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# The Formation of a Distance Learning Institute: Transforming People, Process, and Product

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*Gardner-Webb University*

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# Consultancy Project Executive Summary

Organization: Horry-Georgetown Technical College

Project Title: The Formation of a Distance Learning  
Institute: Transforming People, Process, and  
Product

Candidate: Martha Eddings

Consultancy Coach: John Balls, Ed.D. Gardner-Webb University

Defense Date: July 6, 2017

Authorized by: Becky Boone, Ph.D., Assistant Vice President of  
Student Services

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Dr. Balls of Gardner-Webb University for his support and guidance throughout this program and project construction. I would also like to thank Professor Scott Cyganiewicz and Dr. Becky Boone, AVP, Horry-Georgetown Technical College, for opening doors for me and facilitating my participation in this project. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support, patience, and most of all their encouragement over the past 3 years.

## Abstract

The Formation of a Distance Learning Institute: Transforming People, Process, and Product, Eddings, Martha Cook, 2017 Consultancy Project, Gardner-Webb University, Digital Commons/Online learning/ Distance learning/Technical Community College.

The Distance Learning Institute (DLI) was formed in response to decreasing enrollment and increasing attrition rates ("White Paper: Research in Online Learning", n.d.), to provide another educational option for students, and to compete with other online educational institutions ("The Attack of the MOOCs," July 2013). This consultancy project documents the initiation of a DLI from proposal to implementation, to offer complete online degrees and certificates. The DLI was planned in four phases with milestones and projected completion dates as follows:

**Phase 1:** Established the Oversight Committee, researched best practices, determined the need for the DLI, anticipated and actual completion date August 2014.

**Phase 2:** Appointed Dean, formed subcommittees, began student readiness assessments, course standardization, faculty training, and determined student services needs, anticipated completion date June 2015, actual completion date July 2016.

**Phase 3:** Implemented online student services and administrative roles, and began implementing marketing strategies, anticipated completion date December 2015, actual completion date August 2017.

**Phase 4:** Offered its first online degree and certification programs, anticipated completion date December 2015, actual completion date August 2017 (Hedges et al., 2013).

Results of the overall project were the development of a course standardization template, best practices recommendations for instructors, providing another choice for students to earn their degrees or certificates, and the ability to compete with online colleges. It is anticipated that as the degrees and certificates offered by the DLI continue to increase, so will enrollment numbers, which may offset the declining enrollment numbers documented by the traditional college.

## **Amendment History**

<u>Version</u>	<u>Issue Date Changes</u>
# 1	December 8, 2014
# 2	April 29, 2016

## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1	PROJECT PURPOSE .....	1
1.2	ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS .....	1
1.3	PROJECT PLAN MAINTENANCE .....	2
<b>2</b>	<b>PROJECT SCOPE</b> .....	<b>3</b>
2.1	OUTLINE OF PARTNERING ORGANIZATION’S OBJECTIVES.....	3
2.1.1	<i>Objectives</i> .....	3
2.1.2	<i>Success Criteria</i> .....	3
2.1.3	<i>Risks</i> .....	4
2.2	OUTLINE OF STUDENT’S OBJECTIVES.....	4
2.2.1	<i>Objectives</i> .....	4
2.2.2	<i>Success Criteria</i> .....	4
2.2.3	<i>Risks</i> .....	4
2.3	DEFINITIVE SCOPE STATEMENT .....	4
<b>3</b>	<b>DELIVERABLES</b> .....	<b>5</b>
3.1	TO PARTNERING ORGANIZATION.....	5
3.2	FROM STUDENT .....	5
<b>4</b>	<b>PROJECT APPROACH</b> .....	<b>6</b>
4.1	PROJECT LIFECYCLE PROCESSES .....	6
4.2	PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROCESSES .....	6
4.3	PROJECT SUPPORT PROCESSES .....	6
4.4	ORGANIZATION.....	6
4.4.1	<i>Project Team</i> .....	6
4.4.2	<i>Mapping Between &lt;Organization&gt; and Student</i> .....	7
<b>5</b>	<b>COMMUNICATIONS PLAN</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>WORK PLAN</b> .....	<b>9</b>
6.1	WORK BREAKDOWN STRUCTURE.....	9
6.2	RESOURCES .....	9
<b>7</b>	<b>MILESTONES</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>METRICS AND RESULTS</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>RISKS, CONSTRAINTS, ASSUMPTIONS</b> .....	<b>12</b>
9.1	RISKS .....	12
9.2	CONSTRAINTS .....	13
9.3	ASSUMPTIONS.....	14
<b>10</b>	<b>FINANCIAL PLAN</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>QUALITY ASSURANCE PLAN</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY/IMPLICATIONS</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>REFLECTION</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>23</b>

<b>A</b>	<b>HISTORICAL ATTRITION DATA .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>ENROLLMENT BY HEADCOUNT .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>PROJECT ILLUSTRATED IN THE DEMING CYCLE .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>GENERAL RISK ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>PROPOSED 2016-17 DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTE (DLI) BUDGET .....</b>	<b>27</b>

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Project Purpose

The purpose of the Distance Learning Institute (DLI) is to provide state-of-the-art interactive classes taught by well-trained and qualified instructors who are supported by technically proficient staff to help students become independent thinkers and take responsibility for their learning. The DLI will provide students who are unable to attend traditional classes the opportunity to receive a quality education at the postsecondary level and achieve their life goals. Four areas of concern have been identified and will be addressed by the creation of the DLI:

- 1) Problems identified in the existing online course offerings,
- 2) An increasing amount of students who may only have a “virtual” connection to our campus,
- 3) Possible issues regarding accreditation, and
- 4) The college’s desire to remain fiscally sound through student enrollment.

Online course offerings have continued to grow at the college, presenting new challenges and concerns. Consider the following numbers, which are accurate as of Fall 2013:

- 162 new online/hybrid courses have been developed this year, bringing the college total to 241,
- Currently there are 12 fully online programs,
- 25% of all the college’s courses have already been developed and offered online,
- 803 students are enrolled in 100% online and/or hybrid classes at the college, generating \$798, 235.00 in revenue during the fall 2013 semester,
- 1,552 students are enrolled in 50% or more online and/or hybrid classes, generating \$1,371, 507.00 in revenue during the fall 2013 semester, and
- Online courses continue to grow at a steady pace.

Despite this growth, attrition in online courses is due to a number of factors, many of which the DLI can address. Higher Education providers are recognizing the potential capital of online courses. As such, profit-based online colleges exist and continue to grow. Today’s busy student will likely enroll in an online institution when the traditional institution has not evolved to meet their needs. The formation of the DLI will provide an alternative structure for growth as it does not require new buildings and extensive staffing. This ability to expand offerings will increase revenue utilizing the existing physical buildings of the college.

With enrollment now trending flat and attrition increasing, expanding and improving the college’s online presence may serve as a partial solution to this concern (Tuition and Fees, 2015). Allen and Seaman (2010) reported in their survey of over 2,500 colleges and universities that from 2009 to 2010, online course enrollment increased by 21%, whereas campus enrollment increased by only 2%.

## 1.2 Associated Documents

Online Offerings and relevant enrolment data:

Associate Degree Programs:

- Associate in Applied Science Accounting
- Associate in Applied Science General Business
- Associate in Applied Science General Business, Marketing Emphasis
- Associate in Applied Science Human Services
- Associate in Arts
- Associate in Science

Certificate Programs:

- Basic Business Certificate
- Gerontology
- General Studies Certificate



- Fire Science Certificate
- Medical Coding and Billing
- Natural Resources and Environment

Approximately 25% of the college's courses that are developed are offered in online/hybrid format. The number has not changed due to additional courses being added to the catalog. The college constantly adds courses and seldom deletes any. Approximately 20% of the Fall 2013 current offerings are online or hybrid. These are the numbers of online/hybrid classes that have been developed over the past year broken down by semester offered:

Fall 2012 – 20 courses developed

Spring 2013 – 13 courses developed

Summer 2013 – 11 courses developed

Fall 2013 – 18 courses developed (Hedges et al., 2013)

(See Appendix A for Historical Attrition Data)

### **1.3 Project Plan Maintenance**

The project plan maintenance will be performed by the constant use of the Deming Cycle (see Appendix C) making revisions as needed. Quality Assurance plans are discussed in 11.

## 2 Project Scope

The DLI is being planned and executed to develop a fully operational online campus offering the same quality and rigorous courses as the existing physical campuses, having 24-hour availability of all student support services, full accreditations, its own administrative staff, and designated mission. This project is planned in four phases, each having its own milestones and completion projected dates. A diverse selection of college faculty and staff from various departments of the college's three campuses make up the committees assigned to do the various tasks for the project.

### 2.1 Outline of Partnering Organization's Objectives

#### 2.1.1 Objectives

The project objectives are proposed in phases in order to stagger the changes and allow for development time. The timelines associated with each of the phases are fluid, as many factors are uncontrollable variables within the project.

**Phase 1** was projected to occur July to December 2013 with the formation of the Ad Hoc Committee, delivery of the written proposal to the Deans, decision made by the Senior Vice Presidents, and approval for the formulation of a project Oversight Committee. This phase has occurred with the Ad Hoc committee formation and approval for the formation of the project Oversight Committee.

**Phase 2** had 3 separate projections:

**Spring 2014:** To establish subcommittees, assign administrative leadership, and conduct a review of external funding options.

**Summer 2014:** To establish student readiness plans, to form online course development standardization, and faculty training and development for online/hybrid courses.

**Fall 2014:** To formalized faculty training to begin, implementation of student online readiness assessment and standardized course layout. Fall 2015 is more realistic for this to occur.

**Phase 3: Year 2015** – Implementation of online student services and administrative roles.

**Fall 2015:** To begin marketing for the DLI, submit financial plan for new resources to Senior Vice President and Vice President of Finance.

**Spring 2016:** Begin marketing and branding of the DLI.

**Phase 4: Year 2016** – The DLI goes live with all student support, faculty support, and administrative support fully operational.

This plan is based on projections and subject to change.

#### 2.1.2 Success Criteria

##### Benefits/Outputs of the Project

The projected organizational deliverables or outputs of the project include

1. A decrease in overall attrition identified in online and hybrid courses,
2. An increase in quality and rigor of online and hybrid courses by standardization,
3. Provide an alternative option for education to working adults,
4. To compete with private, for profit, and proprietary colleges,
5. To align the organization for a trend shift to massive online open courses (MOOCs),
6. To increase the enrollment of the college with minimal physical expansion, and
7. To expand opportunities for students and faculty for education, development, and career expansion.

### 2.1.3 Risks

The project objectives are relatively low risk as they will improve the choices of education as well as increase and standardize the quality of online education offered by the DLI. The DLI will provide students who are unable to attend traditional classes the opportunity to receive a quality education at the postsecondary level and achieve their goals. The DLI specifically supports the effort of accessibility, academic excellence, and student services as described in the college's mission statement.

Online courses have continued to grow at the college. Despite the growth, attrition in online courses has historically run 13.25% higher than their corresponding traditional courses (Hedges et al., 2013). Furthermore, there is an 18.25% higher attrition rate in all online/hybrid courses versus all traditional courses (Hedges et al., 2013). This attrition is due to a number of factors, many of which the DLI can address. The DLI serves as a solution to four areas of concern:

1. The existing online course offerings and their problems,
2. The increasing amount of students, who may only have a "virtual" connection to our campus,
3. Possible issues regarding accreditation, and
4. The college's desire to remain fiscally sound through student enrollment.

## 2.2 *Outline of Student's Objectives*

### 2.2.1 Objectives

The overall objective was to participate in and contribute to the overall project of the formation of the DLI by being a working member of the Oversight Committee and having the flexibility to float through all the contributing subcommittees to experience the process.

### 2.2.2 Success Criteria

Project success was measured by the completion of each project phase. Enrollment and attrition data are collected and aggregated for each semester and academic year. These data will be analyzed to determine the impact of the DLI on attrition and enrollment numbers. Student satisfaction will be obtained through end of course satisfaction surveys. The data from these surveys will also be collected, aggregated, and compared for overall interpretation.

### 2.2.3 Risks

Student risks were minimal as the project was supported by the entire college staff and administration, county commissioners, and community partners.

## 2.3 *Definitive scope statement*

The college's mission, vision, and role and scope of the institution support the objectives of the formation of the DLI in order to provide more choices to students. The function of the DLI, in support of the college's mission, is to provide state-of-the-art interactive classes taught by well-trained and qualified instructors who are supported by technically proficient staff to help students become independent thinkers and take responsibility for their learning. The DLI will provide students who are unable to attend traditional classes the opportunity to receive a quality education at the postsecondary level and achieve their goals. The DLI specifically supports the effort of accessibility, academic excellence, and student services as described in the college's mission statement.

### **3 Deliverables**

#### **3.1 To partnering organization**

The outputs of the project were essentially benefits that the college stakeholders will attain by the creation and operation of the DLI.

##### **Deliverables/Benefits/Outputs of the Project**

The projected organizational deliverables or outputs of the project include

1. A decrease in overall attrition identified in online and hybrid courses,
2. An increase in quality and rigor of online and hybrid courses by standardization,
3. To provide an alternative option for education to working adults,
4. To compete with private, for-profit, and proprietary colleges,
5. To align the organization for a trend shift to MOOCs,
6. To increase the enrollment of the college with minimal physical expansion, and
7. To expand opportunities for students and faculty for education, development, career expansion.

#### **3.2 From student**

See 3.1

## 4 Project Approach

### 4.1 Project Lifecycle Processes

The overall approach to the project consisted of monthly meetings of the Oversight Committee to check progress on delegated tasks and to get an update on the progress of the subcommittees. The project was organized into four phases with each having specific objectives and timelines. Phase four was deemed when the DLI would begin full operation with a select number of degree and certificate programs to be offered. Subcommittees report to the Oversight Committee their progress, difficulties encountered, and plans ongoing. Tasks are delegated to the subcommittees. The Faculty Training Subcommittee has been delegated the task of developing a standardized online course outline for instructors as well as a standardized plan for online course development. The Information Technology department was responsible for examining the current technology and the future needs to accomplish the online launch, securing software for testing security, and troubleshooting the ongoing process. The Oversight Committee was responsible for reviewing the SACS requirements and aligning the DLI with those requirements as well as reviewing the accreditation requirements of the programs slated to be a part of the initial launch of the DLI.

### 4.2 Project Management Processes

The DLI's Dean is also the Chair of the Oversight Committee and the leader of the project. She is the designated one to obtain sign-offs from the Senior Vice President and the College President. She regularly reports progress to the Senior Vice President and President of the college and brings back to the Oversight Committee their input and comments.

### 4.3 Project Support Processes

Financial support for the project initially was provided by the college from the professional development fund. A Title III grant was secured for 5 years and will cover the DLI's operational costs. At the end of the 5-year period, it is anticipated that the DLI will be self-sustaining.

### 4.4 Organization

#### Scope, Boundaries, Organizations, Processes, and Systems Impacted

Departments that make up the DLI:

- Administration
- Admissions/Advisement
- Financial Aid/Veteran Services
- Student Success and Tutoring Center
- Library
- Information Technology
- Bookstore
- Teaching Excellence Center
- Marketing

The DLI must have the same services infrastructure in place as the traditional other three campuses.

#### 4.4.1 Project Team

Oversight Committee



Subcommittees reported to the Oversight Committee:  
Student Readiness Committee (SRC)  
Faculty Training Committee (FTC)  
Online Course Standardization Committee (OCSS)

#### 4.4.2 Mapping Between the college and Student

The Oversight Committee members communicated with any and all departments of the college for information and feedback on an ongoing basis throughout the project. The student was given permission to attend any and all committee meetings and participate in the assignments of the project.

## **5 Communications Plan**

The DLI is structured similarly to other departments of the college in that there is a director who reports to the Assistant Vice President (AVP) of Academic Affairs. Clerical support to the DLI director will come from the administrative assistant of the AVP. As the DLI grows, additional personnel will be added. The internal communication route will be the chain of command already established. The online instructors will report directly to the DLI director who will directly report to the AVP.

External communication will also go through the DLI director with college marketing included. A large marketing roll-out was planned for the Fall 2016 semester to showcase the DLI, its initial offerings, and future offerings. The DLI will share the branding of the college for now but will have its own branding in the future. New hardcopy brochures are being distributed as well as highlighting the DLI on the college's social media sites and in radio and television advertising.

## **6 Work Plan**

### **6.1 Work Breakdown Structure**

- Proposal written and approved (Phase 1)
- Oversight Committee and subcommittees formed (Phase 2.1)
- Projected timeline established with 4 Phases (Phase 2.1)
- Course development standardization (Phase 2.2)
- Course implementation standardization (Phase 2.2)
- Tiered roll-out (Phase 2.3)
- Hiring of DLI Director & Administrative Assistant (Phase 2.3)
- Pilot specialty advisement team (2.3)
- Grant funding (Phase 3)
- Marketing and Branding (Phase 3.1)
- Hiring of Instructional Designer (Phase 4)

(See 7 Milestones for timelines of projected vs. actual below)

The project work was delegated to the appropriate subcommittees with due dates to report back to the Oversight Committee.

### **6.2 Resources**

The daily associated costs with this project were absorbed by the college from the professional Development budgeted monies until the Title III grant was obtained. The grant funds the ongoing DLI operation costs as well as the Program Director, Instructional Designer, and administrative assistant. The online instructor costs are considered as FTEs and are supported from the general college budget, as these instructors may teach in all formats and across program lines. (See 7 Milestones for timelines of projected vs. actual below)



## 7 Milestones

### The DLI Revised Timeline of Project

Phase 1 original timeline	[Blue bar from Aug. 2014 to Oct. 2014]					
Phase 1 completion	[Yellow bar from Aug. 2014 to Oct. 2014]					
Phase 2.1 original timeline	[Blue bar from Aug. 2014 to June 2015]					
Phase 2.1 completion	[Yellow bar from Aug. 2014 to June 2015]					
Phase 2.2 original timeline	[Blue bar from Aug. 2014 to Dec. 2015]					
Phase 2.2 revised timeline	[Yellow bar from Aug. 2014 to July 2016]					
Phase 2.3 original timeline	[Blue bar from Aug. 2014 to Dec. 2015]					
Phase 2.3 revised timeline	[Yellow bar from Aug. 2014 to July 2016]					
Phase 3 original timeline	[Blue bar from Aug. 2014 to July 2016]					
Phase 3 revised timeline	[Yellow bar from Aug. 2014 to Sept. 2016]					
Phase 4 original timeline	[Blue bar from Aug. 2014 to July 2016]					
Phase 4 revised timeline	[Yellow bar from Aug. 2014 to Sept. 2016]					
	Aug. 2014	Oct. 2014	June 2015	Dec. 2015	July 2016	Sept. 2016

### Benefits/Outputs of the Project

The projected organizational deliverables or outputs of the project include

1. A decrease in overall attrition identified in online and hybrid courses,
2. An increase in quality and rigor of online and hybrid courses by standardization,
3. Provide an alternative option for education to working adults,
4. To compete with private, for profit, and proprietary colleges,
5. To align the organization for a trend shift to MOOCs,
6. To increase the enrollment of the college with minimal physical expansion, and
7. To expand opportunities for students and faculty for education, development, career expansion.

## **8 Metrics and Results**

Double-loop learning during this project is illustrated in the changes of the timelines for each phase. Most of the original timelines were not met due to unanticipated barriers and delays. These barriers and delays, once identified, allowed for reflection and revision as needed. An example of an unanticipated barrier identified in the project were gaps in advising and coaching experienced by distance learning students, documented on their end-of-course surveys. Because retention is an area the DLI has targeted to impact, the data collected from the end-of-course surveys were used to propose and initiate a pilot project advising and coaching team strictly for distance learning students to meet their unique needs and offer ongoing assistance and coaching throughout their distance learning programs of study. The project is illustrated in the Deming Cycle in Appendix C.

## 9 Risks, Constraints, Assumptions

### 9.1 Risks

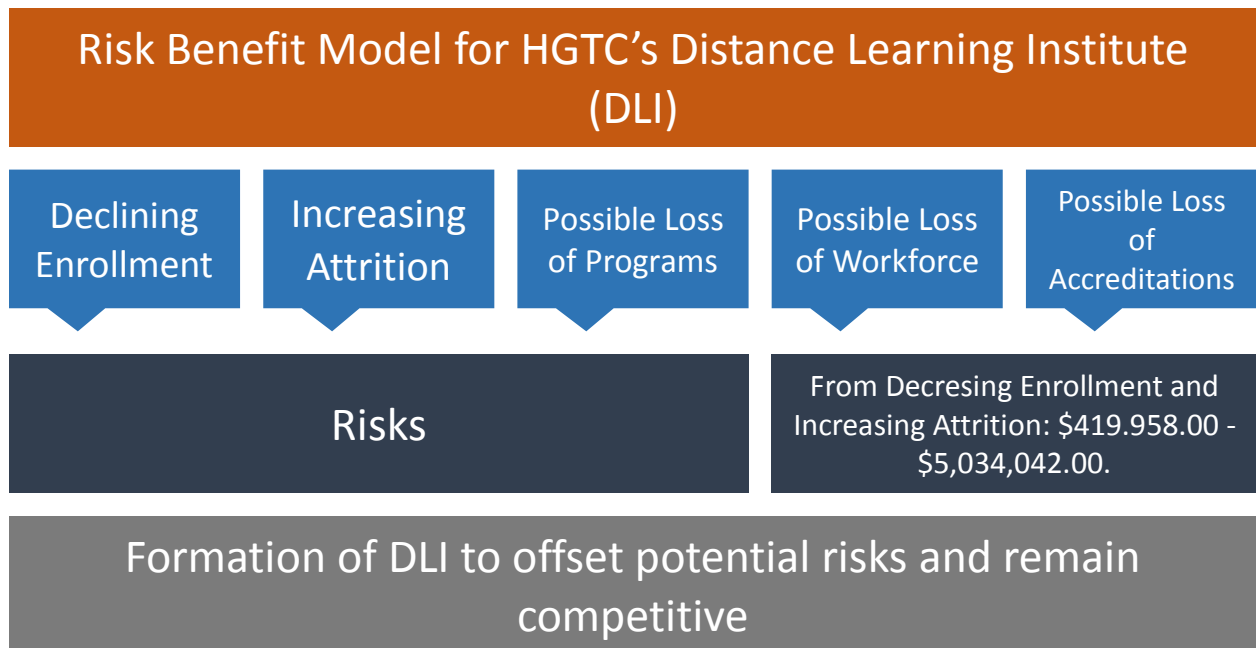
#### Risks Analysis

The categorized risks identified for the DLI are

**Low:** Loss of programs, loss of workforce, loss of accreditations

**Medium:** Increasing attrition

**High:** Declining enrollment



These risks remain active risks, with the mitigation plans for each to follow.

College statistics from Enrollment by Credit Hours, FTE, and headcount provided by the South Carolina Technical College System (2015) revealed a -3.24% headcount change, a -2.36% FTE change, and a -2.36% change in credit hours as of Fall 2015 enrollment numbers for HGTC. Of the 13 South Carolina technical colleges represented in the statistics, our college's numbers were not as decreased as other technical colleges; the overall ranges were

% Change Headcount: 0.34% to -10.32%

% Change FTE: -2.10% to -12.47%

% Change Credit Hours: -2.10% to -12.47% (See Appendix F)

Beginning with the highest categorized risk of declining enrollment, declining enrollment can be offset several ways.

1. All existing faculty should be trained in soft skills, net etiquette, and encouraged to build and maintain relationships with their students. Students need to feel they are a valued part of the class (Cuseo, 2015).
2. As the enrollment in certain programs declines, those faculty members should be cross trained to teach online classes. This will decrease the need and expense of hiring and training new faculty for the online courses.
3. Offer the general education courses needed for transfer to a state college or university as a whole unit. This offering could add strength to the transfer and bridge agreements already in place with the 33 South Carolina colleges and universities which offer students the opportunity to earn a degree, diploma, or certificate; see below (HGTC.edu, 2015).

4. General education courses could be offered and marketed to area high schools to facilitate the existing Dual Enrollment opportunity through the Program for Accelerated College Enrollment (PACE); see below. Utilizing these solutions could function as a contingency plan for the DLI and at the same time provide time and financial impact during the period leading up to full operation of the DLI. The added product of offering general education courses as a unit could add value to the DLI vision.

<b>Likelihood</b>	Very Likely				
	Likely				<b>Declining Enrollment</b>
	Quite Possible			<b>Increasing Attrition</b>	
	Possible			<b>Loss of Programs, Loss of Workforce</b>	
	Not Likely				<b>Loss of Accreditations</b>
		Trivial	Trivial	Significant	Major
		<b>Impact</b>			

## 9.2 Constraints

### Restrictions/Constraints in Planning and Executing

Barriers identified for this project are

- The college has three different geographical locations making it more difficult for online faculty to meet and have face-to-face discussions and brainstorming sessions.
- The college has a high number of adjunct instructors – 220-240 in comparison to 130-135 full-time faculty – who currently teach online courses intermittently, making it more difficult to monitor course administration and quality.
- South Carolina is currently not a member of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA), causing a cap on the number of states that can access the college’s online courses.
- The college continues to operate its online course offerings from the college’s professional development budget, possibly utilizing funds that are needed for other areas of professional development.
- Statistical trends show a decline in overall enrollment and tuition-driven income and an increase in attrition for South Carolina Technical/Community Colleges, possibly a rationale for delaying the construction of the DLI’s own budget.

“The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement is an agreement among member states, districts and territories that establishes comparable national standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education courses and programs. It is intended to make it easier for students to take online courses offered by postsecondary institutions based in another state. SARA is overseen by a National Council and administered by four regional education compacts” (NC-SARA, 2016, p.1). According to data recorded from all technical and community colleges in South Carolina (Oct. 2015), enrollment continues to decrease semester to semester with all colleges listed showing headcount decreases from -2.48% to -10.32%, with only one of the 13 colleges showing an increase of 0.34% (see Appendix B).

It is anticipated that the DLI will have its own separate operating budget for fiscal year 2016-2017. The financial data will be included in the project documentation when available. Enrollment data collected in October 2015 continues to confirm an overall state decrease in technical and community college enrollment numbers depicted as headcounts (see Appendix B).

### **9.3 Assumptions**

#### **Key Assumptions**

According to Schein (2010), shared patterns of thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and values form the essence of “groupness” which forms the assumptions of an organization. External assumptions include the mission and strategy, goals, means, measurements, and corrections. External assumptions and how they are managed influence internal assumptions and integration and adaptability of the organization (Schein, 2010).

Internal assumptions include common language; conceptual categories; defined group boundaries; criteria for inclusion and exclusion; the distribution of power, authority, and status; the development of norms of trust, intimacy, friendship, and love; the definitions of allocations of rewards and punishments; and explanation of the unexplainable (Schein, 2010).

Organizational assumptions, both internal and external, form the culture of the organization. The culture of the DLI is forming with each phase of development and initiation. Externally, the mission and goals mirror the overall college’s mission and goals but are specific to the online format. The program evaluation plan being developed is also specific to online formats, online teaching strategies, online pedagogy, and support systems for the online student.

Key external assumptions for the initiation and operation of the DLI are

1. Online degree and certificate programs are desired by the current and future student population.
2. Providing an online choice will increase options for students giving them more satisfaction in their educational choices and providing online options will create and attract and more revenue, offsetting the current trend of decreasing enrollment, increasing attrition, and declining tuition income.

Key internal assumptions for the initiation and operation of the DLI are

1. Current faculty will see the value and potential in the DLI offerings, will embrace the changes and revisions necessary to create and teach online classes, and buy in to the need for online course standardization and mandatory online faculty training – both for the new online instructor initially and for ongoing online faculty training and professional development.
2. The DLI is operating from financial input from the college’s professional development budget; however, the DLI anticipates its own budget for fiscal year 2016-2017 as the DLI anticipates full operation with coordinated marketing and branding efforts.
3. Enrollment in the DLI will help offset declining enrollment and increase revenue with minimal or no physical expansion necessary.

## **10 Financial Plan**

The DLI has been operating from financial input from the college's professional development budget; however, the DLI has submitted its first separate budget for fiscal year 2016-2017 (see Appendix E). The costs for DLI personnel are and will continue to be reflected in the college's annual budget under faculty and staff. The purchase costs of the offsite testing software and coordinated services were provided from professional development funds and are not reflected in this budget; however, there is discussion on the best way to disseminate future testing costs to the students who choose to test offsite (see Appendix E).

## 11 Quality Assurance Plan

### Quality Assurance Interventions

The Deming Cycle (PDCA) of continuous quality improvement which include the steps of plan, do, check, and act was utilized for this project as illustrated by the plans of the proposal, timelines established, adjustments made to the project phases and timelines to keep the project moving forward, and the making of necessary corrections during the process (Deming Cycle, 2016). -The PDCA is ongoing, providing quality assessment and evaluation feedback (see Appendix C).

Double-loop learning during this project is illustrated in the changes of the timelines for each phase. Most of the original timelines were not met due to unanticipated barriers and delays. These barriers and delays, once identified, allowed for reflection and revision as needed. An example of an unanticipated barrier identified in the project were gaps in advising and coaching experienced by distance learning students, documented on their end-of-course surveys. Because retention is an area the DLI has targeted to impact, the data collected from the end-of-course surveys were used to propose and initiate a pilot project advising and coaching team strictly for distance learning students, to meet their unique needs and offer ongoing assistance and coaching throughout their distance learning programs of study.

## **12 Areas for Future Study/Implications**

Education is rapidly changing to meet the needs of current and future students. As enrollment trends decline and attrition trends increase, providing an educational service and product that satisfies the consumer/student is paramount. Online education is now available in all levels of education, with the number of distance learning programs increasing at a rapid rate. Educational institutions must change and adapt to new learning formats and active strategies of providing instruction to compete in the current environment. Implications for further and future study and/or implications are

1. Streamlining the transfer process for students coming from another online institution.
2. Increasing the offerings of distance learning programs.
3. Reevaluating the need for general education courses to have time limits.
4. Evaluating and revising current face-to-face programs with low enrollment numbers.
5. Instituting a streamlined process for students to transfer from one learning format to another without progression interruption.



## 13 REFLECTION

### Reflection of the Consultancy Project

The past 3 years have been filled with watching this consultancy project – *The Formation of a Distance Learning Institute: Transforming People, Process, and Product* – develop from an idea to a reality. The project's early phases concentrated on the project proposal, obtaining permissions, researching best practices for a DLI, and laying the groundwork of forming the Oversight Committee and subcommittees. A timetable was constructed with tentative phases' completion dates which was updated often throughout the project. Many man-hours went into this project; and I can definitely say as a member of the Oversight Committee, we feel like proud parents of our project! The many delays and setbacks encountered are somehow forgotten when we proudly talk about the DLI and the current degree and certificate programs it offers.

The project was proposed as a way to counter decreasing enrollment and increasing attrition numbers and to compete with private for-profit online colleges and universities. We also wanted to give our students another choice and offer complete degree programs and certifications online as well as provide the student support services that mirror those offered to the face-to-face traditional students.

The DLI specifically supports the effort of accessibility, academic excellence, and student service as described in the college mission statement. The DLI proposal recognized the importance of solidifying the organization, structure, and fidelity of our online (distance) learning programs through the creation of the DLI. The DLI has been recognized as a separate operating campus of the technical college. The technical college was in a unique position due to the existing infrastructure, accreditation status, and faculty, enabling us to put forward a better product than many national for-profit entities and area competitors.

The project was planned in four phases, each having its own milestones and completion projected dates in order to stagger the changes and allow for development time. The timelines associated with each of the phases were fluid, as many mitigating factors were uncontrollable variables within the project. These completion dates have been revised several times; however, all four phases of the original DLI proposal are now complete. The DLI is fully operational with eight degree programs and three certification programs currently offered. Future offerings are in development and will roll-out each semester as student interest dictates.

- The projected organizational benefits or outputs of the project included
- ✓ A decrease in overall attrition identified in online and hybrid courses,
  - ✓ An increase in quality and rigor of online and hybrid courses by standardization,
  - ✓ Provide an alternative option for education to working adults,
  - ✓ To compete with private, for profit, and proprietary colleges,
  - ✓ To align the organization for a trend shift to MOOCs,
  - ✓ To increase the enrollment of the college with minimal physical expansion, and
  - ✓ To expand opportunities for students and faculty for education, development, and career expansion.

All of the above organizational benefits have been obtained with the exception of the decrease in overall attrition identified in online and hybrid courses and declining college enrollment. The data are being collected and analyzed and will be aggregated each semester and academic year moving forward.

Several unexpected things occurred during the 3-year DLI formation period. We anticipated being able to offer student support systems for the DLI that mirrored the traditional campus; however, that turned out to be a challenge. To be able to offer student support services such as tutoring, writing assistance, financial aid assistance, etc. during hours other than traditional working hours of 0800-1700 was not possible. To have these services “live” after 1700 and

before 0800 meant additional personnel and the ability to be on campus during these hours. Other alternatives were investigated including outsourcing these services after hours; however, this option proved to be extremely expensive. The college decided to have personnel in place remotely to provide assistance via live chats as a pilot to actually see how much these services would be utilized during these hours. It turned out that the services were not utilized and are not currently being provided. If a DLI student has a question, they can send an email that will be responded to the next business day, or they can elect to call during normal business hours. The exception to this is technical support, which is available 24 hours telephonically or via internet.

Another unexpected delay was that the SARA certification took much longer than originally anticipated to obtain. The SARA certification involves the membership of the entire state of South Carolina, not just individual online and DLIs. After approximately four months of inquiry and correspondence with the state's higher education administration, the state finally agreed to make membership application, which was promptly accepted.

The final unexpected thing to occur during this project was the unexpected closing of ITT's campuses in South Carolina, which ended up being low-hanging fruit for the DLI. This brought many distance learning students to us, looking for a way to complete their degrees already in progress. I am proud to say our administration moved quickly to review their transcripts and accept them, giving credit for completed coursework, and continuing their academic progress.

Standardizing online courses was a much-needed segment for improving quality of the educational product. Our course subcommittee developed a standardized course development checklist that has since been utilized in all course development and revision within the college. At first, there was much resistance from faculty stating that the checklist infringed on their academic freedom. The faculty resistance was overcome by surveying a random segment of the faculty asking about the importance of consistency in course development and how strongly the faculty felt about consistency and quality in their courses. Best practices were reviewed and used to compile recommendations for online faculty in day-to-day course operation, with specific recommendations such as responding to emails within 24 hours Monday-Friday and within 48 hours Saturday-Sunday. The survey findings were shared with the entire faculty which helped overcome the resistance from the majority of faculty.

The delayed phase for marketing of the DLI somewhat hindered the roll-out of the initial online degree and certification programs. Marketing started advertising online programs too early, back in phase 2, without communicating and or coordinating their materials with the Oversight Committee. That initial marketing was terminated, which left several bruised egos in the marketing department. I do believe marketing should have begun back in phase 2; however, to be efficient and effective, marketing should have communicated and coordinated their advertising materials with the Oversight Committee for specific program roll-out information. It may have been better to include a representative from marketing on the Oversight Committee as they could have been a part of the planning from the beginning, possibly avoiding the bruised egos and later delays. When marketing finally did continue in phase 4, the efforts appeared sporadic and not coordinated or unified. I am not sure what the problem was other than trying to cut costs by using print, billboards, and radio as the sole advertising mediums. I believe the best way to promote the DLI was for marketing to take the message directly to area high schools, educational fairs, district educational conventions, and of course by using the internet as the majority of our online students utilize social media daily. They have made changes and now have a solid presence on social media, have aired television commercials, and held our first virtual open house recently.

I believe the difficulty with coordinating marketing also contributed to the lack of students enrolled in the initial programs we offered. I believe marketing should have been visiting area high schools, talking to guidance counselors to find out what programs students were interested in, and bringing that data back to the DLI, possibly another reason to include them from the

beginning of the process. In retrospect, it is difficult to predict human behavior and the choices we make.

This project was an extremely challenging time of growth for me as an educator and future consultant. I wholeheartedly agreed with the project from day one, seeing the need to expand our educational products and services to another group of citizens. I also see the future of education is definitely online, as the internet has provided an opportunity and medium for education to anyone at any time; however, online education is not a good choice for everyone. To be successful in online education, the student must be self-directed and goal driven and able to discipline their time for study and organize their time to get assignments completed within the designated timeframes. To help students make an informed decision about whether they should pursue online education, the DLI now requires all new online students to attend the online orientation day, a virtual experience providing general information for new students and a virtual tour of the learning management system Desire to Learn (D2L) that we use. We also require they complete five short tutorials on the use of D2L and pass a posttest. This provides evidence that they have the basic knowledge and skills to be successful with an online class within our DLI.

Online education can be isolating if the student does not engage in online activities that are active such as discussions and group work. It is an easy medium to lose students who do not engage easily and frequently. For this reason, we piloted an online advising team to specifically advise, coach, and follow the DLI students throughout their degree or certification programs. After 2 semesters, the students were polled and gave high satisfaction feedback with the specialized advisement team. The specialized advisement team idea is being expanded to other areas of high attrition within the college. Data are currently being collected, but it is too early to draw any conclusions.

I was concerned early in the project about how the college would financially manage the DLI, as typically the college budget is lean and not flexible. Being able to receive a Title III grant for 5 years was the answer to that concern. Using grant monies to support the DLI Program Director, administration assistance, and a new DLI Instructional Designer costs will allow continued growth and development of the DLI without depleting the college budget. This will also allow a 5-year period for the DLI to increase enrollment numbers with the goal that its numbers will sustain its operation.

I am very proud of how the project turned out, and I am very proud of my involvement. I initially felt like "a fish out of water" as my background is healthcare and most recently nursing education. I quickly began to see areas where knowledge from the project could be used in my field of healthcare. Instead of focusing on what I did not know, I focused on what I needed to know to complete the current phase of the project. I could not look at the entire project without being overwhelmed, but I could take it phase by phase. There were many times I thought I was "way in over my head"; but thank goodness; my adviser had faith in me, enough for both of us. As I look back over the past 3 years, I also see how much my confidence has grown. I feel empowered from what I have learned and will use this knowledge going forward into whatever my future holds. I understand the importance of project management, the processes we have learned in classes, and most importantly the ability and value (without fear) of thinking outside of the box.

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## A. Appendices

### Appendix A: Historical Attrition Data

#### Online vs. Traditional (Attrition)

Internet/Hybrid Courses with Counterpart Classes (D/F/W/WF)	Traditional Courses with Counterpart Courses (D/F/W/WF)
(Spring 2010) 44%	(Spring 2010) 29%
(Spring 2011) 35%	(Spring 2011) 26%
(Spring 2012) 40%	(Spring 2012) 27%
(Spring 2013) 36%	(Spring 2013) 20%

\*Data were gathered from Argos Reports

\*\*All courses that had no counterpart equivalent were removed from the calculation.

Internet/Hybrid Courses with Counterpart Classes (F/W/WF)	Traditional Courses with Counterpart Courses (F/W/WF)
(Spring 2010) 37%	(Spring 2010) 22%
(Spring 2011) 29%	(Spring 2011) 20%
(Spring 2012) 34%	(Spring 2012) 21%
(Spring 2013) 29%	(Spring 2013) 16%

\*Data were gathered from Argos Reports

\*\*All courses that had no counterpart equivalent were removed from the calculation.

Internet/Hybrid Courses (D/F/W/WF)	Traditional Courses All Courses (D/F/W/WF)
(Spring 2010) 38%	(Spring 2010) 17%
(Spring 2011) 31%	(Spring 2011) 16%
(Spring 2012) 35%	(Spring 2012) 16%
(Spring 2013) 31%	(Spring 2013) 13%

\*Data were gathered from Argos Reports

\*\*This is a comparison of all courses regardless of a counterpart course.

Internet/Hybrid All Courses (F/W/WF)	Traditional Courses All Courses (F/W/WF)
(Spring 2010) 33%	(Spring 2010) 13%
(Spring 2011) 25%	(Spring 2011) 13%
(Spring 2012) 29%	(Spring 2012) 12%
(Spring 2013) 26%	(Spring 2013) 10%

\*Data were gathered from Argos Reports

## Appendix B: Enrollment by Headcount

<b>Enrollment by Headcount</b>			
<b>College</b>	<b>Current Headcount</b>	<b>Previous Headcount</b>	<b>% Change Headcount</b>
Aiken Technical College	2,359	2,351	0.34%
Central Carolina Technical College	3,662	3,963	-7.60%
Florence-Darlington Technical College	6,007	6,215	-3.35%
Greenville Technical College	12,280	12,592	-2.48%
Horry-Georgetown Technical College	7,097	7,335	-3.24%
Midlands Technical College	10,946	11,424	-4.18%
Northeastern Technical College	1,054	1,090	-3.30%
Orangeburg Technical College	2,774	3,060	-9.35%
Piedmont Technical College	5,216	5,694	-8.39%
Spartanburg Community College	4,928	5,495	-10.32%
Technical College of the Lowcountry	2,332	2,529	-7.79%
Tri-County Technical College	6,128	6,386	-4.04%
York Technical College	4,753	5,061	-6.09%
<b>System Total</b>	<b>69,536</b>	<b>73,195</b>	<b>-5.00%</b>

(South Carolina Technical College System for Fall Semester, October 2015)

## Appendix C: Project illustrated in the Deming Cycle

### **Act:**

Revisions made to

Timelines as needed  
Marketing and branding  
underway

Programs ready for  
Fall 2017 roll out

### **Plan:**

All project phases'  
timelines  
Key people identified  
Student support areas  
Course and faculty  
training  
Marketing and

branding plan  
8 programs for full  
roll-out  
Obtain SARA  
certification



### **Check:**

Periodic checks  
of all phases  
QA- Initial  
Impressions Surveys  
Weeks 2-4  
End of course  
surveys  
Satisfaction surveys  
from pilot  
initiated

### **Do:**

Project timelines initiated  
Key people in place  
Student support areas  
established  
Course development  
and faculty training  
initiated  
SARA applied for and  
obtained  
8 programs prepared  
for full  
Roll-out Fall 2017  
Ongoing QA  
workshops  
Pilot  
advising/coaching  
Use of course  
standard  
checklist and rubrics



### Appendix D: General Risk Assessment of the Project

<b>School Assessment No:1</b>	Horry-Georgetown Technical College
<b>Title of Activity:</b>	Formation of the Distance Learning Institute (DLI)
<b>Location(s) of Work:</b>	Horry-Georgetown Technical College
<b>Brief Description of Work:</b> Project Oversight Committee formed with subcommittees to provide integral parts of the project	

**Hazard/Risk Identification:** Identify all the hazards; evaluate the risks (low / medium / high); describe all existing control measures and identify any further measures required.

<b>Hazard(s)</b>	<b>Present Risk Evaluation</b> L/M/H	<b>Control Measures</b> (i.e., alternative work methods / mechanical aids / engineering controls, etc.)	<b>Risk Evaluation after control</b> L/M/H
Loss of Programs, Loss of workforce	Low	Train existing faculty to teach online courses in the DLI to offset declining program numbers as needed	Low
Loss of Accreditations	Low	Obtain accreditation for the DLI separately to facilitate high program quality and best practices	Low
Increasing Attrition	Medium	Cross train all faculty on online soft skills, net etiquette, and online course requirements	Medium
Declining Enrollment	High	Offer general education courses as a transfer ready unit DLI programs  Market general education transfer ready unit program to area high schools  Market chosen DLI degree programs to Horry and Georgetown counties initially, spreading out to cover entire state of SC and surrounding states, to cover nationally when appropriate documentation is complete.	High

**Additional Information:** Identify any additional information relevant to the activity, including supervision, training requirements, special emergency procedures, requirement for health surveillance etc.

**Appendix E: Proposed 2016-17 Distance Learning Institute (DLI)  
Budget**

Acct/Line Item	Account Description			2016-2017 Budget Request	Justification
7000	Operating Budget Pool			10,500	
7108	Promotional			1,500	Promoting online programs
7109	Other Services			7,500	SARA application fee and annual fee
7202	Educational Supplies			1,000	
7204	Other Supplies				
7220	Postage			500	mailings
7304	Dues and Membership				
7400	Travel - Budget Pool			2,000	Training for DL Coordinator
				-	
<b>Total</b>			<b>0.00</b>	<b>10,500</b>	