

## **ThinkLink: UNC System-Wide Jam on Quality of Online Instruction**

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### **Abstract**

An online ThinkLink, reinventing the concept of JAMS offered worldwide by IBM Corporation, was conducted by the Office of Academic Outreach at East Carolina University on April 18th and 19th, 2007. The event was co-sponsored by the UNC GA Office of the President, and the University of North Carolina Teaching and Learning with Technology Collaborative. Letters of support were provided by UNC System Provosts. 397 faculty/staff from the UNC System universities participated in active dialogue on three threads: (1) Support Needed to Teach Quality DE Courses, (2) Ingredients Necessary for Quality in DE Courses, and (3) Assessment of Quality in DE Courses. Faculty, staff, and graduate student facilitators were responsible for keeping the discussions on topic. Seventeen faculty/staff members served as Text Analysts. Data was analyzed by Technology Advancement Center and affiliates and used to generate 52 individual text analysis reports. Text analysis software was used to refine summary reports.

FINAL REPORT

**UNC THINKLINK TEXT ANALYSIS**

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## I. Study Report

This study provided information on the results of the recent ThinkLink state-wide Jam. In the fall of 2007, East Carolina University held its initial ThinkLink Jam. Based on IBM's successful Jams, such as World Jam, Habitat Jam, and Innovation Jam, the ThinkLink Jam was attended by 15 universities and employees of the University of North Carolina (UNC) system. The purpose of ThinkLink was to provide a state-wide platform for discussions about teaching and learning with technology.

- Platform selection: The first consideration was how to provide an environment that would support a state-wide dialog. Important criteria for selection were that it had easy access and was not too difficult to set up and configure. The choice was phpBB because it was open source and based on LAMP software.
- Discussion questions: The discussion questions were selected after a review of literature that focused on the concerns associated with online instruction. The discussion was held on 2 days from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Participants logged into the discussion board and created a password. Once logged in, the participants were able visit any discussion for as many times as they chose. The topics were as follows: (a) Support Needed to Teach Online Quality Online/Distance Education (DE), Assessment of Quality in Online/DE, and Ingredients Necessary for Quality in Online/DE.
- Method of analysis: The analysis of the discussion boards was performed by trained individuals using text analyst software. The initial analysis provided for two text analysts for each discussion, for a total of six text analysts on-call for the entire time the discussion boards were available. Data for each discussion were extracted twice per session, and the data was analyzed by hand. The data was then sent to Megaputer Text Analyst software to identify key words and phrases. The results of the Megaputer Text Analyst software were returned to the analysts, who then used the key words and phrases to locate data that was either significant or similar to the results of many of the participants. Their conclusions are found in Section III of this report.

The following sections provide information from the text analysis for UNC System-Wide Participation, Comprehensive Report for all Institutions by Thread, and Comprehensive Reports for all Threads by Institution. For more information about ThinkLink, please contact Chris Weaver ([weaverch@ecu.edu](mailto:weaverch@ecu.edu)).

## II. UNC System-Wide Participation

Each of the 15 UNC campuses participated in the first ThinkLink on the quality of DE. There were 397 total participants. One hundred thirty-six or 34% of the participants provided comments associated with threads on the ThinkLink discussion board; 261 of those who registered did not comment. Data on the number of registered users and participants is shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Data on Number of Registered Users and Respondents

University	Registered Users	Participants	Percentage (Users/ Respondents)
East Carolina	162	72	44%
NC Central	30	10	33%
UNC Pembroke	25	8	32%
Appalachian State	25	4	16%
UNC Chapel Hill	19	5	26%
NC A&T	18	7	39%
NC State	18	2	11%
Western Carolina	17	3	18%
UNC Charlotte	16	1	6%
UNC Greensboro	15	6	40%
UNC Wilmington	14	3	21%
Elizabeth City State	10	7	70%
Fayetteville State	8	4	50%
UNC Asheville	7	1	14%
Winston-Salem State	8	0	0%
UNC General Administration	5	3	60%

### III. Comprehensive Report for all Institutions by Thread

#### A. SUMMARY REPORT FOR THREAD 1

##### THREAD 1: *Support Needed to Teach Quality Online/DE Courses*

##### Buy-in From Senior Administration is Critical

Participants stated that support from senior administration is critical to the success of DE courses and programs. However, it was generally agreed that the responsibility for providing a quality DE course rests primarily with the faculty and support staff. Motivation to excel can be provided through administrative recognition and approval. Approaches suggested for enhancing support ranged from encouraging administrators to teach online to providing improved performance data and better information on instructional delivery methods and learning outcomes. Testimonials from students and media coverage are most helpful. Forums and demonstration projects may be used to showcase classes and learners. Fireside chats can be provided with students discussing their experiences and making recommendations.

##### Types of Support

It was agreed that DE teaching requires more support than what is required for face-to-face classes. Some participants discussed multidimensional levels of support in areas including content delivery, improved interaction and communication, instructional methods, course organization, service to students ranging from one to many, and assessment of learning outcomes. Faculty

stipends were discussed as a mechanism to enhance quality. Some participants indicated that this was important because of increased amounts of necessary time. Most suggested that other methods of support, such as providing release time, graduate assistants, technical assistance and training, and recognition were also important.

### Methods for Strengthening Support

Participants felt that DE offerings can be significantly improved with increased levels of interest from the administration. It was suggested that a short demonstration course on online learning be provided, with a select group of administrators invited to participate as both students and instructors. The course could cover the features of online learning offered by the campuses and review modules from current online courses. It was agreed that this approach would give faculty an opportunity to demonstrate features and that administrators could become involved instructing others about DE teaching and learning on their own campuses. A senior administrator who is an advocate for online learning might be the “lead instructor.” The result could be that a group of administrators or senior faculty wanting to discuss online learning could scale the system-wide short course out to many groups statewide. The course might be offered to Board of Governors members, legislators, and others. Several participants from ECU stated that they had developed such a course and would like to work with others on expanding it. Several administrators responded to this idea, indicating that it is difficult to convey to others what goes on in an online course. Such a short course might be very helpful. Conversation also addressed the need for case studies and real-life vignettes from DE learners, many of whom are unable to attend resident campuses.

### Time is Required for DE Teaching

There was general consensus that DE teaching requires more time than face-to-face instruction. Time was recognized as a major factor influencing quality. Anecdotal evidence suggests 18 hours of instruction needed for one effective hour of online delivery.

(<http://www.designingforlearning.info/services/writing/dlmay.htm>). One participant indicated a major corporation states that 1 hour of effective training takes an average of 20 hours of preparation for four developers (80 hours). An exciting dialogue ensued on the impact of DE teaching on research and tenure. There was a great deal of concern over how allowances can be made for faculty who must devote increased amounts of time for DE teaching, thereby taking away from time spent on research, service, and publications. Concerns were expressed about whether faculty members teaching online are jeopardizing their chances for tenure. Some also asked that UNC address standards for teaching an online class that would result in a formula generating a stipend, reassigned time, technical support, and/or student help. It was recognized that all universities do not provide the same level of support. Some indicated that the UNC General Administration (GA) could be very helpful in establishing and/or endorsing standards for expectations that are reasonable and fair to all UNC instructors and students. A great deal of discussion dealt with the impact of stipends for faculty to encourage involvement and improved quality. There were differing views on this; most seemed to feel that the financial incentive was a good motivator, but

that other levels of support were also needed. Other levels of support ranged from graduate assistants to support DE instruction based on class size to reducing the teaching load for a total course makeover every few years. Some suggested that participation in conferences without presenting papers would be helpful to learn new instructional methods and technology. Others indicated support for this idea, suggesting that the faculty member be required to present what was learned to departmental or college faculty. It was also pointed out that support was needed to conduct research, testing, and identification of new technology and software for use by DE instructors. A consortium to share discoveries system-wide would be most helpful. There was some discussion about the tuition rate for DE offerings, both in-state and out-of-state. Some felt that the rates for on-campus and online instruction should be the same, thereby enabling increased levels of funding for DE. Others questioned why virtual campus tuition for out-of-state is as high as on-campus, when no physical facilities are provided.

## B. SUMMARY REPORT FOR THREAD 2

### THREAD 2: *Ingredients Necessary for Quality Online/DE Courses*

#### Types of Communication

It was learned from the posting that communication is an important ingredient for teaching a quality online/DE course. It was mentioned that there are two effective forms of communication: synchronous and asynchronous. They both have pluses and are good for teaching online. Synchronous communication provides real-time interaction but does not always work for everyone. Asynchronous communication allows individuals to communicate more freely because there is no set time to meet. Participants felt that prompt feedback and social interaction are two key components to a quality DE course. Tools that were mentioned to improve interaction included discussion forums, text chats, video chats, e-mail, phone, video conferencing, virtual rooms, text messaging, wikis, blogs, podcasting, and RSS feeds. Of the ones listed, discussion forums, text chats, and e-mail were more frequently mentioned by the individual that participated in this event. That being said, there was a lot of discussion around the Centra tool, which enables live conferencing with the ability for all participants to share presentations and chat on the side. This tool also has the ability to record the session for those that could not attend and for those that wish to review what was discussed, incorporating both synchronous and asynchronous communication. Other tools and course management systems were mentioned by participants as an ingredient for online teaching. It was also noted that there should be multiple forms of assessments in online courses.

#### Student Involvement

It was agreed by the participants that getting the students involved in the activities is a very important ingredient in putting together a quality online/DE course. Participants felt that by giving students the ability to select topics for projects and using real-world examples would keep them more interested in their assignments, thus creating social interaction between students. Some participants felt that it was better for students to be able to apply what they have learned in the course to the exam instead of just memorizing facts for the exam.

### How should online/DE classes be taught?

There was discussion on who should teach online/DE courses. Some participants felt that these courses should only be taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty; however, one individual pointed out that his/her best online faculty was a non-tenure-track instructor and another mentioned that he/she had been around many non-tenure faculty that did a great job teaching a DE course. It was also noted that some faculty lack technical know-how, referring to the technology that is available. One participant pointed out that their university requires new faculty teaching online to attend seminars covering procedures, best practices, and tools that could be used. Others felt that workshops and training should be made available to faculty. There were mixed feelings on how to ensure quality in DE courses. One participant felt that GA should approve courses before they are taught; another felt that GA was not the appropriate place for course evaluation. One participant felt that the best way to show a faculty member how to teach a DE course is to have the faculty participate as a student.

### C. SUMMARY REPORT FOR THREAD 3

#### *THREAD 3 – Assessment of Quality in Online/DE Courses—Standardization*

Strict standardization limits the creativity of the instructor. Perhaps the answer is standardization by degrees. There is a certain amount of standardization in a face-to-face course, and students have an idea of what to expect. So, a level of standardization that isn't prohibitive to relatively straightforward navigation of the course for students or relative flexibility in instructional design for teachers seems a good middle ground. An assessment tool for the evaluation of online instruction should include indicators of the presence of key components, and this can be verified by anyone. Developing a Course Design and Preteaching Checklist with issues to consider (e.g., navigation issues, policy issues, pedagogy issues) that are unique to DE (and perhaps discipline specific?) will help to improve the wheel rather than reinvent it. It would not just be a tutorial in “how” the platform works, but rather “best practices” with lots of sample course Web sites to visit.

#### Assessment

It does seem clear that there are two aspects to be evaluated. The technical (electronic layout, functionality) and pedagogy (teaching practices) are valid areas to analyze in detail. Perhaps the system should look at a self-evaluation tool that would lead a faculty member through the evaluation process and make recommendations for improvement. There are plenty of examples of existing standards and assessment guides to consider, including the following: <http://www.waol.org/info/resources/facultyResources/standards.asp> This document shows how best practices can be embedded in statewide practices for teaching and learning online. There is a section on evaluation and assessment as well. There is also the Quality Matters rubric for peer review at <http://www.esac.org/fdi/rubric/finalsurvey/demorubric.asp>, and a site from MIT offers some ideas on how to assess effective practices at [http://sloan-c.org/effective/details3.asp?LE\\_ID=49](http://sloan-c.org/effective/details3.asp?LE_ID=49).

## Methods

The key is not using the technology or the media types to push curriculum, but to allow the curriculum and the learners to drive the technology selected for use. Designing the online environment in a manner that allows students multiple options for learning is essential to matching their learner styles. There should be minimum requirements in online courses, such as a syllabus button, so that all students know immediately where to find the syllabus and some sort of course calendar button, so that students can see at a glance what assignments are due and when. An online DE faculty lounge would be a great place to get informal and immediate feedback from a community of online peers regarding problems that emerge during a course and new approaches to try. One way to test student learning and try to ensure equivalent quality across all courses would be to administer pre- and post-tests in every course using instruments developed by a department appropriate for that course to see if students have acquired the desired knowledge/skills/mastery. Another suggestion is the idea of a mid-semester formative evaluation. Will the NC portal push us to do this at some point?

## Barriers to valid assessment of online quality

Evaluators should be those who have experience teaching online, who have positive evaluations from students concerning the structure and the learning environment of their online courses, and who demonstrate best practices in their online classes. Reviewers must definitely understand the complexity of online teaching. We seem to take it for granted that face-to-face (F2F) courses have achieved a certain consistent level of quality, and from this discussion we seem to desire to apply more exacting standards or scrutiny to DE courses, but the current formal assessments for traditional courses do not necessarily ensure consistent quality.

### D. MEGA-POSTING OF ALL THREADS

The ThinkLink discussion contained the following three threads:

1. *Support Needed to Teach Quality Online/DE Courses*
2. *Ingredients Necessary for Quality Online/DE Courses*
3. *Assessment of Quality in Online/DE Courses—Standardization*

To assess the information from these three sessions, content from the three threads was combined to determine what “topics” surfaced repeatedly in the discussions. By looking at the *semantic associations* that occurred most often in the data, we were able to determine which relationships were most important to our audience. In addition, bulleted information was combined and analyzed in the same manner to determine consistency between the complete text of the discussions and the extracts our analysts considered important.

We considered these semantic relationships clusters of data signifying the importance of the relationship. The purpose for analyzing the mega report was to look at the overlaps in the “clusters” of information from each report as well as to further justify the importance of the relationships which surfaced.

We found the following:

1. The word *student* had a semantic weight of 99 (a measure of the probability that this concept is important in the text).
2. Student was linked to online (68) and was also linked through online to *DE* (46), *faculty* (65), and *quality* (55).

These were the most important relationships. When we analyzed the bullets as a “backup,” we added information about *discussion* which was associated with *student* at a weight of 20. Otherwise, the complete text and bulleted information was consistent. Thus, we might conclude that conversations about *DE* conducted online had a great deal to do with *students* and *faculty*. They also concentrated on the *quality* of the relationship between *students* and *faculty* based on online *discussions* or conversations.

Several terms and/or *buzzwords* stand out:

1. Communication—Frequent two-way communication between faculty and students is very important and occurs in all three threads over the 2-day period. Also, communication between students and communication with their professors/faculty members using online tools such as discussion boards, e-mails or other communication tools are important avenues.
2. Access/process/evaluate—Plans for online courses should make use of multiple ways for students to “access, process, and evaluate” the course content. These concepts also link to the communication factor which was so prevalent in threads 1 and 3 above.
3. Timeliness and Frequency—On-time and frequent communication is also consistent with threads 1 and 3.
4. Quality—The issue of quality occurred in all three threads and in all sessions whether or not it should have formally been linked to thread 3 above. Quality consisted of:
  - a. *Frequent and timely communications* between faculty and student.
  - b. *Clear and concise expectations*, policies and procedures.
  - c. *Stated standards for each module* so that students could see the expectations for each portion of the course.
  - d. *Access* to the appropriate tools for students to build knowledge.
  - e. *Process* for building knowledge—a clear pathway.
  - f. *Evaluation or assessments* throughout the course that provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate that they have mastered the material.
  - g. *Student rubrics* to help students know how they are being assessed.
5. Support—DE requires a full spectrum of support for faculty, students, and technology. It also requires students and teachers with the knowledge and ability to work with online materials and media. Both students and teachers need to be trained in how to administer and/or use the tools required for the DE courses. Student and faculty online training courses

are important for this purpose. Support from instructional aids must be provided for faculty who are designing DE courses.

#### **IV. Comprehensive Reports for all Threads by Institution**

##### **A. Appalachian State University (ASU)**

###### Thread 1 – ASU

###### TIME NEEDED

There was some discussion about approaches for providing more time to prepare DE classes. Some participants felt that payment of a stipend for teaching would be the major factor that would drive faculty to set aside time; making this funding available would be helpful to expand their research and consulting activities. Others stated that providing a stipend would help to buy time necessary to devote to DE. Participants felt that adding more responsibilities would result in deterioration of quality and less time spent on each class.

###### WHICH UNIVERSITIES OFFER DE

There was some discussion that not all universities should offer DE courses and programs. The recommendation was that two or three universities should be designated as DE schools in the UNC system. This would be similar in principle to developing specialized entities, such as the UNC School of the Arts or School of Science and Math. It was then suggested that money generated would go directly to the departments offering the programs for use in improving the programs that are effectively serving our citizens.

###### Thread 2 – ASU

Provide them with a multi-interactive distance education environment with reactive technology that encourages but does not require students to participate in discussions. This sharpens the discussion interaction component of students.

###### Thread 3 – ASU

###### RUBRICS FOR EVALUATING ONLINE COURSES:

Does anyone currently have rubrics that are being used for evaluation of online courses? Examples of existing standards and assessment guides to consider are as follows:

1. Shows how best practices can be embedded in statewide practices for teaching and learning online. There is a section on evaluation and assessment as well. See:  
<http://www.waol.org/info/resources/facultyResources/standards.asp>
2. Quality Matters rubric for peer review. See:  
<http://www.esac.org/fdi/rubric/finalsurvey/demorubric.asp>.
3. Site from MIT offers some ideas on how to assess effective practices. See:  
[http://sloan-c.org/effective/details3.asp?LE\\_ID=49](http://sloan-c.org/effective/details3.asp?LE_ID=49).

## **B. East Carolina University (ECU)**

### Thread 1 – ECU

#### ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

There was a great deal of discussion on the importance of support for DE by senior administration at the department, college, and university levels. One participant suggested that administrators be encouraged to teach a DE class every few years to experience what it is like. Others felt that the administration needs constant education regarding online pedagogy, the technology enabling online content delivery, and the expertise that technology staff and faculty must have to support these environments. There was a general agreement among participants that they would like to see faculty and staff establish a consortium addressing the critical goal of “helping the upper administration to appreciate more fully the promise of DE/online learning.”

It was a consistent theme that faculty want verification of support from upper administration—not just verbal statements that they believe in DE.

#### ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY

Some participants felt that the connection between the student, instructor, and institution is lacking in a DE environment. Others expressed that their DE students are excited that even though they are taking an online class, they get to interact with their fellow students and learn from their experiences and viewpoints. Some faculty expressed that while many of their students were new to DE, by the semester's end, they are typically amazed at how connected they have been.

#### SUPPORT FROM IT CONSULTANTS

There was some discussion on the importance of sustaining an interdisciplinary relationship between faculty and technology staff to help ensure that the administration understands the value of each partner in the development and delivery of online instruction. Technology consultants help to bring new ideas and best practices to the faculty that can be integrated into DE classes. Some expressed that online education should address the same issues as education in real-life settings as well as the issues concerning technology. The discussion emphasized what was believed to be one of the major goals of online education—to give DE students as many of the same resources to learn with as the students that are on campus. DE requires a full spectrum of support for students, faculty, and technology. Both faculty and students need to be trained to use the DE delivery system.

#### DE JEOPARDIZING TENURE

There was a great deal of discussion of the impact of DE teaching on tenure. It was generally agreed that DE teaching requires more work for planning and execution than on-campus teaching. This time was believed to take away from the time needed by non-tenured faculty for research and publishing, thereby jeopardizing their chances for tenure. Several participants stated that there were not many options for non-tenured faculty if their chair, dean, or provost isn't

supportive of DE teaching. One expressed the belief that once tenure is received, this is no longer a constraint to quality teaching and productivity. Another participant stated that this is one area where, if the university believes in the concept of DE and its role in the university's strategic plan, there should be standards established that will help ensure that non-tenured faculty are not negatively impacted by being part of the DE movement. It was recognized that teaching effectively in a DE environment (while rewarding) does require substantial effort.

#### FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

It was felt that with active faculty involvement motivated by stipends, the instruction can be equal to, and in some cases better than, F2F instruction. “Fortunately, ECU our university has been on the front edge for DE instruction.” Participants generally agreed that financial incentives are necessary.

#### STANDARDIZED CRITERIA

Discussion dealt with the need for standardized criteria that could be applied to annual evaluations commensurate with the effort required by DE. One participant stated that he/she would like to see more recognition available at the university level, with standards for incorporating DE teaching into annual evaluations and progress toward tenure. It was also felt that there is a need for support to provide a course release, allowing faculty to occasionally completely overhaul an existing course.

#### Thread 2 – ECU

#### MAKE IT REAL WORLD

Faculty should apply assignments to real-world applications or work situations that students are currently experiencing to make the experience more relevant. This will encourage students to become active learners. Problem-based, case-based, and inquiry-based strategies that are authentic and use real-world examples are approaches to achieving critical thinking as a student outcome.

#### TECHNOLOGY

Ease of navigation is important. Technology must be used in a way that will stimulate students' interest and challenge them. Technology used in a responsible manner becomes transparent to the environment. Centra technology is mentioned often as being a positive tool. “I have used Camtasia and found it to be a quick method of ‘voice-overing’ PowerPoint presentations.” For faculty, the technology used should be intuitive. “I don't have time to do something with a course that I need to change at least every year. But I Google my topics and find additional materials that are more sophisticated.”

#### TIMING AND COMMUNICATION

“Timing may need to be asynchronous. ECU offers various times to accommodate student participation, and we facilitate the discussions. In our curriculum, we use

a variety of asynchronous and synchronous modalities to engage students. Students should be broken into small, non-mediated groups for concentrated team interactions with specific tasks as the goal. This really serves to benefit all students because chats can sometimes move rapidly, and this places the discussion in context. It makes students feel part of a community. There should be a balance between allowing for student-teacher, student-student, and student-content interaction. It seems that one goal of online education should be to give DE students as many of the same resources to learn with as the students that are on campus. The design should also take into account learning styles and offer options that do not disadvantage any students, including students with disabilities. The social interaction role in learning cannot be underestimated...it is central. Students are being prepared to be functioning individuals that relate to a public world...thus, learning how to communicate is essential. Designing online learning environments that allow students to explore various types of communication modalities is important to their capacities to relate to diverse populations using technology. We seem to be concentrating on verbal communication, and culturally not all individuals communicate well in this manner—there are also individual differences; thus, we must allow for different modes of communication.” (Comment from the text analyst – Cathy – In teaching F2F in different countries, many Asians, particularly the Japanese, will not participate easily in a classroom situation. Instead, they ask questions on a one-to-one basis. They risk losing face.)

## CURRICULUM DESIGN

The quality ingredient for online learning environments is a theoretical basis for curriculum development and design. Educational principles should be applied when creating online environments just as they are in ANY learning environment. Is the issue a LACK of understanding by faculty who are experts in their discipline but do not have training in educational philosophy or theories? We require faculty who are new to teaching online to come to a series of seminars that cover everything from best practices to procedures to hardware/software tools.

SYNOPSIS WORTH NOTING (because they categorize with self-imposed categories):

Someone posted a synopsis of many of the points above—Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering and Gamson, 1983). These principles were compiled in a study supported by the American Association of Higher Education, the Education Commission of the States, and the Johnson Foundation. In their classic study, Chickering and Gamson argue that, based on their research, good practice in teaching and learning must include the following:

- Encourage student faculty contact
- Encourage cooperation among students
- Encourage active learning
- Give prompt feedback
- Emphasize time on task
- Communicate high expectations
- Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

Content/course material should be in a variety of formats: lecture (video), tests/quizzes, assignments, team activities, demonstrations (video/narrative/PowerPoint), podcasts, video/audio, communication, discussion forums, text chat, video chat, open forums for communication among students, e-mail, phone, video conferencing (1-1) (1 to many), virtual rooms, and text messaging.

Interaction – Social Presence should include the communication devices above, grade/feedback on assignments (rated #1 by students as being essential for learning), team video/text chats, biographies/facebook, virtual classrooms, video conferencing, forums, and text messaging.

#### RECOGNIZED BARRIERS

1. Bandwidth is an issue for some students.
2. Difficult to get students together synchronously.
3. Do DE students actually have access to the library? This could be a problem.
4. Lack of technical know-how by faculty. “I have used Blackboard's Virtual Classroom in previous versions when it allowed me to post and manipulate images during a session. In the latest version, this function seems to be missing. When it was there, I found it very valuable for teaching neuroanatomy. I could put up a brain section, add pointers to specific areas, draw boundaries for structures, and so forth—all interactively in response to questions from the students logged into the session.”

#### Thread 3 – ECU

Evaluation of online teaching should not be so far removed from traditional classes because the components both contain the following:

- 1) A syllabus
- 2) A curriculum that is theoretically based
- 3) Content that supports your objectives
- 4) Teaching strategies and approaches that meet learner styles
- 5) Various media that allows for student-teacher, student-student, and student-content interaction.

“Assessment should be done in the way it is done for on-campus courses. I do not believe separating this into DE and on-campus can be a good thing, for anyone.”

#### CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

The criteria for online quality are basically the same as for any means of instruction. The difference in online education is the learning environment, but the underlying principles remain the same. The key is not using the technology nor the media types to push curriculum, but to allow the curriculum and the learners to drive the technology selected for use. Designing the online environment in a manner that allows students multiple options for learning is

essential to matching their learner styles. There are different learning styles, and having a too rigid set of standards can leave some students stuck with one teaching style they could find difficult to adjust to. Quality indicators for DE should be judged two ways: (1) technically and (2) pedagogically. Technical evaluations by TECH and content evaluations by other experienced and trained faculty (both external and internal to the university). “Are my DE students getting the same quality and/or rigor that my F2F students are getting and vice versa? Forget the quantitative assessments and ask yourself if you think the rigor is the same? I do know inherently if my DE students are getting the same rigor and/or quality, but I must temper this with the fact that, in the end, the quality of my courses will be judged quantitatively. I think we can quantitatively measure ‘learning outcomes’ of both F2F and DE classes.

“A big issue in quality is the integrity of the assessment procedure. Test integrity is an important issue and it can be a culprit in the respectability (or lack of) associated with DE obtained degrees. I like the idea of appointing statewide proctors of some sort.”

#### INTERACTION

Student-teacher interaction is a huge part of the learning experience. Otherwise, we could just ship books out to a student and say “Here. Learn.” Having an open dialogue between the students and teachers will also allow for feedback about the quality and effectiveness of the course. Timely communication with the students is essential for making them feel they are connected with the instructor and classmates. The syllabus should give the student a clear idea of the course policies and procedures. Giving them deadlines up-front helps. Finally, there should always be a plan “B,” and contingency plans should be communicated at the beginning of the semester.

#### WHAT IT’S LIKE

“If the instructor who is planning to teach online would take at least one online course as a student, I think the instructor would learn a lot of what to do and what not to do. I plan for multiple ways for the students to access, process, and evaluate the course content.”

### **C. Elizabeth City State University (ECSU)**

#### Thread 1 – ECSU

#### STANDARDS

Participants discussed the need to develop system-wide quality standards prior to DE courses being taught. The standards should address requirements for faculty teaching online and for courses that are to be taught online. Discussion then turned to the need to establish some minimum requirements for faculty development and for course development. It was pointed out that ECSU is trying to implement quality standards and a course development guideline and could benefit by collaborating with other campuses that have already established standards. Participants felt that all UNC campuses should adopt the same minimum standards and then make additional modifications as they see fit.

## SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR BUY-IN:

It was recommended by Jim Sadler that a short demonstration course on online learning be developed, and that a select group of administrators be invited to participate in this course. The administrators would actually engage in the course as students, and would also teach a lesson in the class about DE on their own campuses to other participants. One of the best ways for faculty members to understand the benefits of online learning and to understand the types of interaction that make an online class a quality online class is to actually participate as a student. This topic garnered a great deal of support from discussion participants. Participants in this thread stated many of our online instructors have never experienced being on the student side of an online course. Very few administrators have either taught online or taken online courses. Many participants who are products of online degrees have experienced firsthand the benefits of online education and good and bad online courses. It was also expressed that the one challenge with this idea might be the approach taken to get administrators to attend such a course. It was agreed that the goal should eventually be for all educational administrators to be proactive and attend, but when their calendars are full, something has to drop, and it is usually professional development. It was suggested that this short course might be state-mandated.

## IT SUPPORT

Some participants discussed the importance of tech support and the instructional technologist/designer. It was felt that employing more of this type of staff would be extremely helpful and provide faculty with assistance. An IT team can also save faculty “time” during the design, creation, and evaluation process.

### Thread 2 – ECSU

There is a need for multiple forms of assessment for students as well as opportunities to teach them how to evaluate and think. Faculty members need to include more projects in their courses to promote interaction and community. This will give students a way of applying concepts to real world events.

### Thread 3 – ECSU

A midterm formative evaluation that is standardized across courses would give the DE professor a sense of what's working and what's not while there's still time to fix issues.

Different courses are offered by different institutions, with differing objectives. Considering that different institutions have different levels of selectivity, if we're considering system-wide evaluation, then to which level of selectivity will the courses be pegged?

## **D. Fayetteville State University (FSU)**

### Thread 1 – FSU

#### LEVELS OF SUPPORT—MILITARY

One participant provided comments related to levels of support based on experience with military programs. It was suggested that six types of support might be addressed: content, context, modality, modularity, scalability, and efficacy. Each of these was explained.

“Content is what is pushed by all for-profit providers of higher education. The military doesn't think they are getting good value from people (e.g., Phoenix Online, AMU, Capella, Walden). Context is what the professor in active interaction with the student provides. Modality is the delivery method. Some branches want CDs, some want podcasts, some even insist on face-to-face classroom experiences. Modularity involves breaking down the Content into digestible bites. Scalability means that we have to serve individual students as well as full classrooms. Efficacy is a measure of how well we do the above.”

This participant provided more information indicating that “Distance education must be viewed as being delivered anyplace other than the main campus classroom.” Using the military parameters as set forth previously, a full team effort is needed. The content must be inclusive of supporting materials. Military personnel do not have the luxury of untethered access to the Web. We cannot assume that they can readily download materials on unauthorized sites.

“Second, the Context. Allowing instructors to push content will not work, since they often gloss over items and fail to receive the feedback by expression or questions from the students. Archiving interactive audiovisual linked to the data stream is a step toward asynchronous delivery of context. The support of media technicians for presence, method, and technique coaching, as well as mastering the technology, is essential.

“Third, the Modality. Technological support and mentoring support is necessary to put the content and context of a class into the mode that is needed. Instructors who have debugged particular modes are well equipped to mentor their colleagues.

“Fourth, the Modularity. Here we need the full support of curriculum and pedagogical experts. Course material has to be broken down into digestible chunks whose stream can be interrupted and resumed with minimal loss of content.

“Fifth, the Scalability. Our rule of thumb is that if we have 6 or fewer students enrolled, then we will ask them to do the class online from the archived class supported by the originating instructor, even though it may be past the term in which the instructor was hired to teach the class. If we have 7 to 11 students, we will aggregate their classes with other locations and deliver through interactive audiovisual. More than 12 justifies placement of an instructor in the classroom (I am speaking of graduate-level classes).

“Finally, the Efficacy. Here we need the DE department to serve as a systems integrator and coordinate all supporting staff and optimize the entire system instead of sub-optimization, which normally occurs in such undertakings. The DE staff must deal with the financial and logistical support.”

#### NEED FOR PROCTORED EXAMS

There was some discussion concerning the need for both on-site and off-site proctored exams.

#### Thread 2 – FSU

From the military personnel at Seymour Johnson Air force Base: “By archiving each session for later retrieval, we have effectively used the synchronous classroom experience to create an asynchronous class. If we can figure out a way to compensate the instructor for future support of that class, then we can meet goals of delivery of all classes anytime and at any place.”

#### Thread 3 – FSU

“The quality of learning depends on one's ability to concentrate on learning. In early courses for the student, a quality course is defined as one a student can navigate and follow (e.g., having a central source (or calendar) in which to guide students, maintain VERY close contact with individuals for first two weeks, use a textbook that is easy to follow, and use clear rubrics for participation).

“Developing a course design and a preteaching checklist with issues to consider (e.g., navigation issues, policy issues, pedagogy issues) that are unique to DE (and perhaps discipline specific?) will help them to improve the wheel rather than reinvent it.

“An online DE faculty lounge would be a great place to get informal and immediate feedback from a community of online peers regarding problems that emerge during a course and new approaches to try.”

#### **E. North Carolina A&T State University**

No participants posted content to be analyzed.

#### **F. North Carolina Central University (NCCU)**

##### Thread 1 – NCCU

“Setting goals and objectives for our students to obtain at the highest level and making sure that all policies/procedures are understood and followed by all participants. Discussion forums are a part of the course, which it would seem that they should be, and the faculty member needs to be monitoring this discussion, guiding it, and grading it.”

## Thread 2 – NCCU

### TECHNOLOGICAL SOPHISTICATION

There was some discussion concerning the general belief that many students are ahead of the instructors in terms on their sophistication with technology. One participant stated that today's students have grown up in a world that has always had cell phones and computers and some have been exposed to programming in second grade. This participant pointed out that using multimedia and making use of tools they already use informally helps keep students (and teachers!) interested.

### QUALITY IN DE

There was some discussion on the importance of quality in DE, suggesting that all DE courses in the UNC system need to be approved by GA before they can be taught. This was also felt to be a good way to help draw attention from administrators on the program and to guarantee their buy-in.

## Thread 3 – NCCU

“Create a general rubric as one of the assessment tools that encompasses quality issues important to the institution. NCCU has created such a rubric.

“Faculty should be trained properly on tools to be used for DE. Blackboard is NCCU's major DE tool. Faculty at NCCU are trained to use it.”

## **G. North Carolina State University (NCSU)**

### Thread 1 – NCSU

“To ensure quality, all DE courses in the UNC system need to be approved by GA before they can be taught. This will involve the administrators and ensure their buy-in of DE.”

### Thread 2 – NCSU

### TECHNOLOGICAL SOPHISTICATION

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be taught. This was also felt to be a good way to help draw attention from administrators on the program and to guarantee their buy-in.

### Thread 3 – NCSU

Standards should be established that require specific course layout so that students have an easier time navigating. However, such standardization often limits the creativity of the instructor. Perhaps standardization should be done by degree so that students can expect a similar format.

## **H. University of North Carolina at Ashville (UNCA)**

### Thread 1 – UNCA

One participant shared information on his/her teaching. “Developing quality online courses that the instruction is pretty much able to be delivered independent of an expert faculty member takes much time. Using this formula, to do a 3-hour course with a total of 45 hours (3 x 15) in the semester, we are estimating 45 x 18 hours, which translates into about 18 weeks at 45 hours per week—about  $18/4 = 4.5$  months of full-time work.

“To produce high-quality work, I had to become to some extent the following:

- A graphics editor to manipulate (resize, contrast adjustment) hundreds of images for astronomy and other science areas (Paint Shop Pro)
- An amateur videographer to produce videos of demonstrations and edit them with video-editing software like Adobe Premiere Elements or Final Cut Express
- A programmer in HTML or JavaScript, and an amateur Web designer
- Discovering I could quadruple homework assigned since the computer could grade quantitative physics problems, I had to learn Active-Server Pages (ASP)
- An amateur JAVA programmer to develop online labs
- I had to devise my own course-delivery system with ASP
- An amateur in SQL programming to manage the grades
- An amateur server administrator to manage streaming video and other related things regarding server-side capabilities
- Author of software to be able to get student registration data from my Registrar into my database.”

### Thread 2 – UNCA

#### ONLINE LABS

One participant shared information on how UNCA is teaching online labs, emphasizing instruction on topics such as light and sound, indicating that they wanted the experiences to be realistic and not simulations. It was pointed out that the computer allows for real-time color mixing and sound production and analysis. They also discussed their desire for administrators to appreciate the time and support one needs to transform the computer into a scientific piece of equipment. In discussing how they developed their online labs for color mixing

and sound, one participant pointed out that online students use sliders and displays on monitors. The power of the computer allows for sophisticated oscilloscope and wave behavior if one has Java programmers and a content master to set up the design. It was also pointed out that they felt there was a significant cost savings in the online lab over the physical lab found on campus. A computer programmer makes “equipment” available as applets with complete functionality as real test equipment. They also pointed out that UNCA has accomplished this to some extent for some of their online labs. Now they are able to send the complete set of equipment to 100 students per semester online as applets, and no one has to share the equipment. The equipment seldom breaks. If it does, one only has to fix it once and all the equipment is fixed. The students love taking labs home (especially the sports students) and they love using the mouse.

### Thread 3 – UNCA

No participants posted content to be analyzed.

## **I. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC–CH)**

### Thread 1 – UNC–CH

#### TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT FOR FACULTY

Faculty are being asked to apply technology to make quality courses. They need help to do that adequately and often need more support than most schools can offer within their own units. At the same time, it is more efficient if the schools have centralized support for more specialized activities (e.g., multimedia production, writing centers). This division of labor only makes sense; however, if the very existence of the programs in the schools is not threatened. The bottom line is that more support for faculty needs to be made available if our programs are to be high quality and survive in a very competitive world.

### Thread 2 – UNC–CH

#### NOT ALL CONSTITUTENT UNIVERSITIES SHOULD PROVIDE DE

It was the feeling of several participants that some of the constituent schools are just too small to support an active DE program adequately. They stated that DE classes should be offered only from the larger schools (or those who have been doing it for a long time) and the smaller schools should just send students there. It was their feeling that this would result in some economies of scale in the system!

#### PRESENCE OF THE INSTRUCTOR

There was some discussion about student evaluations of instruction. It was noted that over time, the presence of an instructor is an important factor in terms of quality teaching evaluations. If students don't feel the instructor has been actively involved in some way (i.e., discussion forums, creating and monitoring group

projects, e-mailing individually or via class listserv, chats, or online office hours) the students will feel isolated and disappointed. Some stated that they felt the instructor should be explicit from the outset about his/her own role in the course as well as his expectations for the student. Some instructors like to take a back seat in the discussion forums after initiating topics/questions so as not to intimidate or dominate the forums, but if students don't feel that there's enough engagement, they will be disappointed.

#### VALUE OF LISTSERV

One participant also pointed out that in addition to facilitating the forums, one UNC-CH instructor does a great weekly listserv summary of students' participation in the discussion forums during the week, praising specific comments as well as commenting on what could have been better assessed. She also gives her own views on the topic, asks other questions to prompt more critical thinking, and ends optimistically with what's coming up the following week. Students often praise this specifically in their evaluations, and we recommend this to other instructors as one way of staying engaged with their students.

#### Thread 3 – UNC-CH

#### LONG-TERM ASSESSMENT

One example from UNC-CH is a literature review course where students gave the instructor terrible reviews at the end of the course, but about a year later, commented on the value of the course. Margaret Spellings's call for more attention to public information on learning outcomes is part of a larger concern with assessment. Most serious educators would love to do more assessment. However, assessment is expensive and complicated. Significant funds will be needed for meaningful assessment for many courses.

#### ASSESSMENT

“Assuming that these are courses carrying degree credit, then the quality of these courses should be addressed through the usual departmental, institutional, and accreditation processes. We do not need new, separate, or additional standards for distance courses. Offering courses through distance programs only changes the mode of delivery and not the material included. Our distance courses are regular university courses that are taught on campus but have been converted to be able to be taught at a distance. The academic departments select the instructors of the courses and approve the courses both at the proposal stage and when they are ready to be offered. The quality of such courses developed and offered through such a process is comparable to courses offered face-to-face in the classroom.”

## **J. University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC)**

### Thread 1 – UNCC

#### STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

“The better designed courses make course management easier for students to be successful. For example, I include a one page summary of the course work with due dates that students can keep handy. I find it overwhelming when things are scattered all over the place in cyberspace. Putting it together this way makes it easier for them to see the big picture for the entire semester. They know exactly where they need to go and when.

#### CLASS SIZE IN DE/ONLINE COURSES

“In a perfect world, we would all have small classes regardless of the setting. But online offers challenges not found in the classroom, making class size a more intense issue. For example, we have a great deal of e-mail to manage and a great deal of one-on-one assistance for our students.”

### Thread 2 – UNCC

#### THREADED DISCUSSION

An important point made in this forum was never to underestimate the power of the discussion tool in online instruction. One instructor teaching a very large class online pointed out that at UNCC they break the class up into smaller groups. Each week they post a topic or question for discussion. Everyone is required to post their own thoughts and to respond to at least two of their teammates. Then they let the conversation develop however it wants. It was this participant’s feeling that this approach has been quite enriching for everyone involved. The down side is that this generates a great amount of reading every week. They also pointed out that they really get to know their students this way and get a good, solid sense of what they are learning, and how and if they are thinking.

#### BANDWIDTH ISSUES

There was also some discussion of bandwidth, with one participant indicating that he/she did not think the university has any more responsibility to help underwrite the cost of a certain bandwidth than it does to help with any other cost of higher education.

### Thread 3 – UNCC

#### EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTION

Evaluation of online instruction must be done by someone with experience. The nature of instruction—how instructors present their content, interact with their students, foster learning, ensure ethics— are all foreign concepts to the untrained eye.

## QUALITY IN DE

There are many who believe that online instruction simply means taking your course content and putting it on the Web. This is a recipe for disaster. Hand-in-hand with this question of quality is this one: “How is teaching valued on your campus?” The measure of quality begins with the measure of importance. There is no doubt that communication, feedback, and interaction are of utmost importance in online/DE instruction. One area often overlooked in DE is navigability of the course itself. It is important for students to spend their time learning the course material, not the course management system.

### **K. University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG)**

#### Thread 1 – UNCG

Based on what was posted by faculty and staff from UNCG, it was pointed out that there is a learning curve to teach online/DE courses. To assist with the learning curve at UNCG, a training program is required by professors before they can teach online. It was also pointed out that they have an entire DE graduate degree which is maintained and supported by the Division of Continual Learning (DCL). Since the DCL manages these degrees, they are also responsible for supporting the needs of both faculty and students. The idea of creating a system-wide DE degree was mentioned. This would enable all campuses to get involved with offering courses. It was noted from the posts that universities should look for ways to promote sharing course content in the UNC system due to the time and money it takes to design and create online courses.

#### Thread 2 – UNCG

From the comments posted by faculty and staff from UNCG, it was stated that frequent interaction from teachers and students is very important. It was mentioned that students like learning from each other and that they should be encouraged to share their thoughts with the class. One individual commented that there are different models for DE programs. The two models that were mentioned included the residential component, where the students would come to campus for 2 weeks out of the year for intensive work; and the other was the cluster approach, where you would have clusters of students at different locations and you video conference from one location to the other. It was also mentioned that we should consider backup plans for teaching online, and that faculty should do their best to keep their courses up-to-date.

#### Thread 3 – UNCG

One participant stated he/she found that constant communication is critical in the distance class. It was his/her belief that students are willing to work through challenges with technology, particularly to send and receive audio, if there is support. He/she also indicated that students seem to want consistency across all courses (e.g., calendars, syllabus). He/she stated that keeping things simpler may be better.

## **L. University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP)**

### Thread 1 – UNCP

From the comments posted by faculty and staff from UNCP, it was stated that it is difficult to convey to others what really goes into creating an online course. It was also stated that as class sizes increased, so did the need for technical support. One individual commented that their department chair provided them a graduate assistant to help them handle an increased class size, when it went from 50 to 100 students. It was noted from the posts, that librarians are a resource that can be used to help support DE courses.

### Thread 2 – UNCP

From the comments posted by faculty and staff from UNCP, it was mentioned that many faculty are not aware of the resources that are available to them, including workshops and other events that are used to introduce new technology. One participant mentioned that they were using the iSight/iChat technology from Apple to interact with others from their campus to students overseas. It was mentioned that giving students' choices in an online course is very important. It was also pointed out that prompt feedback to students is crucial, but parameters must be set so that faculty aren't expected to be on call 24/7 to answer e-mails and to reset quizzes. One participant found that requiring students to post to forums gave them an indication of which students are participating and working on assignments and which ones will most likely not hand in homework assignments.

### Thread 3 – UNCP

From the comments posted by UNCP, it was mentioned that online course evaluators should be instructors who have experience in teaching online. They should also be the instructors that received positive feedback from course evaluations by students and shared best practices with students in their classes. It was pointed out that there should be flexibility in the design of the course, but minimum requirements should be in place, so that students know where items are located and when assignments are due. One individual mentioned that there should be more emphasis on course evaluation and less on instructor evaluation because it is difficult for students to separate their feelings about the course from the way the course was taught. It was also pointed out that burnout and inadequate preparation may have resulted in negative performances by students taking online courses. Another individual mentioned that there should be more focus on ongoing assessments for both DE and F2F. There was also a comment posted with concerns for students who have old computers or for those that have poor bandwidth connections.

## **M. University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW)**

### Thread 1 – UNCW

With only one comment posted by faculty or staff from University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW), there was not enough information to prepare a

summary. The only comment that can be made from the posting was they need to focus more on their online courses.

#### Thread 2 – UNCW

From the comments posted by faculty and staff from UNCW, it was pointed out that communication tools are an important ingredient for online courses. One of the tools mentioned was a real-time chat tool for instant feedback when questions are posted. Another tool was Wimba, a two-way audio communication tool that allows students and instructors the opportunity to listen to one another. This tool also allows for archiving the sessions, which was good for those who could not make it to class and for those that wanted to review the sessions again. Other tools that were mentioned for online communication included e-mail, chat rooms, discussion forums, recorded presentations, and pop-up announcements. It was also mentioned that not every tool works for every course. It was noted that the students appreciated having a variety of communication tools in their online courses. Note: there were two interesting questions mentioned in this thread. The first one related to paying for classroom space at different locations, and the second one related to whether requiring students to drive to a location limits their educational opportunities.

#### Thread 3 – UNCW

No participants posted content to be analyzed.

### **N. Western Carolina University (WCU)**

#### Thread 1 – WCU

With limited posts in Thread 1 from WCU, it was difficult to prepare a summary. However, what was mentioned from the posts was that the department heads should have the ability to excuse a course from being evaluated if it is the first time the faculty member has taught online and if it is during the faculty's tenure review process. Having this flexibility enables faculty to incorporate new ways of delivering content in their course. It was also mentioned that for accreditation reasons, universities should remember that there is a difference between courses taught through e-learning and correspondence courses.

#### Thread 2 – WCU

There was limited information provided in Thread 2 from WCU. However, it was mentioned that having tenured or tenure track faculty is the best approach to ensure quality in online classes. Also included in these posts were two URL's and one abstract titled, "Preparing Instructors for Quality Online Instruction."

#### Thread 3 – WCU

No participants posted content to be analyzed.

### **O. Winston Salem State University**

No participants posted content to be analyzed.

## V. **Comments from UNC GA Participants**

### Thread 1 – GA

#### ADMINISTRATOR INVOLVEMENT

Administrator involvement seems to be an important theme. There are some suggestions that senior administrators need to be more involved in DE quality. One participant suggested that a DE advocacy group organize a DE demonstration for senior administrators that could help them more completely understand DE experiences. The campus that develops it could include online learning features and online modules it currently utilizes. Maybe this could assist in developing support networks for online teaching from the GA. Similarly, what kind of technology support could be provided and shared across the entire DE community? In addition, what might the GA be doing to ensure that faculty receives a higher quality of experience? This might assist the GA in establishing reasonable standards for the entire UNC system. This could also create more appropriate preparation methods for both students and instructors.

#### APPLICATION-ORIENTED EXPERIENCES

Another participant discussed application tasks performed by the students for the course. The participant argues that these application tasks provide much greater assessment of knowledge application. This does, however, get more complicated as the number of students increases in a class/section.

#### REWARD SYSTEMS

One participant introduced the idea of providing multiple ways to motivate and reward those instructors who demonstrate improvements in online teaching, such as a hierarchal system of rewards based upon the complexity of one's efforts to improve the learning experience.

### Thread 2 – GA

#### INGREDIENTS IN AN EFFECTIVE CLASS

Identifying the necessary ingredients for a quality DE course must address the principles of teaching quality as well as those technology tools that can be used effectively. Another key issue in examining DE course quality concerns the understanding of a course's purpose. This lack of understanding affects how one chooses learning activities for the course. In addition, when an instructor has little understanding of the effective use of technology, course quality may be adversely affected. What has been done to alleviate this lack of understanding among faculty, administrators, and supporting instructors? The instructor must be able to provide as many communication avenues as is manageable, and instructors must set the same expectations for themselves as for their students during threaded participation discussions.

## DE QUALITY STANDARDS

The GA could provide assistance in establishing/endorsing DE quality standards. These standards should be reasonable enough for all UNC instructors and students to adhere to. One possible method to increase administrator support is to evaluate the assessment of the support to the course, as well as the administrator's role in the support provided. It is also important to define who is responsible for managing the DE as well as the subsequent roles of individuals involved. Who is responsible when the course does not work, and who should receive the credit when the course does work?

## DE RESOURCES

Other aspects for consideration include external sources, such as library usage. The DE instructor's level of access may be different than the student's; it is imperative that instructors understand how their students can use external resources in order to create reasonable expectations for the students.

### Thread 3 – GA

## ASSESSMENT METHODS

One method of assessment identified is using a “critical friend” coaching approach, which involves the instructor selecting a colleague to offer assessment and discussing what will be assessed. To be meaningful, the collected data must address the purpose of the course. Managing this data properly is important with regard to its effective use, and knowing what to do with the data as it is collected can provide one the ability to manage/utilize the data electronically and interpret the data as it is collected.

## EVALUATION RESOURCES

It is important in assessment to identify a list of criteria that create a balance between the need for information and its responsible management. This could assist those persons charged with evaluation resources to develop their skills. A suggestion offered the UNC TLT Collaborative's TLT Assessment Interest Group as a resource. One suggestion introduced the idea of self-assessment, when an instructor documents his own successes, and learns to communicate and integrate assessments into course improvement. The question was asked, “Is it worth the effort to focus on internal assessment and improvement versus external constraints?”