Help Yourself Resources: GCC Tutorials and Student Helpdesk Websites
Innovation of the Year 2009 - Application

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Executive Summary

The GCC Student Helpdesk and GCC Tutorials websites work together to provide on-demand, self-service, 24/7 technical assistance. These websites are designed to facilitate the diverse learning styles of our GCC community members, which includes faculty, students and staff.   Topics include: eGCC, MyeGCC - Managing Your eGCC Resources, Blackboard, Outlook Express, Webmail, Office 2003/2007 applications, and File Management.

Timeliness

Questions directed to the GCC's Helpdesk and the , such as technical inquiries about user accounts and software pointed to the need to develop a resource devoted to answering these questions. GCC community members also expressed interest in having a single online resource where they could find locate answers to frequent questions. As a result, a list of the basic questions community members typically ask about their user accounts and researched answers to each were compiled. These questions and answers were then standardized and made available on the Student Helpdesk website, which can be considered as an FAQ. Since the Student Helpdesk website's revamp and rollout in June 2005, countless numbers have used the Helpdesk website.

The GCC Tutorials project is the result of Debbie Gilsdorf's observations while working with students. Mrs. Gilsdorf noted that many students did not have the basic computing skills required to complete work in college-level courses. Due to the pervasive influence of computer technology in modern life, students are often assumed or expected to possess the skills necessary to perform basic operations in various software applications, such as the software applications in Microsoft Office and course management systems. However, these assumptions and expectations are not always appropriate for a diverse student population with varied educational backgrounds. Needing assistance to address their lack of basic skills, students face several alternatives: seek personal assistance while on campus during normal hours of operation, attempt to learn or improve skills on their own, or, in extreme circumstances, consider withdrawing from the course.

To answer this need for basic skills, Mrs. Gilsdorf designed self-running, visual tutorials to introduce students to many of the basic computing skills they would need for their coursework. She also saw the potential of using such visual tutorials to explain some of the topics presented on the Student Helpdesk Website. Therefore, the Student Helpdesk and GCC Tutorials were integrated to provide an effective and easy to use resources for our GCC community. GCC Tutorials website and initial content went live in June of 2006. As technology and processes improve over time, so do the supporting documentation and visual tutorials found on the respective websites.

Quality

"Kudos to the creators of GCC's Online Tutorials. Since there is no required general orientation for our students, these tutorials provide a much needed guide. They are well designed and the content, particularly for online students, is invaluable." **Charlotte Cohen,** Reference Librarian, Library Media Center

The Student Helpdesk and GCC Tutorials websites increase quality of service at GCC in the following ways:

- **Information GCC Community Members Want:** Compilation of questions and answers on the

Student Helpdesk website, along with the topics visually explained in GCC Tutorials, are created according to GCC community member requests.

- **Researched Solutions:** During the development stages of each topic on these websites, Mrs. Gilsdorf conducted extensive research on how to complete a desired topic, and also review other sites that explain a similar topic. They compile the information, create preliminary written directions, assess the level of understanding of the topic by a non-technical after reading the directions, and then modify as needed. This results in written documentation and visual tutorials that clearly, simply and effectively communicate topics to the end user.
- **Consistently Updated:** Because the Student Helpdesk documentation and GCC Tutorials websites have a reputation of being a great source of current, accurate information, the two websites are consistently updated to reflect the constant evolution of GCC's technological resources.

<u>Efficiency</u>

Currently, many colleges and educational websites use screenshots to better explain written instructions. However, screenshots and text are not always adequate. There are occasions where a visual, self-running tutorial is a more effective method of explaining tasks. Having a library of learning objects available online, both explained visually and in sequential step-by-step instructions, benefits all GCC community members: students, instructors and staff (particularly in the computer labs). For example, let's suppose a GCC student community member is asked to create a PowerPoint presentation for a English course (or a meeting) and upload the completed presentation to the course's (or group's) shared folder on the server. Also, let's say that the individual has never used PowerPoint and doesn't know how to access their shared folder from off-campus. In this case, the tutorials and written instructions help as follows:

- The GCC Tutorials website grants the individual access to various self-running tutorials on PowerPoint. These short tutorials cover topics that take the student from a very general overview of PowerPoint, explanations on how to add/modify items on the slides, and finally guidance on how to have PowerPoint display the completed presentation in slideshow format.
- Then, to help the individual transfer their completed PowerPoint to the appropriate shared folder on the GCC Network, the Student Helpdesk's section on "Working Off-Campus" explains how to access shared folders from home using a computer running either the Windows or Macintosh operating system, step-by-step. And, in case the individual prefers to learn visually, there's the option to click on an image (like the one to the right of this paragraph) and be conveniently directed to the relevant tutorial.

The benefits in situations similar to this one are these:

- Individuals can learn and review the basic functions of PowerPoint, or of any other item available on the GCC Tutorials website, at their own convenience. And, because the tutorials are short and focused on a topic, individuals can get the information they need quickly and without wading through large tutorials.
- In the case of students, the availability of such resources allows faculty to better dedicate class time to actually teaching their courses.
- Should an individual call for assistance on transferring their completed document to the GCC Network and prefers reading instructions while having the instructions explained, the person assisting can direct the individual to appropriate section of the Student Helpdesk website. That way, the chances of a student being confused are decreased.

As a result, staff in the computer labs, departments and the Helpdesk are now able to devote more time to helping more students in less time, as well as being able to troubleshoot the more difficult problems.

Cost Effectiveness and Replication

- **Majority of Content Currently Available Applies District-Wide:** While the GCC Tutorials and Student Helpdesk websites were initially created to focus on the needs of GCC students, the resources can be used by all GCC Community Members needing information on a topic presented on either site. Moreover, many of the materials on the GCC Tutorials website discuss software programs used district-wide (e.g.: Blackboard, Microsoft Office, and Outlook Express).
- **Websites Accessible in Virtually Every Popular Browser:** Each of the website pages are constructed using fully optimized, non-proprietary HTML and CSS code, so that many people can access the resources at any given time using virtually any browser on any platform. The only real limit is the number of inbound connections to the campus web server. No special servers are required.
- **Easily Maintained and Copied:** For the sake of maintainability and applicability at other campuses, the websites were designed with their own templates that can easily be copied and modified by anyone with basic HTML and CSS knowledge.
- **Use Tools At Your Disposal:** As long as there is image editing software available, the project could easily be replicated by anyone with HTML and CSS knowledge and willingness to create the tutorials, The tools Mrs. Gilsdorf used were:
    - Macromedia Captivate (Used to create the visual tutorials. This is the only real required tool would be Captivate, as it's a software application that allows you to create a visual presentation as easily as a PowerPoint presentation.),
    - Adobe Photoshop (For image editing on both the websites and in tutorials), and
    - Macromedia Dreamweaver (To code the website).

Collaboration

Mrs. Gilsdorf noted that the content on the Student Helpdesk website and in the visual GCC Tutorials consistently improved when people with more of an educational/training role at GCC contributed. In the spirit of improvement, Mrs. Gilsdorf formed a voluntary group of such individuals who were interested in improving the Student Helpdesk and GCC Tutorials websites.

All of the individuals in the teams listed below take great pride in the collaborative effort that has improved on these resources. These individuals provide diverse expertise and service perspectives.

Student Helpdesk Author:	
Debbie Gilsdorf - TRI	

Team Members - Content Experts:	
Jim Daugherty – Former TRI Director	Russell Sears - Reference Services, LMC
Dorene Kessler - OIT	John Gibson - Business Department
Dennis Topel - TED	Michelle Shivnani – TRI

In addition to the people above, many students and faculty members have provided suggestions, criticisms

and improvements for tutorials and documentation via email, telephone and in-person. Thanks to the feedback Mrs. Gilsdorf received, along with the Team's contribution, the materials presented have consistently improved.

Learning

Thanks to our diverse team of content experts (noted above) and the success of the GCC Tutorials and Student Helpdesk websites, word of the GCC Tutorials and Student Helpdesk websites has spread within and beyond GCC in the following ways:

"These online tutorials are just the thing some students need to figure out how to get started in Blackboard or how to forward their email. Now we just need to get the word out to students that these handy learning tools are here - when they need them - at the beginning of the semester." **Karen Schwalm, Faculty**, GCC English Department

- John Gibson, Business faculty, shared at district meetings.
- Emailed notices and hard-copies of documentation have been sent to department across campus.
- The eCourses website, located at http://www.gc.maricopa.edu/online, provides students with information on how to begin each of their online courses. Every course information page on the eCourses site now provides a quick link to the appropriate GCC Tutorial pertaining to the course management system used. This helps get students on their way faster than they normally would!

Conclusion

"The Online Tutorials and Student Helpdesk websites are proving to be the much needed and wonderful instructional tools for our diverse population of students. Not only are these resources helpful to students with a wide range of learning styles, and in wide variety across the curriculum, but they are a very important ingredient for our evolving distributed learning environment that now includes traditional, online and hybrid classes. Finally, these tutorials will be of great value beyond GCC - for students at all the Maricopa Colleges and all types of students world-wide. There is nothing like them on the internet yet. Microsoft should hire this team!" **John** *Gibson***, Faculty**, Business and Information Technology

With the increase in GCC community members working on and off-campus, the information presented on the Student Helpdesk and GCC Tutorials websites has become increasingly crucial to students' success in their courses and staff's ability to get more accomplished in less time. Because these sites make information readily available, all can get detailed, current information with ease.   If students can find the information they need and staff can help direct students to one, accurate source of helpful information, then the chances of students staying enrolled in their classes (and perhaps enrolling in more) increases.

Student Helpdesk Website: http://web.gccaz.edu/studenthelpdesk
GCC Tutorials Website: http://www.gc.maricopa.edu/tutorials