

Accreditation Self-Study: Distance Learning Program Considerations for Growth

Pursuant to the college's enrollment management plan, the offering of distance learning courses parallels that of the regular classes: that is, carefully monitored development. The current faculty contract has provisions for faculty who are interested in converting regular courses into distance learning delivery and to teach them as such to do so. However, when the schedule of classes is developed, distance learning course sections are counted toward the total number of sections the college can offer in a fiscally responsible manner. Furthermore, the current faculty contract allows no more than 50% of the faculty's teaching load to be distance learning classes.

In 2008-09, the Distance Learning Committee reviewed the current list of approved distance learning courses that meet general education requirements for the AA degree and for transferring to CSU and UC. The committee explored the possibility and feasibility of offering more DL courses; further, the committee developed specific areas of inquiry for more data:

- Find out from other colleges what they are or are not offering online for pedagogical reasons; are there courses that present inherent challenges to DL delivery?
- Assess current certificate or degree programs in Business Division to see how many courses can be made online for students to complete the certificate or degree by taking online courses. By this year, nearly all courses in Computer Information Systems are being taught in an online or hybrid mode.
- Consider pursuing more DL courses from the areas that do not seem to offer many options for students to complete courses purely online.
- Consider whether the current DL course approval and/or faculty certification for online teaching processes present barriers for faculty. In Spring 2010, the faculty certification process (SPOT) was made available online as well as the process to get a Blackboard account, Blackboard Basics Online. Moreover, a streamlined Distance Learning Course Amendment Form is currently underway for Academic Senate approval.

In recent Education Master Plan summit meetings (January 20th and May 21st of 2010), participants expressed interest in how we grow distance learning courses. Distance learning courses open access to students who might not otherwise attend college: students with multiple work and family obligations, with physical disability, or without transportation. Student interest for distance learning courses would need to be assessed; new courses and, if appropriate, any program level development in distance learning will be reviewed at the faculty department, Academic Senate, and administration levels.

Of the three main goals that emerged from the summit meetings, one goal focuses on supporting strategies to increase student access to classes and services, one of which addresses the college's Distance Learning Program.

Review Distance Learning Plan collaboratively in context of the Education Master Plan, the Facilities Master Plan, and the Technology Master Plan:

- Define where we are going: what do we mean by distance learning and how do we practice “on-line” education
- Identify facilities impact
- Align growth of Distance Learning courses with the best interests of students
- Identify appropriate staffing support for expanded Distance Learning program
- Plan for adequate access to services for Distance Learning students

The aforementioned action items will inform the college’s Strategic Objectives for 2010-11 as well as the content for a successive U.S. Department of Education Title V grant proposal due sometime in spring 2011 (RFP unavailable as of this writing).