New River Approved for $400,000 in Title III Grant Funds

[BECKLEY, WV] New River Community and Technical College has been notified by the U.S. Department of Education that a grant of $400,000 has been approved for the second year of New River’s Title III project entitled “Developing a Distance Learning System for Rural Appalachia.”

In 2008, New River was awarded a total of $2 million over five years for the Title III project. The grant began on October 1. Approval of second year funding was contingent on satisfactory completion of program objectives for the first year.
The goal of the project is to improve New River’s ability to provide comprehensive student services to time- and place-bound students by increasing access to the learning opportunities provided by the college. Grant funds are being used to install an Interactive Video Learning Network (IVN) with access points on New River’s multiple campuses. The grant also supports extensive faculty development to prepare instructors to teach distance learning and online classes, and to provide online student services such as applying for admissions, registering for classes, advising and paying bills.

Carolyn Sizemore, dean of New River’s Beckley and Raleigh County Campuses, is the project coordinator. She reports that over the past six months, New River has opened a Center for Teaching Excellence at the Erma Byrd Public Higher Education Center to assist faculty members in developing online and distance learning classes. The center is under the direction of Ralph Payne, an instructional designer who joined New River in April. He has created a studio to assist faculty in course design and in the production of media-rich course materials using a variety of new hardware and software tools.

Multimedia acquisition tools such as HD camcorders, digital still cameras, WebCams, digital voice recorders and more are currently available for loan to all New River faculty from the center. In addition, graphics and multimedia computer workstations on both the Windows and Mac platforms that boast cutting-edge e-learning and course creation software are available for faculty use at the center, and workstations are also available at New River’s other campus locations. Expert advice, training and assistance in course design and multimedia production are also provided.

“We have identified a cohort of faculty who are enthusiastic about upgrading their skills to deliver instruction using these new technologies. They are in the process of developing 10 freshman General Studies courses for distance delivery this fall,” Sizemore said. She added that the resources of the Center for Teaching Excellence are available to all New River faculty, not just for those in the cohort or faculty who teach online classes.

The cohort includes Shirley Davis, Karen Carter-Harvey, Anita Stapleton, Keith Lilly, Scott McClanahan and Joyce Wawiye from the Beckley Campus; Dr. John Mullens from the Nicholas County
Campus in Summersville; and Lizabeth Rogers and Monica Fleming from the Greenbrier Valley Campus in Lewisburg.

This summer, Dr. David J. Ayersman, Chief Information Officer, is overseeing installation of the first phase of the new Interactive Video Network. Two IVN classrooms will be installed on the Greenbrier Valley Campus in Lewisburg, one on the Beckley Campus and one on the Nicholas County Campus in Summersville. New River’s fall schedule includes 57 sections of IVN classes.

During the upcoming year, the grant will support training of faculty in the Allied Health fields and the redesign of at least 12 Allied Health courses for distance delivery. Additional IVN classrooms will be brought online, and professional development for all faculty members will continue through the Center for Learning Excellence.

“I could not be happier with the progress that we have made toward improving student services and opportunities for our distance learners,” Sizemore commented. “With the level of energy, enthusiasm and growth across our campuses, the Title III project will help New River become the college of the future.”

New River Community and Technical College serves nine counties in southern and south central West Virginia from four campuses: Bluefield/Mercer County, Nicholas County (Summersville), Beckley/Raleigh County and Greenbrier Valley (Lewisburg). Administrative offices are located in Beckley.

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