

**Enabling Staff with Technology Training**  
**Peggy A. Biegler, M.Ed.**  
**District Software Training and Support Manager**  
**Dallas County Community College District**

*The Dallas County Community College District relies heavily on the use of computers to conduct administrative business and to work with students in our classrooms. To meet the challenge of providing software-training opportunities for staff and faculty while reducing time away from the desk, the District created the Software Training and Support Department.*

*On-going software training ensures that new employees are provided training so that they can quickly contribute to the productivity of the department. Proper training helps to maintain the integrity of the data entered into the student information system (Colleague) and to ensure that student records are handled appropriately following FERPA and HIPPA guidelines. Since the District requires that training has occurred prior to granting access to Colleague, the Training Department works directly with supervisors to provide hands-on training and training documentation to District Information Technology, the department that sets up access.*

*Email communication, eCampus electronic class component, eConnect on-line registration, electronic transcript storage, electronic job postings, and using the Microsoft Office suite for everyday office tasks are some examples of why staff and faculty find a need to participate in software training. When queried, faculty and staff cited convenience and short classes as two major criteria for participating in training. The Training Department delivers classes at all of the eleven District locations in a one-half day format to meet the needs of faculty and staff. Classes are also customized to focus on a specific need of a workgroup.*

*In addition to providing software training, the department provides help desk support for employees on all District supported software. The help desk also assists users in resolving issues relating to network access and access to the student information system. Help desk support is available to employees by phone, email or fax. The help desk line is answered 24-7.*

## **Dallas County Community College District**

Generally regarded in the community college industry as being in the top five in the nation, the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) enrolls over 100,000 credit and non-credit students every semester, making it one of the largest higher education institutions in the State of Texas.

The DCCCD is comprised of seven colleges located strategically throughout Dallas County. Anyone in Dallas County has only a short drive, bus or train ride to reach the nearest college. More than three decades of growth and progress are a credit to the vision of Dallas area citizens. In May 1965, Dallas County voters created the Dallas County Junior College District and approved a \$41.5 million bond issue to finance it. The next year, El Centro College began serving students in downtown Dallas. Eastfield College in Mesquite and Mountain View College in southeast Dallas enrolled their first students in 1970. Richland College opened two years later in north Dallas. An additional \$85 million in bonds supported the DCCCD's expansion, and construction began on three more colleges. Cedar Valley College in Lancaster and North Lake College in Irving opened in 1977, followed by Brookhaven College in Farmers Branch in 1978.

In addition to the colleges, the DCCCD also operates the Bill Priest Institute and the R. Jan LeCroy Center for Educational Telecommunications. The Bill Priest Institute opened south of downtown Dallas in 1989, serves individuals and businesses of all sizes with training programs customized to meet their needs. The LeCroy Center is one of the largest producers of distance education products in the nation. There are also two District office sites supporting the colleges.

DCCCD derives its revenue from local taxes, state and grant funding and student tuition. Governed by an elected Board of Trustees that represents individual districts, DCCCD is the largest undergraduate institution of higher education in the state of Texas. It also serves as a workforce development partner for local businesses by providing basic skills and technical training they need.

In its organizational culture, the DCCCD

- places ultimate value on student success;
- applies the principles of continuous quality improvement to achieve student success; and
- uses technology not only to teach distant learners, but also to educate, train and re-tool both its students and its employees.

## **Enabling Staff with Technology Training**

The Dallas County Community College District relies heavily on the use of computers to conduct administrative business and to work with students in our classrooms. To meet the challenge of providing software-training opportunities for nearly 4,000 full-time staff and faculty and about 6,000 part-time employees while reducing time away from the desk, the District created the Software Training and Support Department.

Since 1999, the Software Training and Support Department has been offering classes on all software supported by the District. New employees are hired into the District every month and individuals who do a job intermittently (such as helping with registration twice a year) need to have training available on a regular basis or, in an emergency, to cover a critical position. Having an in-house Training Department allows the District meet these needs in a timely manner so that the work of the District can proceed uninterrupted. A regular core of classes is offered each month to ensure the availability of training for new District employees.

When new software is introduced in the District or new versions are implemented, training is conducted to coincide with the release. This ensures that employees are easily able to transition to and utilize the software and continue their work with the least disruption.

The DCCCD Software Training Department provides a full, on-going technology-training curriculum that includes a core of Colleague and non-Colleague classes. The training is provided at the District Service Center and all DCCCD locations in group and individual formats to meet the client's needs. When staff needs training, informal

assistance, or coaching, the department does everything possible to deliver the training the way it is wanted, when it is wanted and with the highest quality level available. This can-do attitude and the empowerment offered by administration have made the department extremely successful.

**Design:**

The software training program was designed in response to an employee survey of need. Employees were very specific in outlining the conditions under which they were comfortable leaving their desk to participate in training. The 1999-2000 implementation of a new student information, financial and human resources system, Colleague by Datatel, was also a driver for offering training opportunities for employees. Every employee who receives access to Colleague must participate in training prior to being granted access.

The training classes offered by the DCCCD Software Training Department are formatted to fit the schedules of employees and were designed based on employee feedback. Training Coordinators at each location serve as liaisons with the Training Department to ensure location software training needs are addressed. This allows just-in-time training for each location based on software rollouts at that location.

Cost implications have been minimal considering the number of employees to which the training has been delivered. Two existing spaces at the District Service Center Administrative Offices were upgraded with new computer workstations, projection equipment and furniture. Laptops, projection equipment and transportation cases were also purchased to enable the department to offer training at locations where a computer

classroom is not available for use. On the campuses, the existing computer labs are utilized when not dedicated to classroom instruction and three of the colleges have dedicated employee training rooms.

The department started with two trainers, a help desk analyst, an administrative assistant and a manager. To accommodate the increasing requests for classes, two additional trainers have been added. Two of the trainers specialize in Colleague training and two in the Microsoft Office Suite but all trainers are cross-trained and can offer classes in both areas at differing levels.

Software training classes are generally three hours in length and are offered at convenient location to enable employees to take advantage of learning opportunities and still maintain workflow at their desks. The classes offered are specific to the needs of DCCCD employees, using examples that are relative to the work of the District instead of the corporate world, which is the case with external training providers.

Training materials are created by the department and are written, produced, and delivered in a uniform, consistent manner. The trainers also serve as Help Desk backup so are readily available to those who have participated in training for additional assistance and to answer questions specific to their work.

The number of classes offered since the Department started in 1999 has increased steadily: 1999-00, 291 classes; 2000-01 586 classes; 2001-02, 786 classes; 2002-03, 999 classes. There have been over 12,700 instances of employees participating in classes. On evaluations, 94% rank their learning experience as Excellent or Good. A Training Portfolio, which lists all the classes in which an employee has participated, is maintained on all staff and is available to the employee and their supervisors. This supports the

District's employee action plan of development created by the employee and supervisor at the annual performance review.

**Benefits:**

Software training in the Dallas area costs between \$175 and \$350 per class and requires the employee to be out of the office from one to two days. Additionally, in-county travel costs generally accrue. The estimated training cost for 3,500 DCCCD employees for just one \$175 class is over \$600,000 and does not include time away from the desk or travel expenses; three times the cost of running an internal training department.

The Software Training Department offers over 140 different classes covering about 20 different software packages including all Colleague modules (SIS, Financials, and HR). The classes and training materials are updated on a regular basis. Classes have been offered in the evening and on Saturday to accommodate afternoon/evening employees and adjunct faculty training. Classes have been focused to specific audiences that have included art faculty, adjunct faculty, biology faculty, advisors, registration/admissions and other individual workgroups with specific needs. Additionally, some DCCCD Continuing Education divisions have elected to use the department's training materials to support their clients.

The software-training curriculum is made available for staff to review through web-based and printed formats. The monthly schedule of classes is circulated through District-wide email, publicized by the Location Training Coordinators and is on the Training

Department website. On-line registration and evaluation processes ensure good record keeping and on-going improvement in classes.

**In Retrospect:**

Building the program to respond to the needs of employees instead of focusing on that which was convenient or easy for a training department, created a program that is valued and utilized by employees. The department has become the “go to” unit for workgroups across the District to help resolve technology skills issues for their staff. The Department is part of every software rollout offering initial training and help desk support across the District. These two conditions have been slow to develop but now that they have, the challenge of the department is being able to respond to all the requests made for training. The department is part of the Business Support operations, not information technology operation or professional development. However, the department has proved to be a valuable partner to both of these groups and is respected and supported by them.