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Volume 1, Issue 4



# The River's Edge

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**Important Dates**

**November 21**

- Law Enforcement Graduation

**December 11-16**

- Final Exams

**December 18**

- BRTC Graduation

**December 24 – January 2**

- Closed for Holidays

**January 12**

- Classes Begin

**January 16**

- Last Day to Add Classes



*Karen Liebhaber*  
*Distance Education Coordinator*

Options and enrollment in Distance Education are on the upswing at BRTC, a fact that comes as no surprise to DE Coordinator Karen Liebhaber. She has spent a great deal of time and energy over the past several months in planning and coordinating efforts to ensure that faculty have DE training opportunities and to ensure that students have new options in completing coursework via distance education and technology-enhanced instruction. The work is paying off, which is shown by the record number of faculty teaching DE courses as well as a record number of students opting to take classes which allow them to sit in the comfort of home, miles distant from campus, and complete assignments and communicate with instructors and peers via e-mail and message postings.

In line with national trends, BRTC has identified three levels of distance education courses: online, hybrid, and technology-enhanced. These levels of Distance Education options have been greatly enhanced through BRTC's decision last spring to purchase the Blackboard courseware management system, according to Liebhaber. "This was a vital step toward making us more competitive in the educational market," she said. "Blackboard is extremely user-

## Distance Ed. Program Grows

friendly, for both faculty and students, and allows us to provide easy access to a quality education. Since many colleges and universities to which BRTC graduates transfer also use the Blackboard system, having the experience in their first two years means that the transition is that much easier," she added.

In "online" classes, students and their instructor are separated by time and distance, and do not generally interact face to face as in the traditional classroom. The student may meet the instructor at the beginning of the course, but is not required to physically come to the campus for instruction. Students in online classes do, however, have frequent contact with their instructor and with others in the class. This is done electronically, and in many instances, the student-teacher interaction may be even greater than in a traditional classroom, where students may sit passively or comment only on rare occasion.

A second type of distance class is the "hybrid" class, in which part of the instruction, usually about half, is delivered in the traditional classroom setting, and half is delivered via dis-

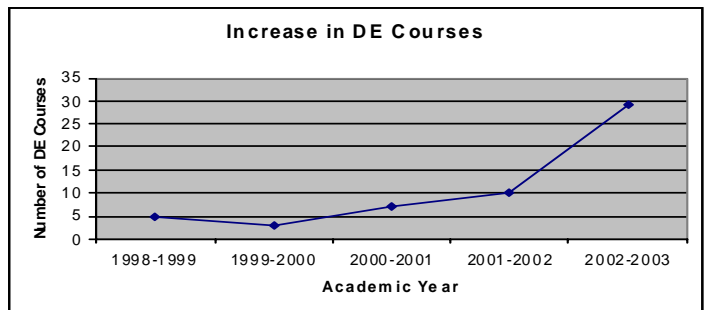
ance. These may include telecourses, in which a major part of the instruction is via videocassette, but actual meetings between students and the instructor do occur.

A third level is referred to as "technology-enhanced," meaning that the students attend classes traditionally, but the instructor embeds the course with technologically delivered components. These may include web-based assignments, Internet research, PowerPoint presentations, instructor web pages with syllabi and assignments, and chat rooms.



*Jack McCord,*  
*VP Academic Affairs*

The chart below illustrates the increase in DE courses from five sections during the 1998-99 academic year to 26 sections during the 2002-2003 academic year. Fall 2003 has (cont'd page 2)



"This is a very exciting time for us. We know DE is very much a part of BRTC's future and it allows us to better serve our students because it not only saves time and overcomes distance barriers, but it allows learning of high caliber to occur wherever and whenever the student wishes." - Karen Liebhaber

# Distance Ed cont'd.....

seen yet another increase in the number of DE courses to 29 sections totaling 819 students.

Approximately twenty faculty and staff members participated in a two-day training session with Blackboard in the summer and have expressed enthusiasm for the new tool. "We applaud the willingness of the BRTC administration to make this major commitment with Blackboard," said business instructor Linda Stacy, one of those teaching online courses. The sentiment was echoed by fellow DE instructors Bert Clevenger, Kay Ellis, Carol Killion, Jason Morrison, Phillip Dickson, Angela Caldwell, Steve Jones, Debbie Prichard, Rhonda Stone, Linda Stacy, and Priscilla Stillwell.

Blackboard software has proven to be a valuable tool in its use across the curriculum. For example, dietetics instructor Caldwell posts reading assignments on Blackboard and can tell with ease which students have clicked onto the assignment. She has been elated with the results, citing as a positive example the fact that typically, of her class of 43 in Basic Human Nutrition, 100% of the students promptly open the posted assignment.

Liebhaber is working with Jack McCord, VP for Academic Affairs, to ensure that BRTC's online and hybrid classes are "quality" classes which meet the same academic rigor as traditional classes, where student achievement is in no way diminished. She points to research that indicates

DE courses are often rated higher than traditional courses in at least five goals: providing students access to information, creating high quality course material, student mastery of course material, evaluating the course's effectiveness, and teaching to students of different learning styles.

Morrison, instructor in social science, agrees, stating that he believes online delivery can be superior when it provides "more individualized and enhanced interactive learning experiences."

"I like the flexibility that distance education offers. "I have wanted to further my education for some time; however, the demands of family and work do not make attendance in a traditional setting possible for me."

-- BRTC Student

Business instructor Killion, who was the first full-time BRTC teacher to offer an online class, concurs, citing recent evidence suggesting that many instructors "feel that the focused preparations required by distance teaching improves their overall teaching and empathy for the student."

Students have also responded positively. "I like the flexibility that distance education offers," wrote one student. "I have wanted to further my education for some time; however, the demands of family and work do

not make attendance in a traditional setting possible for me."

Another student pointed to the advantages of Distance Education by saying, "I really enjoy my online classes. I feel that I have more freedom. Being able to post questions and get immediate feedback all week long at any time is another big advantage." However, the student continued, not all students are suited for this mode of instructional delivery: "The problem I have found in taking an online class is that a person has to be dedicated. All of the freedom comes with price." The student concluded that overall, ... "online classes are great. They give a student a chance to learn new technology as well as preparing them for a future career."

Liebhaber notes that BRTC is still in the development phase with Distance Education and will continue addressing issues as it continues its expansion. Among these issues are questions of appropriate class size and copyright issues, along with the necessity of safeguards against plagiarism and academic cheating. Among concerns of faculty regarding DE, she pointed out, is the question of time. Teaching via technology does not mean the faculty member spends less time, but actually more time teaching and interacting with students via e-mail. She noted that in one online English class, she responded to more than 2,000 messages in a two-week period. Liebhaber, McCord and others are working to finalize a master plan and faculty handbook for the program.

"This is a very exciting time for

us," Liebhaber added. "We know DE is very much a part of BRTC's future and it allows us to better serve our students because it not only saves time and overcomes distance barriers, but it allows learning of high caliber to occur wherever and whenever the student wishes."

## Beebe Visits BRTC

Attorney General Mike Beebe visited the BRTC campus October 20. He was in town to serve as guest speaker at the Annual Chamber of Commerce banquet held that evening in the RCDC.

While on campus, the Attorney General toured the Law Enforcement Training Academy where he witnessed students participating in OC ("pepper spray") tactical training.

The Attorney General then experienced first-hand the Fire Arms Training System (FATS), which is a computerized interactive video firing system where participants receive response training to a variety of real-life scenarios.



Attorney General Mike Beebe

### Current Online/Hybrid DE Instructors



Steve Jones  
Fire Science Instructor



Kay Ellis  
Business Instructor



Jason Morrison  
Social Science Instructor



Bert Clevenger  
Business Instructor



Priscilla Stillwell  
Social Science Instructor



Phillip Dickson  
Networking Instructor



Linda Stacy  
Business Instructor



Carol Killion  
Business Instructor



Angie Caldwell  
Technical Division Chair



Rhonda Stone  
Business Instructor



Debbie Prichard  
Business Chair

## Debbie Spiker Hears, Speaks for Those Who Can't

Ever get stumped on the name of some Greek historian or a little-known city or the scientific name for programmed cell death? Imagine what it would be like if you had to spell at rapid pace Thuycidides or Tlaxcala or "apoptosis," none of which you had ever heard before, all the while listening with intense concentration to what followed so you could sign every word—"pretty much verbatim"—to the person seated next to you? Such is the task of Debbie Spiker of Jonesboro, interpreter for Ashley Grooms, a deaf student at BRTC.

Her job is a fascinating, rewarding, and heart-rending one. Spiker's work over the past fifteen years has taken her from the highs to the lows of the human condition, placing her in the position of not-quite-participant but so much more than passive observer. "I have signed five babies being born, start to finish, and I've signed people being sentenced to life in prison," she explains. "I've signed people through terminal illnesses, I've accompanied them to their appointments, and I've signed funerals," something she describes as "extremely hard." Also extremely difficult, she noted, is working with the profoundly mentally ill, who may "say they 'hear voices.' I may not be sure if they think they heard someone, or if it was just an expression," she says.

Even the comparatively low-pressure task of educational interpreting is not without its challenges. The need for familiarity with words from all subject

matter is one of the key difficulties faced by Spiker in her work at BRTC and around the region. She laughingly recalls the time a computer instructor said what seemed to Spiker to be "skuzzy," but when she signed s-k-u-z-z-y to the very computer-savvy student, he promptly told her, "I've never heard of that before." The word, she will now never forget, turned out to be "Scsi."

Another challenge is what she terms "the fatigue factor," noting she must constantly assimilate the information from the instructor's lecture and interpret it for the student. "Once the lecture begins, I never stop signing," she explains. Whether

she signs using transliteration, basic English syntax with word-for-word interpretation, or American Sign Language, in which the object in a phrase may precede the subject and verb (e.g., "School-you-go?" is signed instead of "Are you going to school?") depends on whether the student or client was trained at the Arkansas School for the Deaf, where ASL is taught.

Northeast Arkansas' only nationally certified CICT (Certificate of Interpretation-Certificate of Transliteration), Spiker keeps busy interpreting at BRTC from 8 to 3:15 Tuesdays and Thursdays, and at another educational institution in the evenings. She also

works days Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays with doctors or other health care professionals, or with lawyers, providing interpretation in legal and medical situations. In spite of the fact that northeast Arkansas' deaf community is relatively small, her services are in continuous demand. One of the downsides of the work, in fact, is the not infrequent 2 a.m. phone call from either a hospital emergency room, or from a police department requesting interpreting services. Nevertheless, it is truly a lifelong labor of love.

Spiker first became interested in signing during her senior year of high school when she enrolled in a night class in signing at the Department of Human Services in Jonesboro. She was "hooked," and has since earned her two-year Associate of Arts in Interpretation degree at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. She is just a few hours short of a B.A. degree in Interpreting from UALR, the state's only institution granting this four-year degree.

To work as an educational interpreter for the deaf, Spiker explains, individuals must receive state credentialing and be qualified at least at a Level 3; for most other interpretation settings, excluding certain legal environments, the individual must receive

certification through the Registry of Interpretation for the Deaf. The national test is an extremely rigorous one, she added, requiring the submission of a video showing the person's work. This video is evaluated by a three-person panel consisting of a deaf person, an interpreter, and a hearing person.

With the national certification now behind her, Spiker is perhaps her own toughest critic, and typically starts each day by doing crossword puzzles just to help expand her vocabulary and familiarize herself with the unfamiliar - no more "skuzzies"- she explains. "I'm sometimes called on to interpret for Ph.D.s or Ed.D.s," she notes. "I want to be able to speak for them on the level they would use if they could speak."

Spiker also is determined to provide all her clients the level of dignity they are due, and holds strictly to the Code of Ethics for her profession. "There is absolutely no disclosure of personal information. If these individuals were not deaf," she points out, "they would have total privacy on legal or medical matters. I believe they deserve to have that same level of total privacy."

Spiker believes those interested in pursuing training to become an interpreter should typically be those who "think visually, who are confident, willing to laugh at themselves, and who are fascinated by language." She is, clearly, all of the above, and more.



Debbie Spiker, Interpreter (right), and Ashley Grooms, BRTC Student

## Trauma Recovery Presentation is November 5

He formerly led a routine life as a Louisiana State trooper, body builder, husband and father in Monroe, Louisiana. On March 14, 1986, the life of Bobby Smith suddenly changed dramatically. At a routine traffic stop, a traffic violator shot Smith in the face with a shotgun, blinding him forever.

Dr. Bobby Smith's ordeal and his

efforts in recovering from this trauma will be the subject of his special presentation on Wednesday, November 5, in the Randolph County Development Center on the campus of BRTC. The presentation is from 8-11 a.m., and is sponsored by BRTC Law Enforcement Training Academy.

The presentation will be of interest

not only to those in law enforcement, but also to the general public. The topic of the program is "trauma recovery," and will explore the process through which Dr. Smith has converted his own personal tragedy into a wonderful learning experience for all regional law enforcement officers.



Dr. Bobby Smith

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## Mission Statement

*Black River Technical College is an institution of higher learning committed to a partnership with the individual and the global community to provide lifelong learning experiences, seeking always to empower those it serves to achieve their academic, vocational, and personal development goals.*



**Richard Gaines**

## From the President's Desk

A little over a year ago, we made a commitment to take our Distance Education program to a higher level. This move includes the decision to adopt a system-wide courseware management system, to provide training sessions for faculty and staff, to step-up the offering of online courses and to increase the use of technology in the teaching process. Clearly we are already seeing the fruits of this work. Impressive gains in the numbers of both faculty teaching with technology and students enrolling in Distance Education classes indicate this decision is a good one for the entire BRTC community and those it serves.

It is a decision grounded in the college's mission and its goals. These were developed by our Strategic Planning Task Force, which in-

cluded broad input from the community as well as from the college staff. The increased use of technology here at BRTC is prompted by several realities acknowledged by that Task Force.

We know, for example, that the generation now entering our campus from the high school setting is one that is increasingly internet-savvy. Within just a few more years, that entire group of students, the ones known as "traditional" students, will have never known life without modems and personal computers. They are accustomed to relying on technology to make purchases, to communicate with friends, to obtain information, and to complete school assignments. This is an important consideration as we plan for how best to serve this segment of our student body.

Also of major importance is our understanding of the obstacles our students face in terms of the distance

many must travel and the time management issues for those who must also work and balance the needs of their families. Often these are what we term "non-traditional" students, but these same concerns are often equally important for the younger student.

The conclusion is clear: Distance Education is an important option for the students—traditional and non-traditional—of today and tomorrow. We have moved with planning and deliberation into this arena, making sure that educational quality does not get left behind, and I am very pleased with where we are today and with where we are going in Distance Education. We realize that Distance Education is not for all students, and we know it will not replace the traditional classroom with face-to-face teaching and learning. But for growing numbers of students, Distance Education is a great option; for some, it is a perfect fit.

## AHECB Meets

Among those attending the quarterly meeting of the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board held last week on the campus of UCA in Conway were BRTC President Richard Gaines, VP for Academic Affairs Jack McCord, Director of Institutional Advancement Dr. Jan Ziegler, and Administrative Assistant Vickie French.

In addition to the review and approval of new programs of study at various locations, the AHECB approved rules and regulations of the State Teacher Assistance Resource (STAR) program. When implemented, this program will provide funding assistance in the form of forgivable loans to attract individuals to teach in shortage subject areas and to teach in geographic areas of the state experiencing teacher shortages.

The Board's next meeting will be February 6 at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. BRTC will host the AHECB quarterly meeting April 22-23.