Technology Allows FAU’s Online Students to Study with Campus Peers at Collaboration Stations in Wimberly Library

BOCA RATON, Fla. (August 18, 2016) — Florida Atlantic University’s Center for e-Learning has gifted collaboration stations to the Wimberly Library to provide its online student body the luxury of connecting with students physically located in the library. These stations also will give more options to large groups of students, faculty and others on campus who want to meet or study together.

The collaboration stations allow the online students, whose numbers have grown rapidly to about 13,000 students per semester, to collaborate from anywhere in real time to work on assignments or simply to chat with their peers in the Library, said Victoria Brown, Ph.D., assistant provost of eLearning at FAU.

“Our off-campus students are often required to work together, but distance makes it difficult for them to meet in person,” said Brown. “Through the stations, our students from off-campus can join their on-campus partners synchronously. The technology allows for a natural way of communicating and sharing not possible before.”

The collaboration stations use a 50-inch HD flat screen along with technology to wirelessly connect and show the screens of up to four computers, laptops or smartphones. Using Skype or Google Hangouts, the off-campus collaborators on each end can see their peers as they converse with each other.

Providing support for FAU’s online students to communicate and work with their on-campus peers without physically being together is a significant step for the Center for e-Learning and the FAU Libraries, which partnered to create services and resources for online students after a 2010 task force report recommendation. The partnership’s goal is to offer the same level of services to all students, regardless of their locations, and to help bridge the gap between online students and those in classrooms on campus.

“Today’s students, whether they are attending class in person or at a distance, expect to have access to technology that enables them to work together,” said Carol Hixson, dean of University Libraries. “These workstations are an expression of a new vision of FAU Libraries that makes them a hub for students and faculty to come together for research, study, and the creation of new scholarship.”

The Wimberly Library was a logical location for the collaboration stations since the Libraries had already begun creating collaborative study environments. The challenge for the Center was to create a way to
connect the students with the off-campus students who receive their instructions through a variety of online formats, including video-streaming, web conferencing and video-connected classrooms.

Since the opening of the collaboration stations ─ one on the east side and one on the west side on the first floor ─ students have embraced the use of them. Some enjoy the large group discussions and the ability to see the work of their peers on the screen. Other students enjoy the large work tables that allow them to spread out their work.

The state of Florida expects its online enrollment for all courses offered in the State University System to be at 40 percent by 2025. FAU plans to expand online course offerings to meet the 40 percent expectation. As students enroll in more online courses, the Center for eLearning is building in collaboration opportunities for students as one of its student engagement strategies. Opening the collaboration stations in the FAU libraries is one way of meeting this goal.

For more information on FAU Libraries, visit [http://www.fau.edu/library/](http://www.fau.edu/library/). For more information on FAU’s Center for e-Learning, visit [https://www.fau.edu/cel/](https://www.fau.edu/cel/)

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**Photo Captions**

**ELearning1jpg**: From left to right, Brittni Johnson and Garrett Goode, discuss online learning tools with Gus Rigas, an online student support instructional designer at FAU. Judy Sommers, an instructional designer at the Center for e-Learning, listens from the Center’s office at Florida Atlantic University’s Boca Raton campus.

**ELearning2jpg**: Students collaborate on an assignment at one of two large-group collaboration stations in Florida Atlantic University’s Wimberly Library.

**About Florida Atlantic University:**

Florida Atlantic University, a member of Florida's State University System, was established by legislative act in 1961. In addition to its original 850-acre campus in Boca Raton, FAU has sites throughout its six-county service region in southeast Florida. With an annual economic impact of $6.3 billion, FAU is currently serving more than 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students through its 10 colleges. For more information on Florida Atlantic University, visit [www.fau.edu](http://www.fau.edu).