MVCC joins consortium to create Open Educational Resources

MVCC has joined a consortium of New York State community colleges to develop a series of Open Educational Resources (OER) for degree programs that can be shared throughout the SUNY system.

Taking part in this consortium with MVCC are Herkimer College, Monroe Community College, Tompkins-Cortland Community College, and Clinton Community College. The initiative is being funded through an Achieving the Dream (ATD) grant, which involves 38 community colleges in 13 states. The goal is to help remove financial roadblocks that can derail students’ progress and spur improvements that will increase the likelihood of degree and certificate completion.

“The idea is to develop textbooks and educational materials which can be accessed online for free or printed and sold at a low cost to the student,” said Jim Lynch, Executive Dean for Academic Development and Innovation. “Research shows that students do better in the classroom when they have their resources at the beginning of class as opposed to two weeks into the semester. They are much more successful.”

The consortium will be supported by the Open SUNY Textbook and SUNY Open Education Resources (OER) Services program based at SUNY Geneseo. The OER Degree Initiative will create a library of high-quality, digital, open courses available to other institutions and the public at large. Making resources easily available to all is expected to encourage OER adoption even at non-participating institutions.

The annual costs of textbooks is about $1,300 per year for a full-time community college student and amounts to about a third of the cost of an associate’s degree. According to a study by the research firm Public Agenda, students who don’t complete college are over 50 percent more likely than those who graduated to cite textbook costs as a major financial barrier.

“The Achieving the Dream grants will strongly support increased access at community colleges across the country, including five SUNY campuses, while bolstering our own efforts to broaden the development of open textbooks and other open resources. Congratulations to the SUNY community colleges at Clinton, Herkimer, Mohawk Valley, Monroe, and Tompkins Cortland on earning this support, which will make our courses and degree programs even more affordable for students,” said SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher.

During the first year of the grant, MVCC will be developing OER for 23 classes leading to a criminal justice associate degree and one-year certificate. When fully implemented, this initiative will serve more than 3,000 students over the course of the three-year grant period.

This initiative will help MVCC train staff, develop systemic approval systems, and raise awareness to ensure the continued progress of OER degrees is seamless and effective.

MVCC has been developing OER for several years on a grassroots level by faculty and staff who have taken it upon themselves to develop these resources to improve completion rates and reduce student costs.

These efforts have been launched by faculty from a variety of academic areas, leading to the development of textbooks, open lab manuals, and gathered links of web-based resources for use by students in their classes. More than 500 students at MVCC are involved with Open Educational Resources each semester.

Colleges and states that have introduced OER initiatives have already seen significant results. Studies have shown that OER reduces costs and contributes to better grades, higher course completion rates, and faster degree completion. A recent multi-school study found that students using OER took an average fall semester credit load of 13.3, compared to 11.1 credits for students using traditional books. If this holds, students using OER would complete their degrees a full year earlier for a 60 credit-hour degree.

During the first year of the grant, MVCC will be developing OER for Introduction to Criminal Justice (CJ101), Juvenile Delinquency (CJ107), Elementary Statistics (MA110), English 1: Composition (EN101), Demystifying Science (CH120), Introduction to Sociology (SO101), and Ideas and Values in Literature (EN102).

“When MVCC begins to adopt these open resource programs, courses are going to be designated as a “Z Course” meaning zero expenditures for textbooks and other learning materials,” added Lynch.

Additional information about OER at SUNY can be found online, at http://opensunyals.org/.
Honoring Employees for Years of Service

There is a group of dedicated professionals who are so important to the College that operations would possibly grind to a halt if not for this department. The information technology crew can be seen in every office and corner on the Utica and Rome campuses making sure the technology is operating efficiently.

One of the IT team was recognized for a decade of service over the summer. Sergey Staskevich has been a dedicated employee at MVCC for 10 years and has been crucial in keeping operations moving forward, especially in the Office of Marketing and Communications.

Whenever called upon, Sergey doesn’t hesitate to jump into action, always providing service and a helping hand with a smile.

“I set up and support anything computer related, other than backend programing and networking. Other than that, if a user touches it, so do I,” said Sergey, whose title is Educational Applications Assistant.

A native of Pinsk Belarus, he considers Utica his hometown having grown up in the community since the age of three. As a team player, he helped win The Golden Gnome award during a fierce kickball competition.

Outside of his duties in the IT department, he also teaches Calculus for Business and Social Sciences (MA140), Introduction to Cybersecurity (CI104), and Introduction to Multimedia Applications for Business (IS125).

He completed the MVCC Leadership Academy last year, and is on one of the Middle States standard review workgroups. He has also presented a few Summer Institute workshops on the MVCC wiki.

Students sign the commitment

As part of MVCC’s Welcome Week, students took a mass pledge to commit to completing their associate degrees or certificates before transferring or entering the job force.

Students signed a “Completion Wall” in support of the challenge and also had the opportunity to read completion stories of faculty and staff, something First Year Experience Coordinator Lizabeth Doherty says helps students realize they are not alone if they become overwhelmed by schoolwork.

“When the times get tough in a couple of weeks or a couple months or a year, they can think back to this and say hey, there are people who know what it’s like to be challenged in school that I can go and talk to and get some support and I can stick with this and finish,” Doherty said.

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MVCC launched the volunteer project iServe Mohawk Valley last year in order to encourage college students to get involved with the community in which they live. A main focus of the iServe mission has been to address the rising issue of hunger in Oneida County.

To this end, iServe Mohawk Valley has joined a national collegiate hunger coalition called Food Recovery Network (FRN). Started in 2011 by three University of Maryland (UMD) students, they were appalled by the amount of food in the dining halls which ended up in the trash at the end of the night. By the end of that school year, FRN at UMD had recovered 30,000 meals to DC-area partner agencies.

iServe Mohawk Valley, which operates out of the Rome Campus, decided to follow this model on the Utica Campus by teaming up with the Sodexo Food Service. Starting this semester, student volunteers will meet in the resident dining hall on Wednesday and Friday afternoons after the kitchens have closed for the day. The volunteers will gather up the unused food, package it and have it picked up by local soup kitchens and feeding centers.

“This is a wonderful initiative MVCC has undertaken. This food would otherwise go into a landfill and not benefit those who need it most,” said Debbie Hanson, Sustainability Manager for Sodexo. She went on to say MVCC is the only college in the Mohawk Valley organizing this form of volunteerism.

MVCC’s Kelly Fleming, iService Mohawk Valley program coordinator, has been recruiting students to help with this initiative. She currently has five dedicated individuals, but is looking to expand her team. Sodexo will be providing training for the students to properly package the unused food.

“We are going to be setting up an informational table in the coming weeks to get more students involved, but the five students recruited to this point are very enthusiastic about helping those in need,” said Fleming. The soup kitchens being served by this program are the Salvation Army Hunger Relief Kitchen and Mother Marianne’s West Side Kitchen.

There are currently 250 chapters of Food Recovery Network across the country with the nearest one to Utica being at Syracuse University. Other universities taking part include University of Rochester, Rochester Institute of Technology, SUNY Binghamton, and Cornell University. FRN is the largest student-run food recovery program in America.

“The iServe Mohawk Valley project will help cut back hunger and provide individuals at MVCC with a fulfilling community work experience. They will help raise awareness of what is happening in our own community by actively lending a helping hand,” added Fleming.

In its first year of operation, the iServe Mohawk Valley staff and volunteers have partnered with the Ava Dorfman Senior Center, CNY Food Bank, The Loaves and Fishes Soup Kitchen, and The Rome Rescue Mission to fight the issue of hunger. These volunteers combat hunger by preparing and serving meals, teaching nutrition classes, running community food drives, and more. iServe Mohawk Valley seeks to provide immediate nutrition to low-income residents, and allow our partnering agencies more time to provide their services that are less urgent but necessary to the community.
WELCOME WEEK