

IMPLEMENTING ONLINE WEATHER STUDIES COURSE AT AN HBCU: CASE OF FAYETTEVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

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The task of implementing a new course is never easy, especially a web based course such as Online Weather Studies. The implementation process here at Fayetteville State University has proven to be even more daunting because of the check and counter-checks put in place to ensure that only course content of the highest quality is put in place for students and the general public.

Fayetteville State University is a public comprehensive regional university whose primary mission is to provide quality education to its students through a basic liberal-arts foundation, specialized professional training, and specific graduate programs. Fayetteville State is one of the Five Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) within the 16-campus University of North Carolina. Consequently and as part of its broader mission, the university extends its services as a regional institution by providing life-long learning experiences and opportunities to the University's immediate and extended communities and serving as a resource for business, education, and culture in southeastern North Carolina.

In pursuit of this mission, the university has expended huge sums of money to upgrade its campus technology infrastructure; today over ninety percent of all course offerings are now available on-line in one form or the other.

The decision to participate in the AMS Diversity Program is the brainchild of the Provost and Vice Chancellor, Dr Perry Massey, a geographer by training who insisted on including Online Weather Studies as part of regular and continuing education course offerings. Two faculty members, Dr Ron Johnston of the Earth Sciences program and Dr. Adegoke Ademiluyi, trained geographer, were sponsored to attend the one week training program at the National Weather Center facility in Kansas City, Missouri.

We came back with the optimism of preschoolers and dreaming of making weather studies a requirement across all degree programs. We returned to the campus at the height of slow but quiet summer months. This environment allowed us to brainstorm among

like-minded colleagues as to the best way to implement this course. The result was a document detailing list of steps and strategies needed to navigate the highly charged academic program approval process here at Fayetteville State. During the "pre-school" conference we circulated the public announcement supplied by the main office in Washington among the faculty and the administration. We followed this with University radio announcements detailing the goals of the course. The efforts appear to have paid off as indicated by the high level of public awareness and interest among students and faculty.

Since our initial goal was to offer the course for the first time this coming spring semester, we began in mid-September to have the course listed in the spring 2003 schedule of classes. We soon found that several issues need to be discussed and decisions made with regards to the following:

1. Is it going to be a brand new course? If so it would have to go through the new course process that will surely take at least a semester to get on course schedules, thereby pushing the launch date to Fall 2003.
2. Can we just convert an existing course i.e. an existing "Introduction to Meteorology" into an online course? But this particular course is already being offered this fall and is not scheduled to be offered again in the fall of 2004. As much as the faculty that teaches this course is supportive of Online Weather Studies, he extremely reluctant to give up the course because he argues that they are not exactly the same in content
3. Is this Online Weather Studies course unique enough to have its own identity, course title and personality? If the answer to this is yes, then we have to go through a different set of processes for the implementation of online course curriculum. The Institution offers two types of online courses; web-based and web-enhanced. Online Weather Studies will be web-based, requiring a higher standard, including the peer review process, before it can become part of regularly scheduled course.

This Online Weather Studies course is generating unprecedented level of discussions across the various academic units because of the impact of the addition of such a course to the college and degree requirements. We expect to conclude this process by the end of this semester and get the course in place by the fall 2003.