Substantive Change Proposal

Addition of courses that constitute 50% or more of a program offered through distance learning

Presented to ACCJC Committee on Substantive Change | November 4–5, 2010
SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE PROPOSAL

ADDITION OF COURSES THAT CONSTITUTE 50% OR MORE OF A PROGRAM OFFERED THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING

SIERRA COLLEGE
5000 ROCKLIN ROAD, ROCKLIN, CA  95677

September 14, 2010

Submitted by

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A. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE

Sierra College is requesting a substantive change to permit the use of distance education modalities to offer 49 degrees and 21 certificates in the following programs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dept</th>
<th>Name of Degree/Certificate</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Certificate</th>
<th>% distance instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>AAD Applied Art &amp; Design-Multimedia</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AAD Applied Art &amp; Design-Multimedia Administration of Justice-Corrections</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ADMJ Administration of Justice-Courts Concentration</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>ADMJ Administration of Justice-Law Enforcement Concentration</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>ADMJ Concentration</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>ART Art</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ART Art History</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>BIOL Biological Sciences</td>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>BIOL Watershed Ecology</td>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>BIOL Watershed Ecology</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>BUS Accounting</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>BUS Administrative Professional</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>BUS Business Administration</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>BUS Business Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>BUS General Business</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>BUS Management</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>86%</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>BUS Risk Management and Insurance Computer Information Systems-Administrative Technical Support</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>CIS Computer Information Systems-Computer Applications</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>CIS Computer Information Systems-Computer Support</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>CIS Computer Information Systems-Internet Support</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>CIS Computer Information Systems-Internet Support</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>CIS Computer Information Systems-Networking Support</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>CIS Virtual Office Professional-Administrative Virtual Office Professional-Technical Support</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>CIS Virtual Office Professional-Web Support</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>CIS Management</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>COMM Communication Studies-General</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>COMM Communication Studies-Graphic Design</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>COMM Communication Studies-Multimedia</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>COMM Communication Studies-Photography</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>CSCI Computer Science-Computer Science</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>CSCI Computer Science-Embedded Systems Computer Science-Management</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>CSCI Information Systems</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>CSCI Computer Science-Web Programming</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>EDU Liberal Studies-Elementary Education</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>ENGL English</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>ESS Environmental Studies and Sustainability</td>
<td>AS</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>FIRE Fire Technology</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate 100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>HDEV Early Childhood Education Teacher</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate 60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>HDEV Early Childhood Education-Master Teacher</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>HDEV Early Childhood Education-Site Supervisor</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>HIST History</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>HUM Humanities-Asian Studies</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>HUM Humanities-Diverse Perspectives</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>HUM Humanities-General</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>ARTS Arts and Cultures</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>NAT SCI Natural Science</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>NRSR Registered Nursing</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>PHED Physical Education</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>PHIL Philosophy</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>PSYC Psychology</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>REAL Real Estate</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>Certificate 57%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>RECM Recreation Management</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>SSCI Social and Behavioral Sciences</td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>WMST Women's Studies</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The intent of this document is to demonstrate that Sierra College has the appropriate planning and support structures in place to ensure high quality instruction should any program listed above elect to pursue offering a degree or certificate via distance education. These programs are listed in the college catalog and are currently offered using traditional modalities. Not every program listed will immediately pursue a degree or certificate using this distance education modality; however, all of the programs currently offer a substantial number of courses in this modality and could reasonably be expected to move in that direction in the near future. Many of the courses in these programs might also be used to satisfy general education requirements for an AA/AS degree.

At Sierra College, distance education modalities include courses broadcast synchronously and asynchronously using cable television, courses offered online, hybrid courses offered using a combination of online and on-site instruction, and courses offered on-site enhanced by the Internet and the World Wide Web. Online instruction and web enhancements for all courses currently utilize the Blackboard Course Management System, and promote the use of blogs, wikis, social networking channels, and podcasts to advance student learning. At Sierra College and throughout this document, the use of distance education modalities is regularly referred to as the “distance-learning program.”

**RATIONALE FOR THE PROPOSED CHANGE**

The rationale for distance learning as a modality for delivering certificates and degrees is aptly stated in the ACCJC Distance Learning Manual:

“[Distance education] can be a convenient, flexible, and effective means of providing education. Nearly half of all
the college students in the country are of the age group once thought of as nontraditional. They are working adults or adults seeking first educational credentials or retraining. Many working adult students with multiple demands on their time find distance education to meet their needs better than campus-based education.

In addition to working adults, the traditional-aged college students come to campus with extensive experience using digital technologies in their personal and school lives. For these students, distance education that involves use of Internet, web casts, text messaging, and other digital media is comfortable and familiar.

Many campus-based students are also now taking at least part of their educational programming through distance education classes. For some institutions, the pedagogical strategies successfully used in distance education classes with distant students (for example, on line chat rooms and electronic voting or feedback) have been incorporated into routine programs and services offered in classrooms on campus or provided for students who are physically on campus and don’t necessarily need to use technology to connect with the campus.”

In addition to the reasons cited above, the California Community College system has, for several decades, supported the notion of distance education as a means “to address student access issues related to geographical, cultural, or facility barriers.”

The use of technology to connect with students across Sierra College’s 3,200 square miles is critical to students achieving their educational goals. Sierra Joint Community College District is one of the largest geographic districts in the state and serves all of Placer and Nevada Counties. Students in remote areas, particularly those in eastern Nevada and Placer Counties, may have to travel more than an hour to get to a Sierra campus. Weather is also a factor related to access for Sierra students since much of the area served is in the Sierra Nevada or Sierra Foothills where snow and inclement weather can make travel difficult, dangerous, and sometimes, impossible.

The use of distance education modalities allows the college to efficiently maximize student and staff time; improve safety for faculty, staff, and students; decrease the need for additional classroom facilities; reduce the need for parking; and lessen the need for other physical resources related to on-site instruction.
RELATIONSHIP TO THE COLLEGE MISSION AND INSTITUTIONAL OUTCOMES

Offering degrees and certificates using distance education modalities is congruent with the college’s mission statement:

_Sierra College provides a challenging and supportive learning environment for students having diverse goals, abilities, and needs interested in transfer, career and technical training, and lifelong learning. The College’s programs and services encourage students to identify and to expand their potential. Sierra College students will develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to become engaged and contributing members of the community._

(Approved June 28, 2008 by the Board of Trustees)

As described in the section above, the variety of distance education tools offered by Sierra College supports the diverse goals, abilities and needs of students by acknowledging that students have differing learning styles and physical abilities. Employing distance education modalities increases access for all students thus making it easier for students to achieve their potential. With technology woven into virtually every aspect of modern life, the definition of “community” and what it means to be a participant in our global world is beginning to change. Using technology-based tools to augment and sometimes, supplant, face to face education, students are allowed to fully explore and develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to become engaged and contributing members of the communities of today.

For these same reasons, distance education also relates to many of the core values of the college as set forth in the Sierra College Strategic Plan (1. Strategic Plan 2008-2011) and Educational Master Plan (2. Ed Master Plan 2009-2019).

_Strategic Plan: Goal I Educational Effectiveness_
- Strategy 4 – Develop and support pedagogically sound online education courses and services, and degree programs
- Strategy 5 – Increase student success in distance education

_Educational Master Plan_
- Providing tools for continuing success in an ever-changing world
- Providing and demonstrating the value of an inclusive community
- Creating and nurturing meaningful connections to the community
- Recognizing that students are active participants in their education
- Supporting and demonstrating the sustainable use of all resources.

The college’s Distance Learning and Instructional Technology (DLIT) Strategic Plan 2007-2008 includes the following mission statement:
To promote student success by facilitating the achievement of learning outcomes in traditional and distance education environments; to facilitate access by developing a fully integrated online student support system; and to provide effective training and support in the development and application of high quality instructional technology.

Student and faculty demand, Chancellor’s Office support, statewide initiatives, and regional initiatives were initial indicators of need for distance education modalities. Research done by the Sloan Consortium, Educause, the Pew Research Center, Quality Matters, @ONE, and other regional and national organizations continue to substantiate the need for this modality and have helped guide development and use at the college.

Student and faculty response to current course offerings has been exceedingly positive, with success and retention rates consistent with trends across the state and nation. Response to the broad availability of web-enhancement for all on-site courses has also affirmed the ongoing need for technology-based instructional support.

HISTORY AND OVERVIEW

In 1987, Sierra College began experimenting with distance education by offering courses via cable television. This experiment was successful and within a few years programming was offered on two channels Monday through Friday, 8 am to 9 pm. The nature of this modality imposed space and time restrictions, as well as costly hardware and staff that ultimately made offering degrees and certificates via cable TV untenable.

In 1998 the district hired a full-time faculty coordinator to oversee the cable TV distance-learning program and chair its steering committee in response to the sustained growth in distance education. In spring 2001 the college offered the first online course. Wildly successful in terms of meeting student demand and instructor preference, by fall 2004 the program had grown to incorporate 108 sections, 86 courses, 83 full and part-time faculty, and 2,283 students. The 108 sections represented approximately 5% of the college’s total course offerings and were selected by faculty members, based upon their interest and training. By fall of 2008 the number of sections increased to 234, representing approximately 10% of total course offerings.

It must be noted that during this period of significant growth and considerable fiscal challenges, the college was able to accelerate online student success and retention as shown by the graphs below.
INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT

The use of distance education modalities has had a positive impact on the institution in several ways. Faculty use of web-based resources in on-site classes has led to the demand for “smart classroom” technology at all four sites. This initiative is noted in the district’s Educational Master Plan, Strategic Plan, and DLIT Strategic Plan as the use of web-based resources adds new modalities and dimensions to the traditional direct-instruction classroom.

Podcasts, blogs, wikis, social networking sites and other audio and video tools are used extensively at Sierra College to enhance student learning in online, TV, and on-site classes. For many faculty, the use of new technologies has been an invigorating experience that has refreshed their interest in teaching and student learning. Students and faculty expect today’s relevant institutions to utilize distance education as an effective and timely learning modality. Distance education is not a choice; it is an imperative.
Faculty continue to demonstrate their support for distance learning as evidenced by the approval and recent reaffirmation from the Academic Senate for new training and preparation policies for online instructors as well as the continued submission of new courses for approval for an online mode (22 such courses in 2009-2010 alone).

And yet another positive impact of online instruction is the reduction in physical resource needs such as classrooms. Online offerings have reduced competition for classroom space at the main campus in Rocklin during often-impacted “prime time” between 9 am and 2 pm. Online offerings have also expanded options for degree and certificate completion for students who attend primarily at the Nevada County and Truckee campuses where class size, instructor availability, and other constraints limit the availability of courses.

B. PLANNING PROCESS THAT LED TO THE REQUEST FOR CHANGE

In 2006, distance education was first included in district wide planning efforts. The Board of Trustees formally acknowledged the importance of the program and indicated the need for additional planning and resources in their planning assumptions.

In 2008, the Distance Learning and Instructional Technology Strategic plan was developed and the Distance Learning steering committee renamed the Distance Learning and Instructional Technology (DLIT or “delight”) Committee and became a standing committee of the Academic Senate. The DLIT Strategic Plan 2007-2008 (3. DLIT Strategic Plan 2007-08) addresses in detail program needs for distance education resources and addresses strategies to increase student retention and success. The plan also sets forth action items, including development of online certificates and degrees and the filing of this substantive change request. A summary of the goals is listed below for reference. The full text of the plan is appended to this document.

• STRATEGIC GOAL 1: RESOURCES AND PROGRAM GROWTH
  o 1:1 Technology: Provide current and appropriate software and hardware for online and web enhanced classes.
  o 1:2 Staffing: Provide adequate staff to support online and web enhanced classes.
  o 1:3 Budget: Provide adequate funding for support of online and web enhanced classes.
  o 1:4 Curriculum: Scale course and section offerings for an appropriate, comprehensive, and well balanced schedule of classes leading to certificates and degrees.
  o 1:5 Faculty Development, Evaluation, and Support: Provide faculty training and technical assistance for developing and maintaining discipline specific online and web-enhanced teaching and develop a process for regular and effective faculty evaluation and
improvement.

- **1:6 Student Services:** Provide online students access to services comparable/equivalent to on ground.
- **1:7 Marketing:** Implement marketing strategies to specifically address online programs.

**STRATEGIC GOAL 2: STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS**

- Improve student retention and success in online courses to equal that of “on ground” courses.

The district noted the need for a Substantive Change Report in parallel with the completion of the DLIT plan in 2008. The Substantive Change Report was put on hold, however, as the college was placed on Warning by the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges in early 2008. As the Commission is aware, colleges on Warning are not eligible to submit Substantive Change Reports. Sierra College was removed from Warning and the college’s accreditation reaffirmed in January of 2010.

**C. HUMAN, ADMINISTRATIVE, FINANCIAL, AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES**

**FACULTY, MANAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT STAFF**

Administration of the distance education program at Sierra College is the responsibility of the vice president of student services and is directly supervised by the dean of the library and learning resource center. *(4. Organizational Chart 2010-11)*

A full-time faculty coordinator oversees the day-to-day operations associated with distance education. *(5. LRC Coordinator)* The faculty coordinator is an ex-officio member of the Curriculum Committee and is the chair of the Distance Learning and Instructional Technology Committee. Two full-time distance learning support specialists and two part-time production assistants provide classified support for the program.

Affiliated with the distance-learning program is the iTech lab, a 20-station Mac dual-platform computer lab dedicated by the district for technology training for all full and part time faculty and staff members. The iTech lab curriculum and instruction is overseen by one full-time faculty member with reassigned time of 40% provided by the Instruction Office.

Other staff members in the district with assigned duties related to the distance education program include faculty in counseling, the writing center, and the library. An assigned faculty counselor provides online counseling services, and
the online writing center has shown impressive results.

**FACULTY TRAINING**

Faculty training is tailored to the specific distance education modality.

**Cable TV Sections:**
Training consists of three hours of one-on-one instruction provided by the Distance Learning Coordinator. A secondary, but growing, application of video is the potential to incorporate streaming video as podcasts into several other distance modalities. As this need increases, additional training for faculty may be needed and a proposal for a new training module to address that need is in development.

**Online Sections:**
Prior to teaching their first online section faculty are required to participate in a four-week online training course developed and taught by the distance learning coordinator. *(6. Online Training Syllabus)* Further, several months prior to offering a course for the first time, online instructors are required to have at least 25% of the course completed and available for review by the DLIT committee to ensure that the curriculum and structure of the online course is pedagogically sound and consistent with best practices as shared throughout the training course. A “best practices” rubric is shared with the instructor and used by committee members to evaluate course content and instructor competency.

**Web-Enhanced Sections:**
On-going faculty and staff technology training sessions are offered by the Distance Education Coordinator (typically Blackboard training) and through the iTech lab. *(7. Fall 2010 Blackboard Workshops)* If desired, faculty and staff may also participate in the annual Sierra Online Summit, which is taught by the Distance Education Coordinator and online faculty members as an intensive, weeklong, instructional technology workshop. This workshop is highly recommended but is not mandatory.

Article 23 of The Sierra College Faculty Association Contract defines the minimum number of contact hours online faculty are to have with students, specifies the maximum number of distance education sections that may be taught by an individual instructor during a given semester, specifies class size maximums for distance learning courses, describes course development stipends, faculty training, composition of the distance learning committee, and review of distance learning course materials by the committee. *(8. SCFA Article 23-Cable and Online)*

**EQUIPMENT, FACILITIES, AND FISCAL RESOURCES**

Facilities to support the distance-learning program include a television studio, control room, post-production bay, the 20-station iTech computer lab, and offices
to house support staff. The distance learning support specialists and the college Information and Instructional Technology Department provide technology support for faculty and staff. Additional support is provided by Blackboard, which hosts the server for the course management system, and Edustream which hosts streaming video. Sierra College’s Learning Resources Center server hosts the Distance learning web site.

The distance-learning program’s annual operating budget is approximately $420,000 and is managed through the Learning Resources Center. Staff salaries and benefits require $375,000, with an annual budget which includes $44,000 for equipment and supply purchases.

With the hiring of a full-time Distance Education Coordinator in 1998, Sierra College began to make significant financial commitments to support the growth of distance education. In addition to the full-time faculty coordinator, there are two full-time classified support staff who provide the technical and general support assistance both for TV and online components of the program; and two half-time television control room operators whose duties include managing the broadcasts of the thirteen live television classes offered each semester.

The Information and Instructional Technology Division is responsible for maintaining an annual contract of approximately $200,000 with Blackboard for licensing and hosting the district’s course management system.

In addition to the permanent Distance Learning support staff, the Office of Instruction grants release time of between 40% - 60% to a full-time faculty member to provide technology training and support to other faculty and staff. With 10% of its enrollment currently being generated by distance education online classes, and over $500,000 allocated annually to the delivery of online instruction, the College is firmly committed to sustaining and growing its DE program.

STUDENT INFORMATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Information about distance learning courses, student support services, and how to be successful in distance learning classes is abundant.

A general description of Distance Learning is included in the college catalog (9. Sierra College Catalog 2010-11) which is available as a hard copy document for purchase or in PDF format on the college web site. Extensive and detailed information about online services and the distance-learning program is featured prominently on the Sierra College web site both on the main web page http://www.sierracollege.edu/OnlineServices/index.html (10. Online Services screen shot) and the dedicated distance learning web page http://lrc.sierracollege.edu/dl. (11. Distance Learning screen shot)

Distance learning web pages and links provide students with comprehensive information about televised courses, online courses, the Blackboard course management system, and online student support services. Links are provided to
the Distance Learning Handbook (*12. Distance Learning Handbook*) that contains minimum computer requirements, FAQ’s, strategies for success, and information about course books, adding/dropping procedures, and testing center information. Student information also includes an online student readiness quiz.

An online Writing Program was piloted Spring 2009 (Online Virtual Writing Center) and recent data provided by the district’s research office indicates a strong positive correlation between utilization of the center and student success rates.

During the 2008-2009 year, a new online course titled *How to be a Successful Online Student* (SKDV 10) was developed. Though not a prerequisite at this time, students are strongly encouraged to take this course. In the spring of 2010, having collected one year of data, students who completed SKDV 10 had a 76% success rate in online courses compared with a 60% success rate for those not taking the course. (*13. SKDV 10 Online Learning data*)

Registration, academic advising, assistance with writing assignments, and library services are all available online. Online assessment and orientation services are being updated and revised and are slated to be offered during the spring 2011 semester.

Student authentication and testing security requirements are met in two ways. First, through the Blackboard Course Management System, students are required to sign in using a secure password. Second, for online examinations Respondus LockDown Browser provides students and faculty with a secure testing environment.

**D. EVIDENCE THAT THE INSTITUTION HAS RECEIVED INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL APPROVALS**

Sierra College is fully compliant with the requirements set forth by good practice, Title 5, the Chancellor’s Office, and the district’s Curriculum Committee.

The Curriculum Committee, a standing committee of the Academic Senate, approves curriculum at Sierra College. Degree and certificate offerings are reviewed and approved by the Educational Requirements Committee, also a standing committee of the Academic Senate. To ensure quality and rigor in distance learning, the California Education Code and Title 5 Section 55206 requires a separate review for any course offered using a distance education modality.

The Sierra College faculty contract stipulates that all online faculty are evaluated following an initial, one-semester term. Evaluation visits can occur individually within a two week period. Evaluation criteria include course statistics to evaluate the frequency and amount of student contact, communication time spent with students, response time to students, level of participation in course discussion
board, and quality of lectures and assessments.

Student evaluations are administered online in a confidential manner each semester, with results going to the peer-led evaluation team and area dean. Specific forms for online evaluations are maintained by the Human Resources Department. *(14. SCFA Article 19, pp. 19.14-19.15)*

To further ensure quality and rigor in the Distance Learning program, the faculty contract also stipulates that all new online instructors receive approval from the Distance Learning Committee prior to the beginning of the semester. The Committee may require training that includes course management skills for online classes, support services for technological delivery systems, the development of course materials, online teaching pedagogy that would apply to each specific discipline, and common syllabus terms.

Instructors are eligible to receive a development stipend prior to teaching an online class for the first time. Instructors must have completed the District’s Distance Learning training program in order to be eligible to receive the stipend. Additionally, the faculty must submit at least 25% of their online courses for review by the Distance Learning Committee. This includes lectures, assessments, discussion questions, group projects and other applicable instructional tools. Any recommended modifications must be made by the faculty prior to receiving approval to teach the class and prior to receiving their stipend. *(8. SCFA Article 23, pp. 23.1–23.2)*

Information on these requirements is made available to faculty in the Curriculum Handbook *(15. Curriculum Handbook 2010-11)*. Other quality assurances include the annual report listing new distance learning courses submitted to the ACCJC. *(16. ACCJC – 2010 Annual Report Submission)*

The DLIT Committee, composed of faculty, classified, and administrative staff, serves as the gatekeeper for quality standards for the distance-learning program. The Distance Learning Strategic Plan addresses student success and retention, proposes a metric “equal to that of on ground courses,” and sets forth other quality assurance measures and timelines for completion.

Student achievement metrics are embedded in the college’s planning process and results are verified annually. An entire section of the college’s annual Factbook *(17. Factbook 2009-10)* is devoted to distance learning and includes information on student demographics, enrollments, and outcomes.

An Online Student Satisfaction Survey, developed and deployed by the DLIT Committee in the spring of 2007, revealed that students are generally satisfied with the quality of online courses and the online learning experience at Sierra College. While survey results were generally quite good, the Committee did note several areas for improvement to better align with best practices. Those items are embedded in the Distance Learning Strategic Plan.
As for student verification, the college has a password protected access system to ensure the identification of the account user and prevent fraudulent access. When students first apply to the college a student account is generated behind a secure web interface, through the college’s “MySierra” web portal. Students are sent a unique username and default password. Students are given the option to change their password after their first successful login to the system. They must provide answers to three secret questions that may be required upon subsequent access. All student accounts are automatically uploaded into Blackboard, the college’s web-based course management system, via a secured FTP.

Students are required to change their passwords every 364 days although the system accommodates unlimited user-requested password resets.

To create an additional security level, only the accounts of those students who register in courses using Blackboard (online or web-enhanced) are uploaded into Blackboard, thus precluding access by non-registered students.

This Substantive Change Proposal was shared with the Academic Senate and DLIT Committee. Senate approval was given on September 1, 2010. (18. 090110 Academic Senate Recollections) The Board of Trustees reviewed the proposal and approved it on September 14, 2010. (19. Board agenda/minutes pending)

E. EVIDENCE THAT THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS WILL BE FULFILLED

1. Authority
Sierra College has been a fully accredited institution since 1952. The most recent accreditation self-study was completed in the fall of 2007 and the college’s accreditation status was reaffirmed by the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges in January of 2010.

2. Mission
The college’s mission statement, approved by the Board of Trustees on June 24, 2008, affirms its commitment to offering a broad range of learning modalities, including distance education.

*Sierra College Mission Statement:*

> Sierra College provides a challenging and supportive learning environment for students having diverse goals, abilities, and needs interested in transfer, career and technical training, and lifelong learning. The College’s programs and services encourage students to identify and to expand their potential. Sierra College students will develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to become engaged and contributing members of the community.
In addition, the college has eight Core Values which guide institutional decision-making. In particular, Core Values 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8 are directly applicable to, and influence decisions relative to, distance education.

Core Values:
1. Support and model excellence in teaching, learning, scholarship, and creativity.
2. Provide the tools for continuing success in an ever-changing world.
3. Provide, and demonstrate the value of, an inclusive community.
4. Demonstrate collaboration in decision making.
5. Foster active citizenship in our community, our nation, and our world.
6. Create and nurture meaningful connections to our community.
7. Recognize that students are active participants in their own education.
8. Support and demonstrate the sustainable use of all resources.

3. Governing Board
A seven-member Board of Trustees has the ultimate responsibility for the quality, integrity, and financial stability of the institution and all distance education programs and services. The Board agendas regularly include new and revised courses and programs which are to be offered in a distance education format. In addition, the Board receives periodic presentations specific to distance education programs and services as well as an annual presentation each summer regarding student success in distance education.

4. Chief Executive Officer
The Board of Trustees appoints the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who possesses the authority to administer board policies relative to distance education. The CEO serves as both the District Superintendent and President of the college, as well as secretary to the Board of Trustees.

5. Administrative Capacity
The college has sufficient staff, with the appropriate preparation and experience, to provide administrative services necessary to support the mission.
Administration of the distance education program at Sierra College is the responsibility of the vice president of student services and is directly supervised by the dean of the library and learning resource center.

6. Operational Status
The college offers a variety of educational programs and services including a range of transfer, career technical and life-long learning programs. Offerings and programs change regularly to reflect the needs of students enrolled on-ground as well as online.

7. Degrees
The vast majority, or approximately 85%, of all Sierra College courses fulfill program requirements for AA/AS degrees or certificates in either on-ground or
online modalities. In addition, a substantial number of students receive degrees or certificates, or prepare for transfer to four-year institutions. In 2007, Sierra College granted the highest number of AA/AS degrees of any California Community College.

8. Educational Programs
Sierra College’s principal distance education and on-ground courses and degree programs are congruent with the mission, based on recognized fields of study in higher education, of sufficient content and length, conducted at levels of quality and rigor appropriate to the degrees offered, and culminate in identified student learning outcomes.

9. Academic Credit
The Curriculum Committee determines specific unit credit total for individual distance education courses, following the guidelines established in the California Community College Chancellor’s Office Program and Course Approval Handbook.

10. Student Learning and Achievement
Course objectives for all distance education courses are defined in WebCMS, the college’s course management system. Program outcomes are recorded for degree and certificate programs, along with concomitant assessment activities, in a web-based program entitled TracDat.

11. General Education
General education distance education courses meet and exceed the requirements of Title 5 Regulations (Section 55063) and are designed to ensure breadth of knowledge, development of critical thinking skills, and promote intellectual inquiry. To earn a degree, students must demonstrate competence in writing and computational skills, as well as critical thinking through assessment, or courses, or both. The Curriculum Committee reviews all general education courses offered in a distance education modality for quality and intellectual rigor before accepting new or revised courses. In addition, all courses, both on-ground and online, are scheduled for curriculum review every six years.

12. Academic Freedom
Sierra College promotes academic freedom, free inquiry, and intellectual independence as a central feature of its distance education curriculum.

13. Faculty
As of fall 2009, the college had two hundred and twenty one full-time faculty members to teach and provide services to students. Full-time faculty members develop new programs and courses, maintain quality in existing programs, conduct curriculum review, engage in departmental and strategic planning, serve on standing and ad hoc committee, act as coordinators and department chairs and provide a variety of services to the community and college outside of the classroom.
Faculty, both full- and part-time, are required to attend an intensive one-week training session and receive approval of at least 25% of their proposed online course from the DLIT committee prior to teaching an online class for the first time.

14. Student Services
The college provides a range of student services consistent with its student population and its mission. Below is a list of some of the services available for distance education students.

- Real-time schedule of classes with capability to search by course name, location, instructor name, instructional method (e.g. T.V, online, on-ground, hybrid), date/ and times, General Education attribute, and course length
- Register and pay fees online
- Course and section deadline dates such as add deadline, refund deadline, etc.
- Assessment test results
- Financial aid services
- iTunes U
- Academic Support Services
- Online counseling
- Online orientation
- Online library services

15. Admissions
Sierra College maintains open admissions policies for distance education in adherence to the Education Code and Title 5 Regulations. Where admission is not automatic, the college publicizes the conditions and procedures required for admission.

16. Information and Learning Resources
The college maintains two complete Learning Resource Centers (LRC), one at the main campus in Rocklin, and the second at the Nevada County Campus. The Tahoe Truckee campus and Roseville Gateway sites have a variety of library, laboratory and support services available, but are more specific to localized program needs.

At Rocklin, the LRC includes the Distance Learning studio, Media Center, faculty and staff technology training lab, Writing Center, Tutoring Center, Language Lab, and open computer labs. Students and staff can access online library catalogs, periodicals, and other research databases from home or any Sierra College center or campus.

17. Financial Resources
The institution documents a funding base and financial resources adequate to support distance education programs and services. The college receives additional revenues for distance education through grants, certain categorical funds, and an independent foundation.
18. Financial Accountability
Accounting and budget practices adhere to the procedures detailed in the California Community College Budget and Accounting Manual. The college’s financial records are audited annually by an independent Certified Public Accountant. The college received an “A+” credit rating as referenced by the 2008-09 audited financial statements.

19. Institutional Planning and Evaluation
In January 2008, the college completely redesigned its planning and evaluation process, placing the mission and the 2008-2011 Strategic Plan at its core. The new annual ePAR (electronic planning and resource) planning and budgeting cycle was deployed in February 2009 for the 09-10 year. Each February, department chairs request needed staffing, equipment and facilities for distance education courses and programs.

The appropriate educational administrator and vice president then review the ePARs and provide feedback regarding all resource requests. Following a review of alignment of resource requests with program review findings and strategic directions, Strategic Council, the college’s primary planning shared governance committee, considers and recommends resource prioritizations to the President.

20. Public Information
Both the online and printed copy of the Sierra College Catalog provide constituencies with precise, accurate, and current information concerning the following:

General Information
- Official Name, Addresses, Telephone Numbers, and web site
- Educational Mission
- Course, Program and Degree Offerings
- Academic Calendar and Program Length
- Academic Freedom Statement
- Student Financial Aid
- Learning Resources
- Names and Degrees of Administrators and Faculty
- Names of Governing Board Members

Requirements
- Admissions
- Student Fees and Other Financial Obligations
- Degree, Certificates, Graduation and Transfer

Major Policies Affecting Students
- Academic Regulations, including Academic Honesty
- Nondiscrimination
- Acceptance of Transfer Credits
- Grievance and Complaint Procedures
- Sexual Harassment
• Refund of Fees

Location or Publications Where Other Policies may be Found
• Board Policies
• Administrative Procedures
• Sierra College web site
• Student Handbook

21. Relations with the Accrediting Commission
The Board of Trustees and the College fulfill their obligations to the Accrediting Commission as outlined in these criteria: Board policies establish the relations of the Board and the college and guide the activities related to distance education. The Board is informed about the accreditation process through regular reports from the Accreditation Steering Committee and through participation in the accreditation process.

Board members serve on accreditation standards committees and participate as members of site visitation teams for other colleges. The Vice President of Instruction acts as the liaison office to ACCJC.

F. EVIDENCE THAT THE ACCREDITATION STANDARDS WILL BE FULFILLED

Standard 1: Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

Mission: The college’s mission statement, approved by the Board of Trustees on June 24, 2008, affirms its commitment to offering a broad range of learning modalities, including distance education. Online courses provide learning opportunities for students who might not be able to attend college.

Improving Institutional Effectiveness: Sierra College has a regular program review process in place for all instructional, student services, and operational programs, as well as three-year strategic and educational master plan processes. In addition, the Sierra College Research Office produces an annual Factbook which provides key demographic, enrollment, financial and outcome indicators.

Standard 2: Student Learning Programs and Services

Instructional Programs: Program review is in place to systematically assess the currency and relevancy of curriculum and teaching methodologies. Online courses are subject to an equivalent curriculum and program review process as compared to on-ground. Students in remote areas, particularly those in eastern Nevada and Placer Counties, will have access from areas where snow and inclement weather can make travel difficult, dangerous, and sometimes, impossible.

Student Support Services: The college catalog and schedule of classes are
available online. Students may apply and enroll for classes by going online to the college’s web site (www.sierracollege.edu). In addition, students are able to add and drop classes, pay for classes and purchase parking permits online. Currently, many of the college’s student services are available online. As examples, the financial aid office is fully online, and counseling and orientation are available online.

**Library and Learning Support Services:** The Sierra College library (http://lrc.sierracollege.edu/) offers many services for distance learners. The library has links for online students and includes the online catalog, the online databases, and online research assistance.

Learning support services now include: financial aid, iTunes U, academic support services, counseling and an “Are You Ready for an Online?” tutorial.

**Standard 3: Resources**

**Human Resources:** All full-time and adjunct faculty meet state and district minimum qualifications to be eligible to teach online courses. All personnel are treated equitably, evaluated regularly and systematically, and are provided opportunities for professional development. The Staff Development Center as well as the iTech lab offer workshops and training for faculty interested in teaching online.

With the hiring of a full-time Distance Education Coordinator in 1998, Sierra College began to make significant financial commitments to support the growth of distance education. In addition to the full-time faculty coordinator, there are two full-time classified support staff who provide the technical and general support assistance both for TV and online components of the program; and two half-time television control room operators whose duties include managing the broadcasts of the thirteen live television classes offered each semester.

**Physical Resources:** Facilities to support the distance-learning program include a television studio, control room, post-production bay, the 20-station iTech computer lab, and offices to house support staff.

**Technology Resources:** Technology planning is integrated with facilities and educational master plan planning activities. In addition, the college’s Technology Master Plan 2008 addresses the essential need for the college to enhance learning and deliver services effectively and efficiently to all students by continuing to plan and upgrade technology infrastructure in a systematic manner.

**Financial Resources:** The college and district’s financial planning and budget processes provide sufficient and stable support for the college. The district contracts with an outside vendor (Blackboard) to support online courses.
Standard 4: Leadership & Governance

Decision-Making Roles and Processes: Decisions at Sierra College are made by a variety of individuals and groups depending on the nature of the decision. Decision-making responsibilities vary by the type of employee as described in AB 1725 and documented in Sierra College Board Policy 2510. Final decision-making authority rests with the Board of Trustees.

Board and Administrative Organization: Sierra College operates within the required governing board policies and regulations.

G. THE FUTURE

Where are we projected to go from here? Enrollment in online courses is projected to increase at approximately 5% per year for the next three years, exceeding the estimated 2.5% enrollment growth for all students.

To meet this projected enrollment growth, the DLIT Master Plan recommends the following key components to ensure the continued success of Sierra College’s distance education program and its students:

Facilities, Equipment and Software

- Fund regular technology refreshes for existing iTech Lab equipment, staff computers, and SMART classrooms.
- Increase the number of SMART classrooms across the district.
- Create a dedicated budget for Distance Learning and Instructional Technology to include salaries and income currently in the LRC budget as well as new positions.

Degree and Certificates

- Review course and section offerings for depth and breadth. Make
recommendations to departments for additions/deletions.

- Establish fully online certificates and degrees.

**Quality**

- Establish process to ensure program integrity with consistency in sections regardless of delivery mode (on ground, online, hybrid).
- Through the appropriate governing bodies, develop a faculty evaluation process that addresses the uniqueness of the online environment yet is comparable to and consistent with the process used to evaluate faculty in an on ground setting.
- Through the appropriate governing bodies, develop a process to ensure a regular evaluation cycle for all online instructors.

**Training**

- Develop online resources that facilitate faculty collaboration and sharing of best practices.
- Develop a long term plan for delivering iTech Lab training programs to respond to emerging uses of instructional technology (iTunes U/podcasting).
- Improve campus-wide dialogue about role of technology in 21st century teaching and learning.
- Provide funding for faculty to attend external online training conferences.

**Staffing**

- Secure release time for Instructional Technology Coordinator.
- Hire a new Instructional Technology Specialist (Classified).
- Hire a new Associate Dean of Distance Learning & Instructional Technology.
- Hire a new Administrative Assistant (Classified).
- Hire a new Instructional Design Coordinator – full-time (Faculty).
- Hire a new support person for Instructional Design and Distance Learning (Classified).

**Support**

- Market online certificate and degree programs as they become available and are approved.
- Complete development of online assessment, BOG Waiver and video orientation services.
- Expand online counseling services including the use of Blackboard for chat rooms, informational video, podcasts and other self-services.
- Develop a comprehensive online orientation program including a testing instrument.
- Develop Blackboard support course (in addition to Blackboard orientation).

In summary, technology pervades all that we do, both formally and informally relative to education. Offering degrees and certificates via distance learning is a service to students that is consistent with the Sierra College mission and
institutional values and included in all college planning processes and documents. The human, administrative, financial, and physical resources necessary to support a distance learning program are in place, as are the organizational structures necessary to ensure program quality and compliance with Accrediting Commission standards.
H. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION AND ENDNOTES

(all supporting documentation available under separate cover)
1. Strategic Plan 2008-2011 (pp 12-13)
2. Ed Master Plan 2009-2019 (pp 7, 27-29)
3. DLIT Strategic Plan 2007-08 (pp 3, 10-13)
4. Organizational Chart 2010-11
5. LRC Coordinator
6. Online Training Syllabus
7. Fall 2010 Blackboard Workshops
8. SCFA Article 23-Cable and Online
9. Sierra College Catalog 2010-11 (pp 10, 31)
10. Online Services screen shot
11. Distance Learning screen shot
12. Distance Learning Handbook
13. SKDV 10 Online Learning data
14. SCFA Article 19
15. Curriculum Handbook 2010-11 (p 43)
16. ACCJC – 2010 Annual report Submission
17. Factbook 2009-10
18. 090110 Academic Senate Recollections
19. Board Agenda/minutes pending

A. Distance Education & Correspondence Education Manual, A Publication of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges Western Association of Schools and Colleges, August 2009, p 2

B. Periodic Report on Distance Education, California Community College Chancellor’s Office, Academic Affairs Division, September 1, 2009, p 3

C. Sierra College Accreditation Self-Study 2007, pp 24, 80, 82, 86-87, 88, 104

D. Sample Curriculum Committee Agenda and Minutes

E. iTech Lab – Spring 2010 Workshop Schedule

F. Sierra College Followup letter from ACCJC dated January 29, 2010