



# Online Education Plan 2015-2018



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MiraCosta College is among the top California community colleges in both the absolute number of distance education (DE) course enrollments and the percentage of total enrollment attributed to DE. MiraCosta has a 20-year history of faculty engagement with quality and innovation in online education. MiraCosta continues to expand the impact of its online education efforts, and as of 2014, nearly one-half of all students take at least one distance education class each year. At the same time, MiraCosta's distance education remains aligned with the institution's mission and goals and is firmly in compliance with federal, state, and accreditor expectations.

This document identifies key objectives, action plans, and outcomes designed to help MiraCosta online education to continuously improve. These goals are described in relation to the areas of primary responsibility within the organizational structure of the college. The goals can also be grouped around key objectives identified for this three-year plan as follows:

### **Objective 1: Establish online education programs and resources within an integrated and comprehensive web-based environment.**

- ❖ Action Plan 1.A: Establish comprehensive MiraCosta online education programs.
  - Outcome 1.A.1: Programs offered fully online, with classes scheduled accordingly, based on analysis of curriculum approval, student interest, and department interest.
  - Outcome 1.A.2: Analysis of opportunities to engage off-campus students with college activities and campus life.
- ❖ Action Plan 1.B: Establish, evaluate, and improve communication about online courses, programs, and supports.
  - Outcome 1.B.1 Improved outreach and communication about online education programs and classes, using new branding/identity developed specifically for MiraCosta online education.
- ❖ Action Plan 1.C: Implement technologies likely to support student success in online education.
  - Outcome 1.C.1: MiraCosta online education technologies that are fully accessible and, to the greatest extent possible, mobile-friendly.
  - Outcome 1.C.2: A course management system re-evaluation; a program supporting faculty in the use of Open Educational Resources.

### **Objective 2: Enhance support and clarify procedures for faculty involved in online education.**

- ❖ Action Plan 2.A: Enhance faculty preparation and support for successful online teaching.
  - Outcome 2.A.1: New and enhanced resources for faculty teaching online: Online Ed handbook; programs for developing, certifying, and maintaining faculty preparation for online teaching; and technologies and personnel support resources through the Teaching/Technology Innovation Center (TIC) and Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL).
- ❖ Action Plan 2.B: Develop organizational practices in support of consistent online class quality.
  - Outcome 2.B.1: Guidelines for online class quality; specific procedures for online class evaluation by students, administrators, and peers; guidelines for online teaching assignment.

**Objective 3: Engage students in effective supports for success in online education.**

- ❖ Action Plan 3.A: Establish and expand support services and intervention strategies.
  - Outcome 3.A.1: Establishment, promotion, evaluation, and expansion as warranted of student help desk, online counseling, online education planning, peer mentors for online students, online learning orientation, online library support, and the Proctoring Center.
  - Outcome 3.A.2: Engagement with CCC Online Education Initiative (OEI) in planning, developing, and implementing tools and procedures, enabling MiraCosta to provide OEI classes and MiraCosta students to take classes through OEI.
- ❖ Action Plan 3.B: Evaluate impact of supports on success, retention, and equity, and refine accordingly.
  - Outcome 3.B.1: Online programs, resources, and support services regularly evaluated and refined to improve student satisfaction, equity, retention, and success.

**Objective 4: Ensure online education at MiraCosta is in compliance with external regulations.**

- ❖ Action Plan 4.A: Monitor and follow accreditor expectations and effective practices for accreditation of distance education.
  - Outcome 4.A.1: Fully accredited status for MiraCosta distance education without sanctions.

Appendix A aligns these objectives with the institutional goals and objectives stated in the current MiraCosta College three-year strategic plan. Appendix B presents the objectives, action plans, and outcomes in a tabular format.

## INTRODUCTION

As noted in MiraCosta College's [2011 Online Education Plan](#), online offerings at MiraCosta began in 1995 with a music class. By spring 2000, 16 faculty participating in the "Cybercosta" program offered 22 online class sections. Online and hybrid class offerings have grown steadily since then, to the point where nearly half of today's MiraCosta students take a distance education class each year, and well over 300 distance education course sections are scheduled each semester.

The quality and maturity of MiraCosta's online education offerings have been recognized externally. Nearly all of MiraCosta's degree programs as well as dozens of certificates have been [approved for offering via distance education](#) by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) through Substantive Change Proposals in 2009 and 2014. Additionally in 2014, MiraCosta was selected as one of twenty-four California Community College Online Education Initiative pilot colleges.

This 2015-2018 Online Education Plan seeks to further strengthen MiraCosta online education by the following:

- Establishing important definitions for MiraCosta online and distance education
- Establishing vision and mission statements for online education that align online education at MiraCosta with the institutional mission
- Identifying guiding principles and drivers of strategic change for MiraCosta online education
- Establishing objectives, action plans, and outcomes for MiraCosta online education to enhance student access and success in alignment with MiraCosta's three-year strategic plan.

The outcomes established in this plan generally fall into one of the following areas:

1. Communication and usage: improving communication about and utilization of existing online education programs, classes, services, and resources
2. Evaluation: evaluating the impact of online education programs, classes, services, and resources on student access, equity, and success
3. Development: enhancing existing online education programs, classes, services, and resources and developing new ones.

## Definitions

*Online education* is an expansive term at MiraCosta College, encompassing technologies, services, resources, programs, classes, and teaching/learning experiences that are mediated at least partially through the Internet.

*Distance education* is a more specific term and is important for accreditation and compliance with state and federal regulations. MiraCosta's administrative procedure on distance education, [AP 4105](#), defines distance education (DE) in accordance with federal statute as "instruction in which the instructor and student are separated by distance and interact through the assistance of communication technology." It is important to note that the distinguishing characteristic of DE as

opposed to correspondence education is regular and substantive interaction between instructor and students, or in the language of California's Title 5, regular effective contact.

*Distance education classes* are defined, in accordance with California Community College and ACCJC procedures for data reporting and disaggregation, as course sections in which over half of the instructional time is structured as DE. *Distance education programs*, in accordance with ACCJC procedures, are those in which half or more of the required courses have been approved to be offered via distance education through MiraCosta's curriculum process.

*Hybrid* classes at MiraCosta are those in which the instructional time is conducted partially online and partially in-person. A hybrid class is considered a DE class for data reporting purposes if over half of its instructional time is conducted online. All hybrid classes are required to comply with AP 4105 for the portions of the course that are conducted via distance education. At the writing of this plan, a MiraCosta class that is fully online except for required proctored exams is classified as *hybrid*.

*100% online* classes at MiraCosta have no place-based instructional requirements.

All 100% online and hybrid courses [must be approved](#) for distance education offering by MiraCosta's Courses & Programs Curriculum Committee.

### **Online Education Vision/Mission**

As part of the regular review of MiraCosta College's mission statement (see Appendix D), a committee considered in 2013 whether online education should be explicitly included. After extensive input from students and employees, it was decided that the rationale for offering online education was clear from the college mission statement in its current form and that no special wording regarding online education needed to be added. In particular, **online education enables diverse learners access to educational opportunities** that they might not otherwise have. A 2013 survey revealed that more than 44 percent of MiraCosta students taking a distance education class would not have been able to come to campus for the class.

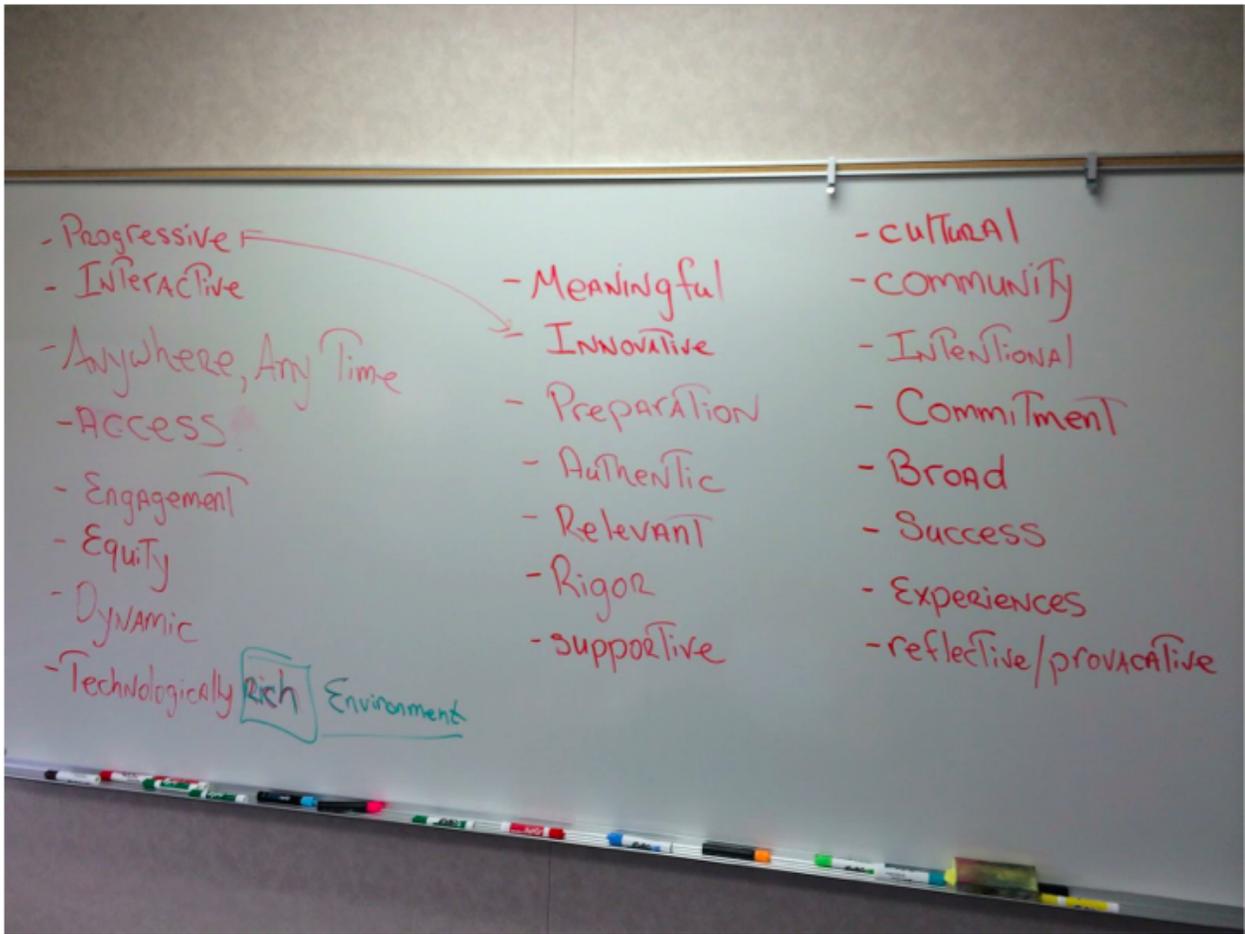


Figure 1. Online Education Plan task force brainstorm of key descriptors and aspirational terms for online education at MiraCosta.

In 2014, the Online Education Plan (OEP) task force developed vision and mission statements for online education, connecting key ideas in the district mission to a basis for strategic planning for online education at MiraCosta:

**MiraCosta Online Education Vision**

MiraCosta’s Online Education leverages an increasingly rich array of teaching and learning resources, experiences, and environments. MiraCosta College will lead in providing effective and innovative Online Education as an integral means of equitable access and student success.

**MiraCosta Online Education Mission**

MiraCosta College embraces student-centered, engaging, and accessible Online Education that meets student needs, enhances the learning experience, and broadens access to superior educational opportunities and support services.

## Guiding Principles for Distance Education Leadership

The following principles guide the leadership and oversight of distance education (DE) at MiraCosta in accordance with accreditor and regulator expectations.

- I. DE should be integrated within institutionalized budget, planning, decision-making, and evaluation processes but called out as a unique mode of teaching/learning.
- II. As DE is institutionalized, decision making about DE should be clearly aligned with MiraCosta's mission and goals.
- III. DE has unique requirements dictated by state and federal regulations as well as accreditation standards.
- IV. MiraCosta should view responding to these requirements not as hoops to jump through but as opportunities to innovate, improve, and lead.

## Key Drivers of This Plan

Numerous internal and external drivers were considered in the development of this plan. At a high level, sources for these drivers include the following:

- MiraCosta [institutional goals and learning outcomes](#) and [planning documents](#)
- MiraCosta [Closure of 2011-2014 Online Ed Plan](#) document
- Existing and emerging distance education requirements from MiraCosta's [AP 4105](#) as well as [ACCJC](#), [state](#), and [federal](#) regulations
- Emergent goals and resources of the [California Community College Online Education Initiative](#)
- Additional important education and technology trends identified by the OEP task force in concert with the MiraCosta Online Educators committee, while considering the vision and mission statements for Online Education.

The OEP task force studied each of these sources to derive a number of more specific drivers. (See Appendix C for the detailed list of drivers.) The task force then developed specific goals to address the drivers; the goals were then grouped into the higher-level action plans and outcomes.

## Key Facts and Figures about MiraCosta Online Education

Over the last five years, MiraCosta online education has grown tremendously, mirroring and even surpassing regional, state, and national trends. The following chart demonstrates not only the growth of distance education at MiraCosta, but also its increasing relative importance to MiraCosta students.

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Online + Hybrid course sections (Fall)	237	253	291	310	337
% of FTES from DE	12.6%	14.8%	16.2%	17.1%	17.2%
Students taking <b>at least one</b> DE course	32.7%	37.8%	42.1%	44.3%	46.6%
Students taking <b>only</b> DE courses	8.8%	11.3%	12.8%	12.4%	14.5%

Table 1. Participation in Distance Education at MiraCosta College.

Over the same five-year period, success and retention in MiraCosta DE courses have remained generally flat (see Table 2) as has success and retention in non-DE courses, resulting in about an 8 percent gap, which is typical at many colleges.

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
DE Success	62%	61%	62%	63%	64%
Non-DE Success	69%	70%	71%	71%	72%
DE Retention	77%	75%	77%	77%	77%
Non-DE Retention	83%	83%	84%	84%	84%

Table 2. Distance Education vs. non-Distance Education success and retention at MiraCosta College.

MiraCosta is among the top California community colleges in terms of both the absolute numbers of students enrolled in DE courses as well as the percentage of enrollments that represents, as the following chart shows (based on spring 2014 data retrieved from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Datamart).

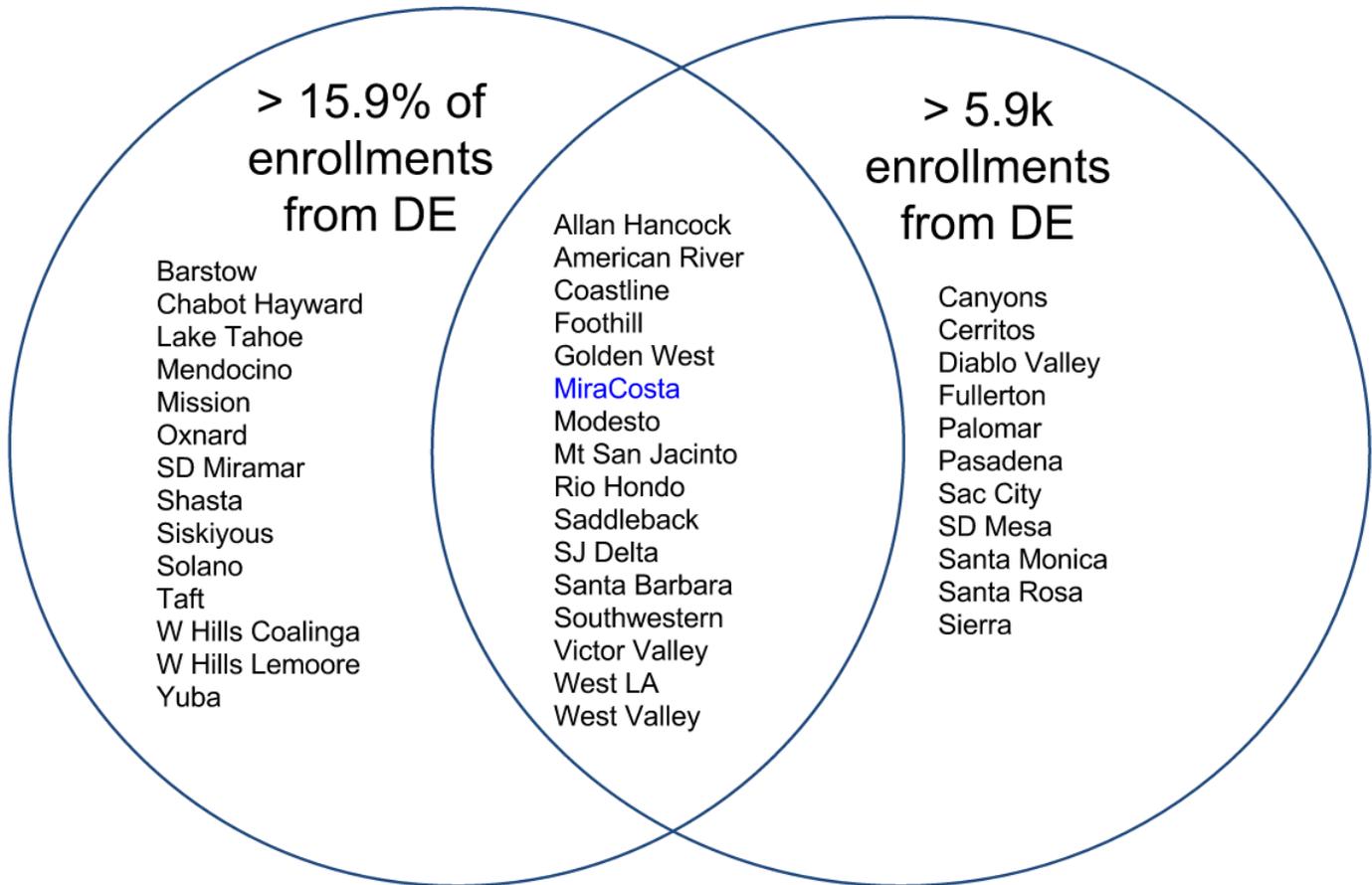


Figure 2. MiraCosta's relation to other California Community Colleges with large Distance Education programs.

Among the 16 peer colleges in the middle of the diagram, MiraCosta's success rate in DE is surpassed by only five colleges, but MiraCosta's retention rate in DE is surpassed by all 15.

As of the writing of this document, MiraCosta offers 24 degree programs for which the courses required for completion through the local general education pattern (Plan A) have been approved for offering via DE as well as 16 certificates of achievement. However, it is not well understood whether the courses are being systematically offered in a DE format such that students could actually complete the programs entirely via DE.

MiraCosta student satisfaction with DE has been surveyed annually since 2012, though 2014 results have not been published by the Chancellor's Office as of this writing. In both 2012 and 2013, MiraCosta students indicated satisfaction with DE classes similar to or slightly above the statewide average, with less than 10 percent of students saying that they would not recommend MiraCosta DE classes to others.

### Online Education Planning Process

The [Closure of 2011-2014 Online Education Plan](#) document describes the process of establishing a task force to close the previous OEP and develop a new one. Closing the previous plan took place  
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during 2013-14, and the development of this plan took place during 2014-15, with involvement of both the OEP task force and the MiraCosta Online Educators (MOE) committee throughout. This process has been overseen by MiraCosta's Academic Affairs governance committee, to which responsibility for the OEP has been routed.

During the writing of this document, the OEP task force included the following members:

- Faculty director of Online Education - Jim Julius
- Faculty/MOE representatives - Andrea Petri & Richard Ma
- Faculty/AAC representative - Francisco Alvarez
- Faculty/Student Services representative - Adrean Askerneese
- Classified/Academic Information Services (AIS) representative - Steve Schultz
- Administration/Instructional Services representative - Carlos Lopez
- Online Education Initiative pilot faculty - Christopher Sleeper and Curry Mitchell

This plan was approved by the Academic Affairs Committee on 05/08/2015, the Academic Senate on 08/28/2015, the Administrative Council on 09/17/2015, and the Cabinet on 11/10/2015.

### Organization of Plan

This document is organized by the areas most directly responsible for planning and completion of the action plans.

- Instruction, faculty, and shared governance
- Student services and support
- Technology
- Marketing and research
- Online Education program

While these areas typically correspond directly with MiraCosta's organizational structure, this arrangement may not reflect actual reporting lines in some instances.

The Online Education program area also establishes service area objectives to be addressed annually in the Online Education program review.

Appendices A and B provide more details regarding the alignment of this plan's goals with the MiraCosta institutional strategic plan.

## INSTRUCTION, FACULTY, AND SHARED GOVERNANCE

MiraCosta has a long tradition of faculty-led innovation and quality in online education. In recent years, MiraCosta has created a position for, and hired, a faculty director for online education through the governance process; has adopted significantly more detailed policy guidance in the administrative procedure for distance education; and has begun disaggregating data for different course modalities in program review and student learning outcome processes. In 2014, MiraCosta's Academic Senate also established MiraCosta Online Educators as a standing committee.

Faculty and instructional administrators need to work together over the next several years to continue to address issues related to the quality of online instruction, recognizing the increasing scrutiny in this area through accreditation and governmental regulation, while maintaining an environment of innovation, faculty leadership, and departmental responsibility. As a specific target, in fall of 2014, MiraCosta's vice president of Instructional Services challenged academic disciplines to narrow the gap between on-ground and DE success and retention rates to 5 percent or less.

Faculty and instructional administrators also need to investigate the demand for fully online degree and certificate programs and to develop and offer such opportunities accordingly. MiraCosta's involvement as one of the initial pilot colleges in the California Community College Online Education Initiative (OEI) will result in opportunities to use new tools and services, offer courses to new students, and enable MiraCosta students to access additional ways to earn credit; all of these opportunities must be carefully evaluated through shared governance.

As faculty develop and offer online classes, they need to consider how best to integrate and promote support services designed especially for students taking online classes. They also need to ensure, to the extent possible, that online students are informed of the requirements and expectations for success in online classes.

An important element of MiraCosta's three-year strategic plan is the development of a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Incorporating online education in the establishment of a CTL will help ensure that faculty support offered through the CTL is inclusive of all forms of teaching and learning.

MiraCosta has supported multiple course management systems for some time (e.g., Blackboard and Moodle for the last four years). Especially with the emergence of a common course management system from the OEI, MiraCosta faculty over the next several years should take the lead in evaluating whether the current situation is optimal or if it may be time to consider any changes in MiraCosta's approach to this core online education technology.

As online education technologies continue to emerge, mature, and become widely adopted, it is important for faculty to select and use technologies in ways that serve all learners, in compliance with internal and external procedures and regulations. Cost, accessibility, mobility, authentication, and privacy are among the key considerations faculty must attend to.

## STUDENT SERVICES & SUPPORT

MiraCosta is committed to providing an array of online student support services, not only to offer comparable services to “online students” but also to make it easier for all students to obtain support, enhance their engagement with MiraCosta College, and successfully complete their educational goals. Examples of these services include, but are not limited to the following:

- [Online tutoring](#) available in many subjects, seven days per week
- An [online writing center](#) service providing video feedback on student papers
- [Online library resources](#) including databases, eBooks, tutorials, online workshops, and a 24x7 live librarian chat
- [Online advising](#) services through live chat and self-serve online resources
- A [student orientation to online learning](#) available in person and live online multiple times each semester
- [Application and enrollment](#) processes that can be completed online
- [Financial aid](#) forms that can be completed online and/or at a distance via mail
- A fully online [orientation to MiraCosta College](#)
- The [student technology help desk](#).
- The [Proctoring Center](#) supporting on-campus and distant secure assessment for distance education classes.

Over the next three years, the overarching goals are to increase usage of these services equitably across all student populations, establish data analytic procedures to gauge the impact of these services in order to fine-tune their implementation and promotion, and to establish additional services to enhance student success and ensure compliance with distance education regulations.

More specifically, it is important to develop more effective communication and outreach targeted at students who are interested and/or enrolled in online classes. These developments can help raise awareness of the various support opportunities available online to students. In addition to the existing services listed above, new online services that will benefit students are already under development, including online counseling and online education planning. Additional services that should be investigated in the next three years include peer mentors who support students in online classes and new approaches to engaging students online with co-curricular activities.

Prevention of financial aid fraud in distance education is likely to increase as an area of concern from regulators and accreditors. This external requirement is important for student service areas, especially financial aid, to attend to in the next three years. Collaboration with the OEI to streamline the ability for students to take online classes from various California community colleges is another external requirement that will impact student support services in the near future.

## MARKETING AND RESEARCH

MiraCosta's 2011 Online Education Plan addressed the development of a "fourth site" for MiraCosta online education, comparable in scope and status to each of the three physical MiraCosta College sites. At this point, MiraCosta online education remains integral with the education programs of the three physical sites rather than distinct from them. However, it does seem clear that MiraCosta students interested in online education would benefit from greater clarity about the existence and scope of MiraCosta's online course offerings, student services, and other resources. And as MiraCosta College develops online programs that may be completed entirely at a distance, it becomes increasingly important to consider the unique identity and marketing efforts required for such programs.

MiraCosta College has in recent years provided more thorough program review data to academic departments disaggregated by course modality, which has enabled departments to consider the performance and efficiency of their distance education offerings. As MiraCosta continues to refine its practice of evidence-based planning and data-informed decision making, the development of new data management tools must consider the reporting requirements and opportunities specific to distance education, including details about distance education enrollments, success, and retention, for various student subgroups.

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## TECHNOLOGY

MiraCosta College's Academic Information Services (AIS) provides a core suite of technologies and technical resources required to support high-quality online education, including the following:

- Infrastructure
  1. Server capacity
  2. Wired and wireless networks
  3. Campus website.
- Core productivity technologies
  1. Email
  2. Office suite
  3. Virtualization of specialized applications: VMWare
  4. Student information system: PeopleSoft.
- Key instructional technologies
  1. Course management systems: Blackboard and Moodle
  2. Voice tools within Bb and Moodle: Blackboard Voice Authoring
  3. Synchronous web-conferencing: CCC Confer
  4. Screencasting: TechSmith Relay
  5. Assessment: Turnitin and Respondus
  6. Accessibility: Read & Write Gold
  7. Technology-enhanced classrooms that enable use of all of the above
  8. Computer labs with a variety of hardware and software, including discipline-specific technologies as needed.
- Technology support
  1. System development and maintenance staff
  2. Employee help desk
  3. Student help desk.

The MiraCosta College 2015-2018 Technology Plan provides a detailed look at the commitment to “deploy and sustain technology initiatives that support student success, teaching and learning, student services, and administrative functions of the district.” The plan highlights strategic focus areas, including student success and support, analytics, mobile and online, and reliable secure technology and infrastructure.

This plan reiterates the importance of MiraCosta's online education technology having sufficient capacity to meet teaching and learning needs while being fully accessible, mobile-friendly, and secure. Further, technology support—especially the student help desk—must be monitored to ensure students and faculty have the level of support they need.

## ONLINE EDUCATION PROGRAM

MiraCosta established a centralized Online Education office in 2011 when the college hired a faculty director of Online Education; the office also includes a classified faculty technology specialist. Initially reporting to the dean of AIS, the program began reporting to the dean of Math & Sciences in 2013. In recent years, the Online Education office has accomplished the following:

- Provided day-to-day faculty support as well as professional development (flex) workshops to more than 1,000 highly satisfied faculty attendees.
- Created a student orientation to online learning, with hundreds of highly satisfied student attendees.
- Worked with the Tutoring & Academic Support Center to establish an online tutoring service; supported the development of other new and improved online student support services.
- Worked with AIS to ensure core technologies for online education are updated, reliable, and supported.
- Supported pilots of a variety of new technologies; offered the Teaching/Technology Innovation Center for faculty to use specialized technology and obtain in-person support.
- Led the development of the successful 2014 Substantive Change Proposal for Distance Education.
- Established Online Education as a program that participates in program review; advocated for the disaggregation of DE outcomes data for all departments to use in continuous quality improvement efforts.
- Contributed to a significant revision of MiraCosta's primary policy document on distance education (AP 4105).
- Restarted regular communication about online and distance education with various MiraCosta constituencies, including the board of trustees.
- Helped MiraCosta to be selected as one of the initial pilot colleges in the statewide Online Education Initiative.

This plan establishes the following general service area objectives for the Online Education program at MiraCosta College:

1. Develop, implement, evaluate, and refine initiatives designed to improve online education access and equity at MiraCosta College.
2. Develop, implement, evaluate, and refine initiatives designed to improve distance education class and program success and retention.
3. Develop, implement, evaluate, and refine initiatives designed to improve student and faculty satisfaction with online education.
4. Develop, implement, evaluate, and refine initiatives designed to ensure compliance with government regulations and accreditor expectations with regard to distance education.

These service area objectives are to be used as the basis for the annual Online Education program review, and they should guide the activity of the MiraCosta Online Education program. Annually, service area outcomes (with specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound goals) for each of these may be established in concert with the action plans enumerated in this Online Education Plan.

The faculty director of Online Education will work in collaboration with the four areas described in the previous sections to fulfill all goals described. The director is also responsible for the following:

- Reporting and communicating online and distance education matters to all stakeholders
- Expanding and improving resources that support faculty involved in online education
- Continuing to expand the impact of the student orientation to online learning
- Ensuring MiraCosta remains in compliance with external regulations and accreditor expectations for distance education.