Summary: This paper answers questions about the online program at Framingham State College in Framingham, Massachusetts. http://www.academicsonline.org

Part 1. The Institution and Its Programs

1. What degrees and major programs are offered?

At Framingham State College, many graduate courses are available online. Several courses in the M.S. in Educational Leadership program are offered online. The Master of Education with Concentration in Curriculum and Instructional Technology (M.Ed. C.I.T.) is offered completely online as is a Graduate Certificate in Instructional Technology Proficiency. (Framingham State College, Online Programs and Courses. (n.d.) Retrieved October 19, 2003, from http://www.academicsonline.org/programs.htm)

2. For how long has the institution been offering the identified program at a distance?

Framingham State College began offering online courses in this program in 1999. Blackboard was introduced as the delivery format in the Fall 2000 semester. The entire program has been available online since 2001. (R. Robinson, personal communication, October 20, 2003)

3. What course delivery technologies are used?


4. Is there a face-to-face component of instruction? If so, where is it conducted and for what duration?

All courses in the CIT program are offered fully online, though some are also available in a hybrid or face-to-face format. These are offered at satellite campuses during the Fall and Spring semesters. (Framingham State College, DGCE Course Schedule. (n.d.) Retrieved October 19, 2003 from http://www.choosefsc.org/schedule.htm)
5. How long does it take to earn a degree in the identified program?

The M.Ed. CIT degree requirement consists of ten courses and 75 hours of field work. Students usually complete the program in two years taking two courses per semester, but some spread it out over three years. A portfolio and comprehensive exam are also required for the M.Ed. program. The Certificate program can be completed in as few as two semesters. (Framingham State College. (2003, July 29) M. Ed. (C.I.T.) Portfolio and Comprehensive Exam Information. Retrieved October 19, 2003 from http://www.academiciansonline.org/MEDportcomp.htm)

6. Is the institution accredited? If so, by what organization?


7. Is the institution public or private? If private, is it for-profit or not-for-profit?

Framingham State College is a public institution. Founded by Horace Mann in 1839 it was the first state-supported institution of public higher education in the United States for the training of teachers. Framingham State College is part of the Massachusetts state college system. (Framingham State College. (2003, June 14) Mission Statement. Retrieved October 19, 2003 from http://www.framingham.edu/catalog_mission.htm)

8. What is the total enrollment of the institution? How many students are enrolled in the identified distance-delivered program?

At the time of last publication, Peterson’s Guide estimates that “approximately 200 students have matriculated into the program, with another 200 taking initial courses in anticipation of matriculation.” (Peterson’s. (2003) Distance Learning Programs. Retrieved October 19, 2003 from http://www.petersons.com/distancelearning/code/idd.asp?sponsor=1&inunId=159364&typeVC=ProgramVC) Exact numbers are not available from FSC at this time, with 100 students completing their masters degrees in June, 2003, and a change in the Massachusetts Department of Education licensing requirements influencing teachers’ professional development. (R. Marquis, personal communication, October 21, 2003)

Since 2000, over 5000 courses have been completed online. (R. Robinson, personal communication, October 20, 2003)
9. What is the tuition (per course or per year?)

The tuition is $698 per four-credit graduate course. (Framingham State College, DGCE Fall 2003 Online Course Schedule. (n.d.) Retrieved October 19, 2003 from http://www.academicsonline.org/schedule.htm)

10. What is the URL for the institution’s or program’s webpage?

Framingham State College website can be found at http://www.framingham.edu. The webpage for the online program is http://www.academicsonline.org.

Part 1. The Institution’s Website

A. How would you rate the visual appeal of the site? What elements are visually appealing, and which aspects are less so?

The Framingham State College website is visually appealing. Though there is a lot of information on each page, the site makes use of white space, bold dividers, and small graphics to define topic areas. Most pages load quickly and there is a consistent look throughout the site. Viewed from a laptop, however, the smaller type in the gray bars is somewhat fuzzy and difficult to read.

B. Is the site easily navigable and well-organized? Provide examples.

The site is very well-organized and easy to navigate. Links to key information are found in Menus at the top and along the left column. Links are also embedded in the text. Experimentation did not locate any broken links or images. Most links enable the back-button; a few open a new window. In no case is the user left stranded. Contact information is easily found on all main pages.

C. Does the site contain sufficient material to answer questions 1-10 (above)? If not, provide details.

The Framingham State College website and Academics Online section in particular contain sufficient material to answer most of the questions (1-10). Information of interest to current and prospective students was readily available. Details concerning the history of the program and exact enrollment figures were not found on the pages searched, but might be available on another, less accessible page.

D. What is the most positive aspect of the website?

The Framingham State College website provides all of the information that a student needs to investigate the program and register for classes. Having recently completed a school search, I did not find this to be true in all cases. Too often, a link would open a PDF file which did not contain the desired answers or, in one case, prompted the user
to order a CD-ROM which promised to provide the answers. I found the most positive aspect of this site to be the quality of the program implied by the admission process, list of courses, and program requirements.

E. What aspect of the site is in most need of improvement?

The site is very well done and only minor changes can be recommended. In the Framingham State College section, some of the pages contain so much information that one must scroll through the equivalent of five or more printed pages. Perhaps some of these could be broken down into shorter pages. In the Academics Online section, the page length is much more manageable. There is some minor inconsistency in whether following a link opens the page in the current window with the back button enabled or opens a new window. A consistent format would make navigation more predictable.