



The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges

PRESENTED TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

DATE: September 9-10, 2013

SUBJECT: 2013 Distance Education in the California Community Colleges Report to the Board of Governors		Item Number: 5.2	
		Attachment: Yes	
CATEGORY:	Academic Affairs	TYPE OF BOARD CONSIDERATION:	
Recommended By:	 Barry Russell, Vice Chancellor	Consent/Routine	
		First Reading	
Approved for Consideration:	 Brice W. Harris, Chancellor	Action	
		Information	X

ISSUE: This item presents the 2013 information report in compliance with the Board of Governors Standing Orders Section 409 (b) which directs the chancellor to provide a report to the Board of Governors every two years that evaluates the effectiveness of distance education and education technology systemwide.

BACKGROUND: Distance education has existed in the California Community Colleges System for over 34 years. This is the seventh report to the Board of Governors. It provides analysis of data demographically (by age, disability, ethnicity, and gender) student accessibility to instruction, and enrollment and completion rates. The first distance education report by the Chancellor’s Office was issued in January 2002. Starting in 2003 and every two years since, this report is updated to include data from the prior two fiscal years. The last report was done in 2011 and covered the five year period of 2004-05 to 2009-10. This report adds distance education data for fiscal years 2010/11 and 2011/12.

RECOMMENDATION: This item is presented for information and discussion.

ANALYSIS: Distance education focuses on the design of pedagogy, technology and instructional systems for students who are not physically present in the same location with the instructor. Title 5, section 55200, defines distance education as —“instruction in which the instructor and student are separated by distance and interact through the assistance of communication technology.” Distance education creates an educational experience of equal qualitative value as a face-to-face course for the learner to best suit their needs in an increasingly demanding culture that is challenged by the traditional face-to-face classroom delivery mode. The demand on the time of today’s students means having to balance multiple commitments in order to achieve academic success. Furthermore, California Community Colleges distance education student survey data indicates that convenience is the number one reason why students take a distance education course.

This 2013 report looks at multiple forms of distance education that is using all types of technology both low and high tech. Regardless of the method of delivery there are two types of time based delivery modes for distance education: synchronous and asynchronous¹.

Online instruction using asynchronous time based delivery is by far the most widely used method of conducting distance education because it offers students the greatest flexibility in taking courses. Currently over 90 percent of all distance education courses are internet asynchronous courses. Nearly 27 percent of all students take at least one distance education course per term and over 12 percent of all courses are distance education courses.

In addition to demographic data the report reviews a wide range of topics which include but are not limited to the following:

Meeting the Learning Needs of Students through Distance Education Courses

When students enroll in courses there are learning needs/expectations. Agreement on whether the distance education course met those learning needs/expectations is an indication of course satisfaction; nearly eight out of ten students either strongly agreed or agreed that distance education courses did meet their learning needs and less than 6 percent of the students either strongly disagreed (2.5 percent) or disagreed (3.4 percent).

Critical Thinking in Distance Education Courses

Critical thinking skills in a course are elements of the rigor of a course. Almost eight out of 10 students believe their distance education course provided them with the opportunity for critical thinking with other students, 78.1 percent of the students either strongly agreed (45.1 percent) or agreed (33.0 percent) with the statement “the online discussion board provided opportunity for critical thinking with other students”.

¹ Synchronous Communication is direct communication, where all parties involved in the communication are present at the same time (an event). Examples include a telephone conversation, a company board meeting, a chat room event, and instant messaging; and Asynchronous Communication does not require that all parties involved in the communication need to be present and available at the same time. Examples of this include email (the receiver does not have to be logged on when the sender sends the email message), discussion boards, which allow conversations to evolve and communities to develop over a period of time, and text messaging over cell phones.

Faculty Training

Increased student retention for distance education courses relies heavily on faculty training. Faculty that have completed some form of certification training for teaching via distance education have better retention rates than those that have not completed any certification training. Faculty recognizes that the ability to teach via distance education broadens their marketability and is an opportunity for professional growth.

Student Satisfaction

The level of satisfaction with a course is a strong predictor of retention and success. Not surprising, students who are satisfied with online courses and programs persist. In one study, students who had graduated from an online program reported satisfaction levels above 90 percent compared with 20 percent satisfaction levels reported by those who withdrew from courses.²

Student Retention

There are three factors that contribute to the student retention problem: student, instructional, and institutional. Subsequently, the solutions must be addressed in all three areas. Bob Nash, the current distance education coordinator at Coast College in an April 2009 Faculty Focus article, "*Tips for Improving Retention of Distance Learning Students*", outlines a multiple variant approach to improve retention and success rates. Nash identifies 11 different areas to look at, six of them are 1) an early alert system, 2) an online tutoring program, 3) a student success course, 4) learning communities, 5) focus on individual courses, and 6) involvement of faculty.

This seventh bi-annual report of the growth of distance education in the California Community Colleges is presented to the Board of Governors as an information item to help inform them about issues and development of this instructional model.

Staff: LeBaron Woodyard, Dean, Academic Affairs Division

² Hart, Carolyn, Factors Associated With Student Persistence in an Online Program of Study: A Review of the Literature, *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, Vol. 1, Number 1, Spring 2012