



# **COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA**

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## **Status of Open & Distant Education**

Commonwealth of Learning continues to provide support to this sector, mainly in the area of capacity building which is one of the major activities as we focus on increasing access to learning opportunities.

In Dominica, national policies on open and distance learning have not yet been developed. This is an area for further research and development. The Government of Dominica has policies for ICT and the Ministry of Education has an ICT in education policy. The status of the Open and Distance Learning is at the “infancy” stage at the Dominica State College (DSC). Though, there have been several interjections starting from as early as 2002, ODL has slowly been implemented.

## **Brief History**

The college in collaboration with the Caribbean Knowledge Learning Network (an initiative of the leaders of the Caribbean, IDB and other investors), sought to improve the college’s connectiveness to its students and potential students via the use of Online and Distance Learning. The drive included providing the training and support for online learning and content delivery. During 2004-2012, CKLN provided the college with:

1. Several training opportunities to selected faculty and staff over the period to implement content online in a moodle based environment
2. Student of DSC follow an ICT based online course with the University of Belize where students received credit for the course.
3. Study tour to Canada: A four member team visited several institutions gathering information on the best practices for online learning (Content management and delivery, and hardware/software support). Places visited include: Humber College, EmbaNET, COL, University of Saskatchewan, SIAST)
4. The purchase of a server (specifications unknown) which was donated to the college to be used for this purpose
5. The specialized training of the college IT staff (2012)

Between 2006-2010, the college has provided training for its staff on several occasions:

- 2006: The first training that took place came from relationships established with Humber College, Canada. The course offered was “Positive Learning in Online environment”. Six staff members participated and were awarded certificates.

- 2009: Teaching in Online Environment – University of West Indies.
- 2011: CKLN provided Moodle Training to staff members. At least 12 persons participated in this workshop. The goal was that these 12 persons would have been part of the training team to train staff on how to use Moodle.

There are currently several courses which are taught in a blended format. The Dominica State College currently uses Orbund, an affordable student information system and learning management application. Through this system, the teachers have the ability to upload lesson plans, set and distribute the course content in an appropriate manner that follows the course outline and syllabus and encourage learning; construct online tests and online submission and completion of assessments. Several teachers at the college have used these features, though sadly not enough.

However, there have been other teachers who utilize other tools for online delivery, like social media (Facebook and Youtube), use of email system and Moodle learning management system.

On a personal level, one lecturer having received training has also conducted training at the college and external to the college. More importantly, implemented all her courses on Orbund Learning Management system and runs her programmes as a blended format using the content online to support the discussions within the classroom. It has been her experience that though the students are young, many of them do not seem adequately interested in studying in a strictly online format or that they have difficulty being able to manage time and/or lack the necessary tools to do it on their own; and are heavily dependent on the teacher as the main source of information. Part of this problem may be due to the fact that the students come directly from high school after having been brought through a system of chalk and talk for nearly 16 years. It would be difficult to implement it as a completely online course at this stage.

One of the goals of the Dominica State College is to develop e-content for online learning and to create a new department responsible for e-learning material development.

The use of open and distance learning is limited to one institution, the Dominica State College. Textbooks are not currently being used on the island.

## **Agriculture**

The continued education of farmers is in keeping with lifelong learning practices and is ongoing. The Ministry of Agriculture uses an integrated approach. They make widespread use of field schools – educational sections on site, using videos and power point presentations. The department has produced several instructional videos. Presently, much has been done in the fight against Black Sigatoka disease in bananas and plantain, Red Palm Blight disease and Coconut lethal yellowing disease. A number of ‘How to’ videos have been prepared and are used in the various education sessions with farmers. Information is also disseminated via radio and television. The department has the capability to produce

their own videos. The Ministry of Agriculture hosts two radio programmes in English and one in Creole weekly.

Looking towards the future, the Ministry notes that the face of the Dominican farmer is changing there is a need to create a website to advance how the farmer gets educated. A website where videos created would be uploaded. There is the need to construct farmers' service centers with internet services to make it easier for farmers to access information more readily, in their own time as need arises.

### **Education & Training Priorities**

1. Human Resource:
  - Training teachers to teach the courses online e.g. Sustainable Agriculture.
  - Developing the capacity and skills of teachers to use ICT in the teaching and learning process, multi-media learning and developing multi-media learning materials.
  - Training teachers to develop supportive online materials at various levels, the concept of e-learning and other ODL methodologies.
2. Training – External to the college environment. Graphics artist/multimedia specialist (videographer, etc.), Instructional design, e-content management, project management, creative writer, quality control and policy development.
3. Development of department: This can consist of study tours to review the current set up of other departments
4. Support Equipment:
  - Software licenses (video editing software, CAPTIVATE, among others).
  - Video cameras.
  - Video conferencing equipment.
  - Projectors.
  - Smart boards.

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