SPECIAL INFORMATION ITEM:

UNCG iSchool: The Nation’s First Virtual Early College
Full Board Special Presentation
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

UNCG iSchool is an online concurrent enrollment program offered without charge to advanced high school students throughout North Carolina. Begun in 1997 as a face-to-face program, iSchool was eventually converted to online instruction to improve access for all students. Recognition by President Bowles and Governor Easley led in 2007 to program funding under North Carolina’s Learn and Earn Online program, through which UNCG currently is the only UNC campus providing early college credit.

The intent of Learn and Earn Online is to provide all qualified high school students the opportunity to experience intellectually engaging academic work and earn college credit. Statistics show that students who earn college credits in high school have a higher rate of attending college, persist stronger once in college, and earn higher grades than other students.

iSchool’s numbers are impressive. In 2007-08, the first year of Learn and Earn Online, iSchool had 2,648 enrollments, from the Carolina coast to the mountains (1,025 in fall 2007, and 1,623 in spring 2008). For 2008-09, we are projecting 5,800 enrollments; there are over 3,400 thus far enrolled. Over 300 high schools are participating in the program, with enrollments in over 90 of North Carolina’s 100 counties. These numbers are due to the high quality of the courses, the extensive support services the program provides, and the strong partnerships iSchool has developed over the years with public schools.

Courses offered through iSchool include Mathematics, Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, Dance Appreciation, Political Science, Fitness for Life, and Anthropology. To expand students’ academic opportunities, UNCG will be adding new courses this year, and we have invited other UNC campuses to participate in the near future. NC State will begin offering courses in spring 2009, and several other institutions have indicated interest in participating in fall 2009. With UNCG providing centralized administration for all UNC campuses, students will enjoy the convenience of a consolidated course catalog, seamless registration, and efficient access to help resources.
Courses offered through iSchool are the same courses offered to UNCG’s other students in terms of content, assessment, rigor, and integrity. The courses are highly interactive, using case studies, video lectures, simulations, audio tutorials, manipulable maps and timelines, educational games, animations, text, graphics, and virtual team assignments.

UNCG iSchool resides in the Division of Continual Learning (DCL), which has won several national awards for online course development. DCL has teams of staff who collaborate with faculty to create courses and entire degree programs. The teams include instructional designers, coders, graphic artists, audio/video specialists, editors, and project managers. In addition, DCL provides registration services, technical help, online orientation for students, marketing and sales staff, training for high school facilitators, and comprehensive communication with all stakeholders.

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