional classroom setting. For those people, there are options available to get a quality education. One such resource is online coursework and programs, such as the Master of Science in Instructional Technology program.

Online courses allow students the flexibility needed to be able to meet their family, work, and community obligations while still pursuing an education. Students can log into online courses from anywhere in the world that has Internet access. Students who travel frequently for work can take classes in an online program because they are not required to be in a designated location at a designated time. The student can log into the course any time of the day or night. This flexibility provides students with opportunity to reach their academic goals.

I started my graduate program in Instructional Technology in spring 2007. The MS in Instructional Technology was one of the few totally online programs available at the time. I did not want to get a degree from a fly by night school that popped up on the local street corner. I wanted to get a degree from what I considered to be a real university that had quality programs. I chose this online program at UHCL because I wanted to create educational opportunities for students from a variety of backgrounds and demographics and felt this was the best degree I could earn to get me to that goal.

Students do not go it alone in this program. The faculty in the Instructional Technology program provide their students opportunity. Students are taught how to go out into the world and provide educational opportunity for those who may not otherwise have access. This program provides students with the opportunity to learn how to analyze, design, develop, implement and evaluate an online resource that contains multimedia instructional elements. Students learn how to collaborate with subject matter experts on content and delivery. Students are not only taught how to create a resource, but also how it needs to be created to meet the learning objectives required for the course.

Educational settings are not the only place that instructional technology is used. The skills students are taught in the INST program can be applied to areas outside of the K-12 and higher education arenas. Businesses are going more and more toward online training resources. For businesses, the use of online resources allows the employee to remain on-site to complete the training, reducing travel and meeting location costs. The training can be completed at a time that is convenient for both the employee and the employer. Opportunity is available in a wide variety of subject areas when it comes to training. If creating training resources is your passion, then this is the program for you. Students also have the opportunity to complete a professional development certificate for Online Distance Educator or Performance Technology.

The Master of Science in Instructional Technology program is a great program for those who want to create resources to help others by providing the opportunity to learn. This program provides opportunity in many forms and gives students the flexibility to pursue their dreams.
According to Dr. Lee Revere, engaging students in online learning has become a necessity due to the advancements in technology. Today’s student is quite adept at using technologies for answering email, chatting with friends, networking socially, playing games, and even interacting with faculty. Faculty, on the other hand, often struggle with identifying the appropriate technologies that will promote and not deter from academic learning. Coupling technologies with existing online learning tools will take an online course to the next level with respect to student engagement. The following tools will certainly enhance learning in online learning:

1. Facilitate Peer Interaction and Assessment Group Tasks:
   Online students often report missing the “social information” that can be gained from face-to-face meetings; however, this can be overcome through multiple technologies such as discussion boards and chat sessions. Discussion boards and chat rooms are commonly used as a means for promoting student engagement and peer interaction. Discussion boards can be useful for engaging students. When conducted well, they provide a consistently supportive climate, a forum for peer review and exchange, and a mechanism for students to increase their knowledge through student-driven content. Online chats encourage spontaneous interactions among students and faculty and may generate new knowledge that is beneficial to both groups. Blogs are a third forum for fostering communication and are typically they are less structured than discussion boards or chats. Blogs easily integrate with mobile and handheld devices which may promote faster response than a discussion board; additionally, younger students are adept at blogging and may be more likely to participate in a blog than a discussion board or chat. Classroom blogs provide a forum for students to share their learning, ask questions of their peers, discuss a topic, comment on their reactions to the course/assignment, etc. For instructors, blogs provide an indirect method for gauging student feelings towards the course and obtaining feedback on course goals and objectives.

2. Using Google Applications for Communication and Collaboration:
   Google is a free application that easily integrates with existing online courses, mobile phones, and handheld devices. Within Google, there are a number of applications that foster collaboration and engage students within an online learning environment. For example, students can forward their Blackboard email account to a Gmail (or other email account) thereby receiving a more real-time experience, particularly for students who access email via a mobile phone. Google Calendar can be used to organize and share classroom lesson plans, assignments, and due dates. Like Gmail, Google Calendar can be accessed from any computer or smart phone; thus students can view updates to the course calendar immediately and without having to login to Blackboard. An additional benefit of Google Calendar is that it can be integrated with the student’s other online calendars, whereas Blackboard or course embedded calendars cannot integrate with a personal calendar. Google Tasks is a tool that allows all users to view a single or multiple task lists. Creating unique tasks for specified groups allows faculty to differentiate learning and fostering collaboration on assignments. Google also provides a free custom search engine that can be created by the online instructor for the purpose of narrowing down searchable websites. With respect to collaboration, Google documents are free applications that easily integrate with existing online courses, mobile phones, and handheld devices. Google documents allow students to work...
simultaneously on a spreadsheet or document. A single spreadsheet can be used by the entire class (simultaneously if need be), at different locations, to collaborate on a classroom project, such as data collection. Instructors may then use the student collected data within the course, or for projects; using student collected data fosters student engagement and interest.

3. Integrating Mobile Applications: There are a number of free mobile applications that can be used to engage students. For example the Notes feature on the iPhone/ iTouch/ IPad allows students to type notes, to email the notes and/or to organize the notes. The Voice Memo feature allows students to create podcasts/ vodcasts related to course assignments, which can be uploaded by the instructor to Blackboard. 'gFlash' is a free mobile application that allows flashcards and multiple choice questions to be downloaded to an iPhone or iTouch for study purposes. Student generated flashcards/study questions can be imported into gFlash via Google documents. Although mobile applications have tremendous potential in both engaging students and enhancing learning, they are limited to those student who have the technology. As the mobile technology grows, so too will the ability to integrate learning through mobile devices.

Blackboard Migration Update
Laura Reeves

As we are continuing with our migration from WebCT to Blackboard, overall progress is steady and we are pleased with the migration effort to date. UCT has trained just under half of the faculty and is currently offering 145 out of approximately 700 courses in Blackboard 9.1 this fall; 506 courses were taught in WebCT. As with any technology migration, we are tracking all issues reported by both students and faculty and have encountered a total of 14 issues to date. We continue to follow up with Blackboard and have closed 8 of the 14 issues; 6 remain open. We have published a blog to document all updates and encourage faculty to review this blog regularly and frequently. We post updates at least once a week. You can get to this blog by going to http://blog.uhcl.edu/blojsom/blog/Blackboard Blog/.

We frequently are asked if training is required in order to use Blackboard. For this migration to stay on track, we feel that it is important that all faculty hear the same thing in relationship to the University’s goals and direction for on-line learning. It is also very beneficial for on-going support that UCT know that all faculty have heard the message. Training is extremely important and we want to encourage faculty to take the time to attend in order to get their blackboard shells. We have listed the training objectives as related to this migration and the importance of attending training.

Training Objectives:
1. Build relationships with Faculty through face-to-face contact.
2. How to take control of provisioning your own course each semester.
3. The process for quality assurance of online courses at UHCL.
4. The procedures involved with creating new on line/hybrid and web-supported courses at UHCL.
5. Provide professional development opportunities for the faculty.
6. Courses faculty plan to migrate and when do they expect to deliver.
You can see five of the eight objectives are important to the growth of our online and web-supported courses and allow both faculty and staff to provide consistent service to our students. The other three relate to migration issues. We have the support of Provost Stockton and the Deans to ensure that all faculty are trained in Blackboard before they begin to use this course management system.

We are excited as we move closer everyday to having all courses in Blackboard. Check our blog often and look for training updates as the schools each get closer to having 100% of the faculty trained and migrated.

Training Breakdown by School as of 03-04-2011

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<th>School</th>
<th>Not Trained</th>
<th>Trained</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
<th>% Trained</th>
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<td>573</td>
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</tbody>
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Coming soon!
• UHCL Online Programs Website.
• Digital Academy-II

Want to contribute?
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For Queries & Concerns.

Contact us at:
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