



## Moraine Park Targets 'Cyber' Students; Boosts Enrollment & Retention

**M**ORAINÉ PARK TECHNICAL College, Wis., is enjoying a surge in enrollment thanks to a recent initiative that put four complete programs and two certificates online. Moraine Park, with campuses in Beaver Dam, Fond du Lac and West Bend worked with the Worldwide Instructional Design System team (WIDS) in developing approximately a quarter of the college's more than 80 online courses and making them available to online learners.

The new online courses, which debuted fall 2001, have successfully captured a portion of the distance-learning market and boosted Moraine Park's enrollment by 900. The school has also managed an online retention rate of 72 percent—far exceeding national averages and Moraine Park's expectations, according to Pete Rettler, Moraine Park's instruction technology partner.

In order to get the courses online in just four months, Moraine Park turned to WIDS team members, who planned and wrote many of the college's general education core courses last summer. WIDS incorporates software and training to help educators design learner-centered curricula that link outcomes and standards. Developed by the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), WIDS software is used at every level of education for curriculum development. In Wisconsin, nearly 50 K-12 school districts and all of the technical colleges use WIDS.

"WIDS supports curriculum development in all content areas—from technical, career-focused courses to liberal and basic studies such as language, math, science, and social studies," said Judy Neill, WIDS director.

With the help of faculty content experts, WIDS team members used performance-based principles to develop online courses such as, written communications, speech, technical reporting, economics and psychology of human relations. The goal of the four-month project was to better serve a target market of self-disciplined, motivated students who were sometimes geographically bound, said Mary Ann Bazile,

Moraine Park's partner for program design and outcome assessment.

Moraine Park's general education courses, which are required for all associate degrees and technical diplomas, are now online. Other programs including two certificates—Legal Office Skills and Clinical Coding Specialist—were also added.

"One of the most difficult parts was to find appropriate learning activities that allowed the learning community to evolve with the online courses," said Denise Martinez, dean of general education. Moraine Park wanted to ensure that online learners felt part of a community within the courses. Retention rates for online learners are low nationally, around 30 percent, according to Rettler. By actively involving students and addressing other areas that affect retention, such as curriculum and instructor training, Moraine Park has engaged and retained learners, he said.

Facilitating interaction between learners and teachers was a goal of WIDS curriculum writers. Learning community frameworks were set up in each course, building interactivity through the use of discussion outlets, such as "chats," WorkSpace and WorkGroups. And, whenever possible, performance assessment tasks were used

to move away from traditional exams.

To ensure "cyber" students are satisfied, a Moraine Park staff member monitors the online courses and acts as a liaison between the learners and the instructor. The staff member is actually called a "lurker" because she "lurks in the courses and prompts students to get involved," said Cindi Thiede, Moraine Park's vice president of teaching and learning and corporate and community services.

The courses enable learners to succeed because they provide a framework for building in learning activities that students complete offline. They also include synchronous and asynchronous activities that are designed to meet the performance assessments and related competencies, said Martinez.

The success of securing a new market of learners came as a result of good teamwork and planning on the part of both Moraine Park and WIDS, said Thiede. "More than half of the online students are brand new to Moraine Park and haven't taken courses from us before. I'm hoping to increase that number next semester."

Since 1992, WTCS has invested more than \$3.5 million in the development and continual improvement of WIDS.

By Haley Jorgensen

## E C H O E S

### Looking back at issues that have shaped and defined community colleges today

*Excerpt from "Consumer Problems in Education," By Arch W. Troelstrup, The Junior College Journal, Volume 21, Number 5, January 1951.*

The goal of educational efforts must be to provide for every student a general education so adapted to his abilities as to develop his maximum usefulness to himself, to his future family, to his community, to his country, and to his world society.

Consumer education is one aspect of the larger movement of educating for liv-

ing which has made slow but steady progress in the last quarter of a century. In the Educational Policies Commission's report on the "Purpose of Education in American Democracy," consumer education is included in its list of major objectives of general education. In a more recent report, the Commission again recognized the ability to purchase and use goods and services as one of the ten "imperative needs of all people."

*Arch W. Troelstrup was then chairman of the Consumer Education Department at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri.*