

Distance Education Strategic Plan
Sacramento City College
Spring 2016

Recognizing and Prioritizing Distance Education as Integral to Meeting Campus Goals

Context

Distance education planning requires the consideration of multiple external and internal factors that influence practices at the campus and district levels. Nationally, Sacramento City College—and all other colleges in California—were tasked by President Obama in 2009 with a dramatic increase in the number of college graduates by 2020, a roughly 42-60 % increase for the State of California. California Community Colleges, which help educate “more than half” of the current college graduates in the state, have been called on by the legislature to increase student success rates and transfer rates in order to contribute to the achievement of this goal. And because California community colleges “offer more online credit courses than any other public higher education institution in the country,” distance education is a critical component of the state’s system of higher education. As Bruce Chaloux and Gary Miller assert in “E-learning and the transformation of higher education,” “online distance education will become increasingly important as a strategic response” to the 2020 goal¹. California Governor Brown has thus dedicated funding for the creation of the Online Education Initiative—a multi-part, state-wide distance education system designed to increase community college student success rates and decrease time to degree and time to transfer. This promising initiative will allow students to receive counseling, remediation, tutoring, and complete courses via interconnected components of an online system. This system is a promising source of valuable resources for SCC students who have competency in the technology of distance education.

At Sacramento City College, distance education has been supplemental to face-to-face programs and instruction, offered as a means to serve students with challenging work-life scheduling demands and to supplement face-to-face programs and course offerings. Sacramento City College offers to its diverse student population more than 500 distance education courses every school year and has experienced increasing student enrollment (Figure 1).

¹ Chaloux, Bruce, and Gary Miller. “E-learning and the transformation of higher education.” In *Leading the e-Learning Transformation of Higher Education: Meeting the Challenges of Technology and Distance Education*, edited by Gary Miller, Meg Benke, Bruce Chaloux, Lawrence C. Ragan, Raymond Schroeder, Wayne Smutz, and Karen Swan. Eds. Stylus, 2014. Sterling, VA. (3-22).

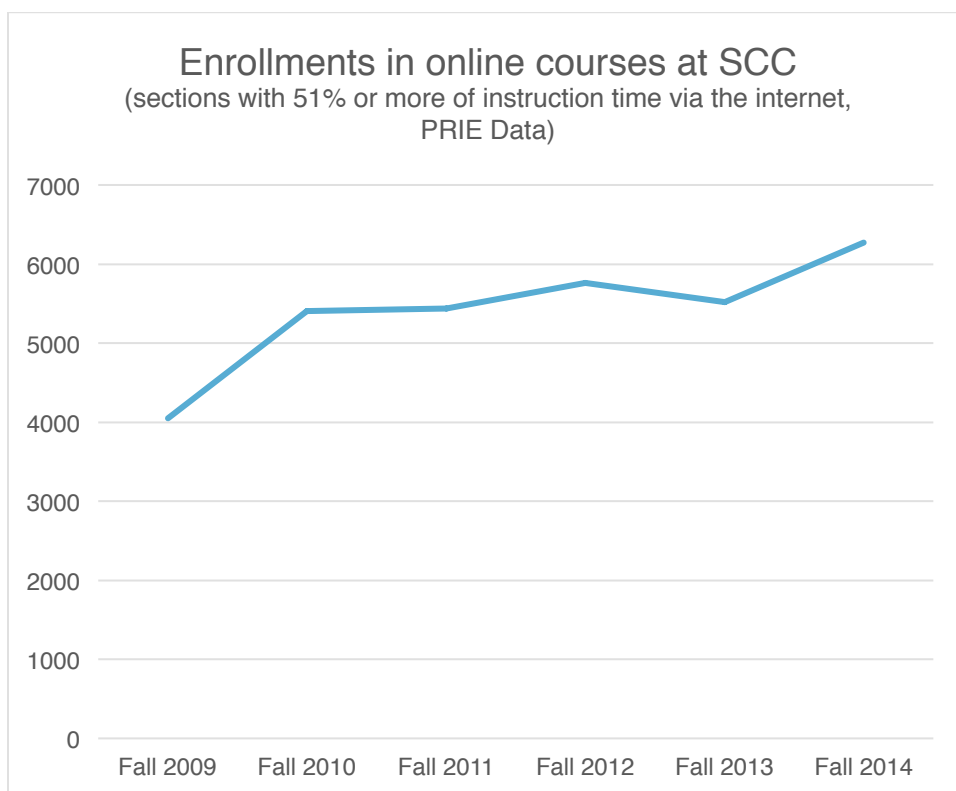


Figure 1: DE Enrollments

Overall, distance education courses are an effective way for students to complete coursework, as evidenced by an increasing student enrollment and more than 83 percent of distance education students who confirmed in a Fall 2013 survey that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their distance education experience at Sacramento City College.

As technology evolves and as programs increase their online course offerings, the campus culture has begun to shift to conceive of distance education as a viable primary modality to serve students rather than a supplementary modality for the delivery of academic programs and certificates. For example, during the 2014-2015 school year, the Distance Education Subcommittee of the Academic Senate's Curriculum Committee processed more than 130 proposals to teach courses in the Distance Education modality. In the 2013 campus substantive change report submitted to ACCJC, Marybeth Buechner, Dean of Planning, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness, explained that the "development of Distance Education courses extends . . . access [to educational opportunities] to a large population of potential students who, for one reason or another, are unable to travel to campus" (p. 5). However, as that report clarified, "not all SCC courses which have been approved for DE are offered in a DE modality in any given academic year. Thus, the programs that are listed in [the] report as 'DE programs' do not typically have the courses offered in a pattern that allows students to complete the program more than 50% by DE" (p. 4). In other words, although the trend on campus is to design

curriculum to be delivered in the DE modality, only about 13% of courses during recent semesters are offered in that modality any given semester.

Despite student satisfaction, retention and success rates of distance education students is a challenge. While the Public Policy Institute of California reported in May of 2014 that online course success rates are an average of 11-14% lower than success rates for face-to-face courses, Sacramento City College students fare much better. At Sacramento City College, student success rates are roughly 3-5% lower in online courses compared to face-to-face courses; however, when success is measured as the percentage of *retained* students who pass rather than the percentage of *initially enrolled* students who pass, the success rates are equal to or greater than the success rates of face-to-face classes. This indicates that distance education courses have a lower retention rate (higher attrition rate): more students drop or are dropped from distance education courses than drop or are dropped from face-to-face courses, but those students who do finish distance education courses are equally or slightly more likely to pass than those retained in face-to-face courses. For example, in the Fall of 2014, retention rates were 82.71% for on-ground, non-DE courses while DE courses retained students at 77.38%. This approximately 5% difference equates to a loss of 340 more students in one semester in the DE modality than were lost in the same number of classes taught via the on-ground modality. Although the overall success rate differences between DE and on-ground courses remain lower at SCC than at other colleges in the system, the lower retention rates indicate a gap that should be addressed; retaining hundreds more students each semester is a goal worthy of pursuing.

With the Online Education Initiative drawing attention and state funding to the use of distance education as a means for increasing student success and time-to-transfer and time-to-degree rates, campus faculty are increasingly examining the quality and effectiveness of campus resources and processes for facilitating distance education. Faculty realize that **improving the quality and effectiveness of campus DE courses and resources could directly improve student success rates**. The campus distance education subcommittee of the Academic Senate, the local and district academic senates, and district educational technology committees have all discussed the quality of these elements of the district's distance education: instructor practices, the learning management system, policies and regulations, student success rates, student support services, and professional development. This set of recommendations comes from the Distance Education Subcommittee of the Academic Senate and therefore reflects this campus (and district) focus on quality and effectiveness as a means of impacting student retention and success.

Recommendations:

1) Current campus practices reflect the status of DE as supplemental or secondary to face-to-face instruction and service delivery and—in order to serve students more effectively—should ***recognize and prioritize DE as integral to meeting campus goals.***

- a) Support academic departments' careful strategizing of their DE programs and courses

2) ***Increase student enrollment in DE classes***

- a) Identify which courses are in high demand or are critical to GE patterns
- b) Determine which of these courses can be offered successfully in a DE format
- c) Develop courses in the DE format, using incentives for faculty if necessary
- d) Schedule the courses
- e) Market DE as a method to meet student education goals

3) ***Increase student completion of DE classes***

- a) Incorporate technology literacy and information literacy skills assessment and instruction

4) ***Facilitate instructional faculty best practices***

- a) Develop and support the piloted DE educator peer review process to ensure quality courses
- b) Broadly and frequently deliver professional development to cover regulatory requirements such as Regular Effective Contact and distance education and higher education best practices such as video and lecture capture technologies

5) ***Provide DE student support services in parity with those for on-ground students***

- a) Facilitate robust DE tutoring, counseling, and student support services in order to facilitate student access and equity
- b) Broadly and frequently deliver professional development for classified staff and non-classroom faculty who deliver support services