Chapter One

I. Nature of Requested Change

Minnesota West Community and Technical College (MWCTC) requests that The Higher Learning Commission, pursuant to policy IC2b, grant MWCTC the authority to offer the following by means of distance delivery methods:

Certificates
Diplomas
Associate of Arts
Associate of Science
Associate of Applied Science

This request is to offer these degrees in any of the disciplines/programs in which MWCTC has such degrees or awards or those it may through its regular and time-tested curriculum committee process in predominately online, interactive television (ITV), classroom enhanced delivery modes, CD-ROM, and other distance delivery technologies that are yet to be identified and evaluated.

Chapter Two

II. Rationale for the Requested Change

Why Minnesota West Seeks Institutional Change

Minnesota West serves a geographical region in southwest Minnesota that exceeds 20,000 square miles, an area larger than the combined states of Vermont and New Hampshire. In addition, four of the five MWCTC campuses are within fifteen miles of either South Dakota or Iowa. We have for the last four years served this large geographical region with individual courses and certificates through distance delivery methods. To complete a traditional face-to-face degree or diploma the learner within our region has been required to attend one of our five campuses.

After four years of developing a strong distance delivery infrastructure we are now in a position to fully meet the College's mission and vision to be accessible to the citizens of southwest Minnesota as well as others in the state and nation in need of our unique online program offerings. For purposes of this report, the terms "distributed learning" and distance learning" are used interchangeably. The terms "e-learning" and "online learning" are also used synonymously.

The expected outcomes are:

- Increase learning opportunities for individuals and groups within Southwest Minnesota
- Provide identical course and program outcomes as found at the MWCTC campus based programs
- Increase enrollments and increase revenue to reinvest in expanded online offerings
- Provide the same strong student support services as found at the MWCTC campus- based sites
- Assist our communities in meeting their economic development agendas
- Work with the business community to meet ongoing and dynamically changing training needs of employees.

Figure 2.1 from MnSCU's ***E-Learning Market Analysis Final Report***, August, 2001, illustrates the learner segments we expect to address:

Figure 2.1

Chapter Three

III. What Factors Led the Institution to Undertake the Proposed Change

Multiple Stimuli for Change

The conversion of multiple factors has led Minnesota West to undertake the proposed change.

For 15 years the College has delivered courses via electronic methods to the dispersed population of its 19-county area. Interactive television, cable television, and now online delivery has made accessible a broad range of courses to five campuses and rural high schools. Accessibility to education has been the philosophical driving factor. That philosophy within the mission of the College and the mission and vision of the state system (MnSCU) creates a dynamic force for growth in innovative, efficient methods of delivery. During intense processes of institutional planning, couple with system-wide planning, an evolution occurred whereby offsite delivery of degrees and diplomas is necessary. Constituents utilizing electronic methods to receive courses wish to finish their programs and degrees. Competition from sources outside the region caused Minnesota West to evaluate its ability to deliver full degrees.

The inability of high schools in rural Minnesota to offer many courses due to budget constraints and shortage of qualified faculty created another impetus for the College to evaluate direction. More contributing forces such as the shortage of allied health professionals and companies requesting online training stimulated extended planning.

Based on broad input by community, student, faculty and administration, strategic planning documents emphasize the need for extended distributive learning.

Assuring institutional growth impacts the decision to ask for program change. Incrementally, Minnesota West has grown in its delivery of courses:

- **In 2001, distance courses accounted for 10.7% of the total FTE enrollments with web courses (stand-alone Web). This growth does not include Web-enhanced courses as all courses are expected to include Web-based learning components.**
- **Of this 10.7%, online courses represent less than 1% of the total and ITV 9.8%.**
- **In 2002, the total FTE enrollments rose to 15.6% with the percentage of Web courses rising to 3.87% and ITV, 11.7%.**
- **In 2003, the total percentage of distance delivery courses reached 17.9%. Web delivery accounted for 6.2% of the total FTE, and ITV decreased slightly to 11.66.**

Innovative, efficient infrastructure has been created to assure comprehensive service to online students.

Online Open Source Tools

In addition to having the hardware and software infrastructure to manage fully online learning, the College has been developing and implementing two other related tools—online advising (particularly for technical programs) and a suite of open source learning tools collectively referred to as the Minnesota West Learning Network (MLN). MnEmerge, our interactive advisory system, enables teachers of technology and professionals in the field to receive feedback on their course content by using Web-based tools and processes. Students benefit from their teachers' cutting edge expertise, and they have access to communications with the teacher. Students benefit from the expertise of field professionals and peer professionals. This communication tool has already demonstrated its contribution to creating a life-long learning community—a community that is particularly valued in distributed rural settings.

MnEmerge, MnMaster, and MnWest Plus

MnEmerge and MnMaster are web-based products and processes that have been developed, tested, and implemented. The third tool in the suite is referred to as MnWest Plus, currently in the early stages of development.

The online advisory project takes the Minnesota West Learning Network and applies it to the technical program advisory system. It is expected that when MLN is applied to the advisory process, a network of lifelong learners will be created. This enables students (new and past), teachers, and advisors to collaborate with each other and increase their knowledge and understanding as a means for making new applications.

The online advisory process establishes and facilitates the workings of advisory committees. Each committee has a maximum of fifteen members who are chosen for their 1) technical expertise, 2) willingness to share ideas, evaluate specific curriculum related to their field, and provide feedback that helps the curriculum be state-of-the-art, and 3) history of communicating and collaborating online. Each program teaches its cognitive competencies online through college faculty. Faculty are responsible for developing and delivering the courses online. Faculty agree to incorporate the advisory input into their lessons and to keep the courses current through MnMaster.

The advisory process is built on the premise that technical faculty are ideally situated to facilitate learning from 1) applied research and 2) field experimentation. For example, the Lamb and Wool program during the past twenty years has become a national advisory process model. On one hand, research veterinarians trust faculty with proprietary information. On the other hand, the practitioners or producers trust

them with proprietary information. Both groups, collectively and individually, are willing to share confidential information since they trust the faculty to keep proprietary that which is "sacred." They also trust them to share industry ideas and practices that will strengthen the students in their fields.

MnMaster, the course management system, currently provides the teacher with document management, assessment tools, discussion and chat forums, student tracking, grade book, file exchange, communication tools, and web links library. Additional modules and enhancements of existing modules are deployed on an on-going basis. An EduTools audit of the qualities of MnMaster can be found in Appendix A. MnEmerge is an online advisory system that gives the advisor and teacher document management, survey tools, discussion and chat forums, advisor tracking, program/course oversight tools, file exchange, communications tools, and web links library. MnWest Plus is an extended support system that reaches beyond course work both in time and content.
Both MnMaster and MnEmerge came into existence because of faculty desire for simple tools that would enable them to put content online and simultaneously secure confidential feedback. Both tools have become major mechanisms for faculty participation in the implementation and maturation of distribution tools. At the same time, they have become part of a culture that is utilizing technology to reach new audiences.

Utilizing Online Tools to Enhance Mission

At a time when the labor pool in Minnesota is diminishing and companies are insisting on broader skill sets from graduating students, an increasing number of Minnesota community and technical college students are trying to prepare themselves to enter and support the workforce—a workforce that is continuously learning in order to stay competitive. As a result, MWCTC has responded by creating and delivering dynamic curriculum that can be accessed anytime, anywhere that is specific to discipline needs. This kind of dynamic curriculum development and refining process is becoming *the* key component within terminal, non-transfer college programs as well as a significant enhancement for transfer curricula. *Building and delivering "dynamic" curriculum have been re-enthroned as the engine that drives identifying, recruiting, and retaining quality employees*.

Minnesota West recognizes that the need exists, in part, from the failure of higher and technical education to develop a system for developing and delivering competency-based training. Beginning in the 1940's companies joined with schools in advisory capacities to identify competencies and develop appropriate curricula. These curriculum development sessions ranged from informal get-togethers to formalized DACUM conferences.

While some schools continue to secure curriculum input through traditional means, MWCTC is one of only a few schools that have implemented a cooperative online curriculum-training model. Successful schools generally invite and diligently seek

input from their business and industry partners. Generally, however, schools go through the motions of listening and being responsive, but "then go teach what they want or what suits the teachers." Even though a limited number of curriculum partners are willing to report that the curriculum is archaic, they are not willing to go against the grain and be perceived as "boat rockers". Often companies assign advisory responsibilities to human resources or public relations personnel rather than supervisors who are responsible for quality and standards. When curriculum specifics are discussed, company representatives sometimes hesitate to share their processes out of fear of divulging proprietary practices to their competitors. Consequently, curriculum and curriculum standards have become weaker rather than stronger.

MnEmerge is innovative in its vision. Its focus is to ensure a strong process for delivering lessons and eventually full courses on the Internet and for providing advisory group access. Advisory groups evaluate lessons as they are brought online. This immediate and necessary feedback enhances the lesson application and ensures that industry standards, as well as national skills standards are being met. Advisory groups are excited about the project as they also see the need for curriculum validation that the lessons are at the appropriate student learning level. Students are more marketable when industry leaders join faculty in taking an active role in ongoing curriculum review and update.

Assuring Continuing Institutional Growth

The most overriding factor that led to this change request, however, is the growth of distance delivery courses.

Commission Support of Educational Innovation

The Higher Learning Commission has publicly stated that it is "supportive of educational innovation and change necessary to improve educational quality." [1] Minnesota West Community and Technical College has invested more than twelve years in the planning and development process for such a move towards offering complete degrees in distance delivery modes. The last four have been intense. Minnesota West faculty and administration have worked together to prepare for this change in educational program offerings through careful planning, faculty training and nurturing, forming and utilizing cluster user groups, and perfecting processes that assure incrementally increased capacity to serve "distance students" with quality offerings and support services.

In this specific case, Minnesota West cites The Higher Learning Commission response letter from Dr. Karen Kietzman to Dr. Ronald A. Wood dated February 17, 2003, as a signal of the Commission's support of educational innovation (**Appendix B**).

Commission Policy on Institutional Change

Commission Policy 1.C.2 defines institutional change and identifies types of innovations requiring an institution to seek prior approval for change. The Commission Policy 1.C.2.b.4 indicates, "Degree programs offered through distance delivery methods"[2] constitute an institutional change in educational offerings by an institution. On that basis, MWCTC requests Commission approval to enable the college to offer degree programs that will be delivered through distance delivery modes including ITV, online, and enhanced.

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1 ***Addendum to the Handbook of Accreditation***, Second Edition (The Higher Learning Commission, a Commission of the The Higher Learning Commission of Colleges and Schools, March 2002), p.43.

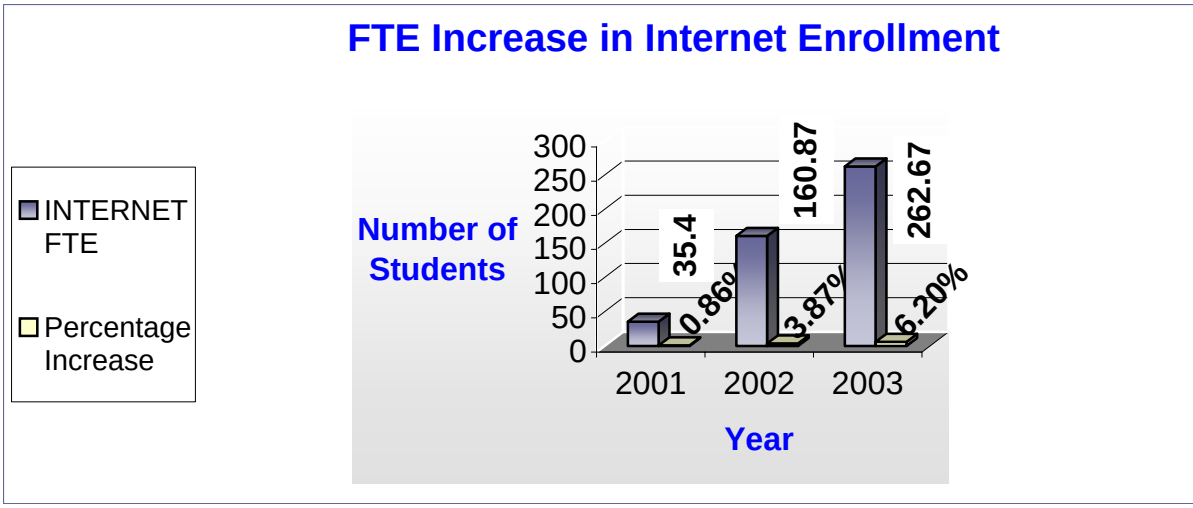
2 ***Addendum to the Handbook of Accreditation***, Second Edition (The Higher Learning Commission, a Commission of the The Higher Learning Commission of Colleges and Schools, March 2002), p.43.

Expected Outcomes of the Proposed Change

The primary objective of Minnesota West in establishing distance delivery programs is to enhance access to community college for Minnesota residents and non-residents, regardless of their location or restrictions imposed by their personal, family or work schedules. While we are pleased to have 67 course sections available online and 68 sections available through ITV for 2003, we recognize that the greatest benefits of education are obtained by those engaged in a comprehensive program of study. Thus, the primary outcome expected to result from this proposed change would be to continue to improve access to community college education to include complete programs of study made available to students via distance delivery technologies. See **Appendix C** for listing of 2003 distance courses.

In addition to the availability of a variety of online and instructional television programs to distance learners, approval of this proposed change is expected to contribute to continued enrollment growth in distance delivery programs which in turn allows the further expansion of offerings and support. These enrollments have been increasing significantly each semester (**Figure 3.1**). For example, the fall to winter 2002-2003 increase in fully online courses was 61%. While it is logistically impossible to maintain similar increases indefinitely, these enrollment patterns are expected to persist for several semesters. Combined with the inherent convenience of the distance delivery formats, we believe that the quality of the courses, programs and services will ensure an appropriate level of sustained growth.

Figure 3.1



Finally, this proposed change will enable MWCTC to better serve the public by making additional programs of study available to distance learners. **This request for institutional change at Minnesota West Community and Technical College stems from a natural and logical progression in the development of the college, directly emerging from the college's mission, vision, values, and purposes.**

Chapter Four

IV. Request for Change as Related to the College Mission and Vision

Anticipated Impact of the Proposed Change on the Institution

The requested change allows Minnesota West Community and Technical College to fully reach its mission and vision statement with respect to being both accessible and affordable. Currently students must attend one of the five campuses for a significant portion of their course work in order to attain a diploma or degree. Individuals who are site bound due to such factors as work requirements, transportation issues, child-care concerns, and cultural barriers are excluded from attaining a diploma or degree. With this change request we are reaching our mission and vision commitment to provide accessible and affordable learning opportunities. The anticipated impacts on the institution are:

- Increase the number of non-traditional students from communities that are located more than twenty miles from one of the campus communities.
- Increase enrollments in technical programs with students that have historically been site bound.
- Increase the level of responsiveness to communities and community enterprises with training needs.
- Increase the number of technical program offerings that project low enrollments when offered at a campus location only (e.g., Wind Energy).
- Increase the number of students in critical shortage programs (e.g., Nursing and Education).

The planning processes occurring at Minnesota West during the last four years have been intense and thorough. Faculty, staff, business and industry, partners, students, foundation members, regional stakeholders, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, legislators, college administrators and advisory committees have all participated. These individuals and groups have brought to fruition a Self-Study leading to a 10-year accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission, a formal Strategic Plan, an institutional facilities plan, and a Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education grant as well as many grants supporting e-learning. The efforts of numerous players resulted in a ***Master Academic Affairs and Student Services Plan*** (enclosed) and institutional program review.

Documentation within each plan reveals the need and desire by the regional constituents for expanded distance learning opportunities. Research conducted during the strategic planning process examined the needs of the population based on demographic, economic, agriculture and political factors. Surfacing repeatedly during the research was the expectation that Minnesota West would deliver accessible, effective and efficient education to the region. Within each of the major plans there are goals, objectives and criterion for distance learning. The Minnesota West online vision is both comprehensive and integrated.

The Minnesota West Community and Technical College Strategic Plan includes three strategic directions that embrace and support distance learning:

Strategic Direction One:
Minnesota West Community and Technical College will create learning opportunities for the citizens of southwest Minnesota that reflect the rapidly changing demographics of the region.

Goal 1.1
The College will increase the level of enrollment of underrepresented students so that it reflects the composition of our communities.

Strategic Direction Three:
Minnesota West Community and Technical College will create a learning environment that broadens the capabilities of students, staff and faculty by expanding its instructional horizon to include all possible learning tools.

Goal 3.1
The College will provide instructional development opportunities.

Goal 3.2
The College will expand its distance/online offerings to include degrees and diplomas.

Strategic Direction Four:
Minnesota West Community and Technical College will collaborate with businesses and communities in southwest Minnesota to identify opportunities for the enhancement of the economy and to provide coordinated political action.

Goal 4.3
The College will develop credit and non-credit programs which improve the economy of southwest Minnesota.

The Minnesota West 2002 annual goals addressed, through task force efforts, seven major goals. One of the goals was "to develop and execute policy and procedures for the implementation of online programs and courses." Furthermore the Master Academic Plan of 2002 stated as Goal VII: Expand quality e-learning opportunities to meet access goals. The Master Plan also stated that courses to address nursing shortages through online and off-site classes would be delivered.

The Carl Perkins Vocation/Technical grant for FY 2003 ($409,512) includes numerous goals supporting the delivery of distance education:

Goal 3: Technology in vocational-technical education. Utilize and promote technology in education through online courses, accessibility and opportunities to technical for area high schools.

Promote technology in vocational-technical education by developing online courses (health care).

Develop online orientation for parent access.

Develop online developmental education and tutoring.

Concurrent activities/mandates at the state level have impacted Minnesota West and supported our efforts to focus strategically on our distance delivery. The MnSCU Strategic Plan, goal 10 states that: *"Minnesota State Colleges and Universities will enhance the use of electronic learning tools and process to support classroom learning and provide students with full range of high quality programs and students services."* In addition, this plan mandates that colleges meet the full range of student learning needs including a variety of student learning styles, further supporting the need for expanded distance learning.

The MnSCU system-wide workplan gives more impetus to distance learning by calling for *"continued development of distance and technology-enhanced education opportunities to improve the system's ability to respond to learner needs."* The plan also defines methods of delivery as flexible scheduling, alternative delivery models, online credit and on-credit courses to strengthen community development and economic vitality.

The mission of Minnesota West gives credence to the request for expanded distance learning*: "Minnesota West Community and Technical College is dedicated to serving the varied educational needs of our diverse populations in affordable, accessible and supportive settings."*

The following mission goals specifically address distance and varied delivery of higher education:

- ***To provide learning opportunities for people of varying ages, backgrounds and abilities with a particular focus and commitment to retraining and lifelong learning.***
- ***To provide extended educational opportunities by means of flexible scheduling and delivery.***
- ***To provide effective and efficient use of resources through partnerships with agencies, other educational institutions, businesses and industries.***

Approval processes for all programs are clearly defined through the Minnesota West Academic Affairs and Standards Council and the MnSCU program approval and

review committee. The Chancellor or designee ultimately approves all new programs. Program approval at the local level is rigorous and no credit-bearing program is delivered by e-learning if it is not an approved program for on-campus delivery. Delivery of online programs/courses is approved by the academic administration with the agreement of the faculty.

Chapter Five

V. Request for Change as Related to Previous NCA Report

Minnesota West Community and Technical College received a ten-year accreditation from The Higher Learning Commission formally in 2002. No stipulations were cited. New degree sites were approved for the Associate Degree of Nursing completion program.

Progress reports were required on the Strategic Plan and Policy and Procedures Manual annually until completed. In August 2002, the Higher Learning Commission approved a report written by President Wood. The Minnesota West Strategic Plan was completed and published (**Appendix D**). The Policy and Procedures Manual is in progress and will be completed by June 2003. An intense review of all academic and student affairs policies has been conducted. Revised and new policies have been approved through institutional channels.

Identified Strengths

The Higher Learning Commission evaluation team reported a number of strengths. Several are relevant to the request for change:

1. **The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, through the knowledge and leadership of the Board of Trustees and Chancellor, understands, accepts, and fosters the community college mission and is clearly committed to Minnesota West's autonomy and to supporting it in meeting the needs of its diverse and geographically distant communities.**
2. **The institution has been responsive to the communities it serves through partnerships with business and industry, active program advisory committees, and five citizen's advisory Committees consisting of community representatives from all five campus locations. As a result, the College enjoys a remarkable degree of support from the Worthington, Canby, Granite Falls, Jackson and Pipestone communities as evidenced by its relationship with area high schools and businesses.** (See growth of online and traditional partnerships in **Appendix E**).
3. **The institution is meeting the geographic challenges of access to programs and services for small numbers of students and declining resource base by extensive use of ITV, alternative delivery (mini-sessions during vacation/holidays), an increase in the number of night offerings, and online courses.**
4. **The library has a current, user-friendly, text-based web site for student access to research materials and links appropriate for student learning.**

Challenges and Responses

The Higher Learning Commission team identified institutional Challenges. Those challenges most relevant to the request for change included:

1. ***The College needs to update the references of its affiliation with the Higher Learning Commission on its web site and publications/documents.***

Response: The status of affiliation with the Higher Learning Commission is on the Minnesota West Web site and will appear in the next catalog printing, online catalog, student handbook, and other publications.

2. ***The institution may want to consider more appropriate and flexible scheduling than now exists for the library, student success centers, and computer labs.***

Response: Flexible scheduling has been addressed by the use of library technicians serving evening hours, tutors made available for evening students, on call technicians available for ITV problems, and proctor utilization for testing. A plan is in operation to hire extra tutors and student service personnel every evening for the remainder of 2003 and the fall of 2004. Perkins funding will provide financial support for that initiative.

The team's opinion based on their visit provides support for the change request, ***"Minnesota West has the resources and personnel necessary to move the institution forward and continue to meet the expanding need of its community."***

Chapter Six

VI. Historical Context of Online Course Development and Delivery at Minnesota West Community & Technical College

Development and Delivery Policies and Procedures

Several elements of the Distributed Learning Plan include course development and delivery issues. The Plan, in its entirety, contains ten segments (**Appendix F**). Items 1, 3, 4, 6, and 9 are featured in the following:

1. Create menu of online courses that has student-appeal and that attracts interest and learning commitment thereby forming the basis for participating students to become life-long learning partners with the College.

Courses to be produced are based on faculty interests and desires. Our vision and plan incorporates the continued development of the Minnesota West Learning Network that includes three products—***MnMaster, MnEmerge, and MnWest Plus***. Faculty champions who extend themselves are the primary ingredient and essential first-step for moving the College into a position of national e-learning prominence by having a holistic or systemic approach to engaging learners from across the globe in life-long learning experiences.

In addition to increasing the size and enhancing the quality of the course menu, the College will continue to develop an online library that provides critical services to all Minnesota West learners, including services that directly support the unique needs of distance students. The role of the Office of Distributed Learning is to support the library staff and assure infrastructure as well as development and delivery support. The library has been responsible for creating *"Mac & Cheese",* an online orientation-learning module that helps potential students assess their comfort level with online courses and simultaneously get acclimated to MnMaster. Working in collaboration with library personnel, the Distributed Learning team desires to assure student online learning success.

As part of its efforts to serve students through distance delivery mechanisms, the Office of Distributed Learning will support and encourage online student services functions such as advising, mentoring, and tutoring.

All Minnesota West online courses will comply with MnSCU quality standards and fit within Minnesota Online delivery parameters.

3. Identify, nurture, and engage content and teaching champions whose expertise fits distance learning market needs and who desire to risk "developing and delivering web-based courses."

Minnesota West is fortunate to have a significant number of faculty who have developed a reputation as cutting-edge content/discipline experts as well an affinity for delivering their content through technical means. Nurturing them and engaging them in course development is achieved through offering/providing assistance for such activities as 1) putting their course outlines on the web-site, 2) demonstrating and encouraging online course handout and archival repository, 3) showing and teaching them how to commence and maintain (with the help of their students) hyperlinks to related research, and 4) creating a community of discussion of new pedagogy and other areas of interest.

To sample Minnesota West online coursework, go to http://ct.mnwest.mnscu.edu/MnMaster. Use "Schwan's" and "mnwest" as username and password.

When a faculty member desires to create and deliver an online course s/he should:

1. Focus on "curriculum committee approved" course that fits within his/her area of expertise
2. Secure dean's approval to produce. Develop rough outline and agreement about delivering the course that includes potential enrollments, timing, compensation for teaching, etc.
3. Receive a MnMaster account.
4. Receive MnMaster training from Distance Learning Coordination Clerk and/or faculty peers.
5. Examine and agree to incorporate WCET "best practices" protocol within the proposed course.
6. Incorporate the following assessment procedures:

    - Adhere to Angela and Cross "classroom learning techniques."
    - Peer review of by at least two (preferably one will be outside the institution) of faculty choosing.
    - Review and input by at least two students chosen by the developing faculty.
    - Agree to include the online survey at the conclusion of the online course.

4. Produce, distribute, evaluate and continually improve fully online high quality web-based courses.

The College has developed its own suite of Open Source tools that includes an Instructional Management System (IMS—sometimes referred to as a course

management system or CMS) titled MnMaster. Faculty will become engaged in the development process as they have need and time to create courses. Providing time and budget as incentives occurred during the first two years through a MnInstruct grant. At the present time, Minnesota West tools are generally accepted as part of the pedagogical tools that are indigenous to the College. As funds become available, they will be offered to participating faculty through Deans and Department Chairs. The Office of Distributed Learning will continue to 1) identify outside funding sources, 2) develop plans for securing outside funding sources in cooperation with participating faculty and/or their Deans and Department Chairs, 3) write proposals and grants that address faculty needs, and 4) aggressively recruit and nurture companies that will develop and market Minnesota West online courses that can be taught to company personnel.

To assure quality online courses, the College endorses and seeks to include the Western Cooperative for Educational Technology/Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WCET—WICHE) principles.

Faculty can also call upon the Instructional Design Team that includes an experienced instructional designer and content-specific coordinator. Both functions are headed by Minnesota West faculty. The role of the designer is to help faculty identify their teaching strengths and determine specific online teaching tools and techniques. The role of the content-specific coordinator is to assist the faculty with the full array of Minnesota West opportunities—student involvement, research, testing, and so on.

6. Develop, implement, and manage a web course production process that respects and celebrates intellectual property and academic freedom.

Ownership of courses, intellectual property, and copyright issues are dealt with in a unique way at Minnesota West. The policy statement is:

Ownership of courses is held jointly by the developing faculty and the institution. Faculty who develop online are supported through programming, curriculum development and ancillary support within the Office of Distributed Learning.

While this statement is an “official policy”, the College has a much more liberal practice. Because we believe so strongly in faculty and their professional expertise, Minnesota West, unlike many sister institutions, has a posture, position, and practice that says “faculty can take their content and go any where in the world and work with any institution.” Minnesota West will not seek to claim exclusive ownership of the content.

We have shown that our culture and online tools have enabled us to create a genuine symbiosis. As an example, a math teacher who moved from Minnesota to Indiana will continue to teach online for the College. This relationship is similar to the one that Novell established between the programmers who owned code and their

new CEO. He told them they owned the code. Rather than owning code, he felt strongly that all of them must become a "team of trust." When they trusted each other with each entity performing its role, the other benefited and the entire organization grew to national prominence.

Financing the development and testing of distance learning courses is also unique. In 1999 Minnesota West along with nine sister institutions received state funding to experiment with and test the concept of faculty sharing their expertise. Known as MnInstruct, the project enabled the College to provide seed funding for faculty who desired to produce online courses.

The MnInstruct grant had been developed and awarded by the time Minnesota West established the new Office of Distributed Learning (ODL). To "stretch" resources for both the project and the ODL, the College chose to focus on five specific areas with Field Project funding directed toward "seeding" champion faculty ideas and the Leadership Cadre funding supporting the sharing and collaboration. In priority order our "areas of focus" included:

- Online course development and delivery and becoming a MnSCU leader in developing and delivering online courses.
- Online/web-based college collaborations or partnerships.
- Online/web-based high school collaborations.
- Online/web-based business/Industry collaborations and partnerships.
- Creating a new institutional foundation model that enables the Development Office to initiate and nurture new avenues for securing scholarships, grants, and gifts.

The MnInstruct project (faculty sharing model) enabled the College to establish basic developmental processes, basic training, email and toll-free phone support, along with follow-up procedures, testing, and implementation of "best practices."

During fiscal year 2000-2001, MnInstruct grant funds that exceeded $50,000 were provided to individual faculty and additional funds were awarded through state agencies. When funds are available, faculty are and will continue to be compensated.

9. Support web development and production through consistent policy and appropriate human support. Assure exemplary support through web helps and toll-free phones that lead faculty to become self-sufficient online course developers and deliverers.

In 2002 under the direction of the Provost, an *ad hoc* Online Task Force Committee came together to deal with online details. While the committee is open to all Minnesota West faculty and staff, it is a working committee and not policy making in nature. The basic *modus operandi* is that those who participate must be contributors. Those who come to the monthly meeting, come with issues and solutions. This

Online Task Force is expected to be the means for faculty and campuses to address production issues.
A second support mechanism is the Teaching and Learning with Technology Roundtable (TLTR)—a password-protected discussion forum for Minnesota West faculty, staff, and administration and stakeholders. In addition to being a forum, the site includes pertinent documents and links. Faculty and staff are encouraged to engage in TLTR. http://www.mnwest.mnscu.edu/mnemerge/tltr/index_frame2.html

All online courses produced at the College will have been through the Academic Affairs and Standards Council and received institutional approval and support. Online courses will have been through four additional quality checks: 1) Angelo and Cross, 2) Peer input during development, 3) Selected student review during development, and 4) Built-in online course evaluation instrument that is given at the end of each online course.

As stated within the Faculty Development pre plan (page 6 of the Distance Learning Plan):

> *When technology-mediated instruction results in increased class sizes or student-faculty ratios beyond traditional classroom and curricular standards, additional resources or workload adjustments necessary to maintain the quality of instruction must be provided through the Provost/Academic Vice President and the Deans.*

A collegewide online production team meets monthly to evaluate progress, make reports, account for previous assignments, accept new assignments, and assure that project benchmarks are achieved. A process has been implemented which prioritizes and reprioritizes as the needs and conditions change. During 2003-2004 the team has goals to refine the production process, incorporate product testing, and assure that all Minnesota West courses are of superlative quality in terms of simplicity, student interaction with each other, the course, and the instructor, navigational ease, eye and emotional appeal, speed, effectiveness, instructional design/pedagogy, and learning effectiveness.

Additional quality features include: 1) securing Higher Learning Commission approval for all online programs which may include incorporating annual quality assessments through the The Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP); and 2) assuring program quality through the following assessment measures:

- Student and faculty surveys
- Help-desk calls from faculty and staff
- MnEmerge advancements and extensions
- Built-in evaluations within each distributed learning course.

In January 2002, the institutional governance "meet and confer council" (Alternative Governance) approved a policy regarding the relationship between administration

and faculty in the delivery of online coursework (**Appendix G**). Policies, procedures and guidelines for all program delivery are approved through an administrative and faculty council mandated by the faculty union contract. A faculty manual is being developed online that can be used by faculty for program and course approval, modification and closure. The same process governs interactive televised courses and Internet courses.

Faculty Development

Minnesota West Community and Technical College has offered faculty development opportunities supporting instruction via interactive television since 1988. Fall workshops as well as recent new faculty workshops incorporate techniques, assessment expectations, good practices and model course demonstrations to all involved faculty.

The MnSCU Online Council operating officers and others provide frequent articles and examples of good practice that are forwarded to faculty. A new timely development newsletter with helpful techniques for online learning and delivery is provided to all online instructors. Minnesota West recognizes that faculty development regarding good practices is essential for all instruction. On March 29, 2003, a proposal to the Center for Teaching and Learning (a MnSCU-administered faculty development system) requested funding for a learning advocate to facilitate resources for faculty.

Intellectual Property

The Director of Library Services is the Intellectual Property and Copyright Coordinator. Because of her involvement in web development, online instruction and as a faculty member her expertise in Intellectual Property interpretation will be received well by peers. The MnSCU Intellectual Property liaison will provide statewide training to all intellectual property coordinators in the spring of 2003. An Intellectual Property policy was implemented throughout all MnSCU colleges on January 1, 2003 (**Appendix H**).

Consortia Agreements

Minnesota West has entered into consortia agreements with several colleges, combining online courses or ITV courses offered by each, allowing students to achieve a degree. A consortia agreement is signed by both college presidents defining the home (degree-granting college) and the host college (course delivery). Roles of each college are clearly outlined. MnSCU Minnesota Online Council provides the suggested format for these agreements (**Appendix I**). Minnesota West is delivering courses to students for the Community Service Disabilities degree program at South Central in Mankato, Minnesota. The nursing program at Minnesota West is in negotiation to deliver joint programs to students with Northwest Technical

College, Minneapolis Community & Technical College, and Ridgewater College. They are working toward a common core curriculum.

Delivery Issues

The majority of delivery issues that have surfaced during the past four years include student readiness, security, learning effectiveness and fear that students could not complete courses. Each of these issues deserves comment.

Student readiness

The question is often asked by faculty, "what assurances to we have that students are prepared to take an online course where they could be learning in isolation?" Initially, students were directed to a sample online course that had been developed by another institution. Unfortunately, the process did not track or measure readiness skills. Since then, most students register toll free and talk personally with a registrar who has been able in most cases to determine some degree of readiness through a series of questions. By fall semester 2004, all students who desire to take an online course at Minnesota West must show competency by entering the sample assessment course—"Mac and Cheese" that has been developed within MnMaster and which has test out questions. Results will become part of the institutional database.

Security

Assuring security of student privacy and data has been a continual concern at Minnesota West as well as within MnSCU. Major online issues are: assessment/testing security, assessments administered via instructional television, securing personal and financial data, and maintaining data integrity. All of these issues have been addressed within the past three years and are under the constant scrutiny of the Director of Technology who is also the institutional Chief Information Officer (CIO). A matrix that identifies the issues, shows the type of security implemented, and the resulting infrastructure change is included as **Appendix J.**

Teacher effectiveness/Learning efficiencies

Teacher effectiveness, learning efficiencies, class size/teaching loads, creating a sense of belonging within a class of peers, securing immediate feedback, quality design, and enhancing learning are a few of the questions that have led to the implementation and nurturing of the online elements described within this self-study. With the addition of both an instructional designer and content/resource advocate, the college is prepared with vision, leadership, infrastructure, support, and a sharing culture that will assure that these issues will be examined and addressed scientifically. The results will become part of the institutional history that will be shared with other institutions that have desires to significantly enhance learning—particularly learning within higher education. Class size is negotiated with the faculty

on a regular basis for all classes including electronically delivered courses. The faculty union contract (http://www.mnscu.edu/LR/Contracts/mscfol-02.pdf) specifies workload limitations.

Retention

A very satisfactory rate of distance delivered course completion by students is illustrated (**Figure 6.1** and **Figure 6.2**). Eighty five percent of students taking ITV courses finished their course. Seventy four percent completed the Internet courses for which they were enrolled. Course completion was tracked since the inception of electronically delivered courses at Minnesota West.

Figure 6.1

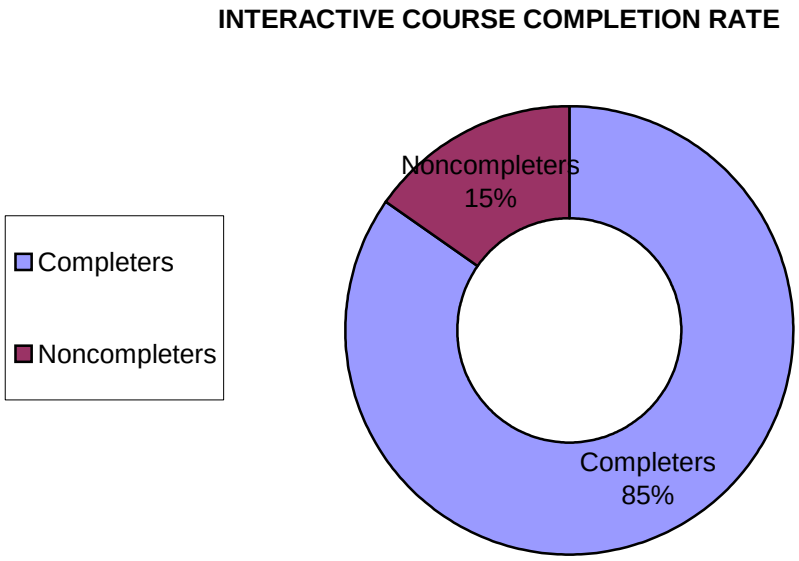
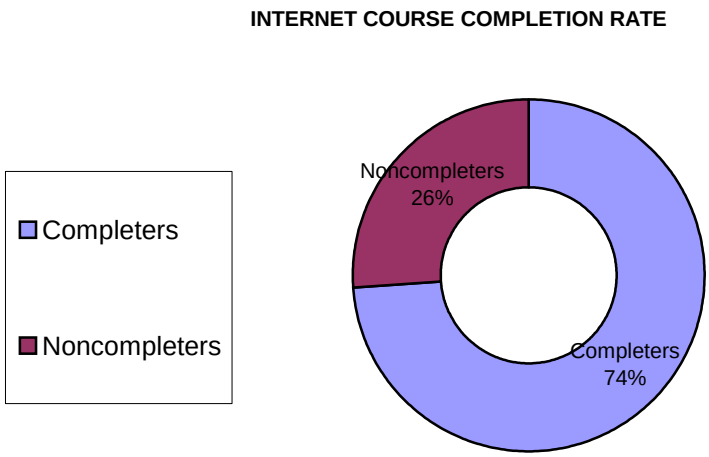


Figure 6.2



The retention rate goal for all students is 72%. A study of retention statistics and factors related to attrition is conducted regularly. Intervention strategies are implemented by the College and may include increased tutoring, early warning systems, and using better practices for electronic delivery of courses. The College will study the retention rate of fully online students to compare matriculation to on ground students.

Chapter Seven

VII. What are the institution's plans to implement and sustain the proposed change

Broad-based integrated planning toward goal achievement and sustainability

The Minnesota West community & Technical College Academic and Student Services Master Plan is included in its entirety as supporting documentation for this Request for Institutional Change.

The vision and goals of the instructional, student service, technical, and academic support programs are integrated with the Minnesota West Mission, Minnesota West Strategic Plan, MnSCU Strategic Plan, and the Chancellor's Workplan. Collaborative processes occurred simultaneously to produce planning in facility improvement and academic program review. Included in all planning were goals and expected outcomes for distributed learning. The goals are articulated in **Appendix K**.

Minnesota West received a 10-year accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission in 2002. Minnesota West is also contributing to a state- wide initiative in e-learning including the development of curricula and programs funded through FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education). Multiple efforts driven by and impacting the academic heart of Minnesota West require action to ensure the integrity of mission, the commitment to constituent needs, the quality of delivery and the assurance that infrastructure resources (physical and human) exist to support all tasks. Policy development and compliance to policy continue to give structure in curriculum development, faculty hiring and issues of accreditation for specific programs and the institution.

President's Commitment to Online Education and Distance Learning

Immediately upon his arrival at Minnesota West, President Ronald Wood began his advocacy and activities toward accessible, electronically delivered learning. One of the first endeavors was to seek and hire a visionary Distributed Learning Associate Vice President. Gary Phelps was hired to fill that role in June 1999. The Director of Technology continued to fill the indispensable role in the technical administration of interactively televised courses while Mr. Phelps creatively sought open source designers, funding, and proactive faculty.

Since the beginning of his tenure President Wood has publicly supported online delivery, participated in strategic planning toward broadening the delivery and quality of distance learning, while setting direction and providing leadership to the College.

Refer to **Appendix L** for a detailed summary of President Wood's commitment to organization of distributive education.

Administrative Structure Necessary to Support Proposed Change

Minnesota West subscribes to a philosophy and practice of gently nudging faculty to "improve their teaching" which eventually leads to the use of technology. As a college, Minnesota West promotes instructional design and technical support to assist faculty in the development and presentation of technology-mediated instruction/learning. When technology-mediated instruction results in increased class sizes or student-faculty ratios beyond traditional classroom and curricular standards, additional resources or workload adjustments necessary to maintain the quality of instruction are provided through the Provost/Academic Vice President and the instructor's dean.

In addition to his commitment, President Wood initiated an organizational change within Distributed Learning that led to increased staff and increased efficiencies. All of the positions shown in the Distributed Learning Organizational Chart (**Appendix M**) are filled. All are full-time with the exception of Instructional Design (.2 FTE) and Content Coordinator (.67 FTE, beginning 7/1/03). The President, Provost, and Associate Vice President of Distributed Learning are extremely pleased that all of the key functions to make this change effective are defined and in place and that those who fill the positions are highly skilled and trained.

Faculty Credentialing and Training

A system developed to track faculty credentials, licenses and ongoing continuing education is in place and monitored by the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs and Human Resources. The hiring protocol established for faculty applies to those who teach on-campus, in distance learning, on the Interactive Television system and online. In 2000, the Higher Learning Commission assessed the level of credentials of the Minnesota West faculty and found the institution meeting requirements established for community college faculty. The same expectations are used and will be used for distance learning instructors.

Minnesota West provides individualized training for faculty in the use of MnMaster, an independent IMS teaching program. In January 2003, an instructional design instructor was added on a part-time basis for faculty training to improve course delivery or put a current course online.

Faculty have participated in numerous workshops during inservice days, on demand, as part of the Center for Teaching and Learning (http:/www.ctl.mnscu.edu), and recently a MITSS (Minnesota Instructional Technology Support Services) project conducted by the MnSCU Office of Instructional Technology (http://www.oit.mnscu.edu). Specific disciplines have attended training (nursing) in their field. Interested faculty attended the League of Innovation in Community

Colleges. Faculty have attended best practice workshops. One faculty member was chosen to present a workshop at the National Conference for Staff, Program Development in Austin, Texas. The Minnesota West Web site has a faculty mentoring program online developed by a faculty member (http://www.mnwest.mnscu.edu/mentoring/mentoring_index.html). An online users' manual for MnMaster, also constructed by faculty, is available online. The library Website (www.mnwest.mnscu.edu/college/libraries) has numerous helpful programs, one of which is a sample online course faculty can review.

Program Approval Process

The Academic Affairs and Standards Council represents five campuses and academic divisions in locally approving new, modified, or replicated course and programs. The programs and courses that are offered online must exhibit the same standards and represent only the courses and programs already approved by the council. The approval process managed by MnSCU is the final step in program approval. Online programs ultimately are submitted to MnSCU. A centralized system of marketing and tracking online courses exists (ISEEK and MnVU) through the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (http://www.iseek.org/sv/index.jsp) and http://www.mnvu.org.

Holistic approach to Online Development and Delivery

For the past four years Minnesota West has been laying a foundation that enables faculty to extend themselves and simultaneously model quality learning. In short, the approach has been to identify and engage faculty champions who subscribe to the open source process which has two essential rules: 1) give credit for that which has already been done, and 2) add value. The Minnesota West Learning Network tools have been designed to engage faculty in the design and development of both the products (MnMaster, MnEmerge, and MnWest Plus) and the learning process. As stated earlier in this Self Study, the first two have been developed, tested and implemented while MnWest Plus is conceptual and in the early design stages. In collaboration with MnSCU, the Edutools team at Educause is evaluating MnMaster. All of the courses being developed at Minnesota West are evaluated against MnSCU/WICHE online guidelines (**Appendix N**).

The Distributed Learning notions and plans that form the basis for this Self Study and change request have been developed and posted for faculty, administration, and staff to scrutinize and offer feedback. A simple over-arching Content, Information and Learning Plan (**Appendix O**) is intended to create a framework and show and "umbrella-like" relationship for three other plans:

- Technology Plan (**Appendix P**)
- Distributed Learning Plan (**Appendix F**)
- Web Site Content Plan (**Appendix Q**)

In effect, distance and distributed learning have become a tool for bringing academic and technical faculty who are scattered over a vast distance together to consider and refine learning challenges – online and on ground. They have also become important elements in improving learning resources and support services.

One of Minnesota West's strengths stems from its experience of teaching with technology for more than a decade. Minnesota West has and continues to be a statewide higher education leader in delivering courses through interactive television. Upon approval, Minnesota West expects to have all cognitive competencies of its technical programs (35 total) delivered via the Web, and offer five certificate and degree programs online. The first fully online certificate program, Wind Energy, a one-year sixteen-semester credit program, was delivered September 2001.

Learning Resources and Support Services

Minnesota West Community and Technical College offers a variety of student service functions for online and ITV students.

- Registration: Students are permitted late registration for pre-selected courses of which some offer an extended time for completion. E-mail addresses are assigned to the students for the purpose of communication.

- Payment Arrangements: Students are afforded online tuition and fee payments with a credit card.

- Financial Aid: All required forms for consideration of financial assistance are available.

- Assessment: AccuPlacer will be afforded to all distance education students online.

- Orientation: Students are able to complete orientation requirements via an online link.

- Disability Services: A direct link for each of our five campuses is available to online students.

- Bookstore: Online purchasing of textbooks is available for all online students.

- Application: Application requirements and forms are consistent with on and offline students. Required forms are available online.

- Centralized Contact: Technology staff member is identified and available as a direct link for referral purposes to all other student services.

- Retention: The overall institutional goal for student retention from year to year is 72%. Currently the retention of students at Minnesota West is 64%.

Minnesota West capitalizes on superlative *online library, research and academic support.* ISEEK, which stands for the Minnesota Internet System for Education and Employment Knowledge, is an online tool that helps everyone—students, career changers and lifelong learners—find the information they need to make informed decisions on educational, career, employment and business opportunities within Minnesota.

A small sampling of ISEEK functional features include:

- Research educational programs and post-secondary school options
- Find out how to secure financial aid
- Learn about specific careers and compensation
- Locate resources for starting a business as well as specific job openings
- Review commonly asked interview questions and quality responses.

The Minnesota West library website has been developed to assure that students at all of the five campuses and those studying at home and who may be disabled have access to the same information and services as those who are on-campus. The site provides access to the online catalog where students may request items through interlibrary loan. Databases of full-text journal articles and reference resources are easy to use. A virtual reference library provides hundreds of useable online resources. E-mail and chat reference services are available along with many research helps, such as, “Preparing a Works Cited Page.”

Budget History and Commitment

The commitment to distributed learning is well-illustrated by the hiring of designated staff, the president’s design of organizational structure, and the efforts in securing partnerships and grants. The process of budget allocation has supported all phases of distributed learning including technological infrastructure, staffing within the distributed learning area, faculty salaries, and support services. The allocation sources are illustrated in the following charts (**Figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4**):

Figure 7.1

Distance Education Budget Data		
Soft Money		
E-Learning Paraprofessional Grant	$	58,730.00
E-Learning Nursing Grant	$	95,746.00
Dual Entrance/Exit Grant	$	7,500.00
Hearing Impaired Interpreter Grant	$	20,270.00
Online Paraprofessional Classroom Aide	$	40,000.00
Child Care & Development	$	15,965.00
Tutors in Training	$	31,900.00
Critical Access Distance Learning	$	10,000.00
Regional Electronic Academy	$	44,753.00
Lakefield Economic Development	$	19,680.00
Online Sign Language Grant	$	60,479.00
	$	405,023.00
Institutional Funds		
Technology Fees Generated and Spent	$	274,425.00
Technology Service & Computer Lab	$	460,405.00
Distributed Ed Admin & Misc	$	125,998.74
Telemedia Memberships	$	68,000.00
	$	928,828.74
Totals		
Soft Money	$	405,023.00
Institutional Funds	$	928,828.74

Figure 7.2

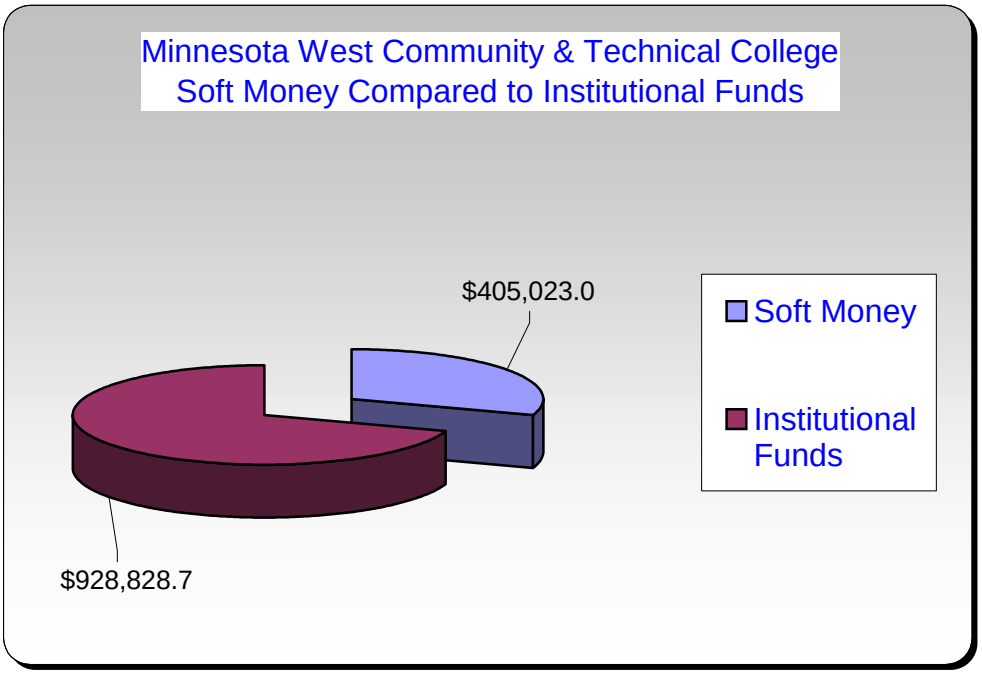


Figure 7.3

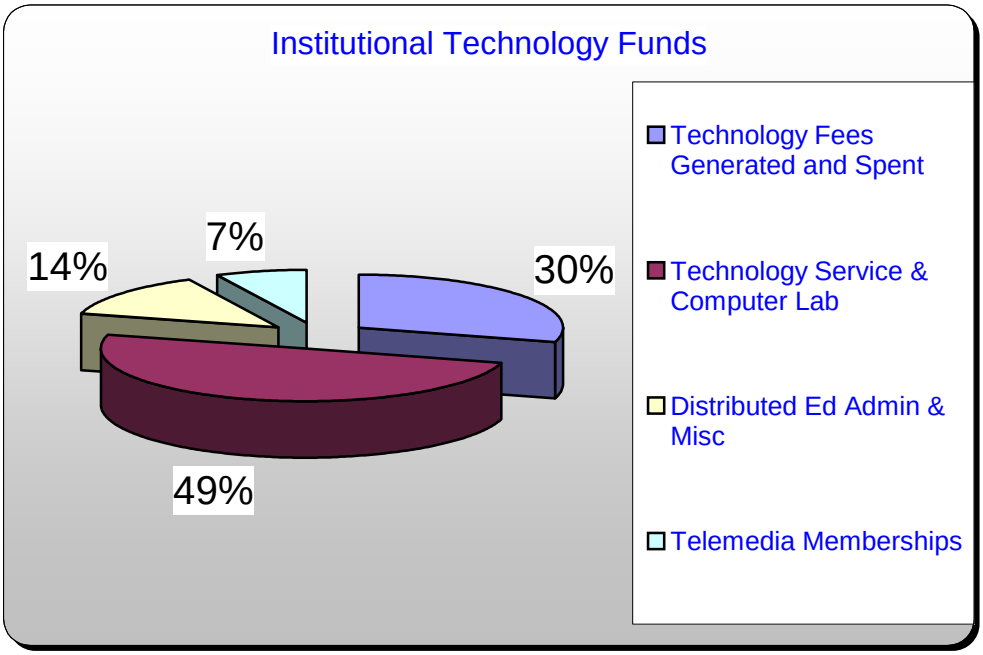
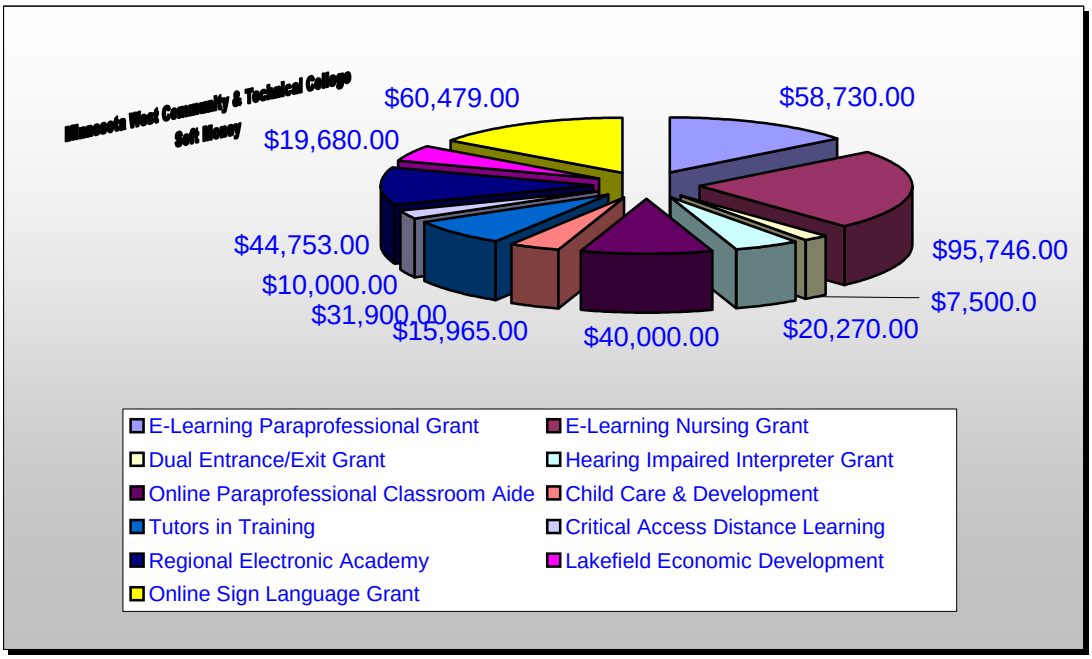


Figure 7.4



The budget allocations and distribution for electronically delivered courses and programs can be found in **Figure 7.1**. Minnesota West has received commendations on budgeting and accounting practices by the MnSCU system for several consecutive years. The planning and attention to budgets regarding the technology of Minnesota West, infrastructure, Internet, and interactive television is found in **Figure 7.3**. Technology fees, MnSCU allocations, Perkins Grant money, and institutional commitment provide funding to make learning accessible to the regional students (**Figure 7.2**).

The Associate Vice President for Distributed Learning has written many grants that have been funded. The grants have partially supported online courses delivered to high schools, business and industry, off-site nursing programs, paraprofessional educators and agriculture-related business and farmers (**Figure 7.4**).

Earned financial support from state departments of Commerce and Agriculture and MnSCU

Since e-learning affords new opportunities for public institutions to collaborate with agencies and businesses in mutually beneficial learning initiatives, Minnesota West will aggressively seek to identify and nurture strategic alliances and partnerships with organizations. The Distributed Learning Office will continue to refine "wholesaling" a notion that has been discussed and considered at the college as a means of engaging external organizations, agencies and businesses in mutually beneficial online learning activities. By aiding these groups in their online learning needs with products, support, and training, they, in turn, develop and deliver training. Equally important, they recruit and support their workers into the courses. In effect, their efforts help defray the three costliest elements of education—1) course development, 2) course delivery, and 3) recruitment. In 2000, the college invited non-college collaboration with such organizations as John Deere, Motion Industries, Synergetic Design, and 5Comm.

Marketing

Minnesota West is a member of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, the single largest provider of public higher education within Minnesota. All of the Minnesota State College online courses are accessible through a link on the system web site, www.mnscu.edu or by going to the web site www.mnvu.org. The Minnesota West web site also provides a listing. The web site address is included on all Minnesota West publications. A distance delivery brochure is updated regularly for distribution. All schedules and bulletins include web and ITV instructions and courses. Press releases and news stories have been utilized to announce course offering via the Internet (**Appendices R and S**).

Chapter Eight

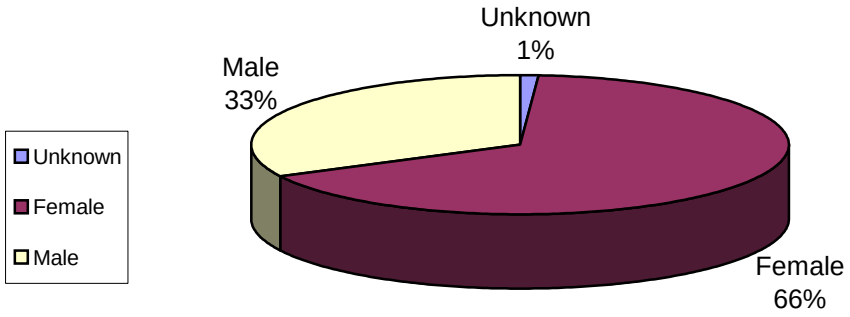
VIII. What Are the Institution's Strategies to Evaluate the Proposed Change

Accessibility to learning, providing learning outcomes consistent with online programs, and increasing enrollment were cited in Chapter Two as expected outcomes of the proposed change in educational programs. In addition, providing strong student support, community economic development, and providing training to business are expected results of the requested change.

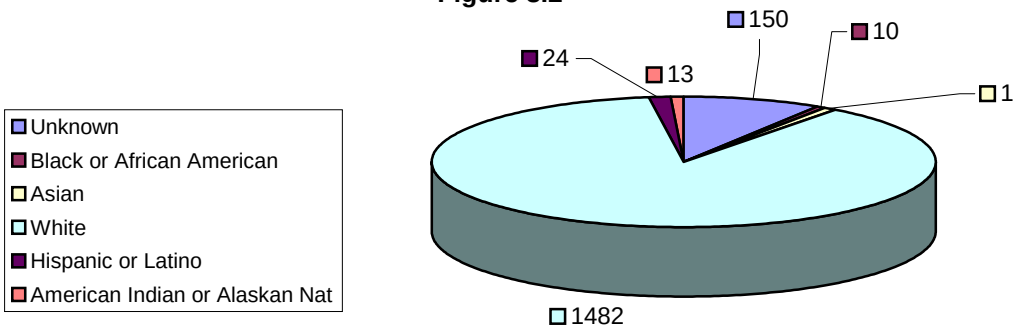
Increased Learning Opportunities

The demographics of students being served by interactive television and Internet is illustrated below (**Figures 8.1, 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4**):

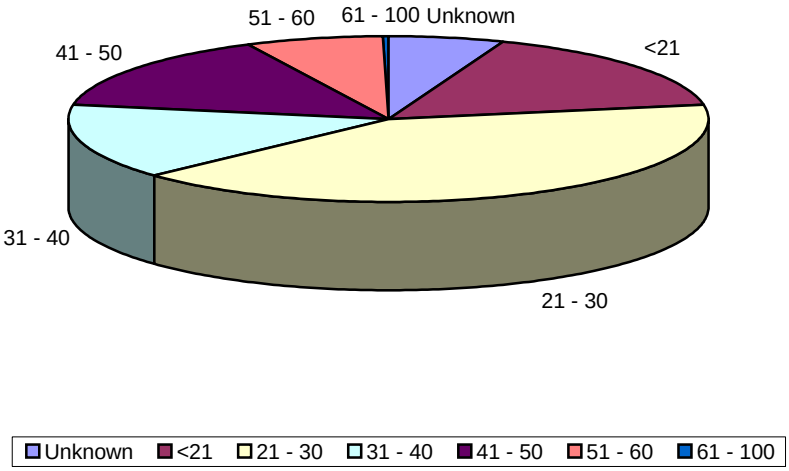
GENDER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN INTERNET COURSEWORK - Figure 8.1



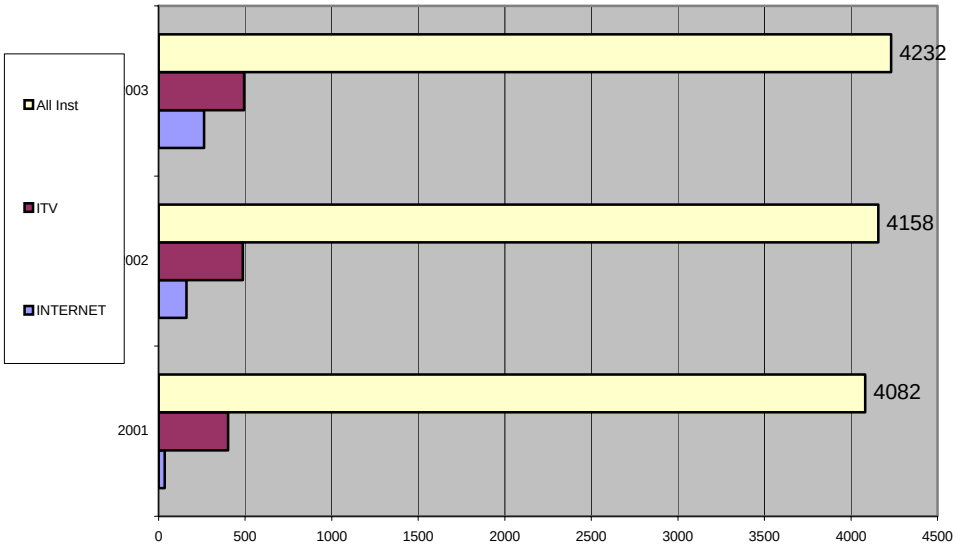
Ethnicity of Distance Educational Students
Figure 8.2



Age of Distance Education Students
Figure 8.3



Distance Ed Instruction Compared to Total FTE, 2001 - 2003
Figure 8.4



Expanding learning opportunities include greater options for students utilizing interactive television toward a broader curriculum. As an example the technical students are able to take more general education courses that may lead to degree completion. Online courses will lead to the same outcome. Expansion of the geographical distance from campus to student will occur because of online accessibility. The demographic profile of student location, age, and site will demonstrate expansion and increased accessibility. Minnesota West will evaluate that change during the next year.

Provide identical course and program outcomes as found at the Minnesota West campus

Minnesota West implemented a collegewide assessment plan in 1998. The plan responded to the Higher Learning Commission's recommendation for Minnesota West to have a collegewide plan. The plan led to a collegewide assessment committee that continues to operate and consists of faculty representation from all five campuses. A Handbook for Assessment is utilized and can be found as **Appendix T**. Jan Lange, a long time faculty member, is given release time each semester to coordinate in-service activities, modify assessment instruments, and provide direction for assessment of student learning outcomes. The newly-appointed Instructional Designer, Kayla Westra, provides mentoring for assessment to instructors.

Previously the assessment process was impeded by the differences in course assessment (liberal arts and technical). Many of the difficulties in merging the two approaches were alleviated by cooperative planning. Student learning outcomes are assessed by course and program. National skill technical assessment instruments are used in most technical programs. Helpful in the collaboration process was the 2002 merger of the technical and community college faculty contracts. The defining elements of course syllabus and course outline, once separately used for liberal arts and technical courses, are now clear. Student learning outcomes are included in the outline and syllabus. Those outlines and syllabi are housed in the Provost's office. Faculty report on effectiveness of their assessment plans through the assessment committee at the same time they report grades to the Registrar.

The system utilized for assessment is the same for all courses and programs; both distance learning and on-ground. In May, 2003, a survey was conducted to ascertain faculty responses to assessment of student learning in online courses (**Appendix U**). One purpose of the survey was to establish the impact of assessment in changing course curriculum and delivery to improve quality. In addition, a review of the process is completed each year during faculty workshops. On April 18, 2003, an orientation was delivered at a required duty/work day (**Appendix V**). The Assessment Coordinator and Instructional Design faculty member delivered the information and provided mentoring to new and seasoned faculty. Assessment instruments and best practices were shared. Faculty assessment concerns are being addressed through the technology support staff and assessment coordinator.

Evaluation of online and ITV instruction is conducted with the same procedure as on-ground instruction. A Minnesota West faculty evaluation handbook has been approved through the "meet and confer" procedure. Student evaluations, classroom observation by deans, peer evaluation, and self-evaluation are all methods employed to give feedback to the instructor for affirmation and development goals. The current handbook is under review by faculty and administration for update and possible revision that may be helpful in electronically delivered courses.

MnSCU academic policy requires placement testing to be administered to all new students. Minnesota West has historically given those placement tests and advised students in appropriate course registration. The Computerized Assessment and Placement Programs (CAPP) test has been used. However, beginning in 2003 – 2004, Minnesota West has begun administering the AccuPlacer, which allows more appropriate means for online students and better places students in math courses. The contract with AccuPlacer has been established. Proctoring for some students will be necessary when they are outside the campuses' area. Students may register for up to 8 credits prior to applying for admission and taking the placement tests.

Nursing Model

Nursing is not only the largest on ground and online program at the College; it is also the assessment leader. The philosophy and practices developed and implemented by this program have become the college assessment model.

Minnesota West is offering distance-learning opportunities to a cohort of part-time students and full time students in practical and associate degree nursing. The distance coursework will be the didactic, skills lab, and clinical, portions of the curriculum. The total programs are offered at a distance. The didactics are offered in a variety of methods including, online, ITV, and face-to-face delivery. The skills labs and clinicals are offered at the remote site. Students who are accepted for the distance learning are screened like all other students. In addition, the prospective students are given instructions on how to use technology.

In order to insure that the students have the same opportunities for services, Minnesota West and the nursing programs have designed the support services to be available online, by email or direct faculty/staff contact. The information that is online for the students regarding registration, readiness, tutoring, bookstore, technology and help with technology, and library resources is available through the Minnesota West Web site through the distance learning link or the library link. The nursing program employs one half time position of nurse tutoring (to bring to a full FTE position) in order to accommodate the need for the off campus students. Academic advising is available by toll-free phone and by email.

Evaluation and assessments are conducted to insure:

- Student capability to succeed in distance programs and application of the information to admission and recruiting policies and decisions
- Educational effectiveness of distance education programs (including assessment of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction) and comparison to campus-based programs
- Integrity of student work and the credibility of the degree and credits awarded.

The distance program students are compared with the on ground students. Several faculty teach online and on ground. Grades of the two groups are compared through the semester and their NCLEX results are compared.

Guidelines for Assessing Technical Programs

In addition to the nursing assessment model, the technical programs adhere to a practice that assures that online courses have the same goals as traditional coursework.

The two types of evaluation that are considered in the assessment plan are formative and summative. Each of these types of evaluation provides different information that can be used for course and program improvement.

Formative evaluation improves program performance by influencing immediate decisions about the program. All data collected by the program for formative purposes are used for implementing and improving the program. Formative evaluation is the process of testing and evaluating a learner's progress toward achievement. Formative evaluation is conducted for measurement of progress, not completion requirements.

Summative evaluations judge programs for the purposes of accountability, advancement and aid in the decisions about continuation of the program. Summative evaluation is the process of testing and comparing to determine if a learner has met exit requirements.

Some evaluations can serve both purposes, but as in the case of student ratings of faculty and courses, distinctions should be made about which data are used for what evaluation.

Programs offering online courses should define in general statements their aims and purposes of education. These goals should be long range and give the programs intended outcomes in broad terms. These goals should direct the programs teaching and learning. They should discuss the programs purpose and identify the expected results of teaching. They will serve as a foundation for assessment planning, program policymaking, and program planning.

Programs offering online courses must review their program and course objectives. These objectives must describe specific student behaviors the program expects its students to demonstrate at the end of instruction based upon the programs goals. Program objectives should be in a written format and be reviewed, revised, and updated on an annual basis.

Student assessment of outcomes provides the program evidence that student learning has occurred. Formative evaluations of outcomes may be done by the following methods: Capstone courses, Classroom Assessment, Performance Based

Assessment, and Surveys (current student, general studies). Summative evaluations may be done by: surveys (alumni, exiting students, and employers), and comprehensive tests.

Evaluation and testing are two distinct activities with testing as part of the larger activity of measurement. Measurement is the process of determining quantity, quality, efficiency, or durability and evaluation is a process by which something unknown is compared to something known.

Technical program assessment is based on the following criteria:

- Course program outcomes are clearly defined
- Make curriculum changes based on data analysis
- Faculty credentials, contract improvement
- 5-year enrollments
- 5-year involvement (quantity and quality)
- Ratio of faculty to students
- Annual total costs
- Previous years enrollments
- Previous years faculty to student ratio
- Total number of seats
- Occupied seats/fill rate/percentage
- Introduction or first course numbers that give an optimum picture for the coming year.

Assessment Summary

In summary, Minnesota West program assessment includes:

1. Assessing learning outcomes. By implementing instructional design principles and protocol through the new instructional designer, we expect to establish basic parameters for measuring learning effectiveness. We also expect to study our findings scientifically and make modifications to ensure that make quality learning is a top priority.
2. Numbers. We have shown and expect to increase the attractiveness of quality courses.
3. Advisory input that includes incorporating MnEmerge and engaging faculty creating courses that are evaluated and critiqued (generally and specifically and in confidence if advisory desires) online.
4. Statistical analysis from the deans (in consultation with program faculty), deans, the academic team, and the Provost.
5. Comparisons with national projects that mirror our objectives. There is a possibility that Minnesota West could set-up and facilitate the collaboration of such groups as Distributed Learning Workshop and the National Occupational Career Testing Institute (NOCTI). We have proposed to become a NSF Applied

Technology Center to assess the effectiveness of online advising and the assessment of quality e-learning.

Documentation measures include, but are not limited to:

1. Annual program reviews completed in concert with the appropriate dean.
2. Instructional design database that electronically attracts, files, catalogues, and compresses data as per instructional design expectations and queries.
3. Student assessments. General. No data to faculty that is not part of his/her course/program.
4. Inclusion of four-step quality design procedures—a) Angelo & Cross, b) peer review that is completed during the first month of course delivery, c) evaluation by at least three students (of the faculty choosing) that is completed during the first two months of course production, and d) completion of evaluation instrument by all students.
5. Since we expect to have students taking online courses including short-courses that have been developed since their graduation/completion, we will collect and evaluate longitudinal data.

Increase enrollments and increase revenue to reinvest in expanded online offerings

As illustrated by the chart showing increased Internet enrollment on page 7 of this study, the progression of growth in online offerings is apparent. Tuition generated by the increase, as well as technology and online fees allows more revenue to be used for further delivery. Because fees are dedicated to technological and human resources the revenue is a steady stream for continued growth. That growth is monitored by a regular enrollment analysis done at the college and system level.

Same strong student support

Evaluation of support services is conducted yearly in informal surveys and the Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey. The Online Task Force compiles responses regarding quality of student support function of the College by utilizing the Guidelines for Electronically Delivered Programs.

When issues are identified a solution is sought by the task force and addressed by process and policy.

Assist our communities in meeting their economic development agendas

In assessing the effectiveness of this project component, the College will:

- Document community and regional economic development issues where Minnesota West is invited to provide input and assistance.
- Under the direction of the college president, set up and facilitate online collaboration with community and economic development leaders.

- Within the President's Council review, prioritize, and set goals for assisting community and economic development leaders. Formally evaluate at least twice during the year.
- Invite and secure formal (online) input from community and economic leaders relative to their perceptions of the ability and response level of Minnesota West.

Work with the business community to meet ongoing and dynamically changing training needs of employees.

Even though this Self Study does not focus directly on the work that has been done to help businesses and industries identify and meet their ongoing employee training needs, the study references a few developments such as John Deere, Schwan's and "wholesaling". The most important business and industry developments could be summed up under the following:

Nerness Project: Private individual who represents a variety of industrial products to more than 500 Minnesota and upper Midwest manufacturing companies. When he determines through his explorations and discussions with company officials that they can utilize online training, he refers them to Minnesota West and encourages them to produce and deliver online training modules to their employees and customers.

Taylor Elk Ranch is an example of an entrepreneur who is building online courses to build an interest in a new industry and engage serious investors and industry partners in online learning.

Northwest Iowa Technical and Community College has an extensive on ground customized training program. They desire to offer more courses online. In concert with Minnesota West and two organizations, they will develop courses and collaborate through the MWCTC suite of tools.

Synergetics: North Carolina company that is developing several courses for the utilities industry. MWCTC has agreed to help the company refine curriculum and try to establish certificate and degree programs around their curriculum. In turn, Minnesota West expects to have the company to offer college credit to every trainee.

Motion Industries: Alabama company that specializes in hydraulics and related training. Five engineers working as a team have developed the basic hydraulics course that is taught as part of the online Wind Energy certificate program. This a first attempt by the company to produce and deliver online. They have been pleased that a public institution of higher education has provided the tools, server space and infrastructure, training, and support to help them succeed. Like the other partnering companies, they are expected to teach the courses in-house and thereby further "wholesaling."

Reitech is a Minnesota company that is expanding into other states. When they market safety equipment, they also provide on-site training that has proven to be cost prohibitive. As a result, they are developing training specific to their company needs and utilizing Minnesota West tools, infrastructure, and support to accomplish their mission.

Evaluation for this component will be completed by using the following criteria:

- Numbers of companies that enter into online learning partnerships
- Numbers of trainees within each company
- Degree of wholesaling accomplished by each company

Learning effectiveness of each course as determined by the same quality criteria used at Minnesota West Community and Technical College.

Chapter Nine

IX. Summary and Conclusion

This Self-Study and Request for Change in Educational Program is climactic for Minnesota West Community and Technical College. It represents years of progressive events during which the College has become increasingly sophisticated in the delivery of distance learning (**Figure 9.1**). Incrementally the technological and instructional systems have been modified and improved to accommodate the growth of off-site courses, training, and development.

During the last few months a number of faculty and administrators from neighboring colleges have visited Minnesota West to experience a model course and examine the technological infrastructure. The open source model employed by Minnesota West is of great interest to the colleges and businesses who wish to be innovative in their approach to online learning. Southwest State University, Marshall, Minnesota and Western Iowa Technical College, Sioux City, Iowa have recently sent representative to evaluate its potential use.

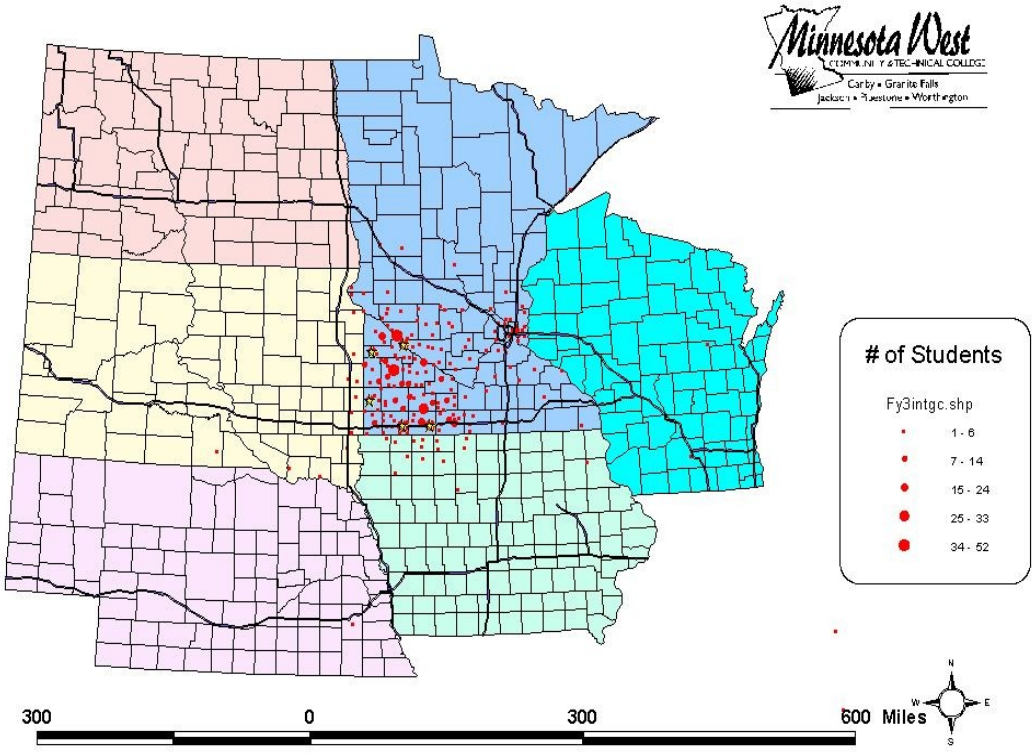
There are numerous ventures which Minnesota West could share, all identifying the strength of the delivery system. One example demonstrates a successful model built by the technology team, faculty, and support staff. The newest venture for Minnesota West is representative of the mission, vision, and goals as identified by the Online Plan, the Academic and Student Services Master Plan, and the Strategic Plan. Minnesota West has embarked on offering Competency-Based Education (CBE) to employees of a corporation in southwest Minnesota: Schwan's, Inc., Marshall, Minnesota. Release time has been given to a Minnesota West instructor to advise employees in the completion of competency-based portfolios that will give them college credit for courses. She is using the Internet to advise, mentor and evaluate the students' work in cooperation with appropriate faculty. Faculty assessment of the students' work via the portfolio will substantiate learning outcomes.

Accessibility to educational advising, career growth, and constituent connection to the College can result from this project. Cooperation with business and industry, retaining employees in rural Minnesota, and potential enrollment for Minnesota West will result. Students can remain employed, potentially have career upward mobility, and can become familiar with academic expectations. This project is symbolic of the potential for online learning.

The possibility of being approved to offer degrees and programs fully online is exciting. However, it has been only through active team efforts, MnSCU support, and community relationships this could come to fruition.

Figure 9.1

Geographical Location of Fiscal 03 Internet Students



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