

### 3. What approvals were needed?

The internal and external approvals are identified in this section.

#### ***3.a. Identify the internal approvals required, and provide documentation confirming these actions.***

The decision to request an institutional change to offer online programs has been the subject of campus discussions for a considerable period of time. The process began in Teaching and Learning, but has been carried forward through many different venues for widespread support. As mentioned in Section 1.c., RCTC's mission and statement of vision reflect the strategic priority of online education. A high priority was placed on the ability to meet current and future student needs for online courses and programs, and this change is seen as a decisive step in the process.

The Distance Education and Technology Committee began work on the project in January 2005, with the adoption of the Solve and Dissolve (SAD) group priorities identified in section 2.a. One priority was the ability to offer the AA degree online, followed closely by formalizing the process for faculty development and class/program development in online. At the same time, the reorganization of the Educational Technology department and creation of the administrative position for distance education included management of the accreditation proposal. The Teaching and Learning leadership developed strategic Teaching and Learning goals tied to the institutional change, and all of these converged with a late spring application to MnOnline seeking approval. MnSCU's Assessment & Effectiveness Director hosted an informational session in the summer, and timelines were established based on the goal of completion by end of spring session 2006. The approval to proceed was granted by the Office of the President, Teaching and Learning, and participants in the information session. The group included Student Services, Media Services, Information Technology, Effectiveness and College Relations and Finances.

The MnOnline Accreditation Team began their weekly meetings in fall of 2005, after identifying interested participants and ensuring adequate and diverse representation. Some of the specific tasks completed since the initial meetings include:

- Completion of Peer Review training for Team Chair by MnOnline. This was deemed beneficial as it would enlighten the college on the process and criteria for approval
- Partnerships with recently online accredited campuses (St. Cloud State, Minnesota State University at Mankato, Riverland) to act as consultants and offer advice



- Data gathering and posting in the electronic e-folio site. This includes college missions and vision statements, past accreditation reports, statistics related to distance education, national and MNSCU system reports, and committee meeting notes.
- Completion of the self-study Best Practices table. This served as the outline and foundation for the report.
- Identification of key personnel to be included in the Peer Review visit. All areas of the college (Administrative, faculty, staff, and students) were informed of the May 2 and 3 dates, and calendar reservations were made.
- Proposed schedule for the Peer Review team (Appendix)
- Hosting MnSCU's Assessment & Effectiveness Director in a campus-wide briefing January 2006. A meeting with the MnOnline Accreditation Team was followed by an open meeting of the DETC.
- Proposal of additional communication devices. College Crossings, Program Leader and Division Coordinator meetings, AASC, Assessment of Student Learning, Open Forums and Peer Review visit practice sessions.
- Identification of specific courses needed to complete the online AA degree. It was determined 3 courses were needed to be developed, with a projected timeline of fall 2006.
- Identification of service needs or areas for improvement. These include assessment (Quality Matters pilot), student satisfaction (Noel-Levitz), online tutoring (SmartThinking), live support and synchronous meetings (Breeze), Disability services and ADA, and others.

The decision to seek accreditation through MnOnline has been reviewed and endorsed at all levels of the institution. Administratively, the support was offered by the Office of the President, the Cabinet and the Teaching and Learning division. Faculty and students endorsed this through the Distance Education and Technology Committee representatives, and participation on the work team. Finally, staff served on the work-team and managed the process through the Department of Educational Technology.

***3.b. Identify the external approvals required, and provide documentation confirming these actions.***

RCTC has notified MnOnline, as grantor for the Higher Learning Commission, of our plans to seek accreditation for delivery of online degrees. Since MnOnline has received the authorization from HLC, and is the agency within the MNSCU Office of the Chancellor concerned with online education, we are



not aware of any other requirements for external approvals. MnSCU will continue to approve new online programs and consider program duplication in the online venue.

