NWACC Using Online Evaluation System

New SmartEval Allows More Timely Feedback for Improved Student Outcomes

BENTONVILLE, Ark. (November 27, 2012) – NorthWest Arkansas Community College students are using an online course evaluation system this fall in what college officials believe will provide more consistent and timely feedback to course instructors.

The college is now using a SmartEval software that integrates with NWACC’s Banner system so that when a student logs into his account, he is notified automatically that evaluations are open. Evaluations are completed online and can be filled out on or off-campus. Devices such as smartphones and tablets can be used, along with any web browser.

Previously the institution used a combination of evaluation tools, including Scantron sheets (slips of paper covered with rows of ovals to be filled in with a pencil), printed materials and a survey created in-house.

“It was very unwieldy,” said Dr. Kate M. Burkes, director of Distance Learning at NWACC. Typically the process would require compilation of responses by the administrative assistant serving in the subject area. Once the information was compiled, it would then be shared with the appropriate dean or department head. Sometimes the compilation process took months to complete.

Throughout the campus, deans, faculty members, departmental secretaries and Distance Learning leaders discussed revamping the process. A faculty and staff committee led by Burkes worked on an Academic Quality Improvement Program action project. Faculty, staff, students and administrators were surveyed. Faculty feedback led to a 17-question form for all students to complete. Room also
was allowed to customize additional survey questions for different departments. The college purchased the online survey system from SmartEval to improve processing and data collection.

Paige Francis, associate vice president of information technology, estimated that the prior evaluation methods cost NWACC more than $28,000 per year to implement if nearly 1,700 hours of preparation and processing and $4,500 in supplies were factored in. The cost for SmartEval is $11,000 per year.

“The SmartEval system increases the number and frequency of student evaluations of faculty,” said Dr. Bryan Aguiar, Faculty Senate president and an associate professor in NWACC’s business department. “Student comments, which are the most valuable component of the evaluation, are easier to collect.”

The evaluation reporting process is reduced from months to weeks, Aguiar said, providing in-depth information allowing instructors to alter their coursework and teaching more quickly, thus improving student outcomes.

Francis said, “The system enables the college to have the documentation and timely data to make sure we are continuing to serve our students how they want and how they need to be served.”

NWACC received recognition in University Business magazine’s winter 2012 Models of Efficiency program for the college’s work on this initiative.

NorthWest Arkansas Community College is a smart choice for students wanting to pursue quality higher education. As an accredited institution through The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, NWACC is a public two-year institution that serves and strengthens its surrounding communities in Benton and Washington counties by helping our students maximize their potential and exceed expectations. With state-of-the-art facilities, NWACC provides excellent academic instruction and workforce training needed to succeed, offering personalized attention from highly respected faculty, staff, and administrators. For more information, visit www.nwacc.edu.