Recommendation from Work Team: Faculty Preparedness for Online/Hybrid Teaching/Learning

Step 1: Problem/Issue
Valencia College currently does not have a consistent process for qualifying faculty (tenured, tenure-track, annual contract and adjunct) to instruct in an online or hybrid environment; similarly there is no process to ensure high quality standards in course design. Student demand for distance learning has increased over the last decade, pushing departments to find faculty to teach classes, often with very little notice. Some faculty members are required by their deans to attend faculty development courses, while others are required to teach online or hybrid courses with little or no notice. The main concerns uncovered by the faculty preparedness team are consistency of the student experience and providing faculty development in instructional practices that increase student success and align with the Essential Competencies of a Valencia Educator. According to research (Berge) these practices include managerial, social, pedagogical and technological areas that will increase student success.

Step 2: Proposed Solutions

Note: In the absence of a precise definition for “hybrid course”, we are recommending solutions for online and hybrid teaching preparation be the same at this time. When the term “hybrid course” is more clearly defined, we recommend revisiting the proposed preparation program and creating a hybrid teaching preparation program that would specifically address the unique nature of hybrid teaching and learning.

We recommend a process be created to prepare faculty to teach online and hybrid courses. This process will be phased in over time in concert with the other online learning plan work teams.

Solution Guidelines

- Faculty Preparedness includes both:
  - **Faculty Development** defined as courses and programs that support faculty members in developing a framework of best practice strategies for engaging, instructing, supporting and communicating with students in the online environment. The effective online instructor has skills to facilitate course content and resources in the online learning environment so students successfully meet learning outcomes. This unique set of facilitation skills includes managerial, social, pedagogical, and technological expertise not specifically addressed in traditional Faculty Development courses.
Online Course Design & Development defined as the planning, creating and/or implementing pedagogy, technical tools and course content using Valencia best practices that enhance successful online student learning. Course design and development could include interactive and multimedia resources, presentation software, technology tools for formative and summative assessment, and curriculum experiences to improve online student learning.

We propose a Faculty Institute for Online Instruction with a program for online (and in the future hybrid) training. The program would be composed of a Three Tiered Preparedness System with faculty development in these levels:

- **Tier 1**: Online/Hybrid Facilitation (Apprentice): The first tier, with a primary focus on faculty development, would be required for faculty teaching online/hybrid courses for the first time at Valencia. Faculty at this level will learn to use instructional and technical tools, employ guidelines and follow best practices modeled in a master course template provided to faculty. Faculty members would be trained through this program, before being assigned to facilitate an existing master course template. If no master course template is available, faculty would need to complete both tier one and two.

  **Tier 1 Criteria**
  - Faculty would apply to be accepted to apprentice certification program
  - Deans/program chairs would recommend faculty to the program
  - A committee would review applications and accept faculty to the program each semester (Fall, Spring, Summer)
  - To demonstrate Tier 1 success, faculty would need to complete development courses for online facilitation skills in the managerial, social, pedagogical and technological areas.

- **Tier 2**: Online/Hybrid Course Design/Development (Architect): The second tier, with a primary focus on course development, includes working with instructional designers, experienced online instructors, and/or peer mentor to build an engaging, online community and to review the course through administrative evaluation or Quality Matters review. Evaluation of course design may include course structure, content organization and usability, instructor presence, learning community, and assessment. Program faculty will be trained to design and create online courses while developing a course that would be reviewed using criteria from QM and other quality standards.

  **Tier 2 Criteria**
  - Completion of Tier 1 program or previous completion of Digital Professor Certification
  - Faculty would apply to be accepted to architect certification program—we expect 25-30 faculty would be accepted per semester; however,
the numbers could increase based on dean/program needs for training.

- A committee would review applications and accept faculty to the program each semester (Fall, Spring, Summer)
- Deans/Program chairs would recommend faculty to this level based on
  - Number of semesters/terms teaching online at Valencia (at least 4 semesters/terms)
  - Review of online pedagogy and alignment to successfully meet course learning outcomes
  - Review of online social interaction and feedback from SFI for online classes in the last 2 semesters/terms
  - Review of online managerial and technical responsibilities
  - Appropriate certifications for online instruction from other institutions

- To demonstrate Tier 2 success, faculty would need to complete development courses for online facilitation skills in the managerial, social, pedagogical and technological areas. Additionally, faculty would need to complete development work in course design and develop a course that meets quality standards.

*Waiver of both tiers is based on Dean and committee approval through application and review of course using Rubric for Online Competencies.

**Tier 3** - Online/Hybrid Faculty Leadership Experts (Ace): The third tier limited access program, with a primary focus on successful practices, offers faculty who successfully conceptualize, design, and deliver an online course ways to mentor, research and/or lead colleagues. This tier covers advanced topics that enhance online design and delivery. At this level, faculty members seek out best practices by engaging in reflection, pedagogical inquiry, research, mentoring and/or problem solving. Annual continuing education (in the areas of leadership, facilitation, mentoring, and/or research) would need to be completed.

**Tier 3 Criteria**

- Completion of Tier 2 or waiver by committee and dean approval
- Recommendation by dean/program chair
  - Number of semesters teaching online (at least 8 semesters)
- Faculty would apply to be accepted to the aces certification program-10-20 faculty would be accepted per semester
- Expressed interest in action research for online instruction or facilitation of faculty development courses
- Course created during Tier 2 development meets standards in a QM review and is subsequently shared for faculty use in Valencia courses.
Tier Guidelines

Each tier will focus on the four aspects of online facilitation, appropriate to the tier (using Z.L. Berge’s model):

- Managerial- This role involves organizational; procedural; administrative responsibilities.
- Social- This role involves promoting human relationships, developing class cohesiveness, maintaining the group as a unit.
- Technical- This role involves making participants comfortable with the system and the software, while technology works to support learning.
- Pedagogy- This role involves the duties of the educational facilitator to create pathways for students to meet learning outcomes.

☐ For faculty new to Valencia College, there could be an alternate approval process for the first two tiers based on a faculty member’s success and work products at a prior institution.

☐ All Valencia faculty members who have been successfully teaching online classes at Valencia before Fall 2016 (or whenever this program is put into place) could be “grandfathered” through the first and or second tier.

☐ “Success” in this context will be determined by the dean, discipline/program chair, and/or faculty panel using the Rubric for Online Competencies (ROC).

☐ All Valencia faculty members who have been facilitating online teaching/learning programs at Valencia, before the preparedness program is initiated, could be "grandfathered" into tier three, based on a review of their course(s) with the Rubric for Online Competencies (ROC), by the dean, discipline/program chair, and/or faculty panel.

☐ All faculty members should have at least one full semester in which to prepare and take faculty development (pedagogy) to teach an online course they have never taught before, if a master course template is available. If no master template is available, two full semesters will be needed to prepare, to include faculty development and course design development.

☐ All faculty members will receive PD hours for completion of development opportunities in each tier.

☐ All faculty members who complete Tier 2 and contribute their course (to be used as a Valencia master template course), which has met QM standards, will receive compensation in the form of a stipend.
We recommend seeking funds (grants, distance learning fee, annual budget, etc.) to support the cost of faculty preparation.

**Step 3: Hypothesis/Working Theory (We believe that...)**

Each point of our working theory addresses one of the proposed solutions:

**Preparation**
- Design/development of online/hybrid courses requires a more robust level of training than does facilitation.
- Faculty must be given adequate time to prepare, both faculty development and course design and development, for courses. Access should not be at the expense of quality, ever.
- Preparation to teach online/hybrid courses is a priority for Valencia as an institution and in order to confirm this value and ensure that faculty give training their full attention, they should be compensated.
- Quality faculty development programs will incur a cost, and consistent funding is needed to cover these costs (such as the Florida College System’s Distance Learning Fee, grants, etc.)

**Faculty**
- The four roles, as defined in the Berge model, can be addressed individually and/or taken together. The roles and facilitation skills, when practiced together, will provide for a well-rounded online/hybrid instructor.
- Faculty members who have taught online/hybrid at other institutions may already have much of the knowledge they need in order to teach online/hybrid courses, but should learn about Valencia’s policies, procedures and technologies.
- Faculty members who will be training other online/hybrid faculty need to have the very best skills and training in order to do so.

**Step 4: Evidence (Our key research/evidence is...)**

The Distance Learning Report (Diane Meiller and Associates) provided us with a problem statement addressing the inconsistencies regarding preparation of faculty members teaching online for the first time. Specifically, the report observes that some faculty are required to prepare via rigorous programs such as Digital Professor, while others are not required to prepare at all.
Articles that we have shared as a committee are:

Virginia’s Community Colleges “Top – Idol – Model” programs:  
https://sites.google.com/a/email.vccs.edu/top/course-descriptions

The Role of the Online Instructor/Facilitator by Zane L. Berge, Ph.D  
http://www.cordonline.net/mntutorial2/module_2/Reading%202-1%20instructor%20role.pdf

Various samples of existing online teaching/learning programs were researched.

Results of two surveys we administered:
- Faculty survey on faculty preparedness for online/hybrid teaching/learning
- Dean/Chair survey on faculty preparedness for online/hybrid teaching/learning

**Step 5: Goals/Expected Outcomes (We expect that…)**

- Faculty members will be adequately prepared to teach online and hybrid courses before being required to do so at three levels.
  - Tier One prepares a faculty member to facilitate a course given an existing course template.
  - Tier Two prepares a faculty member to execute course design and develop of an online/hybrid course, meeting Quality Matters standards, with the support of an instructional designer.
  - Tier Three completion acknowledges a faculty member’s course(s) to have met QM standards and the Rubric for Online Competencies criteria. The faculty member can design and develop an online/hybrid course with minimal instructional support, engage in successful practice reflection, practice pedagogical inquiry, research, mentoring and/or to facilitate training programs for online/hybrid faculty.

- Faculty members will have a clear picture of the requirements for online and hybrid development and express more confidence in their online facilitation skills.

- The success gap between onsite and online courses will close.

- There will be a reduction in the online withdrawal rate and increased satisfaction rates in the SFI for online courses.
Step 6: Test and Metric

An assessment plan will be created in collaboration with Valencia’s Institutional Assessment Office to measure expected outcomes.

To verify we have reached the expected outcomes, we recommend the college engage a consultant to review our program and provide feedback.

We may also distribute surveys to engage faculty perception of preparedness and dean perception of preparedness.

Step 7: Resources (To succeed, we need...)

- A small, agile, and experienced committee to create the program led by a faculty development leader. Committee members would need to commit to a 3 year term.
- A year to develop the program. We recommend initial offerings for Fall 2016 or Fall 2017, depending when funds are made available.
- Compensation for course builders if this work is not part of their defined workload.
- Financial resources to complete the work in the form of grants, distance learning fees, etc.

Budgetary Implications

- Approximately 64 new faculty members teach online or hybrid classes for the first time each semester (192 annually). We recommend that Tier 1 training be approximately 20 hours for which faculty would receive professional development hours. A new faculty member, hired but not yet on a teaching contract, would be able to begin this program in the semester prior to beginning their position and would be compensated with a stipend according to the schedule currently being developed.

- Annually, we estimate that approximately 75-90 faculty members will receive Tier 2 training during the first three years. We recommend that Tier 2 training be approximately 30-40 hours for which faculty would receive professional development hours. In addition, each faculty member who creates an approved template at the completion of his or her Tier 2 training would receive a $1,821 stipend if the course meets Quality Matters standards and is offered to the college for instruction use. Each QM review would incur a cost of $550-$700, itemized as follows:
  - $250 for the QM review chair
  - $150 for each of the other two reviewers for a total of $300
- $150 if the review requires revision and a second review by the review chair

- We estimate that approximately 10-20 faculty members will receive Tier 3 training each year once it is available. We recommend that Tier 3 training be approximately 10-20 hours for which faculty would receive professional development hours for completion of development opportunities.

- Tier 3 will require a regular renewal each year for which Aces would receive faculty development hours.

- To support the increased faculty development, course design and course template needs, additional staff are recommended for the program: five additional full-time Faculty Developer/Instructional Designers, two multimedia specialists and an Implementation Coordinator. Additional budget will also be requested to provide accessibility/captioning resources for all courses, in coordination with the Accessibility Advisory Group.