

A. DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

Student Services

undefined

1. Describe the program’s purpose and mission. Limit 250 words.

The mission of the Distance Education (DE) program is to offer students an alternative learning mode that accommodates their academic goals while providing the flexibility to manage life’s demands, such as work and family obligations. This flexible scheduling allows students to pursue their education without sacrificing personal or professional responsibilities. However, flexibility is not the only benefit. For many students, online learning is a preferred or more accessible modality due to factors beyond life demands—such as learning differences, social anxiety, or physical and mental health conditions.

DE also expands access to students beyond our immediate community. In Fall 2023, 87% of credit and noncredit students lived outside of Santa Monica and Malibu, our district cities. The program helps meet the needs of these students who may otherwise face geographic, financial, or logistical barriers to attending in-person classes. Through online instruction, the College can reach a broader and more diverse student population while maintaining its commitment to quality education.

To ensure student success, the DE program emphasizes supporting faculty through ongoing pedagogy and technology training. By staying current with best practices and technological advancements, faculty are better equipped to deliver high-quality online instruction.

All online and hybrid courses are taught by SMC faculty and adhere to the same standards as face-to-face classes, ensuring consistency in the quality of education. The program also mirrors critical student services, offering online counseling and tutoring to provide support for distance learners.

2. Which of the following Institutional Learning Outcomes does the program support? Select at least one.

ILOs

- ☒ #1 - Acquire the self-confidence and self-discipline to pursue their intellectual curiosities with integrity in both their personal and professional lives
- ☒ #2 - Obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to access, evaluate, and interpret ideas, images, and information critically in order to communicate effectively, reach conclusions, and solve problems
- ☐ #3 - Respect the inter-relatedness of the global human environment, engage with diverse peoples, acknowledge the significance of their daily actions relative to broader issues and events
- ☐ #4 - Assume responsibility for their own impact on the earth by living a sustainable and ethical life style
- ☐ #5 - Demonstrate a level of engagement in the subject matter that enables and motivates the integration of acquired knowledge and skills beyond the classroom

B. STUDENTS SERVED

3. Describe 1-3 salient demographic composition of students served by the program and include an analysis of how it aligns with the students your program is intended to serve. (500 words)

The DE program has experienced significant growth over the past seven years, with an 83% increase in unduplicated headcount from 17,861 students in 2017-2018 to 32,680 in 2023-2024. This increase reflects the growing demand for flexible online education options.

1. **Gender:** The gender demographic of students enrolled in the DE program is consistently skewed toward female students, who make up 57-59% of the total enrollment over the seven-year period. In 2023-2024, 57% of the students were female, while 40% were male, and 3% were unreported. This distribution closely mirrors overall SMC enrollment trends, where female students also represent a majority of the college’s student population.
2. **Race/Ethnicity:** The race/ethnic demographic of the DE program reflects a diverse student body. In 2023-2024, Latine/x students made up the largest group, representing 35% of the student population, followed by White students (32%) and Asian students (10%). The proportion of Black students has remained steady at around 8-9%. The racial/ethnic breakdown of students enrolled in DE courses indicate this population is

equally representative of the overall college population at SMC. Additionally, the program serves smaller percentages of Native American, Pacific Islander, and students identifying with two or more races. This diversity aligns with the DE program's mission to serve students from a wide range of backgrounds, increasing access and providing opportunities to overcome barriers, such as transportation and scheduling, that might otherwise prevent students from attending face-to-face classes.

3. **Age:** In 2023-2024, 31% of students were aged 19 or less, an increase from 22% in 2017-2018. The 20 to 24 age group also represents a significant portion of the student population, making up 31% of the total enrollment in 2023-2024. These younger students, who are often first-time college students or recent high school graduates, are drawn to the flexibility and accessibility that the DE program offers, allowing them to balance their education with work or other commitments. Interestingly, there has also been an increase in students aged 40 and older, rising from 6% in 2017-2018 to 16% in 2023-2024, indicating that adult learners seeking career advancement or retraining also find value in the DE program.

4. Describe how the program does outreach to, and provides access for, the intended student population. (250 words)

The DE program does not currently engage in specific or intentional outreach efforts targeted at particular student populations. Instead, the program relies primarily on the college's general marketing strategies and word-of-mouth recommendations from current and past students.

The College marketing efforts include: Online advertisements, social media campaigns, and informational resources on the college's website, serve as the primary means of promoting the DE program.

5. When considering student outcomes, SMC produces the largest equity gaps for Black and Latinx students. How does the program address equity gaps within the scope of work that it performs? (500 words)

The DE program provides professional development (PD) opportunities, which also incorporates equity-minded and culturally responsive teaching practices. These opportunities are designed to equip faculty with the tools necessary to engage and support racially minoritized students more effectively in both online and face-to-face settings.

Historically, distance education (DE) courses have exhibited wider success rate gaps for Black, Latinx/e, Native American, and Pacific Islander students compared to face-to-face courses. However, concerted efforts to address these disparities have begun to show positive results. Success rates for DE courses have improved over time, with gaps narrowing for most groups. Despite this progress, Black students continue to experience the largest gap, consistent with statewide data, which shows African American/Black students performing about 20 percent lower than the highest-performing group in DE settings.

One of the key strategies in addressing equity gaps has been through the PD opportunities provided to faculty. These PD sessions are designed not only to enhance faculty knowledge of online pedagogical best practices but also to help them develop culturally responsive teaching techniques that better serve racially minoritized students. The PD offerings integrate equity-minded practices, which promote a sense of belonging and instructor engagement to ensure success in an online learning environment.

However, the DE program's capacity to address these equity gaps is limited by several factors. The program heavily relies on campus-wide resources and equity-minded PD programs to support faculty in this effort. Due to the constraints of our scope and capacity, and because the program is unable to mandate online teaching training as other CCCs do, there are still faculty with varying levels of expertise in online teaching. This disparity in faculty preparation places a burden on the DE program, as we are focused on supporting faculty at all levels rather than being able to establish a baseline of training that would allow us to expand our initiatives. Unlike other institutions that mandate online teaching certification, our reliance on voluntary PD means that faculty who may need the most support are not always able to engage with these opportunities.

The program also actively collaborates with the Office of Institutional Research to analyze course success rates by race and ethnicity, using this data to inform strategies aimed at closing equity gaps. As these gaps are

continually monitored, future efforts will focus on further reducing disparities through enhanced faculty development, expanded digital support resources, and initiatives aimed at fostering a stronger sense of belonging and academic success for students.

6. If applicable, describe any instructional partnerships or collaborations that impact the students served by the program. (500 words)

N/A

C. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

7. Describe any changes that have been implemented as a result of the recommendations of the last program review. (500 words)

In response to the recommendations from the last program review, changes have been implemented to enhance student onboarding and support, as well as to improve course design.

To address the recommendation to better onboard students new to online learning, we have implemented "Passport to Canvas", a self-paced course designed to teach students how to navigate and use Canvas effectively. This course has been tailored with SMC-specific information to ensure it meets the unique needs of our student population. Many faculty members have integrated this course into their own classes or direct students to use it as a tutorial. This is a tool to help students familiarize themselves with the learning management system with the goal of improving their confidence and success in online courses. While we currently do not track individual completion data, the Fall 2024 CCC Student Survey shows that 89.6% of SMC student respondents reported that the college provides a Canvas module to help them navigate online learning, indicating high awareness of this support tool. Moreover, 62.3% of students found these resources to be “very helpful,” suggesting these tools contribute positively to students’ online learning experiences.

In addition to Passport to Canvas, our Senior Online Learning Services Specialist has begun conducting research to identify gaps in the support services available to online students. Recognizing that existing student services may not fully address the unique needs of online learners, she has initiated discussions with counseling leadership and the Peer Navigator Program to better understand the scope and delivery of current offerings.

While SMC provides a wide range of online resources—such as tech support (72.3%), online tutoring (75%), and online readiness assessments (30.6%)—survey data suggests there is a disconnect between resource availability and student utilization. For example, only 30.5% of students reported using online tutoring, and 22.7% indicated they had not accessed any online learning support resources at all. These findings point to potential gaps in student awareness, ease of access, or perceived usefulness of available services.

This ongoing research will inform future strategies for enhancing support both in and outside the virtual classroom, with the goal of fostering a stronger sense of belonging among online students and better aligning support services with student expectations, accessibility needs, and online learning environments.

Furthermore, in response to the recommendation to hire a full-time instructional designer, we have hired a full-time Instructional and Universal Designer since the last program review. This individual plays a crucial role in assisting faculty with the design of online and hybrid courses, ensuring they adhere to sound pedagogical principles, ADA/508 accessibility standards, and equity-minded practices. The addition of this position has strengthened our ability to offer high-quality, accessible, and inclusive online courses that meet the diverse needs of our students.

8a. Identify and describe one or two outcomes students are expected to experience after receiving services from, or participating in, the program. (200 words)

1. Students who utilize Brainfuse Online Tutoring will demonstrate positive outcomes.

2. DE faculty will report being satisfied with training and/or professional development offered by the DE Department.

8b. Describe how the identified student outcomes are assessed. (e.g., a survey of program participants is administered at week 12 of each semester) (200 words)

The Distance Education (DE) program assesses student outcomes through multiple methods that help monitor effectiveness and guide continuous improvement. To evaluate the impact of online tutoring services, the DE program collaborates with the Institutional Research office to review student performance data. This allows the program to compare success rates of students who utilize tutoring with those who do not, helping to determine the effectiveness of these services in supporting academic achievement.

In addition, faculty who participate in DE-related professional development are asked to complete post-workshop surveys. These surveys assess their satisfaction with the training, the relevance of the content, and how well the workshop supported their teaching needs. Feedback from these surveys is used to improve and tailor future training sessions.

To supplement these efforts, the DE program also incorporates findings from statewide student experience surveys. These surveys offer broader insights into how students perceive their online learning experiences and the resources available to them. Taken together, these assessment methods help the DE program make data-informed decisions about instructional support and student services, and ensure alignment with institutional goals for student success and equity.

8c. What is the “effectiveness” target goal for each of the expected student outcomes identified? (e.g., 90% or more of students attending the FAFSA workshops successfully complete the financial aid application within four weeks) (200 words)

1. Students who participate in at least one online tutoring session will demonstrate success rates at least 15% higher than those who do not participate in tutoring.
2. 75% or more of faculty who engage in training or professional development provided by the DE department will report being satisfied with the support they received.

8d. Analyze the program’s performance on the data collected to assess the program’s student outcomes. Is the program meeting the target goals? What context is needed to understand the results? (500 words)

Following the transition from Smarthinking to Brainfuse Online Tutoring, the DE program is actively collecting data to assess student outcomes. With support from Institutional Research, we aim to analyze this data by the end of the fiscal year to determine whether Brainfuse contributes to a 15% increase in student success rates for users compared to non-users. While the analysis is still underway, early indicators—including increased usage and positive student feedback—suggest the platform is being well-received. We anticipate that the final data will show the student success target is on track to be met.

To complement student data, the DE program regularly gathers faculty feedback to assess PD outcomes. A faculty survey conducted during the 2025 Online Teaching Winter Institute showed that the majority of participants “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that sessions improved their online teaching, and 100% said they would recommend the training to colleagues. Popular sessions highlighted strong interest in instructional integrity and the integration of AI into online pedagogy.

Additional faculty survey data showed that of 117 respondents, 72 were full-time and 45 were part-time. Key areas of interest included Interactive Content Creation (84 responses), Course Design and Layout (62), and Multimedia Integration (60), indicating faculty eagerness to explore innovative strategies for enhancing online teaching.

In response, the DE program has prioritized the development of an instructional studio lab. Eighty-five faculty expressed interest in using the lab, with 64 citing the ability to enhance online courses with engaging content as a key motivation. Additionally, 57 emphasized the opportunity to create high-quality course materials. These findings suggest the studio lab will be a vital resource in aligning course design with the program's goals for innovation and instructional quality.

Faculty engagement with PD remains high, with 100 faculty members expressing interest in attending training sessions or studio workshops. However, time constraints were noted as the most significant challenge, with 89 faculty members reporting limited availability. To address this, the DE program plans to offer more flexible options, such as virtual workshops and open lab hours, to better meet faculty needs.

Notably, 102 faculty members believe content produced in the studio lab would be beneficial or somewhat beneficial to student learning. This strong interest in working with instructional designers reflects a shared commitment to improving the quality and effectiveness of online instruction.

Students have also expressed high satisfaction with their online learning experiences. In a Fall 2024 statewide survey, 89.8% of SMC students agreed or strongly agreed that their most recent online class was of high quality, and 62.3% found the online learning resources "very helpful." These results underscore the DE program's growing impact in supporting both student success and high-quality online instruction.

9. Based upon the outcomes assessment, satisfaction evaluation and/or other data, provide two notable examples of how the program serves students effectively and briefly explain why they are successful. (500 words)

1. One of the most effective services provided by the DE program is the implementation of Brainfuse Online Tutoring, which replaced Smarthinking in Fall 2023 after Smarthinking closed its online tutoring operations. This transition ensured uninterrupted academic support for online learners. Historically, students who utilized Smarthinking demonstrated success rates at least 20% higher than those who did not use the service. It is anticipated that Brainfuse will mirror or exceed this trend due to its expanded features and user-friendly accessibility. Brainfuse provides students with 24/7 access to one-on-one tutoring, academic resources, and writing support—addressing the needs of learners who require flexibility to balance coursework with personal and professional obligations. The availability of around-the-clock academic help aligns well with the demands of the online student population, making support services more equitable and accessible. However, student access to Brainfuse is limited to a set number of hours each semester, based on available budget resources.
2. Another example in effectively serving students is the DE program's focus on faculty professional development. Faculty training and support play a vital role in improving the quality of online courses, directly impacting student engagement and learning outcomes. The DE program has implemented ongoing workshops, peer course review programs, certification courses, and offers access to an instructional designer to help faculty create more interactive, engaging, and accessible courses. The focus on professional development has been successful because it empowers faculty to improve the quality of their online courses, which in turn leads to better student outcomes.

10. Based upon the overall assessment and evaluation of the program, describe 2-5 areas that require attention or improvement. (500 words)

1. Building Community and Enhancing Support in Online Learning: A key area for improvement is fostering community and ensuring consistent student support throughout the online learning experience. While SMC offers resources such as online tutoring and readiness tools, survey data reveals a gap between availability and use—only 30.5% of students reported using tutoring, and just 9.3% accessed the online readiness assessment. This suggests that students may not be fully aware of these services or find them easily accessible or relevant.

Open-ended feedback highlighted a need for greater structure, connection, and clarity. Students described online learning as isolating and expressed a desire for regular check-ins, timely feedback, and stronger interaction with faculty and peers.

To address these concerns, the DE program will prioritize embedding support resources directly into Canvas course shells and collaborate with faculty to enhance online presence and engagement. PD will be a key strategy, with offerings focused on quality course design, community-building, and integrating student services. Encouraging participation and cultivating faculty interest will be essential for creating more connected and supportive online learning environments.

2. Addressing Faculty Time Constraints in Professional Development: While faculty have shown strong interest in professional development opportunities—particularly the proposed instructional studio lab—survey results indicate that time constraints are a significant barrier to participation. Survey data shows that time constraints prevent many from engaging in training. In response, the DE program records all virtual workshops for on-demand viewing and is exploring ways to incentivize participation. For example, stipend-supported programs like the Online Teaching Winter Institute see higher engagement, but budget limitations prevent this model from being applied broadly. The program will continue identifying scalable strategies to support faculty development within existing constraints.

3. Ongoing Focus on Equity, UDL, and Accessibility: Another critical area for improvement is the continued emphasis on equity and inclusive course design in online education. While the DE program has made important progress—most notably through the hiring of an instructional designer with expertise in ADA/508 accessibility standards and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles—additional efforts are needed to ensure all students are supported, particularly Black and Latinx/e learners who continue to face disproportionate success gaps in DE.

Unlike accessibility, which is primarily compliance-driven, UDL offers a proactive, student-centered framework that addresses variability in how students learn. It encourages flexible content delivery, varied methods of engagement, and multiple ways for students to demonstrate their learning. Integrating UDL more deeply into online course design can help reduce barriers before they arise and support a wider range of student needs.

To move this work forward, the DE program will continue offering targeted PD focused on equity-minded teaching and inclusive design practices. Expanding faculty training in UDL will help ensure that online learning environments are not only accessible but also equitable and responsive to the diversity of our student population.

D. THE FUTURE OF THE PROGRAM

11. Based on the findings from your assessment/evaluation, describe the goals/priorities and accompanying action plan(s) you will pursue to improve your program. (500 words)

The DE program is committed to continuously improving online education for both students and faculty. In alignment with this, the program will also support the Chancellor's Office's initiative in collaboration with The RP Group to assess the impact of the post-pandemic shift toward online education on student learning, access to courses, and outcomes. This study will provide valuable insights for future planning and improvement of online education practices. As part of this effort, IR will assist in distributing surveys to students and faculty to gather data on their experiences with online learning, contributing to statewide recommendations for policymakers and educational leaders. In addition to supporting this study, the DE program has identified four key goals and action plans for future growth:

1. Enhance Community-Building and Ongoing Student Support in Online Learning

- Goal: Strengthen student connection and engagement in online courses by embedding support resources and fostering community throughout the term.
- Action Plan: In response to survey findings highlighting feelings of isolation and underutilization of support tools, the DE program will shift from a one-time onboarding approach to an ongoing support

model. Rather than focusing solely on a standalone orientation, the program will embed support resources, such as Direct Connect, directly into Canvas course shells to ensure students can easily access support at the point of need. In addition, the DE team will work with faculty to enhance instructor presence and student connection through improved course design and engagement strategies. PD will be a central component, offering sessions focused on community-building, student services integration, and engagement techniques. However, since faculty PD is voluntary, the DE program will focus on cultivating faculty interest and modeling high-impact practices through Canvas templates and shared resources. This strategy aims to bridge the gap between available services and actual student usage while promoting belonging and retention in online environments.

- **2. Open the Faculty Studio Lab**
- Goal: Equip faculty with tools to create high-quality, engaging online course materials.
- Action Plan: The Faculty Studio Lab will be launched by Spring 2025. This dedicated space will provide faculty with access to technology and resources for creating multimedia content, such as lecture recordings, interactive videos, and other instructional materials. The lab will feature recording equipment, editing software, and technical support to help faculty develop engaging, high-quality content that enhances student learning experiences. We will also offer workshops and one-on-one sessions for faculty to learn how to best utilize the lab’s resources. The studio lab is expected to increase faculty creativity, improve course design, and contribute to more engaging online environments, ultimately benefiting student learning outcomes.
- **3. Ongoing Collaboration on Accessibility, UDL, and Equity-Minded Professional Development**
- Goal: Ensure courses are accessible and foster equity-minded online teaching practices.
- Action Plan: The DE program will collaborate with accessibility and equity-minded practitioners to provide ongoing professional development (PD) and training opportunities throughout each semester. These trainings will focus on improving faculty awareness and competence in areas such as ADA/508 compliance, UDL course design, and fostering equity-minded practices in the online learning environment. The DE program will integrate these PD opportunities into existing programs and events, such as the Peer Online Course Review (POCR) and the Online Teaching Winter Institute. These efforts aim to advance UDL and equity-minded practices across online learning, with the goal of closing equity gaps and creating a more supportive and responsive environment for Black, Latinx/e, and other underrepresented students.
- **4. Expand Peer Online Course Review (POCR) and Winter Institute Programs**
- Goal: Encourage faculty to adopt data-informed best practices for online course delivery.
- Action Plan: The DE program will continue to expand our POCR and Online Teaching Winter Institute programs to support faculty in adopting data-informed best practices for online courses. These programs offer faculty the opportunity to review each other's courses, receive feedback, and implement improvements. The Winter Institute will focus on themes such as AI in education, equity-minded strategies and practices, and innovative course design to ensure faculty stay current with the latest trends in online teaching. By expanding these initiatives, we hope to foster a community of continuous improvement, where faculty are actively engaged in refining their online teaching methods.

E. EMPLOYEES/PROGRAM STAFF AND DEPARTMENTAL CULTURE

12. List and describe program staffing, including FTE, faculty, classified professionals, managers, and student/intern support. (250 words)

Associate Dean, Online Services & Support - Academic Affairs
Instructional & Universal Designer
Instructional Media Specialist
Senior Online Learning Services Specialist
Online Learning Services Specialist

13. Analyze staffing levels in the context of the program's mission and purpose. Are there any gaps or needs to be addressed? (250 words)

Adding a second full-time Instructional & Universal Designer would significantly enhance the program's ability to meet growing instructional design needs. It would enable the team to provide more timely, individualized support for faculty in course design and accessibility improvements, while also deepening UDL integration and expanding professional development participation.

Currently, support staff serve both on-ground and online students, which can dilute the level of targeted support online learners receive. Dedicated online student services personnel would enable more cohesive and proactive support, increase engagement, and foster a stronger sense of community—key factors in retention and student success in digital learning environments.

In addition to improving the student experience, a robust and dedicated support infrastructure would strengthen the college's ability to promote and sustain its online program. A strong support system helps prospective students feel welcomed and confident from the start, which can influence their decision to enroll and remain engaged throughout their academic journey.

While the college's current Master Plan includes a strategic goal to expand on-ground instruction and limit online offerings, it is essential to ensure that existing and future online students continue to receive consistent, high-quality support.

14. Describe how the program provides ongoing professional development opportunities for staff. (500 words)

The DE program ensures that staff are continually provided with professional development opportunities to stay updated on the latest trends and best practices in online education.

A key professional development event that staff attend annually is the Online Teaching Conference (OTC). The OTC is a leading event for faculty, staff, and administrators involved in online education, offering a variety of workshops, presentations, and discussions focused on innovative approaches to online teaching.

In addition to external conferences, staff also engage in professional development through internal training opportunities. For example, two of the four members of the DE team have completed the Classified Equity Training offered by the college.

15. What equity-centered practices and training have been implemented in the program? If applicable, provide examples and discuss strengths and areas for growth. How can the institution better support the program and staff in developing an equity minded work culture? (500 words)

Classified Equity Training: The participation of staff in Classified Equity Training has been an important step in fostering an equity-centered culture within the DE program. The strength of this training lies in its ability to help staff apply equity-focused strategies in their day-to-day interactions.

Accessibility and Universal Design: The DE program has made significant strides in promoting accessibility by hiring a full-time instructional designer with expertise in ADA/508 standards and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. This has ensured that all online courses are designed with accessibility in mind, creating equitable learning environments for students with disabilities. Faculty are also provided with ongoing training in UDL principles, delivered by our DSPS faculty and staff. These principles promote flexible learning environments that accommodate diverse learning needs. Additionally, the theme of the 2024 Online Teaching Winter Institute centered on Accessibility and UDL principles, emphasizing the importance of inclusive course design. Although progress has been made, the DE program recognizes that

ongoing training in accessibility and universal design remains essential to continuously improve and adapt to the evolving needs of our diverse student population.

Equity-Minded Professional Development for Online Courses: The DE program actively promotes equity-minded professional development for faculty through workshops and initiatives offered both at the college and within the DE department. For example, the DE program has collaborated with equity-minded practitioners in developing content for optional certification courses, such as the Online Teaching & Design (OTD) 8-week course. These efforts are designed to integrate equity-minded strategies into online course design and instruction. A key highlight of the 2025 Online Teaching Winter Institute was the session titled “Identifying Equity Gaps with Precision Campus,” which empowered faculty to engage with disaggregated course-level data and make informed instructional changes aligned with the college’s equity goals.

However, a challenge in delivering these professional development opportunities lies in the technologically intensive nature of online education. Finding the balance between facilitating reflective equity-minded professional development and ensuring that faculty are proficient in navigating the learning management system (LMS) and educational technology, including AI, can be difficult. These competing priorities require careful integration of both technology skills and equity principles, but they remain central to achieving our long-term goals.

Institutional Support for Developing an Equity-Minded Work Culture: To further cultivate an equity-minded work culture, the institution could take steps to expand and mandate equity and accessibility training for all employees. This would ensure a baseline understanding across the institution, enabling a more consistent and unified approach to promoting equity in all areas on campus.

16. If applicable, describe if the program has a succession plan to ensure that it is minimally impacted by staffing transfers, departures, and/or retirements? (250 words)

The DE program has taken steps to ensure continuity in the event of staffing transfers, departures, or retirements through the development of a comprehensive knowledge base document. This document contains detailed information about the roles and responsibilities of each position within the department, including procedures, workflows, and key contacts. By maintaining this resource, the program ensures that essential knowledge is captured and easily accessible to any incoming staff or interim personnel.

In addition to the knowledge base, the DE team encourages cross-training among staff members. This practice allows employees to develop a broader understanding of the various roles within the department, providing flexibility in staffing and minimizing disruptions should a member of the team leave.

17. Describe the program’s workplace culture, climate, and morale, and discuss how it impacts the program’s ability and capacity to effectively serve students. Describe how the college can support and improve the environment and/or morale in your department. (500 words)

Morale within the DE program is generally high, largely due to the team's shared sense of purpose and productivity. However, there is growing concern over the possibility of losing the flexibility to maintain a hybrid work schedule in the near future. The DE program is unique in that it serves primarily online students and faculty, and the team has demonstrated consistent productivity and effectiveness while working remotely. This remote work model has proven to be well-suited for the nature of our work, allowing staff to provide timely support to both students and faculty.

The option to work in a hybrid format has significantly contributed to the team's morale and job satisfaction. Being able to balance in-person and remote work has not only boosted morale but has also allowed staff to maintain a healthy work-life balance, which in turn enhances their performance. The team remains readily available to come to campus whenever necessary and is committed to fulfilling the program’s goals, but the flexibility to work remotely has been a key factor in maintaining high levels of engagement and satisfaction.

The possibility of losing this hybrid flexibility creates tension and uncertainty, as many staff members feel that it could negatively impact their ability to maintain the same level of productivity and job satisfaction.

Given that the DE program's work aligns naturally with remote support, many believe that the hybrid model is an ideal approach for balancing operational effectiveness with staff well-being.

To continue fostering a positive workplace culture and maintaining high morale, it would be beneficial for the college to consider continuing the remote work policy option for the DE team.

F. BUDGET PLANNING

18. Describe how the current program budget aligns with the program’s goals and outcomes over the next three years. If it doesn’t align, what would be needed to supplement the current budget allocation? (250 words)

The DE Program is grateful for the one-time funding provided to pilot the Faculty Studio Lab, which aligns well with our goal of enhancing faculty creativity and course quality. However, looking ahead, the current program budget may not sufficiently support the continuously evolving educational technology landscape, particularly in relation to AI tools and other emerging innovations. Over the next three years, we anticipate increased demand from faculty to explore and pilot new technologies, especially AI, which has the potential to revolutionize online teaching and learning.

To fully meet these needs and stay competitive in providing cutting-edge resources, additional funding will be required for software licenses, tools, and training that enable faculty to integrate these advanced technologies into their courses. Without sufficient budget allocation, the DE program may struggle to keep pace with the technological advancements that are becoming critical to online education.

While the current budget has allowed for some initial progress, additional ongoing funding will be necessary to ensure that the program can effectively explore, adopt, and implement the latest educational technologies to enhance faculty support and improve student outcomes.

19. Are there any special projects or initiatives that will require additional budgeting or a reallocation of existing resources for the program? Consider the following: human resources, reducing racial equity gaps, student success and completion, community relations, professional development opportunities, and federal, state or district initiatives. (500 words)

At this time, there are no additional special projects or initiatives requiring immediate additional budgeting or reallocation of existing resources beyond what has already been allocated for the Faculty Studio Lab pilot. Our current focus is on the successful launch of this lab, which has received one-time funding to support its development and is expected to enhance faculty engagement and the quality of online course materials.

However, we have identified a growing need for sustained investment in professional development to support faculty and address persistent equity gaps. Historically, we have relied on internal faculty and classified professionals to lead sessions at the Online Teaching Winter Institute, which has served the college well. That said, the 2025 Winter Institute marked a significant turning point, receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback—particularly for its inclusion of two external keynote speakers. Their sessions provided fresh insights, advanced perspectives on instructional integrity and inclusive design, and helped reframe how faculty approach AI and equity in online education.

Faculty feedback from the event indicated a strong appreciation for these external voices, noting their relevance and inspiration. Expanding the use of guest speakers and equity-minded experts in future PD events would deepen learning opportunities, promote innovation, and help align our efforts with institutional goals related to student success, racial equity, and faculty support.

To sustain this momentum, additional funding or a reallocation of resources may be needed in future years to continue hosting high-quality, impactful events that elevate teaching and learning across modalities.