

Ensuring An Effective Online Program: A Faculty Perspective

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Introduction

Since the time that the first fully online course was taught in the California Community Colleges more than twenty years ago, the educational landscape has changed dramatically. What was once considered distance education—one-on-one correspondence that utilized pen, paper, and the post office as the sole channel of communication between pupil and teacher, limited in content, desultory, and educationally disparaged—has evolved to enable students to engage their instructors and their fellow students through interactive online environments in which content is delivered to the student through varied means. The development of this technology, combined with the andragogy that has advanced alongside it, has led to the creation of courses that can rival, and in some cases perhaps even surpass, an in-person classroom in terms of positive student experience, rigor, and efficacy. In short, distance education has evolved from correspondence courses to a legitimate instructional modality in the form of online education.

The purpose of this paper is to address the need for guidance on professional standards for educational practices in online education. Since 1995, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) has provided leadership in the introduction and successful implementation of distance education. During this time, the ASCCC has played a leading role in shaping policies and procedures for distance and online education in order to ensure that students are receiving the most effective educational experience possible. At the Spring 2016 Plenary Session, the delegates adopted Resolution 11.01 (S16) calling for an update of the ASCCC paper on best practices for online education:

Whereas, The creation of educational programs, including professional development, technology, and curriculum standards, is an area of faculty primacy regardless of modality, and an increasing number of colleges are creating or expanding online programs in response to student interest in online courses, degrees, and certificates;

Whereas, in order to be effective in serving students, high quality online educational programs require sufficient resources, including infrastructure, technology, professional development resources, and student support services, all of which are needs that may be identified through local program review processes, institutional planning and budget development processes, and faculty development processes, each of which is a matter of local senate purview;

Whereas, Since the publication of the Academic Senate paper *Ensuring the Appropriate Use of Educational Technology: An Update for Local Academic Senates* in 2008, substantial advances in online education have occurred in the areas of technology, pedagogy, and student support services, including those promoted through the efforts of the California Community Colleges Online Education Initiative; and

Whereas, The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges is the legal representative of faculty on academic and professional matters and therefore has primacy in providing professional guidance to the field on the elements of high quality online education programs, including curriculum, student support service needs, infrastructure, technology, and faculty professional development;

Resolved, That the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, in order to provide guidance to local senates and colleges on best practices in online education programs, update the 2008 paper *Ensuring the Appropriate Use of Educational Technology: An Update for Local Academic Senates*.

Rather than attempting to update the 2008 paper on educational technology, as called for in the resolution, the ASCCC Executive Committee decided that, given the recent and fast-moving developments in distance and online education, a more useful approach would be to write a new paper exclusively focused on online education. This new paper will address several aspects of online education, including suggestions for local senates when they are looking to adopt effective practices, interacting with student services, creating and ensuring practices around accessibility, developing curriculum designed to promote student success while maintaining sufficient rigor, and working to ensure equity in the online environment.

This paper is intended to be more a principled document regarding online education, as opposed to a paper covering all of the practices associated with this instructional method. Given the rapid changes occurring within the realm of online education, the ASCCC Executive Committee determined that it should attempt to create a paper that could stand the test of time rather than something that would need to be updated on an annual basis. Additional resources for faculty teaching courses online are planned, as well as the development of a repository of information that will be updated and changed as the field of online education changes.

This paper will use the term “online” deliberately to differentiate its subject matter from traditional correspondence courses and from other forms of distance education.

Correspondence education is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations as “education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor” (34 C.F.R. § 602.3). These courses have limited interaction between the instructor and the student, contact is neither regular nor substantive, and contact is primarily initiated by the student. These courses are usually self-paced and do not qualify for federal financial aid.

Other forms of distance education include courses conducted through television broadcasts or cable channels and courses in which videos or other media forms are used. While some colleges still use these practices, the majority of distance education at this time is more correctly defined as online education, whether in a fully online format or as a hybrid course. For these reasons, this paper will focus exclusively on online education.

Differing definitions of online education appear in Title 5, guidance from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), California Education Code, and federal regulations under the Department of Education (DOE). Title 5 §55204 defines distance education by referring to the need for “regular effective contact” between students and faculty, while the federal guidelines from the DOE Code of Federal Regulations Title 34 §600.2 require “regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously.” The ACCJC has used the federal definition of distance education in its instructions to colleges regarding accreditation standards. The ASCCC has long called for a reconciliation of the terminology used, most recently in Resolution 7.07 (F14), which reads in part, “Resolved, That the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges work with the Chancellor’s Office to align the

definition of distance education in Title 5 §55204 with the federal definition of distance education stated in Title 34, Education §600.2.” For the purposes of this paper, the terms “online education” and “distance education” shall be used somewhat interchangeably, with the acknowledgement that the ACCJC guidelines are more stringently enforced due to the requirement to see parity among all modalities of course offerings, including comparable support services.

The paper is divided into several major sections. The first portion is dedicated to effective practices for developing and offering online education at a college, including the roles of the local academic senate, curriculum committee, online or distance education committee, professional development committee, and other entities under shared governance or participatory decision-making structures that have a role to play in the creation and offering of online courses and programs. The second part of the paper is focused on the pedagogical elements that are necessary to create a successful online course, including regular and effective contact, course design, and accessibility, along with examples of effective practices to aid faculty who create online courses. The final portion of the paper looks at the role that online courses can play in terms of diversity and equity, particularly regarding the importance of promoting equity and achievement in online courses as well as the diversification of offerings to reach students who might not be able to participate in a traditional in-person course.

Finally, one should consider that this paper is a snapshot in time and that changes may occur in regulation or policies after its publication; therefore, those engaged in online education, whether as practitioners, governance leaders, administrators or in other roles, must remain vigilant about keeping themselves informed regarding changes that may affect online education.

Effective Practices for Offering Online Courses

THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE AND OTHER GOVERNANCE GROUPS IN ONLINE EDUCATION

All academic and professional matters fall under the purview of faculty through the legal authority granted to local academic senates in California Education Code and Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations. Specifically, Education Code §70902(b)(7) gives local academic senates the right “to assume primary responsibility for making recommendations in the areas of curriculum and academic standards.” Title 5 §53200 delineates the academic and professional matters under the purview of local academic senates, including areas that have a direct impact on all distance education programs such as curriculum, educational program development, and policies for faculty professional development. Furthermore, Title 5 §55204 specifically identifies regular and effective contact in distance education courses as an academic and professional matter.

Title 5 §55202 establishes the determination of distance education course quality standards as a curricular matter¹, with the process for determining course quality standards requiring collegial consultation with local academic senates, by reference to §53200 and subsequent sections:

The same standards of course quality shall be applied to any portion of a course conducted through distance education as are applied to traditional classroom courses, in regard to the course quality judgment made pursuant to the requirements of Section 55002, and in regard to any local course quality determination or review process. Determinations and judgments about the quality of distance education under the course quality standards shall be made with the full involvement of faculty in accordance with the provisions of subchapter 2 (commencing with Section 53200) of chapter

2. Thus, the determination of the pedagogical implications of a course’s instructional modality is a matter of local academic senate purview and should be addressed through existing local processes established by collegial consultation with local academic senates.

Title 5 §55204 stipulates the requirement that governing boards ensure “regular and effective contact” (commonly referenced as “regular and effective contact”) between instructors and students in distance education courses and identifies regular effective contact as an academic and professional matter. Local regular and effective contact policies must be established by governing boards through collegial consultation by relying primarily upon or reaching mutual agreement with their local academic senates.² Because regular and effective contact policies are established through collegial consultation, if these policies are to be revised, the revision must also be achieved through collegial consultation.

¹ With reference to Title 5 §55002

² Board policies vary in terms of whether boards will “rely primarily” or “mutually agree” regarding the 10+1 under the purview of the academic senate; check local board policy to determine the requirements and agreements for any specific district.

Title 5 §55206 requires separate local approval for courses to be offered through distance education in order to ensure that the proposed distance education courses meet the same course quality standards as in-person courses and that regular and effective contact is ensured. The process described in this section of Title 5 is a curricular review process that must be established through collegial consultation with the local academic senate. The creation of this process may be overseen by the academic senate, the curriculum committee, or another committee under the purview of the academic senate.

In addition to the academic senate, other local committees may play significant roles regarding the development and implementation of a college's distance education program. Among the most important of such committees are the curriculum committee, distance education committee, and the professional development committee, all of which are in many districts sub-committees of the academic senate.

THE ROLE OF THE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

Title 5 §55202 establishes the requirement for distance education and in-person courses to have the same quality standards, while §55206 establishes the requirement for separate review and approval for courses to be offered through distance education. These requirements apply to both existing and new courses that are offered through distance education. Because §55202 specifically references Title 5 §55002, which establishes curriculum committees and the requirements for course quality standards, and §55206 requires the use of local course approval processes, the required separate review is a curricular process which should be performed by the local curriculum committee and must be established through collegial consultation with the local academic senate.

While local processes vary, a common practice is the use of a distance education addendum to the course outline of record (COR) that describes how instruction for the course will be conducted in the distance education modality. The distance education addendum would then be reviewed through the local curriculum process to ensure that all course quality standards are met, including regular and effective contact. The curriculum committee should review and consider the course methods of instruction to ensure that the course content is delivered to students with regular and effective contact and that students may successfully complete the objectives and meet the learning outcomes described. The curriculum committee also needs to ensure elements of the course such as accessibility, authentication of student identity, and strategies for ensuring academic integrity are evident in the COR being reviewed. Once the local curriculum process is completed, the course can then be offered via distance education. The time required to complete the curriculum approval process for distance education courses should be consistent with that for approving in-person courses.

THE ROLE OF THE DISTANCE OR ONLINE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The ASCCC recommends that if a college does not have a local distance education or online education committee in place, a committee should be established to oversee the quality of the college's distance education programs. While the curriculum committee is responsible for ensuring that course quality standards are met for all courses, including those offered through distance and online education, and that the methods of delivering instruction through regular and effective contact are described, the role of the distance or online education committee can be either more or less specific. Most distance education committees are under the auspices

of the local academic senate, although colleges may also have broader technology committees that can be college – or district – wide and that might help support online education but often have other functions as well. The role of the distance education committee is often to oversee the quality of the entire distance education program. This oversight may include, but is not limited to, the following responsibilities:

- ♦ Development of recommendations and acquisition of approval from appropriate faculty groups regarding instructional design standards for online courses;
- ♦ Review of course shells in the course management system (CMS) to ensure that the shells comply with the college's instructional design standards;
- ♦ Recommendations on the development of policies regarding the distance education program, including policies for the ongoing professional development of distance education instructors, policies regarding training in the use of the CMS, and policies for ensuring that all courses and materials are accessible to people with disabilities;
- ♦ Development of the college's distance education plan;
- ♦ Drafting of the college's distance education handbook;
- ♦ Processes for peer review and professional development in the college's distance education program to ensure the program's overall quality, that all accreditation requirements are being met, and that students are being well-served.

Because the responsibilities of the distance or online education committee can include academic and professional matters, the committee should be under the auspices of the local academic senate, which would then review and take action on the committee's recommendations.

The membership of the distance education committee will vary from college to college. While no single structure is correct in all cases, the composition should be primarily faculty. The ASCCC recommends that the local distance education committee membership include the distance education coordinator, the curriculum chair, the primary distance education administrator, the faculty professional development coordinator, a learning disabilities specialist, a counselor, information technology staff, faculty with distance education expertise from a broad scope of disciplines, and student representation. If the distance education committee is not established as an academic senate committee, all recommendations regarding academic and professional matters must still be considered by the local academic senate for review and action.

THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

The professional development committee is generally responsible for creating and monitoring the overall faculty professional development requirements for all faculty, regardless of the modality in which the faculty member teaches. This committee should work closely with the distance or online education committee to ensure that faculty professional development requirements include appropriate standards for professional development for distance education instructors, including flex requirements for colleges on flexible calendars, and that these recommendations are forwarded to the local academic senate for review and action. Depending on local process, the professional development committee may also work closely with a distance education coordinator or other individuals to ensure that adequate and relevant professional development be provided in on-ground and online formats for faculty who teach online or hybrid sections.

POTENTIAL ROLES OF OTHER COLLEGE COMMITTEES

Discussions can occur in all committees regarding the evaluation of student learning styles and the need for tools to allow students to self-evaluate their ability to perform well in a course taught online. Discussions about potential pre – or co-requisites for students can also occur, particularly if faculty have concerns about the performance of students in certain disciplines or modalities (i.e., courses offered fully online versus hybrid). Again, these discussions would be under faculty purview and could happen in any number of committees.

CONSULTATION WITH COLLECTIVE BARGAINING GROUPS

Title 5 §55208 states that faculty selected to teach courses via distance education must meet the same minimum qualifications as faculty teaching in-person courses and that the selection process will be the same for both in-person and online faculty. This section further states that appropriate class sizes for distance education “shall be determined by and be consistent with other district procedures related to faculty assignment” and that these determinations can be reviewed by the curriculum committee. Furthermore, Title 5 §55208(c) states that “nothing in this section shall be construed to impinge upon or detract from any negotiations or negotiated agreements between exclusive representatives and district governing boards.” Many local collective bargaining agreements contain language about the rights and responsibilities of distance education instructors. Such language can include parameters for training and professional development, standards for the portability of meeting professional development requirements in multi-college districts, guidelines for instructor evaluation including separate evaluation tools, requirements for assigning faculty to distance education classes, and class size restrictions.

While pedagogical issues and academic and professional matters are implicit in many or all of these areas, these topics may also overlap with working condition issues. As such, the faculty bargaining agent should be consulted when developing policies for distance education in order to ensure compliance with the local collective bargaining agreement.

THE ROLE OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Student services departments play an essential role in online courses and programs. The Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012 requires matriculated services to improve access and provide comprehensive student services in order to foster student success. The goal of the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP) is to increase student access and success by providing students with the support services necessary to achieve their educational goals through core functions including orientation, assessment and placement, counseling, and other educational planning assistance. These services are not dependent upon the location in which the course is offered nor on the modality of instruction, since the services must be provided to all students. Student services departments must therefore provide support and assistance in all of these areas for online students to the same degree that they do so for in-person students.

AUTHENTICATION OF STUDENTS

One of the greatest challenges facing faculty who teach courses online is ensuring that the person who is enrolled in the course is the person actually completing the assessments. While many colleges currently employ multiple methods to ensure student authentication for exams, including requiring proctored or in-person exams with photo identification or other methods of authenticating the students, not all colleges have the capacity or technology to do so. Even at colleges that do not have all of these resources fully available, faculty can use multiple means of assessment and required weekly discussions or other assignments that enable the faculty member to become familiar with the student's writing style. Faculty can also consider encouraging students to use photograph avatars and to attend online office hours to allow the faculty member to become familiar with the students in the course. As the technology in online education continues to improve, so too will the tools that faculty have at their disposal to authenticate the identities of students enrolled in their courses.

Andragogical and Instructional Challenges in Online Education

In the early years of distance education, faculty and other groups, including the ASCCC, argued that no difference existed between classes taught online and those taught in person. The common claim was that the only difference between those courses was the modality and that everything else was identical. As faculty who teach online are aware, that claim may be true regarding rigor, but major differences actually do exist among the various modalities. Some of these differences are defined in statute or in regulation; others exist in areas such as accessibility. While the use of online education has expanded over the past decade, policies and regulations at the state and federal levels have been slow to match the shifting use of technology. At the time of this writing in early 2018, a proposed reauthorization of the Higher Education Act could—as currently written—significantly alter federal regulation of distance education, including policies governing the engagement of students via distance education, by repealing the language regarding distance education and encouraging competency based education.³ Given this complex and often-changing context, this section of the paper will focus on the challenges that faculty teaching online courses face in order to ensure that their classes are compliant and on effective practices to assist faculty to teach their courses.

REGULAR AND EFFECTIVE CONTACT/REGULAR SUBSTANTIVE INTERACTION

A variety of terms may be used for what is most commonly referred to as “regular and effective contact.” Depending on the source, contact can be required to be “regular and effective,” “regular and substantive,” or some combination of these labels. The laws and regulations that establish the requirement for regular and effective or substantive contact are intended to ensure that students receive their share of instructor-initiated contact and instruction from programs that receive federal support via student financial aid. The ACCJC evaluative criteria for distance education, which is more detailed than the state or the federal criteria, is based on the premise of ensuring parity between traditional on-ground and distance learning modalities, including requirements around support services. The ACCJC language regarding distance education encompasses formats including interactive television as well as internet-based methods of delivering instruction.

One of the challenges that colleges face in ensuring compliance with requirements for online courses is that no clear definition exists for what regular and effective contact means. For example, in a February 2017 program review determination letter to one of the California community colleges, the Department of Education summarized its January 2017 review of the college’s Title IV-eligible programs. Although “no significant findings were identified” during the review, the Department of Education offered recommendations, specifying that the college should “stress the importance of regular and substantive interaction with students.” The DOE elaborated by stating,

Faculty should provide feedback and guidance to students throughout the weekly online meetings and through multiple channels (e.g. engaging in forum discussions with students, commenting on written assignments, *and* graded quizzes. This is true even when students are required to attend

3 *Reauthorization of Higher Education Act, 2018: <https://edworkforce.house.gov/prosper/>*

in-person orientations, midterms, and finals . . . Feedback and guidance must be related to the academic content of the course (i.e. not limited to reminders about deadlines or other logistical matters) and must go beyond perfunctory comments such as “good job” or “great work.”⁴

Additional examples of what would be considered regular and substantive interaction are available but limited. Types of interactions that might not be considered substantive (i.e., reminders about deadlines or other logistical matters) are also not clearly defined and have the potential to cause confusion: if an announcement, for example, includes information about how to answer exam questions but also contains a reminder about the due date, one might debate whether or not it would be included in the definition of regular and substantive contact. When the various examples and definitions are taken together, they indicate that regular and substantive interactions are between the certificated faculty member of record and students, are faculty-initiated, are regular and predictable, are about the course’s subject matter, and are qualitatively more than just a static assessment of student work.

California Education Code § 55204 includes the language “regular effective contact” and specifies that “any portion of a course conducted through distance education includes regular effective contact between instructor and students, through group or individual meetings, orientation and review sessions, supplemental seminar or study sessions, field trips, library workshops, telephone contact, correspondence, voicemail, email, or other activities.” The same section adds that regular and effective contact is the purview of faculty: “regular effective contact is an academic and professional matter.”

In addition, the ACCJC uses the federal terminology of “regular and substantive” and is clear that colleges should have policies that ensure the quality of distance education courses and programs. The ACCJC also requires that colleges ensure that their distance education students receive support comparable to in-person students, and that the institution has effective practices and policies that support student success in distance education. ACCJC is in the process of “beta” testing a thought paper on peer evaluation of courses taught online. Although this document has not been widely released as of this paper’s publication, ACCJC can be expected to continue to refine processes for accreditation evaluation teams to use during their visits.

Given the importance of federal financial aid to students at California community colleges, the role of accreditation and the increased scrutiny online courses are facing from the ACCJC, and the lack of a precise definition of what regular and effective contact entails in practice, colleges might most logically and productively work from a definition that combines the federal specifications with those offered by California Education Code and Title 5. An inclusive definition would consider regular and effective contact to be consistent and predictable faculty-initiated interactions with students about the course content and about more than just a boilerplate assessment of student work.

Based on Education Code, colleges should also conclude that regular and effective contact is an academic and professional matter under the purview of the academic senate. Therefore, given the limited degree of official definition for regular and effective contact, any local definitions or policies created at colleges regarding this concept should be made by faculty practitioners who are familiar with the federal, accreditation, and

4 Letter to City College of San Francisco Regarding Program Review: https://www.cos.edu/About/Governance/Academic-Senate/DistanceEducation/Documents/Expedited%20Final%20Program%20Review%20Determination%20Letter%202.2.17_no%20appendices.pdf

state requirements and who are able to accurately convey what is possible in an online course in terms of interaction with students. Any local definitions and requirements for regular and effective contact should be included in the college's distance education addendum in order to assure that they are consistent with local needs and resources. For example, for many years, some course management systems did not include the ability to thread discussion posts, so requiring students to post responses to classmates was technologically almost impossible.

The role of the academic senate in helping to create and shape these policies is paramount, especially at smaller colleges where the charges of information technology-related committees may include academic and professional matters related to distance education because the college lacks a separate distance education committee. Colleges may define regular and effective contact in any manner they choose as long as the definitions meet the requirements spelled out in law, regulation, and accreditation standards and the definitions contain elements of regular and effective contact that can be easily demonstrated in an evaluation of the course. In addition, whatever definition of regular and effective contact is developed at a college, this definition should be published in an easily accessible location, such as board policy, administrative procedure, distance education handbook, or curriculum handbook, to provide an ACCJC evaluation team with a clear expectation of how the college applies the term. The definition should also be clearly spelled out in the distance education addendum for each course. When an accreditation team visits and team members access online course sections, that definition will be central to the evaluation. For samples of regular and effective contact policies that have been adopted by California community colleges, see Appendix B.

LABORATORY COURSES IN ONLINE EDUCATION

One area in online education that has come under increased scrutiny in recent years is the use of online labs. The advances in technology that have provided affordable mobile computing devices have also created pedagogical paradigms that are outdated. A few years ago, when the costs of computers or intricate software were prohibitive for individuals to have personal access, colleges purchased the equipment and software and provided direct access for students via activity laboratory classes where faculty directly supervised student work. Now, as students have their own direct access to computers, phones, and software, local labs or equipment and faculty supervision may appear to be less necessary, thus changing the curricular paradigm. State apportionment requires faculty supervision of student work, and as such all labs taught in the distance education modality, including online, must include faculty supervision and regular and effective contact. Faculty must be diligent in the curriculum development and review process to ensure that this contact occurs when all courses are approved for online education, but particularly for laboratory classes. While in some fields online labs are currently considered pedagogically unsound, particularly in the natural sciences, experimentation with online labs is occurring in many fields where such instruction would have been once considered impossible, and as such it behooves faculty to remain familiar with the pedagogy around online instruction.

DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF ONLINE COURSE CONTENT

Many colleges have well-established online programs, in some cases dating back two decades or more, and faculty who have taught online for many years may contend that they do not need to review their courses or their course designs. The recent transition of many colleges to the Canvas course management system provided an opportunity for some faculty to reevaluate their course designs, as have the numerous professional development opportunities around the state in online teaching and learning pedagogy. Because courses being offered online require a separate approval, the faculty who wish to teach these courses, even if they have been teaching them for years, must be aware of the course requirements, including the need for regular and effective contact.

Once a course is approved for online instruction through local approval processes, course materials may be developed and evaluated. The term “evaluation” in this section is not referencing the evaluation of the instructor. Rather, the evaluation described here is focused on the instructional design of the course, and it can take many forms.

When an instructor wishes to teach an online class for the first time, the first type of evaluation that usually takes place involves the course design itself. These evaluations come in many different forms and with differing expectations and requirements. Some are peer evaluations of the course design conducted by members of a college’s distance education committee or by faculty with considerable experience in teaching and learning online. Others use templates for self-evaluations, allowing an online instructor a better idea of what should be developed for students to be successful when the course is offered online. Still others are a mix of the two—a guide to ensuring online success, often conducted with the assistance of an experienced peer. Some colleges require specific types of training, such as how to use Canvas, with the faculty members having elements of their course design evaluated by the faculty and staff conducting the training.

The ultimate purpose of these evaluations can vary significantly from one college to another. Depending on a college’s collective bargaining agreement regarding online teaching, a poor result on an evaluation can mean that the instructor in question is not allowed to teach the particular course in an online modality until the inadequate areas are improved and efficacy is demonstrated. In other cases, these evaluations may have no binding impact on whether or not an instructor can teach online; rather, they serve as a helpful review of course materials and class design. At some colleges, faculty may only teach courses online after they have completed an instructional design course or other pedagogical or technical training, regardless of previous experience teaching online.

Ultimately, though, these evaluations should utilize rubrics that guide the evaluators through the various aspects of a course that the faculty and the college have determined to be crucial for successful online education and for regular and effective contact. Since some online teaching tools and methods are more effective when applied to different disciplines and content, evaluation standards and processes should be informed by the standards and methods outlined in the local curriculum committee’s process for approving a course to be offered online. Many different course design rubrics exist, just as many different colleges create and use such rubrics. Some rubrics are more extensive and require detailed responses; others are briefer and highlight the

most important aspects of online teaching. In short, course design rubrics have been developed and deployed in a wide variety of ways, depending on the needs of the audience for whom they were developed.

When the Online Education Initiative (OEI) originated through the Chancellor's Office in 2013, it had several goals, including the creation of a course exchange, the determination of a system-wide course management system, and the development of a rubric that could be used universally, if colleges desired. In addition to the creation of the OEI Exchange and the decision to purchase and promote the use of the Canvas course management system, the OEI also created the OEI Course Design Rubric. The rubric was first released in 2014 and continues to be updated on a regular basis. The OEI website states, "The Rubric is intended to establish standards relating to course design, interaction and collaboration, assessment, learner support, and accessibility in order to ensure the provision of a high-quality learning environment that promotes student success and conforms to existing regulations."⁵ In other words, the rubric is not just a tool for evaluating existing online course design; it can also serve as a guide for instructors developing new courses or wishing to improve their existing courses. While courses that are being taught in the OEI Exchange must use the rubric, it is voluntary for all other courses taught online, although some colleges have begun adopting parts of the rubric as their evaluative measurement for online course design. ASCCC Resolution 9.01 (F15) encourages "local senates to establish rubrics for online course standards." The resolution stops short of encouraging colleges to adopt the OEI Rubric, but it does indicate that colleges should develop rubrics for courses taught online that, like the OEI's rubric, define regular and effective contact. For these reasons, colleges and districts must have both a clear definition of regular and effective contact and a rubric in place to assess how and where that contact takes place in a course taught online.

In addition to regular and effective contact, courses should be reviewed for accessibility. Although the review can vary in scope and content from college to college, the review itself needs to be as thorough and as comprehensive as possible in order to ensure compliance. An individual knowledgeable about both accessibility and distance education can conduct the accessibility review, or it may be conducted by a group, such as a sub-committee of the distance education committee, which includes individuals skilled in either accessibility or distance education or in both. Ideally, the actual evaluation should be completed by someone with both accessibility and online teaching experience. More about accessibility compliance can be found in later in this paper.

EVALUATION OF ONLINE INSTRUCTION

The delivery of courses taught online can be evaluated in a range of ways. Instructor self-evaluations and student evaluations can provide feedback about regular and effective contact as well as other elements. A self-evaluation can also allow instructors a chance to clearly explain both their philosophies toward online education and the teaching practices utilized to bring these philosophies to life in their classes. Instructor self-evaluations can be conducted on a regular basis in order to give the online educator an opportunity to reflect on the online teaching experience, to celebrate successes, and to identify areas of improvement. These evaluations can be part of the formal evaluation process or can be done individually by faculty seeking to improve the overall experience of their courses.

5 OEI Course Design Standards: <http://ccconlineed.org/faculty-resources/professional-development/online-course-design-standards/>

The student evaluation process can be used to give online students an opportunity to assess the positive and negative qualities of their online experiences. Many colleges adapt modified versions of their traditional evaluation forms to include questions that focus specifically on aspects of the educational experience that are unique to students taking courses online who may never meet their instructors in person, including the elements of regular and effective contact. Colleges should take actions to ensure that these evaluations are conducted anonymously, as they are for in-person courses, to encourage the most honest feedback from the students in the course. The more times the evaluations are conducted, the better an instructor's understanding will be of what students find helpful and unhelpful in their online class experiences. As with self-evaluations, student evaluations can be part of the formal evaluation process or can be done by individuals seeking to improve the overall experience for students in their classes taught online.

Instructor self-evaluations and student evaluations can help to improve the online education experience for both students and teachers. However, continuous evaluation does not need to stop at that point; classes taught online can also be evaluated periodically by faculty peers to gauge the courses' effectiveness over time. Just because a course is deemed to be effective when first developed does not mean that the course remains effective. Periodically allowing peers to review and evaluate a course taught online gives additional feedback to the instructor, and it also helps to reaffirm that regular and effective contact is evident in the course. At some institutions, these types of continuous evaluations may be a repeat of the initial course design evaluation; the same forms and processes could be used periodically. In other cases, these ongoing reviews may focus only on the most important aspects of online student success, such as regular and effective contact. The key is the consistency of the administration of evaluations. Since local processes vary, colleges must ensure that their collective bargaining agreements are honored while these evaluations take place.

Another type of evaluation that can and should be conducted is a regular review of the college's distance education program as a whole. Most colleges and districts have numerous mechanisms in place to effectively evaluate the health of a program, such as the program review cycle, accreditation, and committee evaluations. Every college's distance education program should be subject to the same kinds of regular review as all other programs on campus. Given the recent focus on online courses and programs during ACCJC visits, consistent demonstration of ongoing improvement and of evaluation and assessment is essential.

Finally, colleges and districts should seek to ensure the continued health and the continuous growth of distance education programs by developing and regularly revising college or district master plans for distance education. Some institutions may have multiple relevant plans—an overarching district technology plan, for example, along with college technology and distance education plans—but these documents should all be developed with faculty involvement and leadership and should be revised regularly. In addition, a college's distance education committee should regularly review its own performance, identifying both successes and challenges and seeking out solutions to problems in order to ensure that the college's distance education offerings are the strongest and most successful they can be.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is critical to ensuring that instructors are properly trained in online course design, basic online technology, and online pedagogy. At some colleges, this training is mandatory and must be

completed before an instructor can teach a class online; for other colleges, the training is recommended but optional. Different institutions may also include varying levels of detail and different content in their trainings. These decisions can be made locally and may be determined by the local collective bargaining agreement, by the college's online education committee, or through other means.

Whatever the requirements or rules at a given college, faculty that are new to teaching teaching should receive training before developing and teaching courses online, perhaps beyond what the college requires or provides. Experienced instructors should also receive continued training in order to stay current with the latest developments in online education and to better hone their own craft. At some colleges, such training may be a contractual issue; at others, it may be a departmental requirement or a college expectation. Finally, all faculty involved in online education can benefit from attending workshops, institutes, or conferences in order to discuss and debate the latest issues in the field and be informed about changes to regulation or other areas around course construction.

Fortunately, faculty have many available options for receiving training to teach online. For those who are considering a first foray into the online teaching process or who want to begin to design a class to be taught online, an initial step could be to actually take a course online. Faculty teaching online must understand the experience of being a student in an online class. Many training classes are designed specifically to introduce faculty to the basic concepts regarding teaching online and to take them through the process of developing online course content. Some colleges and districts have developed their own such courses, while others rely on existing courses conducted by organizations such as @ONE. Similarly, Canvas has self-paced courses that are available to any faculty member interested in learning about online teaching and andragogy.

The online training course experience is key for both beginning and experienced teachers, but just taking a course is typically not enough to produce a quality course for online instruction. The next step is usually local training, either in the form of one-on-one tutoring with a distance education expert such as an instructional media designer, group workshops, peer review sessions with a content expert, or a combination of all of these.

Once instructors have developed courses and begun teaching online, continued training remains beneficial. After all, no course is perfect; all faculty can benefit from continued education. This concept is particularly true for faculty teaching courses online, as online education changes rapidly and faculty should keep up with the latest trends and tools. Luckily, this sort of professional development is available from many sources. Online, one can find various webinars and other presentations that focus on key online issues and professional development. Conferences and workshops also take place on a regular basis throughout California. In addition, nearly every major ASCCC event includes breakouts on distance education or related issues. These breakouts are especially helpful because they provide a direct opportunity not only to hear from online education experts but also to network with others passionate about online education. Finally, faculty who aspire to be true online education masters might consider taking additional courses to receive certification in online teaching. This

certification allows faculty to train others, either at their own campuses or elsewhere, and provide professional development to their peers.

ACCESSIBILITY

Another critical aspect of online education is compliance with federal and state accessibility regulations. “Accessible” means a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner and with equivalent ease of use. A person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally, and independently as a person without a disability. Although providing this accommodation might not result in identical ease of use compared to that of students without disabilities, it still must ensure equal opportunity to the educational benefits and opportunities afforded by the technology and equal treatment in the use of such technology.⁶

To address the needs of individuals with disabilities, the federal government enacted the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Rehabilitation Act states that “no otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participating in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal assistance.”⁷ As recipients of federal funding, California’s community colleges are subject to the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act and must be in compliance.⁸

In 1990, the federal government reinforced its commitment to individuals with disabilities by enacting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA provides civil rights protection to individuals with disabilities and places emphasis on providing them with equal opportunity. Specific provisions of both the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA apply to programs and activities offered by public entities, including California’s community colleges.⁹

In 1998, Congress enacted Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, which requires federal agencies to make electronic and information technology accessible to individuals with disabilities. The law applies to federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use information technology. Under Section 508, agencies must provide individuals with disabilities access to and use of information and data that are comparable to the access to and use of the information and data available to others. In 2002, the California Legislature amended state law to make the requirements of Section 508 applicable to public entities in California. Because California’s community colleges are public entities, they must comply with the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, the ADA, and Section 508.

In conjunction with these laws, California Government Code §11135 requires that accessibility for individuals with disabilities also be ensured by a community college district using any source of state funds. Title 5 §55200 explicitly makes these requirements applicable to all distance education offerings, including courses taught online.

6 United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the growth of online education, many California community colleges have not met mandates from the federal and state governments to provide accessibility in online education. A 2017 California State Auditor’s Report focusing on three community colleges’ processes for replacing and upgrading information technology found that none of the colleges examined were at the time monitoring their accessibility compliance.¹⁰ The report also found that the colleges did not have specific processes in place to review whether instructional materials used were in compliance, nor had the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office provided these colleges with guidelines on how to develop accessibility monitoring procedures. According to the report, some students were continuing to be denied access to equal education. The report concluded that community colleges must make accessibility a shared responsibility between faculty and their colleges. Suggestions for initiating this partnership include the development of online course content around the principles of universal design. An example of how to implement universal design course content and mandated accessibility can be found in the OEI rubric, which focuses on the development of inclusive course design and accessibility parameters.

WEB CONTENT ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES

The accessibility portion of the OEI Course Design Rubric utilizes the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). WCAG provides definitions and requirements essential to making web content accessible. Several layers of guidance are offered, including overall principles and general guidelines. The guidelines have three conformance levels in which each checkpoint is either a level A, AA, or AAA—from lowest to highest respectively—and were created around the following four foundations:

1. Perceivable

- ♦ Provide text alternatives for non-text content.
- ♦ Provide captions and other alternatives for multimedia.
- ♦ Create content that can be presented in different ways, including by assistive technologies, without losing meaning, thus making it easier for users to see and hear content.

2. Operable

- ♦ Make all functionality available from a keyboard.
- ♦ Give users enough time to read and use content.
- ♦ Do not use content that causes seizures.
- ♦ Help users navigate and find content.

3. Understandable

- ♦ Make text readable and understandable.
- ♦ Make content appear and operate in predictable ways.

¹⁰ California State Auditor Report 2017-102: The Colleges Reviewed Are Not Adequately Monitoring Services for Technology Accessibility, and Districts and Colleges Should Formalize Procedures for Upgrading Technology: <https://www.bsa.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2017-102.pdf>

- ♦ Users avoid and correct mistakes.

4. Robust

- ♦ Maximize compatibility with current and future user tools.

Meeting accessibility guidelines can be a challenge, and faculty understandably have questions about how best to provide accessible content to their students. Some of the challenges were answered in-depth in the Distance Education Accessibility Guidelines (DEAG) report published by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office in 2011 ¹¹. Such questions include but are not limited to the following:

- ♦ Do I really have to make my course accessible?
- ♦ I have a video I want to use in my distance education course that is not captioned, but I do not know of any deaf students currently enrolled in my course. Do I still have to caption the video?
- ♦ How much time will it take to make my course accessible?
- ♦ What if I teach a Math or Chemistry course? Is accessibility possible?
- ♦ If I have no disabled students in my course, do I still have to make it accessible?
- ♦ To whom do I go for help?
- ♦ Do I have to use alt tags for all my classes?

Answers to questions such as these are typically available to faculty through their distance education offices or faculty professional development programs. As the DEAG report made clear, colleges must provide faculty resources to work towards compliance with accessibility regulations. California community college faculty can, in addition to using the resources available at their campuses, access resources available through the High Tech Center (<https://ccctechcenter.org/about/accessibility>).

In order to ensure compliance with state and federal mandates, faculty should become familiar with applicable state and federal accessibility laws and with the definition of accessibility. Colleges should provide faculty with resources on accessibility and ensure that accessibility training is part of the resources provided for faculty teaching online, whether included in the technological and pedagogical training or separately. Although slightly dated, information from the Chancellor's Office DEAG, which was last updated in 2012, can also be helpful in terms of what campuses need to provide.¹²

Ultimately, while the 2017 State Auditor's Report was only an examination of three colleges, it made clear that the system may not be keeping up with the demands of the changing classroom setting, both in terms of accessibility to technology and in terms of the processes used to ensure compliance with accessibility regulations and statute. In order to ensure that students with disabilities have the greatest opportunities for success in courses offered online, faculty must learn how to make their courses accessible and ensure that their colleges have the tools and resources to do so. While this task might not seem to be a direct faculty responsibility or to fall directly under the 10+1, it should be something faculty and local academic senates are aware of and advocate for as needed.

11 California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Distance Education Accessibility Guidelines <http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/AA/DE/2011DistanceEducationAccessibilityGuidelines%20FINAL.pdf>

12 Ibid.

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY IN ONLINE COURSES

Another area that faculty should consider when teaching online is equity and diversity. Equity and closing the equity gap are prominent and vital topics in higher education, including online education. In previous years, campus and statewide discussions have centered around equality, but while equality is focused on ensuring fair treatment and resources for everyone, equity is concerned with ensuring that students have the opportunity to reach the same outcomes across disparate populations. As such, the discussions that previously were about equality have moved into the challenge of providing equity across the diversity that exists in campuses, modalities, and courses.

Addressing the equity gap is crucial for the students, colleges, and society, and this issue has long been a concern of the California community colleges and of the ASCCC. In 2011, the Student Success Task Force convened by the Board of Governors examined problems in equity, retention, and success, among others matters, and provided recommendations to colleges through the task force's report published in 2012.¹³ In an attempt to provide fiscal support for the closing of the equity gap, the California Legislature passed SB 1456, the Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012 (Lowenthal, 2012), designed to support the success of all students within the California community colleges. Other documents from the Chancellor's Office, including the report from the Task Force on Workforce, Job Creation, and a Strong Economy in 2015 and reports from the Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity Advisory Committee, also point to ways to improve student success, although online education is not as clearly delineated in those reports.¹⁴

Discussions around equity in online education can touch on a variety of areas. Many types of gaps exist, and although some of these matters may seem obvious – such as access to technology or familiarity with software programs or other tools needed for course success – others may be less so, including issues such as housing and food insecurity. While all such impediments to student success are important, this paper focuses on areas of equity that can be addressed by faculty teaching online in terms of effective practices that help bridge the equity gap, thus allowing for success of all students in a course in addition to reaching students who might not otherwise be able to enroll in a community college.

All faculty should be familiar with equity issues involving in-person courses and the challenges that underrepresented groups face in these courses. Students in courses online face these same challenges in addition to others. Two large-scale studies examined outcomes for tens of thousands of students enrolled in thousands of courses at fifty-seven different community colleges in the states of Virginia and Washington. Looking separately at different types of students based on ethnicity, gender, age, and previous academic performance, as well as different academic subject areas, all subgroups tended to perform worse in courses taken online when compared to in-person classes. Some students—in particular, males, African-American students, and students with lower levels of academic preparation—had much more difficulty in courses taken online than they did in in-person courses. These results are consistent with smaller-scale studies suggesting that the gap between online and in-person outcomes is wider among males, students with financial

13 California Community College Chancellor's Office Student Success Initiative Report <http://www.californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/StudentSuccessInitiative/Reports.aspx>

14 California Community College Chancellor's Office Report – Doing What Matters http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/Portals/6/docs/SW/BOG_TaskForce_Report_v12_web.pdf; EEO & Diversity Best Practices Handbook <http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/Reports/2016-EEO-and-Diversity-Handbook-ADA.pdf>

aid, those with lower prior grade point averages, and Hispanic students.¹⁵ Researchers followed up with a qualitative study of twenty-three courses taught online in Virginia, including interviews with faculty and a sample of enrolled students. The students responded that they received less instructor guidance, support, and encouragement in their online courses and that as a result, they did not learn the material as well. For highly motivated students who are familiar with the online environment, a relative lack of interpersonal connection and support may not be particularly problematic, though certainly it is never an advantage. However, low-income, ethnic minority, or first-generation students—that is, most community college students—who may not have familiarity with the online environment are often anxious about their ability to succeed academically. This anxiety can manifest in counterproductive strategies such as procrastinating, not turning in assignments, or not reaching out to professors for help.¹⁶ Ultimately, the study suggests that courses offered online may need to incorporate stronger interpersonal connections and instructor guidance than most currently do.

Interestingly, at least one study found that retention rates were lower for community college students taking courses exclusively online, but for students only taking a portion of their course load online, with the remainder of their load being in-person, retention rates did not decrease. These results, while found in national studies, remain consistent with the research results in California along with anecdotal information shared among colleagues that teach online in the CCC system.¹⁷ In California, analysis by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office found that the rate of students taking courses online has increased dramatically in the past two decades. In 2005-6, approximately 12.5% of the enrollment in community colleges was in online or other distance education courses. By 2011-12, that number had risen to nearly 27%. In 2011-12, 94% of distance education courses were taught via the internet, versus 6% that were taught using other distance education methods; these numbers do not include correspondence courses, including those taught for incarcerated students.

However, while the number of students taking courses online increased significantly between 2005 and 2012, commensurate increases in retention and success did not occur. In its 2013 *Distance Education Report*¹⁸, the Chancellor's Office stated, "The seven-year averages of traditional retention and success rates are 84.5 percent and 66.4 percent respectively. The seven-year average of distance education and retention and success rates are 77.4 percent and 55.9 percent, respectively."¹⁹ The report also broke down success by ethnicity, with the highest success rates being held by Asian/Pacific Islanders at 66% and lowest being held by African-American students at 44 percent.²⁰ The most recent seven-year study analysis has revealed an encouraging reduction in

15 S.S. Jaggars. "Democratization of Education for Whom? Online Learning and Educational Equity." Association of American Colleges & Universities. <http://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/2014/winter/jaggars>

16 See Rebecca A. Cox, "It Was Just That I Was Afraid": Promoting Success by Addressing Students' Fear of Failure" in *Community College Review* 37(1), 52-80.

17 Of particular interest are Xu, D., & Jaggars, S. S. (2011). *Online and hybrid course enrollment and performance in Washington State community and technical colleges*. CCRC Working Paper No. 31. New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Columbia University. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/online-hybrid-performance-washington.pdf> and Jaggars, S. S., & Bailey, T. (2010). *Effectiveness of fully online courses for college students: Response to a department of education meta-analysis*. New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Columbia University.

18 At the time of the adoption of this paper, the 2013 Chancellor's Office *Distance Education Report* was the most recent publication from the CCCCO on distance and online education.

19 California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Distance Education Report http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/reportsTB/REPORT_DistanceEducation2013_090313.pdf

20 Ibid.

this gap from about 12% to 6% at the end of the 2015-2016 year as reported by the Chancellor's Office at the 2017 annual Distance Education Coordinators retreat.²¹

A number of complexities with online education do not rise to the same level in other modalities, and studies have shown wide variation in success rates in individual courses, suggesting multiple contributing factors. One of these issues is that effective practices for online education have not been broadly implemented statewide. Literature reviews on the topic of underrepresented students, particularly regarding the impact of courses taken online on low-income and underprepared students, have shown that courses taught online have significantly higher mid-semester or mid-quarter withdrawal rates than in-person courses, especially for underprepared students. Evidence also suggests that students who take courses online and withdraw may be less likely to return in subsequent terms and that of all demographics of students taking online courses, community college students may be the most impacted by the barriers of online education.²² For these reasons, faculty must work with their student support services, instructional designers, online administrators, and others to ensure that they are familiar with the most recent information regarding assisting students in bridging the equity gap.

Some of the barriers experienced by online students may cut across all demographics. For example, access to technology continues to be an issue for many students. The assumption is that because of the broad availability of technology, everyone is familiar with how to use common platforms, applications, or programs. For many years, the talk of the “digital divide” has been that faculty and students that are older are not as well equipped to deal with the various kinds of technology that exist as compared to their younger counterparts. Increasingly, that claim is being disproven, in that many students, including younger students, appear to struggle with elements of technology to which they have not been introduced, such as word-processing programs, using a course management system, or having access to the equipment necessary to do their coursework. While most students possess a smartphone, this instrument is generally not the most efficient way to write a paper or to submit an examination in a course being taught online. In addition, because colleges have been forced to scale back economically, equipment on campuses might not be up-to-date or even available for student usage, as colleges may assume that every student has access to technology of his or her own. As the founder of Udacity, Sebastian Thrun, stated after the results of a partnership between San Jose State University and Udacity did not produce the hoped-for results, “the disadvantaged students targeted by the pilot proved a mismatch for online education. It’s a group for which this medium is not a good fit,” he said.²³ The “digital divide” is also clearly more than an age issue. A Federal study found that “78 percent of Whites nationally used the Internet in 2015, compared to 68 percent of African Americans and 66 percent of Hispanics. In rural areas, 70 percent of White Americans had adopted the Internet, compared to 59 percent of African Americans and 61 percent of Hispanics.”²⁴

21 Tech Ed Blog

22 Xu, D., & Jaggars, S. S. (2011). *Online and hybrid course enrollment and performance in Washington State community and technical colleges*. CCRC Working Paper No. 31. New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Columbia University. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/online-hybrid-performance-washington.pdf>

23 Straumsheim, Carl (December 18, 2013) Scaling Back in San Jose. Inside Higher Ed <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/12/18/san-jose-state-u-resurrects-scaled-back-online-course-experiment-mooc-provider>

24 Carlson, Edward and Goss, Justin (August 10, 2016) *The State of the Urban Rural Digital Divide*. Department of Commerce <https://www.commerce.gov/news/blog/2016/08/state-urbanrural-digital-divide>

The Chancellor's Office's 2013 report also indicated that for a student who is "not particularly well prepared for college-level work and not an especially motivated beginning student, online courses early in the college experience may not be advised."²⁵ Entry into online instruction without proper preparation can be particularly damaging to students who are unfamiliar with college protocols, especially in community colleges where students are only allowed to attempt courses a certain number of times without penalty. In addition, online instruction may not be the best choice for students who need remediation, especially if only limited support services are available.

Another equity concern is class size and the impact the number of students in a class has on pedagogy and on the students taking the course. In-person classes have obvious constraints that preclude a class from becoming too large, including the size of the room or the lab and the amount of equipment available. Such barriers do not exist in classes offered online. While increasing the seat count in a class online might seem to be an issue only for the faculty member, it is an issue for the students as well. Teaching online requires a great deal of work; contrary to the belief of many, teaching online does not entail setting up a course site and letting the class run itself. Responding to students, designing new assessments each quarter, and reaching out to students who are not succeeding is no different in a class taught online than it is in an in-person course. However, if the seat count for a class offered online is greater than that of an in-person class, as some colleges have different seat counts for courses taught online versus in-person, that means that the faculty member teaching online has less time to connect with the students in the course. It also makes interaction between the students in the course more difficult. The widespread interest in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in 2013 and 2014 convinced some in higher education and in the legislature that these huge classes would be the solution to all of the problems in higher education: just create a course for thousands to take at a time, and all issues would be solved. However, experience demonstrated the profoundly problematic nature of this approach, as, among other problems, the lack of direct contact for students led to a recognition of difficulties with MOOCs.

Other forms of diversity exist in courses taught online as well. Many individuals taking classes online are traditional students who need an additional course that did not fit into an in-person schedule, but others are working adults, military personnel, those unable to leave their homes for medical and other reasons, family members caring for an elder or a special needs child, and students with a host of other situations. These students and their needs should also be taken into account when a faculty member is designing and teaching a course online. Faculty can take steps to ensure that equity is present in their courses when taught online. For example, requiring that students use a particular type of software is fine, provided that the program is easily or reasonably available to students; however, if a faculty member requires that all students use a particular word processing program and does not allow for any substitutions or other alternatives, some students may be prevented from succeeding if that program is only available for purchase rather than available at no cost. Flexibility in times that assignments are due may also assist students: if assignments open at 9 PM and are due the following morning at 9 AM, students who must use public computers—at a local library, for example—may not be able to complete their work on time. Working students may be better served with assessments that are due on a weekend day rather than during the week, while military personnel may have limited times that at which they can access a computer or other device. Ensuring the same kind of accessibility to materials, such as putting books on reserve at the library for courses taught online as some faculty do for in-person classes, is also helpful, particularly for students who might not be able to afford a textbook. Finally, the use of open

25 Ibid.

educational resource (OER) materials, which are free or of low cost to students, can aid students who might not be able to afford textbooks or might not be able to use a physical text, as most OER materials are available digitally.

Regardless of course modality, faculty might also consider the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California's "Five Principles for Enacting Equity by Design":

- ♦ Clarity in language and goals
- ♦ Equity mindedness as the guiding paradigm
- ♦ Equitable practice and policies should accommodate differences in the context of students' learning
- ♦ Enacting equity requires a continual process of learning, disaggregating data, and questioning assumptions about relevance and effectiveness.
- ♦ Equity must be enacted as a pervasive institution – and system-wide principle.²⁶

Equity and student services are often discussed together, as one of the roles of student services is to provide institutional support to close the equity gap. That support may include a dedicated advisor or counselor to work with students taking courses online, with varied availability to match when students would be online. Because campuses are required to have support services that are equal to those offered to in person students, such practices should already be occurring.

The 2013 report from the Chancellor's Office also provided a list of common retention strategies, and while some of the recommendations may already be occurring on campuses, reviewing them might help to spark new ideas and suggestions for online faculty and support services at campuses:

- ♦ Regular and effective two-way contact between the faculty member and students and among students, when possible, along with reminders and notifications from faculty when assignments are due;
- ♦ Longitudinal data from the campus' institutional research office about retention and success rates in courses to see where gaps exist;
- ♦ Assessments of readiness for online courses, available through the OEI and other groups provided to the students before courses begin to allow them to see if they are prepared to take online courses; and
- ♦ Clear delineation of the types of equipment, software, and other materials needed for successful completion of the course and links embedded in the course as to where to get those materials. If specific software is needed, the required software should be available for use on campus or online for little to no cost to the students, and that information should be provided to students prior to registration.

²⁶ The Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California. *America's Unmet Promise: The Imperative for Equity in Higher Education*. Published January, 2015. <https://www.aacu.org/publications/unmet-promise>

Conclusion

Ultimately, only faculty can accurately determine and assess the pedagogical soundness of offering a course online, the assessments given to measure student achievement in the course, and the course elements most likely to allow students to succeed. Given the rapidly changing landscape of online education, courses that today might seem impossible to teach online may in the future become commonplace in the online environment; however, those decisions must be made by faculty in order to ensure appropriate pedagogy, andragogy, and rigor and to allow students their greatest chance of success.

Recommendations

1. Colleges should have established regular and effective contact policies for courses that are taught online, and those policies should be widely available and included on the distance education addendum.
2. Colleges should have a distance or online education committee under the purview of the local academic senate to deal with academic and professional matters related to courses taught online. Responsibilities of this committee would include the development of recommendations and securing approval from appropriate faculty groups regarding instructional design standards for online courses and participation in the development of recommendations on policies regarding the distance education program, including policies for the ongoing professional development of distance education instructors, policies regarding training in the use of the course management system, and policies for ensuring that all courses and materials are accessible to all people with disabilities.
3. Colleges and districts should seek to ensure the continued health and appropriate growth of distance education programs by developing and regularly revising a college or district master plan for distance education.
4. Professional development around online education should be available to all faculty interested in teaching courses online, regardless of status as full – or part – time faculty. Ideally, faculty involved in online education should be given the opportunity to attend workshops, institutes, or conferences in order to discuss and debate the latest issues in the field and be informed about changes to regulations or other areas regarding course construction.
5. Local senates, working with their local collective bargaining units, should review evaluation tools to ensure that online courses are properly evaluated and that student evaluations in courses offered online can be conducted anonymously. The local bargaining unit should also be involved in discussions of policies for online courses to ensure compliance with the local collective bargaining agreement.
6. Online course offerings should be reviewed regularly to ensure accessibility for all students, and colleges should provide the tools and resources to accomplish this purpose.
7. Faculty should work with their student support service areas, instructional designers, online administrators, and others to ensure familiarity with information regarding ways to bridge all equity gaps in courses offered online.
8. The needs of all students should be taken into account when a faculty member is designing and teaching an online course.
9. Faculty teaching courses online should be cognizant of the digital divide and provide alternatives, when pedagogically sound, for software programs and other resources, including the use of open educational resources (OER).

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- Straumsheim, Carl (December 18, 2013) Scaling Back in San Jose. Inside Higher Ed <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/12/18/san-jose-state-u-resurrects-scaled-back-online-course-experiment-mooc-provider>
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Appendix 1

The following citations are from the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 5, and other statutory references that impact online education; please note that this list is not exhaustive.

Code of Federal Regulations (34 C.F.R. §602.3) <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/34/602.3>

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 508): <https://www.fcc.gov/general/section-508-rehabilitation-act>

United States Department of Education—Office of Civil Rights (OCR) <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act): <https://www.dol.gov/oasam/regs/statutes/sec504.htm>

California Education Code §70902 https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=70902.&lawCode=EDC

California Code of Regulations Title 5 §53200 [https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/I6EED7180D48411DEBC02831C6D6C108E?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&bhcp=1](https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/I6EED7180D48411DEBC02831C6D6C108E?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=(sc.Default)&bhcp=1)

California Code of Regulations Title 5 §55202 [https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/ICE42A7E0D48411DEBC02831C6D6C108E?transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)](https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/ICE42A7E0D48411DEBC02831C6D6C108E?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default))

California Code of Regulations Title 5 §55204 [https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/ICE9FE310D48411DEBC02831C6D6C108E?transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)](https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/ICE9FE310D48411DEBC02831C6D6C108E?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default))

California Code of Regulations Title 5 §55206 [https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/ID00A2170D48411DEBC02831C6D6C108E?transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)](https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/ID00A2170D48411DEBC02831C6D6C108E?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default))

California Code of Regulations Title 5 §55208 [https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/ID16AE9F0D48411DEBC02831C6D6C108E?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=StatuteNavigator&contextData=\(sc.Default\)](https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/ID16AE9F0D48411DEBC02831C6D6C108E?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=StatuteNavigator&contextData=(sc.Default))

MATERIALS FROM THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE, THE ACADEMIC SENATE FOR CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES, AND OTHER RESOURCES:

Academic Senate

ASCCC Online Education Committee <https://www.asccc.org/directory/online-education-committee>

Creation of Local Online Education Rubrics, ASCCC Resolution Fall 2015 9.01, <https://www.asccc.org/resolutions/creation-local-online-education-rubrics>

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO)

CCCCO Distance Education Accessibility Guidelines for Students with Disabilities

<http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/AA/DE/2011DistanceEducationAccessibilityGuidelines%20FINAL.pdf>

CCCCO Distance Education Report (2013)

http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/reportsTB/REPORT_DistanceEducation2013_090313.pdf

CCCCO Doing What Matters: Workforce, Job Creation and a Strong Economy Report and Recommendations (2015)

http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/Portals/6/docs/SW/BOG_TaskForce_Report_v12_web.pdf

CCCCO Student Success Report (2012)

<http://www.californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/StudentSuccessInitiative/Reports.aspx>

OEI Course Design Rubric: http://ccconlineed.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/OEI_Rubric_Edited-ACC.pdf

OEI Online Course Design Standards: <http://ccconlineed.org/faculty-resources/professional-development/online-course-design-standards/>

OTHER RESOURCES

Accessible Environments: Toward Universal Design by Mace et al: <https://mn.gov/mnddc/parallels2/pdf/90s/90/90-AEN-CAH.pdf>

Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges <https://accjc.org/publications/>

California Community Colleges: The Colleges Reviewed Are Not Adequately Monitoring Services for Technology Accessibility, and Districts and Colleges Should Formalize Procedures for Upgrading Technology Report 2017-102

<https://www.bsa.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2017-102.pdf>

Community College Research Center Working Paper No. 31. New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Columbia University. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/online-hybrid-performance-washington.pdf>

High Tech Center Training Unit Distance Education Accessibility Guidelines (2011): <http://www.htctu.net/dlguidelines/2011%20Distance%20Education%20Accessibility%20Guidelines%20FINAL.pdf>

Letter to City College of San Francisco Regarding Program Review https://www.cos.edu/About/Governance/AcademicSenate/DistanceEducation/Documents/Expedited%20Final%20Program%20Review%20Determination%20Letter%202.2.17_no%20appendices.pdf

Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act: <https://edworkforce.house.gov/prosper/>

United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>

Appendix 2

DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSE EVALUATION FORMS/ADDENDA

American River College DE Course Checklist <http://bit.ly/DE-checklist>

Foothill College Distance Education Addendum <https://foothill.edu/curriculum/forms.html>

Imperial Valley College DE Course Evaluation Form https://www.imperial.edu/ivc/files/distance_ed/DE_Course_Evaluation_Form.pdf

Mt San Antonio College “Classroom Visitation Evaluation of Distance Learning Faculty” <http://connection.mtsac.edu/forms/hr/fa-forms/H4C.docx>

Mt San Antonio College Distance Learning Amendment Form <http://www.mtsac.edu/dlc/forms/DL-Amendment-Form.docx>

