

2. What factors led the organization to undertake the proposed change?

RCTC's ongoing planning efforts detail action plans for meeting MnSCU accreditation requirements for online degrees and programs. These plans have been checked through a needs analysis comparing the RCTC online environment to the regional and national college online environments. In order to ensure successful change, the entire institution has been involved in the planning.

2. a. Describe the relationship between the proposed change and ongoing planning.

Ongoing planning is directly linked to the proposed change of offering online degrees and programs in the following ways:

- Ongoing planning has incorporated online degrees and programs
- Organizational changes have been made to accommodate online degrees and programs
- Distance learning priorities have been established

Ongoing planning to incorporate online degrees and programs

RCTC's initiatives are driven by and parallel closely Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) Annual Work Plans, created by the Office of the Chancellor. This relationship means that as the system office identifies goals for the academic year, the college needs to support these through local campus actions.

The focus on technological delivery to serve students, particularly with the online format, is a common thread in the Annual Work Plan dating back to 2001-2002. Examples of this include:

- (2001-2002) IMPROVEMENT GOAL 4: Make the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities a leader in using technology to serve students in new markets.
- (2001-2002) Goal 4-1: By July 2002, refine and implement strategies to move effectively and successfully into the eLearning market
- (2001-2002) Goal 4-3: Use technology to reach new market segments with eLearning Services.
- (2002-2003) 10. Expand High Quality Learning Programs and Services. Continue development of distance and technology enhanced education opportunities to improve the system's ability to respond to learner needs.



- (2002-2003) 10.5 Distribute funds to lead institutions to increase the number of fully online programs and services by 10 percent: January 2003
- (2003-2004) 2. A more coordinated and increased access to courses, full degree programs, and student support services offered through emerging technologies [Access and Opportunity, and Quality Learning Programs];
- (2004-2005) Examine goals, objectives and strategies to assure better management of expenses and increased productivity. The examination also will consider the application of technology to improve efficiencies in administrative and academic environments.
- (2004-2005) As demographics change, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities must affirm its mission and commitment to serve underrepresented populations and maintain educational access for Minnesotans.

Internally, RCTC responded to these goals by developing strategies aimed at addressing these system-wide goals. This can be seen in the RCTC Strategic Planning Process website, stating:

“RCTC has devoted significant time and energy to develop our strategic planning processes in accordance with Malcom Baldrige guidelines. Consequently, we want to build upon and leverage these efforts. It's obvious we have a solid system and process to align the RCTC strategy throughout our institution. Going forward, we want to simply refine the current strategic planning process we have in place and maintain its integrity.”

As a part of those efforts, distance education has become integrated throughout several initiatives and is not an isolated entity. RCTC's Goal 2 for FY 2006 is “Enhance learning through improved instruction, support services, technology and facilities.” One of the strategies (2.5) is to align technology and facility improvements to academic plans. This indicates that as resources are invested by the college, they cannot be separated from the overall academic goals. As proposals are made for investments in infrastructure, training centers, support personnel, software and hardware, and capacity, they must contain strong supporting evidence that academic needs are being served. This is also evident in the early section 1.c., where the stated RCTC mission and goals include several entries for access, opportunity, and technological innovations. It is clear that online education has become a critical component within the system and institution, and therefore present throughout the planning process.



Organizational changes to accommodate online degrees and programs

Significant changes in RCTC's organizational structure have been made in order to respond to the impact and needs of distance education. As of February 2006, Teaching and Learning made permanent the Director of Educational Technology position, as well as two full-time Educational Technologists. This administrative position is responsible for the management of college distance learning issues, among other technological dimensions to learning in the next years. The Director serves on many of the critical academic planning committees, including the Academic Leadership Meeting (ALM), Distance Education/Technology Committee, Information Technology Committee, Human Resources Committee and the Student Development and Services group. Externally, this position also serves on the MnOnline Council, the MnSCU Intellectual Properties Group, and as a Peer Reviewer for the HLC/MnOnline process. Additionally, the college has identified a Distance Education Advisor, who is responsible for managing online student needs. The Advisor manages the RCTC Online website content, coordinates communications with online students and advises potential online students. The VP of Teaching and Learning has volunteered to serve as a Chief Academic Officer representative on the Minnesota Online Council.

Establishment of distance learning priorities

As a part of the pilot process for these changes, a Solve and Dissolve (SAD) group was formed in January 2005 to identify priorities for Distance Learning at RCTC. The pilot's suggestions were used to identify necessary resources and document improvements. The highest priority strategic issues identified include:

- Institutional Change Request
- Formalize Process for faculty development and class/program development in online
- Complete the Online AA and framework for future online programs
- Ability to apply for admission and file an intent to return form online
- Instructional Design services
- Requirements for students in catalog course outline
- Inventory current offerings and resources
- Ability to file the graduation application online
- Identify and resolve institutional policy barriers
- Faculty Development programs for distance learning
- Quality in courses – SAD Committee
- Offering ASAP online or contract through another college



These strategic issues were incorporated into both the Teaching and Learning strategic plans, Education Technology goals, and the action plans of the Distance Education/Technology committee. The strategies continue to serve as fundamental principles throughout the institution. This accreditation request has been managed through the Department of Educational Technology, as part of the highest priority projects.

2.b. Describe the needs analysis related to this proposed change.

This accreditation process was approached with careful consideration and viewed as a serious endeavor requiring reputable data to support it. The primary needs analysis was done using data showing the growth of online education in the following environments:

- Local online RCTC environment
- Comparison of RCTC to the national online college environment
- Comparison of RCTC to the regional online MnSCU environment
- Student needs in the online RCTC environment

Local RCTC environment

The RCTC Online Student Survey shows that there is ongoing interest in classes and programs delivered online, and that RCTC will need to meet these needs through planned strategic growth in distance education.

Comparison of RCTC to the national college environment

The Sloan Consortium published a study entitled Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States 2005 to report on the nature and extent of online education. The study is based on responses by over 1,000 colleges and universities, and the results mirror the environment at Rochester Community and Technical College.

The first similarity between the national Sloan report and RCTC data is how mainstream online courses and programs have become. The data gathered shows that 63% of schools offering undergraduate face-to-face courses also offer undergraduate courses online. The two charts below detail the penetration of (a) online courses and (b) online programs in 2004 at different levels. It is important to highlight the undergraduate levels for the baccalaureate, associates and specialized degrees offered at RCTC. The numbers for associate degree courses (77.5% - Figure 4) at undergraduate levels are compelling, as is availability of entirely online associate programs (42.8% - Figure 5). This indicates that online education



is not only impacting fringes area such as non-credit or non-degree, but has made inroads in core offerings throughout many different types of institutions. Similarly, RCTC’s online offerings include all program areas and several degree options.

	Doctoral/Research	Masters	Baccalaureate	Associates	Specialized
Undergraduate Level	64.3%	67.6%	33.9%	77.5%	31.7%
Graduate Level	78.9%	65.8%	32.2%	100.0%	58.2%
Continuing Education	74.1%	48.5%	29.1%	70.8%	26.3%

Figure 4: Fall 2004 National online course saturation

	Doctoral/Research	Masters	Baccalaureate	Associates	Specialized
Certificate Program	60.3%	40.8%	17.2%	32.2%	22.8%
Associate Program	43.9%	23.3%	25.7%	42.8%	23.0%
Bachelors Program	38.4%	34.4%	19.0%	23.1%	22.8%
Masters Program	65.7%	45.3%	25.8%	50.0%	35.0%
Doctoral Program	16.4%	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%	9.3%
Professional Program	24.7%	11.9%	11.1%	19.0%	8.4%

Figure 5: Fall 2004 National online program saturation

The second similarity between the national Sloan report and RCTC data is the statistics on faculty teaching the courses. In the earliest stages, there were concerns that growth in online delivery might come at the expense of core faculty. Even at RCTC, the technological expertise required and efforts needed to convert face-to-face courses had caused many faculty to express concern. However, the Sloan study does not support the conclusion that core faculty are not involved in delivery. In fact, quite the opposite appears to be true and online offers new opportunities to core faculty. For instance,

- Sixty-five percent of higher education institutions report that they are using primarily core faculty to teach their online courses compared to 62% that report they are using primarily core faculty to teach their face-to-face courses.
- Seventy-four percent of public colleges report that their online courses are taught by core faculty, as opposed to only 61% for their face-to-face courses.



- Except for the largest schools (15,000+ enrollment), all sized schools report an equal or greater rate of online courses being taught primarily by core faculty compared to their face-to-face courses.

This data and the chart at right show that more courses are taught online by core faculty than even face to face. This information is crucial in creating buy-in for the long-term opportunities created with distance education; dispelling the myth of hiring outside contract instructors or relying solely on adjuncts; enforcing the strategic planning of RCTC in the area of faculty development and creating opportunity for growth.

WHO TEACHES ONLINE AND FACE-TO-FACE COURSES, FALL 2004

	Face-to-face	Online
Core	61.6%	64.7%
Split	24.7%	16.4%
Adjunct	13.0%	18.1%

The third similarity between the national Sloan report and RCTC data is in forecasting future enrollment. The explosive growth of online education in the past few years has caused concern about what will happen when the rate of growth inevitably slows down. Since it has been so dramatic, forecasting enrollment has been difficult and planning based on past numbers unrealistic. The Sloan study shows that recently this growth has begun to stabilize, and slowed to a more predictable level. The years 2002-2003 saw a 22.9% growth rate, 2003-2004 was 18.2%, while 2003-2004 came in at roughly 15.4%. There are now almost 2.5 million students taking at least one course online in the U.S., and the predicted mean growth rate for fall 2005 was nearly 20%. It is noteworthy that the online enrollment growth rate is still more than ten times that projected by the National Center for Education Statistics for the general postsecondary student population. In other words, the growth rate greatly exceeds the overall growth rate in the higher education student body. This same trend has been noted at RCTC. The data below shows the number of courses within RCTC’s Instructional Management Systems (IMS) from fall semesters of 2002 to 2005. The first years showed growth in the number of total courses at more than 200% annually, eventually slowing to 25% by 2005. Online courses changed from 50% increases annually to 30% by 2005. While this level is still very healthy and impressive, the ramp-up period has now transitioned into a more reasonable rate of growth. This stabilization has allowed for more accurate yearly predications locally, without a flattening or decrease overall.



RCTC Instructional Management Systems Data

Year (Fall Term)	2002	2003	2004	2005
Total Courses	117	297	339	447
Online Courses	20	30	66	94
Total User Accounts	5123	5535	6122	6342
Instructor Accounts	248	281	317	332

Figure 6: Growth of online courses at RCTC

Avg. Yearly Growth in # of Courses	110
Average % Online classes	16.92%
Avg. Growth in # of Accounts	406
% Growth Courses 2002 to 2005	282.05%
% Growth Online 2002 to 2005	370.00%
% Growth Users 2002 to 2005	23.79%
% Growth Instruct. 2002 to 2005	33.87%

The fourth similarity between the national Sloan report and RCTC data is the overwhelming evidence that online education is becoming a part of long-term strategy for colleges. The Sloan Report states “The proportion of institutions which believe that online education is important to their long-term strategy continues to increase, growing from 48% of all institutions in 2003 to 53% in 2004 and 56% in 2005. Associate institutions show the sharpest increase over the last three years, moving from 58% to 67% to 72%.”(Figure 7) This is the case at RCTC, where online education has gone from two innovative program areas (Digital Arts and BTEC) to one integrated throughout all program areas. As shown earlier in the report, distance learning has become a strategic priority within the Teaching and Learning division, and is integral to the overall mission and goals.

ONLINE EDUCATION IS CRITICAL TO THE LONG-TERM STRATEGY - 2005

	Doctoral/Research	Masters	Baccalaureate	Associates	Specialized
Agree	52.4%	55.7%	27.7%	72.2%	46.5%
Neutral	35.8%	36.8%	37.9%	22.1%	34.8%
Disagree	11.8%	7.5%	34.5%	5.6%	18.7%

Figure 7: Online education as part of long term strategies



Comparison of RCTC to the regional MnSCU environment

While the national data provided in the Sloan report is encouraging, the same kinds of trends are seen within the MnSCU system. The dramatic increases found in 2000-2002 have slowed somewhat, and are now in the ranges found across the U.S. The chart below, provided by MnOnline, shows the number of online FYE in the system from 2002-2005. Fall of 2005 showed a 47% increase from the previous year.

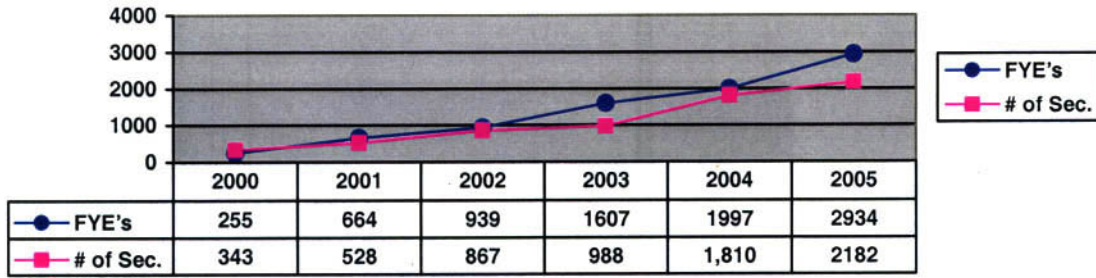


Figure 8: Growth of online FYE's in MnSCU system

Seat count mirrored the same kinds of growth levels. The following chart shows the number of seats sold in online courses, at 30,306 for an annual rate of 47% in 2005. This relates directly to the number of individuals taking at least one course online across the nation, and is expected to continue to rise.

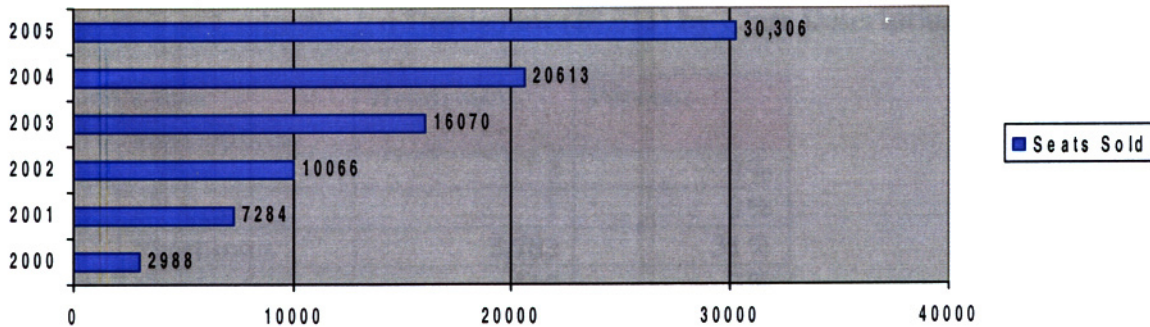


Figure 9: Growth of online seat counts in MnSCU

Finally, there is ample evidence that MnSCU continues to meet students' needs. The following chart shows that nearly 40% of the online FYE's are supported by the top five institutions for 2005. RCTC is rated as the 5th in this category, in line with their rating for campus-based courses. There is no evidence that colleges have reduced their normal campus-based deliveries in order to specialize in online delivery, or that other MnSCU campuses have suffered lower enrollments due to the growth in online delivery.



Top (5) Institutions by FYE's

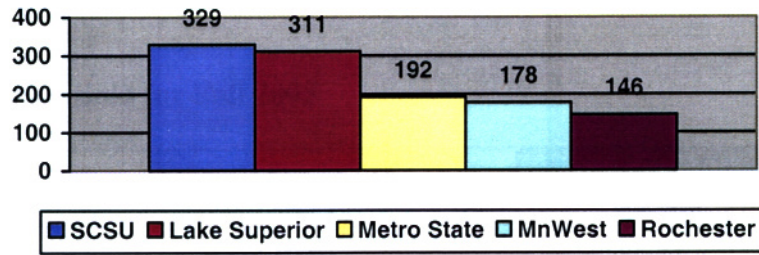
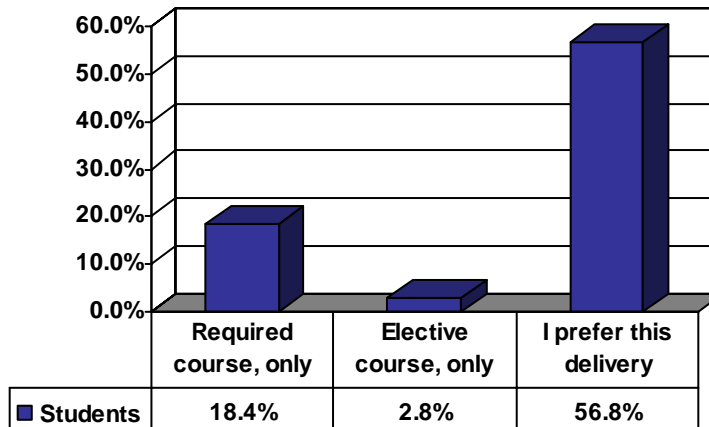


Figure 10: Top five online MNSCU institutions

Student needs in the RCTC online environment

No analysis would be complete without consideration of student needs. One of the methods used to assess student needs was the online student survey administered in 2004. One of the questions asked why students chose to enroll in an online course. Over half (56.8%) responded it was their preferred delivery method. This distinction is an important one. When given an option, many students opted for the online environment over traditional campus delivery.



2. c. Describe the involvement of various constituencies in developing this proposed change.

As addressed in earlier sections, online education has become a critical strategic priority for RCTC and therefore involves the entire institution:

- Constituencies involved
- Academic leadership
- Distance Education and Technology Committee
- RCTC MnOnline Accreditation Team
- Keeping the campus community informed

Constituencies involved

As RCTC sets its yearly goals, specific projects are identified that meet support the goals and resources are aligned to complete the necessary tasks. Accessibility to education is a critical component within all stated goals, and online education is one of the strategies RCTC uses to address that need. The mission and vision statements contain references to the importance of online education to long-term success. Components can be found within Teaching and Learning, Student Services, Finances, Information Technology and almost all academic departments. Faculty organizations (i.e. Academic Affairs and Standards Council (AASC), Minnesota State College Faculty (MSCF) Shared Governance, Distance Education and Technology Committee) and student bodies (i.e. Student Senate, Student Development/Services) regularly consider issues related to online education, and have expressed support for this initiative. Major organizational restructuring such as the creation of the Director of Educational Technology, Online Student Advisor and V.P. of Teaching and Learning service on Minnesota Online Council are examples of long-term investments supported by key decision-makers. Support for the institutional change comes from the entire campus community, and it is seen as a major milestone in accomplishing the mission.

Academic leadership

The leadership for this initiative came primarily from two areas. The first is the Teaching and Learning Leadership team, which is responsible for the oversight of all academic issues and providing recommendations. The group is chaired by the Vice President of Teaching and Learning, and includes the Deans of Teaching and Learning; Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning; Director of Library and Media Services; Director of Business and Economic Development; Faculty Development Advocate; and



the Director of Educational Technology. In the spring of 2005, this group charged the Director of Educational Technology with managing the process for online accreditation. This was done primarily to achieve Teaching and Learning strategic goals for 2005, as described earlier. Specifically, the charge was to carry this item to the Distance Education and Technology Committee in pursuit of achieving one of the primary goals identified by the group. A work-team consisting of individuals from all areas of the college (faculty, staff and students) was formed to carry out the specific tasks. The Teaching and Learning group has maintained an ongoing role in assessing progress, providing resources as needed and ensuring the involvement of the entire campus community. This has been done through use of an accreditation cost center budget for expenses, regular updates in meetings, invitations to Program Leader and Division Coordinator sessions, and involvement in report editing and approval.

Distance Education and Technology Committee

The Distance Education and Technology Committee is a subcommittee of Teaching and Learning, and responsible for developing recommendations regarding distance learning. The committee is co-chaired by an online faculty member and the Director of Educational Technology. Administrative membership includes the V.P. of Teaching and Learning, V.P. of Student Development Services, Dean of General Education and the Chief Information Officer. Faculty are represented through the Faculty Development Advocate and individuals from disciplines as diverse as English, Business Administrative Technology, Computer Science, Speech, and Accounting. Student perspectives are represented by a Student Senate member, and staff includes an Educational Technologist and Librarian. This committee has confirmed online delivery of an AA degree as a high priority in strategic plans, and focuses on related topics throughout the year. Their role in the process has been to provide advice and expertise in the accreditation process, and to maintain vigilance to ensure deadlines are met.

RCTC MnOnline Accreditation Team

The RCTC MnOnline Accreditation Team was formed once a formal application was made to MnOnline/HLC, and following a visit the MnSCU Assessment & Effectiveness Director in the summer of 2005. College faculty, administration and staff were invited to and attended the discussion. The informational meeting was designed to explain the accreditation process, provide specific timelines, and advice on proceeding with implementation. This led to the formation of the work team responsible for data gathering and report generation – known as the RCTC Online Accreditation Team. The work team includes faculty from Computer Science, Sociology, Math and Business Administrative Technology. The Dean of General Education and Director of Educational Technology serve as administrative



representatives, and the Online Student Advisor serves as staff representative. Other individuals are directly involved as required, such as Assessment Committee chairs, Library and Media Services personnel, Educational Technologists, Student Senators, Chief Financial Officer and the Chief of Strategic Operations. This team meets weekly, and will continue to manage the application process until completion.

Keeping the campus community informed

Several presentations to the campus community have been made in order to communicate progress and achievements. The chair of the MnOnline Accreditation Team has been invited to multiple Program Leaders/Division Coordinators meetings. All disciplines of the college are represented at these sessions attended by 35 leaders of academic departments. A regular progress report is being published in the campus newsletter the College Crossings. This publication is a weekly newsletter published on Mondays during the academic year to let faculty, staff and administrators know what's happening on campus. The chair of the Academic Affairs and Standards Committee (AASC) has invited the Accreditation Team chair to attend a spring meeting in order to provide background details on the process and possible implications. The issue was also discussed at the Assessment of Student Learning Committee meetings. The Presidents Council and Cabinet members have been updated through Teaching and Learning officers. There is also a plan to seek input from the entire campus community on the draft of this report, and share all data gathered in the electronic online resource room in March. Final preparations for the Peer Review visit include an April run-through session, and possible invitations to other MNSCU campuses that have successfully completed their accreditation processes. Each of these informational sharing techniques is designed to provide vehicles of communication for the institutional change request proposal, and build on the widespread support of the campus community.

