



Institutional Plan for Distance
Education
Summer 2024

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Item 1: Instructional Multi-Year Technology Plan

Provide evidence of an institutional multi-year technology plan that addresses its goals for distance education and includes provision for a robust and scalable technical infrastructure. (Planning, item 9).*

McLennan Community College (MCC) is preparing for the future of the college and distance education by developing strategies and budgets to ensure readiness for the next generation of technology and distance learning needs. The college has produced the following examples of these strategies and plans: (1) Vision 2030 (link to [Vision 2030](#), Page 6); (2) [Department Unit Level Plans](#); (3) [Technology Assessment](#); (4) Technology Plans (link to [Future Project Docket](#)); (5) the [College's technology budget](#); and, (6) the [Center for Teaching and Learning budget](#). The college maintains and operates Brightspace as the Learning Management System. Brightspace is hosted and managed by Desire2Learn. In addition to planning ahead, MCC also offers an array of [professional development courses](#) which develop and standardize the quality of support for distance education.

To support our distance education students, staff have deployed several software programs to provide flexibility, and to increase the quality of distance learning. Upswing is the tutoring and writing center platform which allows MCC staff to support distance education students 24-hours per day. Faculty and students use YuJa as an on-premise video service. This service provides video instruction for distance education. Our institution recently upgraded Yuja's capabilities to provide students and faculty with unlimited storage space to further support their distance education.

MCC's recent participation in the Institutional Resilience and Expanded Postsecondary Grant provided funds to upgrade and install a robust and resilient infrastructure to better serve online and distance learners. The College replaced network equipment (max capacity 300.5 Gb/sec) with newer, higher capacity, core network switches (max capacity 3.2 Tb/sec) including a redundant battery backup system. The updated core switches with newer hardware are much more stable and resilient than previous equipment. This equipment ensures stable access to remote resources for our online students, while the redundant battery backup system ensures the core switches will remain powered up during power fluctuations. In addition, MCC upgraded the load balancers and reconfigured the wireless network authentication system for redundancy. Pairing the improved load balancers with the reconfigured and expanded wireless network authentication system ensures the system students use to access our wireless network has maximum availability during peak usage. MCC had approximately eighty minutes of downtime for the wireless networks per year. After the upgrade to the new load balance servers, there has been zero minutes of downtime per year.

Item 2: Plans/Goals to Increase Distance Education

Describe planning documents where goals are explicit to increase the number of programs provided through distance education courses and programs and/or the number of students to be enrolled in them. (Planning, item 11)*

Enrollment growth, whether in-person or at a distance, is important at McLennan Community College. The ongoing success of the college relies on student success, retention, and degree completion. To prioritize this effort, the institution has formed a Strategic Enrollment Committee focusing on “successful student recruitment, retention, and completion” (link to [committee website](#)). This is demonstrated in the Retention Subcommittee of the Strategic Enrollment Management Committee and in the Strategic Plan (link to [Strategic Plan](#)), “Help all students succeed at the highest level possible.”

On our website, McLennan also has a website dedicated to students wanting or already taking online courses and degrees (link to [McLennanOnline.com](#)). The website includes a list of degrees which are 100-Percent Online and Hybrid Programs. This website also allows students to see the coinciding bachelor, master, and doctorate degrees they can receive online from our University Center partners. Currently, we advertise 65 degrees, certificates and awards 100-Percent Online. However, with new state definition changes degree numbers may fluctuate within the next year or so.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, all colleges had to increase their online offerings. In light of this, MCC has continued to offer and maintain a wide range of [online courses](#) and [degrees](#). In Fall of 2019, before COVID-19, our online-only student population was 22.2% compared to 42.1% in Fall 2021. Even years after the pandemic, our numbers have remained higher than pre-COVID, but they have also stayed steady, with Fall 2023 at 39.7% and Spring 2024 at 43.3%. In addition, the success rate of our online-only transfer students has increased seven percent from Fall 2021 to Spring 2024 (66%-73%), compared to only a two percent increase in the success rate of face-to-face students in the same time period (81%-83%). The workforce online-only still remains low in Spring 2024 at 65% compared to 87% face-to-face only, but it has increased 6% points in two and a half years (Attachment: [Enrollment,Retention,Demographics_FA21-SP24](#)).

To assist with this increase while still remaining vigilant to our institution’s success, the College required all faculty and adjuncts to complete training before teaching online. In addition, the college’s Professional & Organizational Department offers an array of courses dedicated to andragogy, distance education, ADA, technology, etc. In the attachment, we have listed our current list of POD offerings and trainings which will be implemented Fall of 2024 (Attachment: [Current&PlannedPD](#)). MCC also has 24/7 Virtual Academic Support, Success Coaching and Advising to assist all our online students.

Item 3: Expansion of Distance Education with Quality

Describe plans for expanding distance education that also demonstrate the institution's capacity to assure an appropriate level of quality. (Planning, item 13)*

McLennan Community College (MCC) recognizes the need to support online students to ensure success. The college offers several strategies and services to meet the needs of our students. One service provided to students and faculty is Supplemental Instruction or SI. This involves pairing an instructor with a student (of their choosing) who previously completed the class successfully, to offer structured and guided study sessions throughout the semester. While not many distance education courses currently contain SI, this support system/program will continue to grow in the upcoming years.

A link to Upswing is on the Navigation Bar of our LMS, Brightspace. This resource allows students to search, schedule, and meet with tutors across a full range of subjects 24-hours a day. Throughout the semester, both MCC and Upswing tutors are available to meet with students using video conferencing, or students can schedule an in-person meeting.

A [Student Resources module](#) is embedded into every course shell on the LMS and updated every semester as needed. This module contains links to every student resource that exists on campus. In addition, all students are enrolled in a [Brightspace Orientation shell](#) that helps prepare students for the potential hurdles of online learning.

MCC online courses are initially evaluated during the MCC Principles of Good Practice (link to [MCC's Principles of Good Practice](#)) process. Before the evaluation, faculty are given access to guidelines for universal course design. (link to [MCC Course Design Guidelines](#)). Plans are underway to expand these guidelines to include stronger quality standards in a rubric format. RSI has been introduced as an additional standard to be addressed (Attachment: [RSIForm](#)). MCC will be implementing a program to review all courses every five years after their initial launch. In addition, faculty will be required to recertify their online teaching certificate to refresh their skills every five years after their initial certification to teach online.

MCC has a robust training program for faculty who wish to teach online, blended/hybrid, or hyflex. The core of this training has three components, Brightspace Mechanics, Teaching Online: Fundamentals, and, for those who wish to teach in the hyflex modality, Hyflex Fundamentals (link to [Instructional Method Requirements](#)).

According to [policy](#), all full-time faculty are required to complete 12 hours of PD a year. MCC offers many PD courses that are applicable to online instructors as well as a certificate in online teaching. Instructional Designers teach most of these courses and in an effort to be visible and available, ID staff visit a different building on campus once a month for part of the day to answer questions and offer assistance.

Item 4: Academic Integrity

Provide the institution's policies on academic integrity including explicit references to online learning and how they are discussed during orientation for distance education students. (Curriculum & Instruction, item 13)*

All students at McLennan Community College, dual credit and regularly enrolled students, are required to complete new student orientation. Orientation has various online components including informational modules discussing academic integrity and resources for students (link to [Academic Integrity](#)).

Students have access to resources in multiple areas online. Online tutoring is available through UpSwing 24 hours a day. In addition, The Department of Academic Support and Tutoring at MCC has Zoom options available. The Library has a variety of online databases for students to access. Students may also seek the help of an MCC librarian 24/7 through our library's website (link to [Library website](#)). Students of all types can engage with our services on campus or in a distance education environment.

The College currently has a subscription for Turnitin which faculty have the ability to deploy in their courses. The accuracy of Turnitin with AI is debatable and difficult to prove therefore the college has informed and had training on alternatives or multiple means of assessments to deter cheating in relationship with AI. MCC has also deployed an AI Task Force which also has looked at academic integrity for distance education students (link to [meeting notes](#)).

Teaching Online: Fundamentals is a course in which all MCC faculty must complete to teach online. One of the objectives in the course states: Participants will describe current best practices and perspectives on academic integrity in an online environment. Within the course, there is required reading for all the instructors regarding online cheating and academic integrity online ([articles 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#)).

Faculty have the ability to navigate academic integrity concerns within their courses using their syllabus, which students receive on the first day of classes. All Instructor Plans include [boilerplate information](#) which includes the college's academic integrity statement. Faculty always decide the grade sanctions for their assignments within their course. They can also refer students to the student conduct officer which could result in more punitive sanctions such as disciplinary probation, deferred suspension, etc. depending on the severity of the violation. When adjudicating allegations with distance education or online students, the student conduct officer utilizes Zoom to have constructive conversations about the significance of academic integrity and determine what occurred in a course and how a student can move forward and be successful in their academic pursuits. (Link to [General Conduct Policy](#) and [Student Investigation Procedures](#) attached.)

Item 5: Distance Education Evaluations

Describe the process by which distance education courses and programs are evaluated on a periodic basis. (Curriculum & Instruction, item 15)*

McLennan Community College (MCC) maintains the quality of its distance learning courses through a rigorous review process based on the MCC's [Principles of Good Practice](#) (PGP). This process begins with instructors developing at least 50% of their course and completing the PGP form, which is then submitted to the Instructional Design department. The department reviews the course for quality, various Instructional Design practices, rules, and regulations. If the course passes this review, it is further evaluated by the department supervisor, division chair, and Dean to ensure compliance with SACSCOC and THECB standards. (Attachment: [OnlineDevelopmentQualityProcess](#)) The Instructional Design team tracks the entire process, maintains a list of approved courses, and archives the completed PGP documents. In the 2021-2024 academic year, 260 PGPs were approved.

To maintain high standards, MCC implements a recertification process for online courses every five years, ensuring that each course meets current teaching standards and incorporates the latest technological advancements. This approach keeps courses up-to-date, accessible, and effective, reflecting MCC's commitment to continuous improvement and adherence to best practices in online education.

Student evaluations of courses at McLennan Community College are conducted for all faculty in every section and delivery mode every semester, including summer terms and minimesters (link to [Faculty Evaluation Standards](#), pages 2-3). Additionally, MCC mandates regular evaluations of teaching performance by their direct supervisor. Tenured faculty are observed at least once every three years, while tenure-track and adjunct instructors are observed yearly for the first five years, and then at least every three years thereafter. Faculty and division chairs may request more frequent observations to ensure ongoing instructional excellence. For detailed information, refer to the [Principles of Good Practice Form](#), [Course Design Guidelines](#), and [Faculty Evaluation Standards](#).

McLennan Community College (MCC) ensures continuous improvement and quality of its distance learning courses through a 3-year program review rotation, as detailed in the [Assessment Procedure Process Guide](#), pages 16-18. This systematic evaluation aligns programs with institutional goals and accrediting standards. The process begins with a self-study where programs conduct a thorough self-assessment, analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) while gathering data on student outcomes, course effectiveness, faculty performance, and resource utilization. Key metrics such as enrollment trends, completion rates, and student feedback are then analyzed to identify areas for improvement. The head of the department presents the Program Review to the academic leadership team along with members of the Institutional Research and Effectiveness department (including the Director, Program Review, Planning & Assessment) to provide an evaluation of the program's quality and effectiveness. (Attached: Program Reviews for [Mental Health & Social Work](#), [Paralegal Studies](#), [Geology](#), and [History](#)) More details can be found on the MCC's [Program Review Process](#) website.

Item 6: Distance Education/On-Ground Courses

Describe the process by which curricula delivered through distance education are benchmarked against on-ground courses and programs, if provided by the institution, or those provided by traditional institutions. (Curriculum & Instruction, item 17)*

Distance education is benchmarked against in-person courses through course content, success rates, ACE/SLOs, and through Program Reviews. Many faculty who teach distance education courses at McLennan Community College also teach the same course in-person. By faculty teaching both distance education and in-person, there is more consistency between the courses taught in different modalities. In addition, faculty meetings and discussions within departments regarding curriculum, learning objectives, and ACE/SLOs help ensure consistency which can be seen by reviewing course syllabi for distance education and corresponding in-person courses (Attachment: [BIOL 2404 InPerson](#), [BIOL Online](#), [ECON 2302 InPerson](#), [ECON 2302 Online](#), [ENGL 1301 InPerson](#), [ENGL 1301 Online](#), [GOVT 2306 InPerson](#), [GOVT 2306 Online](#), [HIST 1301 InPerson](#), [HIST 1301 Online](#))

Prior to COVID in Fall of 2019, our online-only students were 22.2% of the MCC population compared to 42.1% in Fall 2021. Even several years after the pandemic, our numbers have remained high and steady with online-only students consisting of 42.1% of the student population in Fall of 2021 and 43.3% in Spring 2024. In addition, the success rate of our online-only transfer students has increased seven percent from Fall 2021 to Spring 2024 (66%-73%), compared to only a two percent increase in the success rate of face-to-face students in the same time period (81%-83%). The workforce online-only still remains low in Spring 2024 at 65% compared to 87% face-to-face only, but has increased 6% points in two and a half years (Attachment: [Enrollment,Retention FA21-SP24](#)).

Assessing College Effectiveness (ACE) Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) are assessed semesterly with reports being run annually. The report produced by MCC's Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness looks at [face-to-face, online, and dual credit SLOs](#), pages 10-36. The purpose of ACE/SLO is to improve instruction practices in order to increase student learning. The faculty in the program/department is responsible for the SLOs in their area. Workforce SLOs normally come from program review boards or similar agencies, while Arts and Science/General Education SLOs must cover, at a minimum, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board core component area requirements and objectives (link to [ACE/SLO website](#)).

Lastly, all academic disciplines have Program Reviews which are conducted every three years. During Program Reviews, a faculty member or division chair/department head discusses the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the department. In addition, enrollment and success rate comparisons are discussed for disciplines offering distance education courses. (Attachment: [MH&SWProgramReview](#)) (link to [Program Review Website](#) attached).

Item 7: Distance Education Scheduling

Provide evidence supporting the scheduling of distance education courses and programs provides students with a dependable pathway to ensure timely completion of degrees. (Curriculum & Instruction, item 19)*

Available data on enrollment and success rates for online courses provides valuable insights into student performance and trends. In Fall 2021, 84% of MCC students took at least one distance education course. That number had decreased in the last three years since COVID but remains strong at 78% taking distance education in Spring of 2024. Success rates for online courses have shown improvement. In the fall 2021, the completion of online courses was 66%, compared to 81% for face-to-face courses. However, by Spring 2024, the online success rate had risen to 73%, while the face-to-face success rate remained steady at 83% (Attachment: [Enrollment, Retention FA21-SP24](#)).

MCC moved to centralized scheduling in 2023 to provide clear and consistent year-long scheduling options. This collaboration between Instruction and Student Advising helps to supply a variety of scheduling times and methods and allows the college to react quickly to students' needs during registration. MCC strategically ensures that prerequisite, gateway, and core courses for degree completion are consistently offered in online formats. This initiative addresses the needs of students who rely on the flexibility of online education to complete their degrees on time, even though the college does not specifically track the percentage of students completing online degrees compared to traditional in-person programs.

Key courses are consistently available through distance education methods every semester. [Analysis of course offerings](#) identifies several courses regularly offered in online (IT) and hybrid (HYBR) modalities. For instance, ENGL 1301 is offered in both IT and HYBR modalities and is consistently available every spring and fall, highlighting its foundational role in the curriculum. Similarly, HIST 1301 is offered each spring and fall in online and hybrid formats, reflecting continuous demand and essential inclusion in degree plans. MATH 1314 is regularly available every spring and fall, indicating its importance as a core requirement.

MCC provides distance education degree plans and academic roadmaps, which can be found on the college's [online program website](#). These resources offer students clear guidance on how to navigate their academic journey through online courses, ensuring fulfill all necessary requirements for degree completion. The website also lets students know which degrees they can take online through the University Center at MCC based on their MCC degree path.

Item 8 – Distance Education Expectations

Describe the ways in which expectations for any required face-to-face, on-ground work (e.g., internships, specialized laboratory work) are stated clearly for students. (Curriculum & Instruction, item 21)*

McLennan Community College (MCC) ensures that students clearly understand expectations for required face-to-face, on-ground work through detailed communication tailored to each course modality, including Face-to-Face, Online, Blended, or Hyflex. When students register for courses, they are provided with information about the course modality, including comprehensive explanations for Online, Blended, or Hyflex formats. This upfront communication helps students make informed decisions about their course selections (Attachment: [DistanceEducationRegistrationScreen](#)). In addition, the [Student Support and Orientation](#) course located in Brightspace and the McLennanOnline.com website also gives information regarding course modalities.

Faculty are required to provide students with syllabi or instructional plans (IPs) at the beginning of the course, regardless of the modality. These documents are essential for setting clear expectations and include the instructor's contact information, required texts and materials, course competencies, and the teaching modality. Notably, the IPs feature a section titled "Methods of Teaching and Learning," where instructors list any face-to-face or in-person meetings required for the course. This section provides detailed descriptions of various instructional activities, such as lectures, discussion groups, group projects, field trips, lab exercises, service learning assignments, student presentations, and exams. By clearly outlining these requirements, faculty ensure that students are aware of all face-to-face commitments from the outset. In addition, the IPs include the class attendance policy and specific expectations for participation in the chosen modality. This section is titled, "Attendance Policy" and emphasizes the importance of regular and punctual attendance and specifies how each faculty will maintain complete attendance records. (link to [Instructor Plans website](#), [DAAC 2354 B001Syllabi](#), [ACNT 1303 O080Syllabi](#))

Additionally, all faculty are encouraged to explain the course modality in detail and include a course calendar with specific due dates. This practice helps students manage their time effectively and meet all course requirements. For hybrid courses, faculty are specifically encouraged to state explicitly when face-to-face meetings will occur, ensuring that students can plan accordingly.

Program-specific handbooks offer information on internship/clinical expectations (face-to-face vs. online), information regarding the college's learning management system, and requirements for lab work, along with other important outlines for each program. By including comprehensive guidelines and expectations, these handbooks serve as valuable resources for students, helping them navigate the requirements of their courses and programs effectively (Attachment: [InternshipBusinessMgmtSyllabi](#), [HITTHandbook](#), [SurgicalTechHandbook19](#), pages 28-30, [MLTHandbook](#), pages 42-45,58).

Item 9: Curriculum Design and Course Management

Describe how curriculum design and the course management system enable active faculty contribution to the learning environment. Curriculum & Instruction, item 22)*

McLennan Community College (MCC) enhances faculty contributions to the learning environment by allowing the faculty to create and build their curriculum within the college's LMS, Brightspace. MCC demonstrates a strong commitment to faculty professional development related to distance education through a comprehensive array of [courses and training](#). In particular, there are two courses offered at the college to help faculty learn how to use the Learning Management System (LMS) and build skills in online course design. Brightspace Mechanics familiarizes instructors with the LMS, while Teaching Online: Fundamentals (TOF) guides faculty through best practices in online instruction. By the end of TOF, faculty will build two full modules of learning, define specific and measurable objectives, and describe best practices for online instruction. (Attachment: [TOF_InstructorPlan](#)).

Faculty at MCC value the instructional and technological support provided by the institution, which helps to enhance their courses and promote an inclusive learning environment. Amy Antoninka, faculty, values the Instructional Design (ID) team's commitment to ADA compliance and accessibility, which has equipped her to maintain these standards independently. The ID team's proactive stance on AI in education has facilitated open discussions and the development of preventative measures. In addition, their assistance with content organization in Brightspace and engaging professional development sessions, like "Lunch and Learns," have been particularly beneficial to faculty like Samantha Buerger. Faculty member, Amanda Castro, highlights their role in creating tailored, interactive learning environments, promoting continuous improvement and innovation at the college (Attachment: [FacultyFeedback](#)).

The Assessing College Effectiveness (ACE) Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) program is a college-wide, ongoing effort to improve our overall instructional practices for a quality education (link to [ACE/SLO Website](#)). The ACE-SLO process is an integral part of our institutional [planning and evaluation process](#) and is guided by MCC's [ACE/SLO & Program Review Process Manual](#). The faculty in each Program/Department is responsible for the SLOs in their discipline/program (Attachment: [ACE-SLOProcess](#)). Faculty review and update SLOs annually, noting changes in the Annual Evaluation of Student Learning Outcomes report.

Due to the Regular and Substantive Interactions (RSI) regulatory requirements set forth by the U.S. DOE, all online courses at MCC must meet RSI compliance. Distance Education courses must include regular interaction between a student and an instructor. Such interactions must be initiated by the instructor. The instructor-initiated interactions must be connected to the subjects/concepts covered in the course and contribute to student progress toward mastery. The [MCC Principles of Good Practice \(PGP\) document](#), which will be in effect for Fall 2024, includes a series of four questions regarding faculty's implementation of RSI in their course. Instructors of previously PGP approved courses must fill and submit the [RSI Online Course Review Form](#) to demonstrate how they are meeting RSI requirements.

The current [MCC PGP](#) sets expectations related to active faculty contributions to the course design process. ID staff review these expectations as part of the evaluation process. Specifically, three standards are applicable: "Learning activities promote interaction, communication, and support active learning.", "Teacher Presence is apparent. It is clear the

instructor will be involved and active in the course.", and "Expectations for feedback are discussed or stated. Feedback for students will be provided in a timely manner."

Item 10: Accessibility

Describe the mechanisms for which accessibility of course content and technologies required for course completion is reviewed and alternative methods for access are identified if necessary. (Curriculum & Instruction, item 24)*

MCC provides assistance and information on accommodations through the [Disability Services](#) area. A link is provided in all courses and a [disability statement](#) is included in every syllabus (instructor plan). For stats on accommodations offered and numbers of students served, please see the attached [Accommodations](#) link.

MCC uses Yuja Panorama, an LMS add-on, to create [alternate formats of documents](#) that the students can download. For example, if a document is a scanned PDF in the course, students can download an OCR'd and tagged version of the file in PDF format. Instructors can see an accessibility report and overall accessibility score within each of their courses. In addition, each file in the course has an icon on the right side that is color-coded. The color-coded system represents the accessibility score of that file. Instructors have the option to view a preview of the document containing highlighted accessibility issues. Each issue includes a link to a guide on how to resolve it. If faculty are creating material through the HTML editor in Brightspace, Yuja Panorama will flag accessibility issues instantaneously.

Instructors and ID staff have the ability to run [course reports and evaluations](#) of accessibility at any time through Yuja Panorama. This is also done routinely for online courses as they are developed or when ID staff are asked to consult on an online course. In addition, Instructional designers provide feedback and guidance regarding accessibility to faculty during the [PGP](#) process.

For administrators, Panorama provides a breakdown of all file types and the number of documents processed for alternate formats. Data will also show the number of files that were requested to be downloaded in an alternative format by students. The Issues Report lists the total accessibility issues and breaks the data down to Severe, Major, and Minor issues by file type and issue. This is a major aid to target the most pressing issues that need to be addressed (Attached: [IssuesReport](#)).

In addition to assistance from ID staff, the Professional Development area on campus offers MCC Instructors and Staff numerous opportunities to receive [training on accessibility issues](#). These trainings range from information on disabilities and accommodations to pedagogy and hands-on training for creating or remediating accessible resources. Employees who take a set program of courses may earn an [ADA certificate](#).