

# Ensuring Effective And Equitable Online Education: A Faculty Perspective

The 21st century has brought about tectonic shifts in college instruction and the system level priorities that guide it. In the early 2000s, the California Community College system began to scale its distance education courses, as the shift from correspondence courses to interactive, asynchronous online learning accelerated. Between 2005 and 2015 total online student headcount grew from 11% to 25% (CCC Distance Education Report, 2017). Without the barriers of time and place that face-to-face courses pose, the system's growth in online courses expanded college access to students who had been left out of the traditional higher education model. By 2017, the demographic of a student most likely to take a distance education course was female, 20-24 years old and Hispanic.

Online courses provide students with flexibility to achieve their academic goals while meeting day-to-day responsibilities such as work and childcare and when conducted asynchronously they support individuals who do not have the privilege to predict their schedule week-to-week or have reliable transportation to campus. However, data has shown that online courses can also exacerbate equity gaps when they are not intentionally designed and facilitated to support the needs of diverse students. Driven by the commitment to achieve equity for all students and prepare a diverse workforce to support the future of our state, the California Community College Chancellor's Office established the Vision for Success in 2017. The Vision for Success has subsequently inspired the implementation of systemwide initiatives including Guided Pathways, the removal of remedial coursework in English and Math through AB705, and a concerted focus on ensuring course materials are accessible to everyone.

In 2020, COVID abruptly halted in-person instruction and work and required all faculty and students to move to emergency remote learning. As faculty made this shift, many chose to utilize web conferencing (TechConnect Zoom) to offer students an online environment that was similar to their classroom. In the months that followed, distance education support staff across

the state carried the immense challenge of supporting hundreds of faculty to fulfill local Title 5 online teaching preparation requirements.

At the same time, our nation witnessed countless racially motivated attacks and deaths of Black people that encouraged a system level dialogue about systemic racism, unconscious bias, and intentional efforts to foster inclusion by decentering White dominant culture in our workplaces and in our classes. These contextual layers will continue to be part of our teaching context and shape the future of instruction, as well as the way institutions support and value online education.

The purpose of this paper is to address the need for guidance on professional standards for educational practices in online education that prepare institutions for future instructional disruptions and continue to expand access to more students. 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.

This paper aims to be an update to the 2018 ASCCC paper “Ensuring An Effective Online Program: A Faculty Perspective,” which specifies that “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.” (p.2) The 2018 paper used the term “online” deliberately to differentiate its subject matter from traditional correspondence courses and from other forms of distance education.

The 2021-22 ASCCC Online Education Committee determined that as the world entered the third year of the COVID pandemic that resulted in colleges quickly pivoting most courses to online modality starting in March 2020, as well as the reckoning with

racial equity in the wake of George Floyd's murder, an update to the 2018 paper "Ensuring an Effective Online Program: A Faculty Perspective" would be useful to the field. Specifically, some of the major changes include: [Major subheadings TO BE COMPLETED]

INSERT Chaptered Title 5 language on "regular and substantive interaction" once it is official

## Types of Online Education Modalities

Also called "Distance Education" or "DE" modalities, California community colleges have identified as many as five different modalities<sup>1</sup>, such as: 1. Fully Asynchronous: 100% online, no meetings 2. Asynchronous Hybrid: partially on campus 3. Fully Synchronous: 100% Zoom meetings 4. Synchronous Hybrid: partially on campus and partially on zoom 5. Online Blend: partially asynchronous and partially synchronous. Modalities and pedagogical strategies have much impact on quality and quantity of student engagement in online classes. A modality that has been evolving and in use more frequently since the 2019 Pandemic is HyFlex ("Hybrid Flexible"). In November 2021, ASCCC published a Rostrum article on HyFlex, "What Is HyFlex And Why Do I Keep Hearing About It?"<sup>2</sup> In that article, HyFlex is defined:

"Brian Beatty first introduced hyflex learning in 2006 at San Francisco State University (Beatty, 2019). A true hyflex class will offer three different modalities simultaneously and allow the learner to choose between those modalities on a session-by-session basis (Whalley et al., 2021). The three modalities Beatty suggests are asynchronous or fully online, synchronous engagement via a mobile streaming platform like Zoom, and face-to-face in-person instruction (Lohmann et. al, 2021).

Beatty established four key principles to guide the use of the modalities (Kelly, 2020). The first principle is learner's choice. The student decides which modality to use to access the course and can make that decision on a session-by-session basis. A student who prefers to learn entirely online may never attend a class session or may choose to come to class either in person or

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.evc.edu/support-resources/participatory-governance/distance-education>, see "DE Modalities and DE Eligibility" under "DE documents"

<sup>2</sup> <https://asccc.org/content/what-hyflex-and-why-do-i-keep-hearing-about-it>

through Zoom. A student may also choose to attend completely face-to-face and never access the online component unless the student gets sick or has an emergency. The key to this principle is that the student can decide how to access the course on a session-by-session basis.

The second principle is equivalency. For a hyflex course to be equivalent, all content and activities in all modalities must lead to equivalent assessments and learning outcomes (Whalley et. al, 2021). The instructor has the responsibility to ensure that all students in all three modalities are not only taught the concepts, but are taught in a way that produces equal results.

The third principle Beatty introduces is reusability. Beatty suggests that instructors make all learning activities used across modalities available to all students. If a discussion board is available for asynchronous learners, face-to-face learners should also have access to it. On the converse, if students watch a video in class, the video should be posted into the LCMS course to be accessed by all. Reusability ensures that all students have equal access to the course and course materials across modalities, but it also reinforces learning. For instance, a student who has attended class face-to-face would be able to go home and re-watch the video of the lecture and review concepts learned in class.

The final principle of hyflex learning is accessibility. While accessibility should be at the forefront of every class, it is especially important in a hyflex course where any student can access any of the modalities at any time during the course, unlike, for instance, an in-person course where an instructor can control what learning materials will be digitally transmitted or delivered via ICT. Whalley et al. (2021) recommend that instructors equip their students with the necessary skills and access to all modalities. In addition to making sure links are correctly identified and images have alternative text, the instructor should ensure that students know how to access the material and have the technology to do so.”

The technological setup for HyFlex varies from campus to campus and from classroom to classroom, but the requirements are the same: all students in the classroom and all students in the synchronous online modality should have equal and high-quality access to the classroom activities. Special care should be taken in ensuring that students attending in person can hear those attending via teleconference and vice versa. Student learning activities should be arranged to ensure parity between all three modalities. Various popular HyFlex technologies that are in widespread use as of the writing of this paper include wireless speaker-microphone devices and

many variations of classroom video recording and or broadcasting equipment. It is important for both the faculty Academic Senate and the faculty union to be involved in joint purview/input on HyFlex course offerings, the technological set-up, and training of faculty, including compensation for additional hours required for training and setup, to maximize the most student- and faculty-user friendly and accessible HyFlex modality.

Campuses have also been experimenting with variations of HyFlex that only combine two modalities (e.g. synchronous teleconference and in-person instruction or asynchronous and in-person instruction) or that lock students into one of the three modalities because of COVID-related protocols. The CCCCCO will be working with ASCCC and 5C during the 2022-2023 year to develop HyFlex guidance for the system. Meanwhile, campuses should rely on three CCCCCO memos (21-09, 21-12, and 21-07) that establish related accounting, video, and attendance-related protocols.

Thus, with the availability of hybrid (a mix of both in-person and online learning, typically involving the use of an online course management system), fully online (both asynchronous and synchronous fully online courses typically utilizing an online course management system, and Zoom or other video conferencing software for synchronous learning/classes), and HyFlex (synchronous in-person and online learning, with student choice of which modality to participate in on any class day during the term), faculty must make thoughtful and sound pedagogical choices based not just upon what modality students and faculty find most convenient, but also based on the most appropriate means through which students should demonstrate course learning outcomes and objectives. This is especially important for courses articulated for transfer that must meet articulation requirements of the transferring institutions, as well as for career technical education courses preparing students to be certified or trained to enter workforce/industry. Faculty should clearly communicate on their syllabi the modality-related expectations of their students.

Many webinars, conferences, and other resources have been developed to address student engagement in online learning. Building student community, a sense of connectedness to the class participants and course content, reaching out with extra student services support to students who are struggling, and in sum, all of the “Six Factors of Student Success”<sup>3</sup> identified by the RP Group (Research, Planning, and Professional Development for California Community Colleges),

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/CollegeFacultyStaffandAdmins/StudentSupportRedefined-10WaysEveryoneCanSupportStudentSuccess-January2014.pdf>

still are successful strategies to keep students engaged in learning and on the path to student achievement of course success and attainment of educational goals. How to do this in an online environment presents a challenge that is addressed by utilizing more intrusive outreach to students via technological means such as texting, calling, “early alert” notifications via email, inviting counselors, tutoring services staff, and other student service providers into Zoom classes to introduce staff and services, holding campus events such as guest speakers via Zoom, and using course management software messaging and announcements features. Creating the kind of vibrant college life that includes traditionally in-person activities such as student clubs, student government, internships, on-and-off campus volunteer and student employment opportunities, research and teaching assistance to faculty, course field trips, and study abroad is altogether another challenge that faculty and colleges may also seek to offer online. There is already some degree of success with training and employing online student tutors who conduct sessions via conferencing software such as Zoom.

## Effective Practices for Online Education Curriculum

**A**ll 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 matter<sup>4</sup>, 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 Substantive Interaction (RSI) –formerly called Regular Effective Contact-- between instructors and students in distance education courses and identifies regular effective contact as an academic and professional matter. Local RSI policies must be approved by governing boards through collegial consultation by relying primarily upon or reaching mutual agreement with their local academic senates.<sup>5</sup> Because RSI policies are established through collegial consultation, if these policies are to be revised, the revision must also be achieved through collegial consultation.

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

---

<sup>4</sup> With reference to Title 5 §55002

<sup>5</sup> 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.

committee under the purview of the academic senate.

### **Roles of Committees**

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 substantive interaction (RSI). The curriculum committee should review and consider the course outline of record's methods of instruction to ensure that the course content is delivered to students with regular and substantive interaction 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 Course Outline of Record (COR) being reviewed.

Recent changes in Title 5 section 55205 also require that colleges provide information about their distance education (DE) courses before students enroll in their courses.



Curriculum committees should work with their campuses to establish practices through which faculty can provide this information such as proctoring and technology requirements and synchronous meeting times, so that students can make informed decisions about which courses meet their needs. 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 proposed for offering 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 and accessibility of the entire distance education program. This oversight may include, but is not limited to, the following responsibilities, per local collective bargaining agreements:

- 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, including policies designed to help the college comply with federal, state, and accreditor expectations for distance education, as well as policies for the ongoing professional development of distance education instructors, policies regarding training in the use of the Course Management System (CMS),

- and policies for ensuring that all courses and materials are accessible to people with disabilities;
- Establish short and long-term planning goals which enhance engagement and success of faculty, and of students, specific to online courses by:
    - a. Review institutional and statewide data to make recommendations for goals and their related priorities;
    - b. Review and respond to the goals of Board of Trustees, the Superintendent/President, the Strategic Plan, the Information Technology Plan, and the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan when formulating the priorities and planning activities;
    - c. Evaluate the progress and attainment of online education initiatives.
    - d. Support programs and initiatives designed to promote student equity and success in online courses.
  - Explore emerging and accessible technologies to support teaching and learning
  - Train and engage Distance Learning faculty by
    - a. Acting as an advisory group in establishing process and training recommendations.
    - b. Developing and implementing an annual review of local online teaching certification programs.
  - Draft 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, and all accreditation requirements are being met, and that students are being well-served.
  - Make recommendations about the college's engagement with external online education programs and initiatives

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 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 and any decisions to create policies and/or develop new evaluation instruments and tools for online courses, programs, teaching, and learning likely involve discussions, input, and approval by entities such as local and district Academic Senates, Student Senates, faculty union, and administrators. Creating and evaluating curriculum and programs are part of faculty purview.

#### Equity and/or AB 705 Committees

Discussions about potential online 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). Discussions about potential online pre- or co-requisites for students should also be faculty-led, as curriculum and programs are a 10+1 Academic and Professional Matters issue. Faculty who develop the curriculum within the concerned discipline(s) should be the lead(s) in these discussions. A recent systemwide example would be any pre- or co-requisites developed as part of the AB 705 implementation impacting English, Math, and English as a Second Language (ESL). Because AB 705 implementation is being driven by scrutiny of student success throughput data, other entities and committees concerning institutional research, program review, course scheduling and enrollment

management, student assessment, curriculum approval, and counseling/advising may also be involved in giving input on online pre- or co-requisites. Some colleges have developed campus AB 705 committees bringing together all the concerned entities/offices/departments to have these discussions. Again, these discussions would be under faculty purview and could happen in any number of committees. Once any online/hybrid pre- or co-requisites are developed, then online education support and professional development offices should then be engaged in providing support to faculty and any others to ensure that the online/hybrid modalities are receiving all the support needed to help faculty help students succeed in these modalities to the best of their abilities. Determining how online pre- or co-requisites modalities are offered should also be guided by Institutional Equity goals, to ensure equitable access and success for all student populations.

#### Enrollment Management Committees

As a majority of courses pivoted quickly to online modalities during the COVID pandemic, and because enrollment decline has been an ongoing issue that many colleges have been dealing with even prior to COVID, enrollment management of online courses has become an increasingly larger task with huge implications for students and colleges. Ensuring adequate knowledge to inform decision making around enrollment management goes beyond just looking at course data showing numbers of students enrolled in past offerings of a course. Enrollment management committees with department faculty schedulers, students, and adjunct faculty participating in discussions and/or giving input can help contribute to more expansive understanding of current student needs and equity gaps that just looking at past enrollment data may not provide. Such input/information gathering for enrollment management decision making should include understanding aspects such as how divisions and departments make course assignments to faculty, how courses are being marketed, how new and returning students are outreached, and what courses students need in order to complete certificates and degrees in a timely manner. At many colleges, the enrollment management piece of online programs should be discussed as part of Guided Pathways or other institution-wide work to ensure that they are removing all barriers to students enrolling and succeeding in courses and attaining their educational goals. At a time when many colleges are trying to shore up lost enrollments and recalibrate what a emerging/post pandemic “new normal” requires, nimble colleges encourage innovation and creativity, soliciting ideas from students, staff, and faculty who have fresh current “on the ground” perspectives to help colleges maximize their potential to reach and enroll students. However, a

sobering reality is that most colleges could use more professional resources and help with the work of effectively marketing, outreaching to, and enrolling students. There are some interesting [investments](#) that well-funded private foundations are making in public community colleges around this. Those investments include consultants providing technical assistance in behavioral design and planning for sustainable enrollment efforts, and the development of “digital toolkits” to help colleges access strategies developed by professional marketers and strategy consultants. In addition, faculty should closely monitor the results of efforts such as CVC (California Virtual Campus) to make it easier for students to navigate the system of the California Community Colleges’ course offerings and enroll in any participating colleges’ online course offerings.

### **Consultation with Collective Bargaining Groups**

Instructors of distance education shall be prepared to teach in a distance education delivery method consistent with local district policies and negotiated agreements

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 multi-factor ICT authentication or 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 participatory style of engagement. 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.

## **Culturally Responsive Instruction and Instructional Modalities 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 based solely on federal criteria, but contains 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/>  
10 | Ensuring An Effective Online Program

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."<sup>4</sup>

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](https://www.cos.edu/About/Governance/Academic/Senate/DistanceEducation/Documents/Expedited%20Final%20Program%20Review%20Determination%20Letter%202.2.17_no%20appendices.pdf)

Ensuring An Effective Online Program | 11

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

[OUTLINE FOR NOW: Points we will make in this section—not necessarily in this order:

1. COVID proved that we can teach labs online where we never thought possible before
  - a. Some of these labs will continue in the DE modality
  - b. Many variations are being explored, including hybrid where students spend 2-3 in-person days at a college lab facility but most of the other time in the online modality
  - c. Lab kits sent to student homes are making DE a feasible alternative, but there are affordability issues (similar to textbook cost issues)
  - d. Online lab options may be more appropriate for non-majors courses; individual departments may need to carefully consider this
2. Labs that were created in the days when the only technology available was on campus (e.g. computer science or accounting) should be carefully analyzed by local campuses (faculty, of course) to ensure that faculty-supervised labs are still necessary for completing the SLOs in the curriculum. It may be that the faculty-supervised labs of the 1990s can actually be the homework of today, or may be done online through virtualization software making specialized software available at a distance.
3. Although the UCs and CSUs have stated that modality doesn't matter when considering student units for transfer [Kandace will dig out some sources/attributions here], it is within local UC/CSU department scope to determine whether they accept for equivalency online labs. Local campuses should know or learn where this happens and advise students accordingly before they enroll in online labs (where possible!). ]

## Design and Review 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 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 review 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 review that usually takes place involves the course design itself. These reviews come in many different forms and with differing expectations and requirements. Some are peer reviews 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 such as Peer Online Course Review, or POCR<sup>6</sup> for self or peer reviews, allowing an online instructor a better idea of what should be developed for students to be successful when the course is offered online. Some colleges require specific types of training, such as how to use Canvas, with the faculty members having elements of their course design reviewed by the faculty and/or staff conducting the training.

The ultimate purpose of these reviews can vary significantly from one college to another. Depending on a college’s collective bargaining agreement regarding online teaching, a poor result on a review 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 reviews 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

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://onlinenetworkofeducators.org/course-design-academy/pocr-resources/>

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 California Virtual Campus Online Education Initiative (CVC-OEI) originated through the Chancellor's Office in 2013, it had several goals, including creation of the CVC-OEI Course Exchange, the determination of a systemwide learning management system (Canvas), and the development of a course design rubric (*via the Online Network of Educators, or @ONE, CVC-OEI's course design and teaching professional development unit*). The rubric, first released in 2014, is regularly updated with the goal of "...establish[ing] 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."<sup>5</sup> 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. @ONE provides a number of [trainings](#)<sup>7</sup> and other resources to support faculty engagement with the rubric, including those offered through its [Local Peer Online Course Review \(POCR\) initiative](#)<sup>8</sup>. Courses aligned with the @ONE Course Design Rubric are advantaged in the Exchange sort order, and are otherwise eligible to participate in the [@ONE Independent Course Alignment program](#)<sup>9</sup>, wherein faculty have the option of sharing rubric-aligned courses. Over the 2021-22 academic year, CVC-OEI is working on a broad-scale initiative to holistically promote quality distance education programs. As part of this effort, @ONE has convened an advisory group of faculty and distance education coordinator stakeholders to develop a set of teaching competencies to complement the @ONE Course Design Rubric, tentatively scheduled for pilot distribution in fall 2022.

Some colleges have begun adopting parts of the @ONE Course Design Rubric as

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://onlinenetworkofeducators.org/course-cards/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://onlinenetworkofeducators.org/course-design-academy/pocr-resources/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bmKVmI2TZU2pboBQOr2-x75FpfSMZDh9/edit#heading=h.9yu093xkpalv>

their evaluative measurement for online course design and ASCCC Resolution 9.01 (F15) encourages *“local senates to establish rubrics for online course standards.”* Though the resolution stops short of encouraging colleges to adopt the @ONE Course Design Rubric specifically, it does indicate that colleges should develop rubrics for courses taught online that, like the @ONE rubric, define regular and substantive interaction 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 later in this paper.

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 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 students in online courses have high quality learning experiences. The online environment is distinct from a physical classroom. While teaching online may, at first, feel like a barrier to faculty because things can't be done the same way, teaching online can also be an avenue to transform the way our students learn. Professional development for online instructors ensures that faculty are prepared to teach online but also provides ongoing opportunities for growth and

development.

Title 5 (§55208) requires that “[i]nstructors of distance education ... be prepared to teach in a distance education delivery method consistent with local district policies and negotiated agreements.” This baseline preparation for online teaching varies widely by college but may include developing proficiency in using the course management system, creating videos, demonstrating mastery of quality course design principles like backwards course design, applying active learning principles through discussions, authentic assessments, and/or cultivating instructor-student relationships at a distance. Decisions about what constitutes preparation to teach online are opportunities to raise the bar for our students’ online education and are made collaboratively in consultation with Academic Senates, online education committees, and unions.

COVID made us very aware of the need for all faculty to be prepared to teach online and to provide a variety of support to faculty as they are offering online classes. But professional learning development requires much more than the commitment of individual faculty; it requires an institutional investment. High quality in-house professional development in support of online teaching requires knowledgeable facilitators with ample time and support. Institutions that need to augment their internal professional learning opportunities have access to @ONE online courses, webinars, workshops, and other resources that are offered through CVC.

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 and other forms of professional support remains beneficial. After all, no course and no instructor is perfect; all faculty can benefit from continued education and collegial support. 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 and support others, either at their own campuses or elsewhere, and provide professional development to their peers. Finally, many colleges, especially during the COVID pandemic, successfully offered more informal collegial support opportunities led by experienced peer faculty. Mentoring programs, communities of practice, departmental online lead faculty, and other such programs enable faculty to receive ongoing support for online teaching, as needed, in more informal settings compared to traditional professional development.

## 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.<sup>10</sup>

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.”<sup>7</sup> As recipients of federal funding, California’s community colleges are subject to the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act and must be in compliance.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup>

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.

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

---

<sup>10</sup> United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html> 7 Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

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.<sup>13</sup>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.

---

<sup>13</sup> 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>

- 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.

- 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.<sup>14</sup> 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

---

<sup>14</sup> California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Distance Education Accessibility Guidelines <http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/AA/DE/2011DistanceEducationAccessibilityGuidelines%20FINAL.pdf>

Tech Center<sup>15</sup>.

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.<sup>16</sup>

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.

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Online Courses

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have become words that faculty hear regularly in meetings and statewide presentations. Ensuring faculty comprehend what these concepts mean, how they relate and yet are distinct from one another, as well as how they influence the online courses offered in our system. Diversity asks, "Who is at the table?" It refers to the differences among a group of people. Inclusion asks, "How included do those at the table feel?" Inclusion ensures identity safety and creates an environment where difficult topics turn into meaningful conversations. And while equality asks, "Is everyone treated fairly?," equity asks, "Does everyone at the table have what they need to be successful?" Embracing DEI as core values across our system and our campuses first requires faculty to be self-aware of their own identities, privileges, and unconscious biases. Self-awareness enables an individual to wholeheartedly embrace diversity as an asset, as opposed to a burden, to consider how power and

---

<sup>15</sup> <https://ccctechcenter.org/about/accessibility>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

privilege marginalizes individuals from non-dominant identities, and to seek out and remove barriers that prevent every individual from being successful.

Online courses pose powerful opportunities for achieving equity in California community colleges. For decades, online courses have increased access to more students in our system, providing flexibility to students who can't be on campus at all or as regularly as some students. Yet, online courses have also been shown to increase equity gaps and should not be viewed as a "silver bullet" (Palacios & Wood, 2015).

But to bring these opportunities to fruition, faculty must not see online courses as a second-tier option for teaching and learning. Most college classrooms are designed to communicate a hierarchical power that places the instructor above students. When faculty approach online teaching with curiosity and are provided with time and support, online courses can open new uncharted opportunities for student-centered, equitable learning.

Becoming an equitable online educator is a longtime goal that requires personal commitment and iterative improvements. It requires most faculty to begin a transformation in their own professional identity that begins with seeing the influence that White dominant culture has had on one's own educational experiences and shapes one's teaching approaches. It is hard, exhausting work. It requires faculty to know who the students are in their courses and to be race-conscious, as opposed to color blind. It requires recognizing that the students who are served in community colleges are largely students who bring trauma from the structural racism built into their earlier educational experiences.

Studies have shown that students of color, English language learners, linguistically and culturally diverse students, and low income students are less likely than other students to receive intellectually challenging instruction in K-12 classes and they are more likely to enroll in community colleges. As such, community college faculty serve both independent and dependent learners in every class. Adult learning theories like andragogy assume that a student is an independent learner and leave out students who require scaffolding, regular check-ins, individualized support, and personal rapport to ensure mutual trust is established. These are tenets of culturally responsive teaching, which is key to moving the needle and achieving equity both on campus and online in our system.

Asynchronous online courses have been the cornerstone of distance education in community colleges for decades. Four-fifths of community college students are employed and work an average of 32 hours per week and many do not have the privilege to predict their schedules week-to-week (Horn & Neville, 2006; Parsad & Lewis, 2008). Technical difficulties, staying on track, isolation, and lack of feedback are cited as barriers in research about community college students taking asynchronous online courses (Jaggars, 2019). These barriers can be significantly improved through intentional course design, which has been a major area of improvement in the CCC system in recent years. The systemwide adoption of the CVC Online Course Design Rubric and Local Peer Online Course Review (POCR) have increased dialogue and sharing of effective course design practices. Students enrolled in online courses that were aligned to the CVC Online Course Design Rubric succeed at 4.9 percentage points higher than non-aligned courses (RP Group, 2018).

Online courses enabled our system to stay afloat in 2020 when COVID shut down our campuses. But this period also brought many inequities to the surface. Colleges recognized the deep-seated impact of the digital divide in many communities, particularly our colleges in rural settings. As colleges distributed tablets and laptops to bridge the divide, faculty recognized that not all applications operated on all devices. Faculty teaching synchronous courses often found themselves looking at empty squares on their screen when some students chose not to enable their webcams. While faculty appreciate seeing their students, turning on a webcam can be an unwelcome and intrusive experience for many students. To be inclusive, students must feel trusted and their choices must be valued. With a focus on equity, many colleges adopted inclusive webcam policies that stressed the need to give students choice in their learning. @ONE, a CCC-funded state level professional development provider, developed a 2-week course, Introduction to Live Online Teaching, that introduces faculty to active learning strategies in a live, digital context and has participants develop a set of inclusive live session norms and deliver a live mini-session as a final project. That course has been adopted by many colleges across the system and incorporated into local online teaching preparation requirements.

During COVID, our system also saw a major increase in the use of online proctoring. Debates about the ethics of online proctoring grew across the nation. Many online proctoring tools require students to download an application onto their computer that grants the tool access to their webcam. The webcam is used to scan the students' face and compare their facial features with a scanned version of their legal photo ID. Use cases have shown that these facial

recognition systems do not detect Black faces. Transgender students may also be impacted by the biases built into these technologies. Moreover, being watched while taking an exam is a chilling experience, particularly for Black students in the United States who live their lives in a shroud of suspicion. Despite these jarring concerns, online proctoring tools are widely used across our system. Faculty who teach online must be critical about the biases built into online proctoring and commit themselves to finding alternative approaches to assessment, like project-based learning and other forms of authentic assessment.

## 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 and accessibility standards for online courses and participation in the



development of recommendations on policies regarding the distance education program, including policies for the ongoing professional learning and support of distance education instructors, policies regarding training in the use of the course management system, policies regarding evaluation of online courses and instructors teaching online, guidance for student learning outcomes and curriculum development for online courses, and policies for ensuring that all courses and materials are equitable and 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 which is aligned with other key plans and initiatives.
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. Faculty should also have ongoing access to technical support, instructional design expertise, and collegial mentors and guides.
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 develop and use practices designed 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).

Draft