

A Summary of the 2020-2021 Distance Education Review

Comprehensive Review Date: October 20, 2020

Program Overview

The Distance Education (DE) Department, housed within the division of Academic Affairs, consists of four staff members who provide services for students enrolled in DE (online and hybrid) courses and support and training for faculty teaching DE courses. The department provides ongoing support and maintains the college's Course Management System (CMS), Canvas, ensures that the college is compliant with federal and state mandates, and stays abreast in the latest and emerging technological innovations for online education. The ultimate goals of the DE Department are to increase student access to DE courses, provide a high-quality online learning experience for students, and ensure student success in DE courses.

Program Populations Served and Outcomes

The percentage of the credit population enrolled in at least one DE course has increased by over 16% over the last six fall terms, from 24% (7300 of 30159) in Fall 2014 to 41% (11331 of 27932) in Fall 2019. In the most recent completed fall term (2019), the DE student population closely mirrored the overall college population in terms of ethnicity/race, etc., however, disproportionately more DE students are between the age of 30-49 when compared to the overall population. The DE Department hypothesizes that online courses offer more flexibility for working adults who typically fall into the stated age group.

Due to the current pandemic, a vast majority of students are now enrolled in courses that are delivered through an online format.

The DE Department engages in regular assessment to determine whether they are meeting their unit outcomes (UOs) focused on the utilization of Smarthinking, the online tutoring service, increasing course success through tutoring, and faculty satisfaction with the Canvas platform. The DE department reviews the results of its outcomes assessment on a semesterly basis and monitors progress towards their target goals. Recent outcomes data suggest an increase in the number of students utilizing Smart inking, positive Course outcomes for students who used Smarthinking when compared to those who did not, and high levels of satisfaction amongst DE faculty on the Canvas platform.

In addition, the DE Department compares the course success and retention rates between DE and onground courses and examines course success rates in DE courses, disaggregated by student race/ethnicity.

According to their analyses, some areas needing improvement include professional development opportunities (81% of faculty indicated they were satisfied with a goal of 90%) and closing racial equity gaps for Black students in terms of course success.

Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

When the coronavirus pandemic hit, the DE Department responded swiftly to assist the college in converting all classes which previously met in-person to a remote learning environment. In addition, the department led the efforts to ensure the college develop and submit the Summer and Fall 2020 Distance Education Professional Development Plans required by the California Community College's Chancellor's Office. The Department refocused and ramped up their professional development and training opportunities to meet the demands of faculty who previously did not teach online courses or in a remote/virtual environment. The DE successfully planned and coordinated several multi-week course to assist faculty in receiving Online Teaching & Design or OTD certification during the summer and fall terms.

Changes and Milestones Since Last Review

Migration to Canvas: The DE Department led efforts to move the college to a new CMS (Canvas) in 2017.

Increase in Faculty Professional Development: Since the last review, the department has increased their faculty professional development offerings, including implementation of the Peer Online Course Review process, Canvas Central, @ONE courses, and a faculty peer mentorship program in addition to supporting and hosting ongoing workshops and trainings.

Participation in the California Virtual Campus (CVC) – Open Education Initiatives (OEI) Improving Online CTE Pathways Grant: During the 2019-2020 academic year, the college joined the CVC-OEI Consortium of colleges. The goal of the grant is to increase access and success in high-quality online courses at consortium colleges.

Response to Previous Program Review Recommendations

The DE Department has adequately addressed the recommendation for program strengthening that were made by the Program Review Committee during its last comprehensive review. The recommendation focused on increasing its assessment and evaluation efforts for departmental planning. Since the last review, The DE Department implemented a "DE Professional Needs" survey in Spring 2020 to assess faculty needs for support and training and deployed smaller surveys that are administered after the conclusion of workshops and trainings provided by the department.

Commendations

The Distance Education Department is commended for:

1. Effectively responding to and supporting the college's DE priorities and needs with a small team;
2. Successfully accomplishing the herculean task in supporting the conversion of instruction from an in-person to a remote learning environment during the coronavirus pandemic;

3. Providing a wide array of training resources and support services for faculty, including coordinating the @ONE Online Teaching and Design courses, and fostering a culture committed to professional development among faculty teaching online;
4. Seamlessly migrating the college to the new CMS, Canvas, and providing ongoing training and support for faculty using Canvas, and for leveraging the use of Canvas to promote distance education;
5. Enhancing the online learning experience for users with the installation of educational technology software and services and integration of Learning Tools Interoperability (LTIs) with accessibility compliance in mind;
6. Improving the course success and retention rates in DE courses over the last six years by increasing efforts to training faculty on distance education practices and tools; and,
7. Implementing online tutoring, Smarthinking, for students enrolled in DE classes which had led to higher success rates for students who participate in the tutoring when compared to their peers who do not.

Recommendations for Program Strengthening

The Program Review Committee has identified the following as recommendations for areas of growth and program strengthening:

1. Conduct inquiry and implement data-informed strategies to effectively onboard students new to online courses and build community for online students, including providing support in and out of the classroom;
2. Research the underlying issues and challenges that lead to racial equity gaps for Black students in DE courses and implement one or more strategies to address the gaps.

Recommendations for Institutional Support

The Program Review Committee proposes that the College respond to the following recommendations in order to support the continuous improvement of the DE Department:

Support to Ensure Sustainability and Growth of Program (Budget and Resources)

Prior to the pandemic, the DE Department served a large proportion of the instructional sections and departments. In Fall 2019, 41% of credit students enrolled in at least one distance education. However, due to the pandemic, currently nearly all students and faculty are being supported by the DE Department in the remote and online learning environment. As cited in their review, “The modest budget from the District does not meet the demand and need of the DE Community” (p. 11). To meet the growing distance education-related needs of the college, the following recommendations for

institutional support are identified. These resource-related recommendations to will ensure that the DE Department is properly staffed and have adequate resources to continue serving the entire college campus effectively.

1. SMC invests sustainably in software licenses used to the online learning environment such as Turnitin, Respondus, Canvas Studio, Pronto, and Otter AI. The Distance Education Department's limited budget is unable to meet the increasing demands from faculty and student to adopt emerging software and educational tools to enhance course content and the online learning experience for students;
2. With the significant increase in Canvas usage on campus and growing interest in Canvas for non-instructional programs, SMC funds one full-time Canvas programmer position to design and develop complex reports and processes, including integration of third-party APIs, to improve functionality and maximize the full potential of the platform;
3. SMC increases the budget to purchase additional "tutoring" hours from Smarthinking, the online tutoring service provided to online/hybrid students, to meet the increasing demand for tutoring amongst online students;

Other Institutional Support

4. SMC invests in the growth and improvement of distance education. SMC's leadership demonstrates institutional commitment for the future of distance education by clarifying the vision, direction, and priorities of distance education at SMC, and allocates adequate district resources to ensure the distance education goals are met; and,
5. SMC hires a full-time instructional designer, with expertise in ADA/508 standards, to assist faculty in the design of online and hybrid courses using sound pedagogical, accessibility, and equity-minded practices.

Approved by the Academic Senate Joint Program Review Committee on 11/3/2020