

Help Yourself Resources: GCC Tutorials and Student Helpdesk Websites Innovation of the Year 2008 - 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, My eGCC - Managing Your eGCC Resources, Blackboard, Outlook Express, Webmail, Office 2003/2007 applications, and File Management.

Timeliness

While Crystabelle Lopez was working primarily as the Student Helpdesk Analyst from October 2004 until October 2006, she noticed the consistent nature of the many questions directed to the Student Help Desk, such as technical inquiries about user accounts and software. In response, Ms. Lopez compiled all the basic questions community members typically ask about their user accounts and researched answers to each. She then standardized the compiled information, and made the results available on the Student Helpdesk website. Since the inclusion of these questions and answers into the Student Helpdesk website in June 2005, countless numbers have used the Student Helpdesk website.

The GCC Tutorials resulted from Debbie Gilsdorf's observations while working with students, where she 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 (e.g., Microsoft Office and course management systems). However, these assumptions and expectations are not always appropriate for diverse student populations with varied educational backgrounds. Students often face these alternatives: seek personal assistance while on campus; 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 Ms. Lopez presented on the Student Helpdesk Website. As a result, Ms. Lopez and Mrs. Gilsdorf joined together to integrate the content found on both sites. The GCC Tutorials website and initial content went live in June 2006. Since then, the supporting documentation and visual tutorials consistently are improved based on feedback.

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** – GCC Library Media Center.

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

- **Documentation and Tutorials Address Issues Common to all GCC Community Members:** The content presented is created according to observations made by help staff, students and GCC community member requests.

- **Content Presented is Thoroughly Researched and Tested:** Each piece of information goes through a development process that involves creating preliminary written directions, assessing topic comprehension by a non-technical user going through the information, and then modifying as needed. This results in written documentation and visual tutorials that effectively communicate topics to the end user.
- **Content is Up-To-Date:** 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.

Efficiency

Currently, many colleges and educational websites use screenshots to explain written instructions. However, there are occasions where a visual, self-running tutorial is more effective in 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 say a GCC student community member is asked to create a PowerPoint presentation and upload the completed presentation to a shared folder on the server. And, the individual has never used PowerPoint and doesn't know how to access their shared folder from off-campus. The tutorials and written instructions can help as follows:

- The **GCC Tutorials** website makes various self-running tutorials about PowerPoint available. These short tutorials guide the individual through a general overview of the application, provide instructions on how to perform various tasks (e.g., add/modify slide information), and demonstrate how to 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 systems, 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 about any topic available on the GCC Tutorials website, at their own convenience. And, because the tutorials are short and task-focused, individuals can get the information they need quickly.
- The availability of such resources allows faculty to better dedicate class time to actually teaching their courses.
- Should an individual call for assistance, the person assisting can direct the individual to written instructions present on the Student Helpdesk website while verbally guiding the caller. Thus, comprehension is increased.

As a result, staff in the computer labs, departments and the Helpdesk can now help more students in less time, thereby allowing staff time to troubleshoot the more difficult problems.

Cost Effectiveness and Replication

- **Majority of Information Available Applies District-Wide:** Many of the materials on the GCC Tutorials and Student Helpdesk websites discuss programs used district-wide (e.g., Blackboard, Microsoft Office, and Outlook Express).
- **Websites are Accessible in Virtually Every Popular Browser:** Each website is 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. As such, these websites can easily be copied and modified by anyone with basic HTML and CSS knowledge. No special servers are required.

- **You Can Use Tools At Your Disposal:** The project could easily be replicated by anyone with HTML and CSS knowledge and willingness to create the tutorials. The tools Ms. Lopez and Mrs. Gilsdorf used were:
 - Macromedia Captivate: Software used to create the visual tutorials as easily as a PowerPoint presentation. This is the only real required tool;
 - Adobe Photoshop (or your favorite image editor): Used for image editing on both the websites and in tutorials; and
 - Macromedia Dreamweaver (or your favorite code/website editor): Used to build and modify web pages.

Collaboration

Ms. Lopez and Mrs. Gilsdorf noted that content presented 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 collaboration, Ms. Lopez and Mrs. Gilsdorf formed a voluntary group of individuals interested in improving the content.

All of the individuals listed below take great pride in the collaborative effort that has improved on these resources. These individuals helped Ms. Lopez and Mrs. Gilsdorf provide diverse expertise and service perspectives, as noted below:

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

In addition, many GCC community members have provided suggestions, criticisms and improvements via email, telephone and in-person. Thanks to the feedback, the materials presented have consistently improved.

Learning

"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

Word of the GCC Tutorials and Student Helpdesk websites has spread within and beyond GCC in the following ways:

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

Conclusion

"The GCC Tutorials and Student Helpdesk websites are proving to be the much needed and wonderful instructional tools for our diverse population of students. ... [These tools] are very important 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 worldwide." **John Gibson, Faculty**, Business & 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 have become increasingly crucial in everyone's ability to accomplish more 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 succeeding increases.

Student Helpdesk Website: <http://web.gccaz.edu/studenthelpdesk>

GCC Tutorials Website: <http://www.gc.maricopa.edu/tutorials>