

Quality Assurance for Distance Education at the San Diego Community College District

OPERATIONAL BENCHMARKS FOR ASSURING DISTANCE EDUCATION QUALITY

Online and Distributed Learning is the support division for the San Diego Community College District's distance education programs. The following core values and services, outlined below, frame the operational benchmarks for assuring distance education quality.

Our core values are:

1. To provide high-quality instructional services to our teaching-learning community--the faculty, staff and students of City College, Mesa College, Miramar College, and Continuing Education
2. To foster instructional leadership in the adoption of best practices for the use of technology to promote educational effectiveness.
3. To promote quality innovative approaches to teaching and learning via technology-mediated instruction.

The Division of Online and Distributed Learning promotes the following elements essential to ensuring excellence in distance education at the San Diego Community College District:

1. Curriculum development for online and technology-enhanced instruction

- a) Guidelines regarding quality standards must be in place to guide course development, design, and delivery.
- b) Learning outcomes must be determined to shape the technology being used to deliver course content.
- c) Online, partially online, and web-enhanced courses need to adhere to accreditation agencies' principles of best practices for electronically delivered instruction.
- d) Instructional materials must be reviewed and revised periodically to ensure they meet program standards.
- e) Courses must be designed to require students to engage in higher-order thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) as part of their course and program requirements.
- f) All online materials must clearly and consistently be linked to SDCCD's academic standards.
- g) All courses must meet copyright compliance and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Section 508 accessibility standards to be responsive to the changing nature of a web-based digital media teaching-learning environment guided by industry standards and legislative rules and regulations.

2. Faculty development for adapting instruction for technology-mediated delivery

- a) Technical assistance in course development needs to be made available to faculty, with convenient access to technical support staff.
- b) Faculty members must be assisted and guided in the transition from classroom teaching to online instruction.
- c) Faculty training for the online digital media environment must include instruction on using the interactive asynchronous and synchronous

communication tools that provide effective levels of student contact, feedback and interaction important to learners.

- d) Faculty training and assistance, including peer mentoring, needs to be made available and continue through the progression of the technology-mediated course.

3. Student support for learning online

- a) Students need to receive information about the course and/or program, including admission requirements, tuition and fees, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and student support services.
- b) Students need to be provided with supplemental course information, including course objectives, concepts, and ideas; and learning outcomes for each course are summarized in a clearly written, straightforward statement.
- c) Before participating in a technology-mediated course, students need to be effectively advised about the course to determine if they possess the self-motivation and commitment to learn at a distance and if they have access to the technology required by the course design and delivery approach.
- d) Students need to be provided with training and information to aid them in securing material through electronic databases, interlibrary loans, and other sources.
- e) Students need to have technical assistance and convenient access to technical support staff.
- f) Questions directed to student service personnel need to be answered quickly and accurately, with a structured system in place to also handle and respond to student complaints.
- g) Student interaction with faculty and with other students is an essential component for effective online learning and needs to be facilitated through a variety of ways, including discussion boards, chats, voice-mail and/or e-mail exchanges.
- h) Feedback to student questions and assignments needs to be constructive and provided in a timely manner.
- i) Students need to have access to sufficient library resources that may include a "virtual library" accessible through the World Wide Web.
- j) Faculty and students participating in online teaching-learning programs need to have agreement about expectations regarding times for student assignment completion and faculty response.

4. Technology Delivery System – Blackboard Vista

- a) The integrity and validity of the course information and user data must be assured via systematic backups to the server and server security systems.
- b) The reliability of the technology delivery system needs to operate as failsafe as possible.
- c) Technology support needs to be provided to assist with technical problems and questions on a 24/7 basis, with a response time not to exceed 12 hours.

5. Evaluation and Assessment of Effectiveness of Instruction

- a) The educational effectiveness and the teaching and learning process for all technology-mediated courses must be assessed through an evaluation process that uses multiple methods and applies specific standards.
- b) Data on enrollment, retention, persistence, costs must be used to guide the evaluation of program effectiveness.
- c) Intended learning outcomes need to be reviewed regularly to ensure clarity, utility, and appropriateness

IMPLEMENTATION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION QUALITY

The implementation of distance education quality at the SDCCD addresses each of the following areas:

- **Curriculum and Instruction**
- **Institutional Context and Commitment**
- **Students and Support Services**
- **Evaluation and Assessment**

Our quality assurance procedures follow Section 55202 of the CCC Chancellor's Office August 2008 Distance Education Guidelines regarding Course Quality Standards:

55202. Course Quality Standards.

The same standards of course quality shall be applied to any portion of a course conducted through distance education as are applied to traditional classroom courses, in regard to the course quality judgment made pursuant to the requirements of section 55002, and in regard to any local course quality determination or review process. Determinations and judgments about the quality of distance education under the course quality standards shall be made with the full involvement of faculty in accordance with the provisions of subchapter 2 (commencing with section 53200) of chapter 2.

http://www.cccco.edu/Portals/4/de_guidelines_081408.doc

Curriculum and Instruction

Distance education courses undergo an equivalent curriculum review and approval process as for oncampus courses. Additionally, for a course to be approved for distance education delivery, the distance education curriculum undergoes a separate review that requires distance education-specific information when the curriculum originator inputs required fields in CurricUNET:

Techniques used to ensure quality — Explain techniques you will use to ensure quality.

Evaluation Method — Enter the Evaluation Methods you will use.

Additional Resources — Enter any additional resources to be used.

Contact Type — Define the types of contact the instructor will have with students and the frequency of each contact type.

Once reviewed and approved by the Colleges and Continuing Education, the distance education courses are then reviewed and approved by the Districtwide Curriculum and Instructional Council. A list of approved distance education courses is updated regularly and posted to the Instructional Services website. Instructors are assigned by their college departments to teach distance education courses in either a fully online or partially online delivery mode. Partially online courses require at least one class meeting on campus and/or require proctored exams.

SDCCD Online Learning Pathways, led by a Districtwide Dean of Online and Distributed Learning and anchored in the District Office of Instructional Services and Planning, is the Districtwide support program for distance education faculty and students and works closely with new and experienced distance education faculty to ensure distance education quality. This process is outlined below and documented in the SDCCD Online Learning Pathways Course Development Approval Guide posted to: <http://www.sdccdonline.net/handbook>.

Course Development Standards

San Diego City, Mesa, and Miramar Colleges offer fully online, partially online, and web-enhanced courses via a district-wide implementation of the Blackboard Vista 8 course management system. The courses follow a course design template for consistent look and feel. In Fall 2008, the SDCCD completed a migration from the old WebCT Campus Edition to the new Blackboard Vista hardware and software. During this two-year migration process, the online faculty were retrained and their courses went through a “second edition” review and redevelopment on the new system. On Blackboard Vista each course is set up as a Master course that does not contain student data and is editable and revisable for continuous quality improvement. At the start of the semester, the Master course is copied to a live section and made available to students.

The online courses are recommended to be presented in learning modules with each module taught on a time-scheduled basis, such as one module per week. Depending upon the learning objectives, all the modules may be available throughout the course or the modules may be time-released week by week. (Recommended Components of a Learning Module posted to: <http://www.sdccdonline.net/faculty/resources>) The seven recommended components of the learning modules to assure consistent course quality are:

1. Pre-Assessment- Prior to beginning the module, students are assessed to determine their entry-level knowledge of the topic. Results of the module assessment are to be compared with this PreAssessment to measure students' learning outcomes.
2. Learning Objectives
3. Assigned Reading
4. Assigned Writing
5. Exercise/Activities
6. For Further Study

7. Assessment - The purpose of the assessment is to measure the achievement of the Learning Objectives for this module. Specify the instructor feedback concerning the assessment (how will feedback be provided and when). Specify what the remediation process would be for students who miss meeting the learning objectives. Use authentic assessments that require critical thinking and deter students from cheating.

Faculty Preparation to Teach Online

To achieve distance education quality, faculty training includes course tools, course design, course development, course management and pedagogy training for teaching effectively online. Faculty attend an 8-10 hour online training course in a monthly cohort where they have dual roles: as students who complete learning modules and participate in discussions, take quizzes, and as course designers/instructors where they apply their skills to their individual sample course. Faculty, in their role as students, earn points for the work they complete and experience what it feels like to be an online student.

The second part of the training is completion of a minimum of 10 hours of development on their actual online course by appointment with an Instructional Design Coordinator from SDCCD Online Learning Pathways. Faculty are advised to start developing their course at least six months in advance.

Throughout the faculty training and course development process, course quality standards for online courses based on these “foundational four” elements are the focus.

1. Establish and maintain expectations and goals.
2. Provide regular and frequent opportunities for communication and feedback, including instructor-initiated contact.
3. Actively engage and facilitate students’ learning.
4. Provide multiple opportunities for authentic assessment and demonstration of student learning outcomes.

In preparing faculty to meet the requirements for instructor contact stated in Section 55204 of the CCC Chancellor’s Office August 2008 Distance Education Guidelines, SDCCD Online Learning Pathways trains faculty in the importance and effective use of the communication tools in the online course. A guide to the range of asynchronous and synchronous tools within the Blackboard Vista course management system is also provided, (“Features of the Online Course” <http://www.sdccdonline.net/resources>) along with workshops that target new Web 2.0 social networking tools to promote communication.

Model online courses are demonstrated to illustrate the best practices in online course design and pedagogy. In addition to one-on-one faculty appointments with the team of Instructional Design Coordinators, SDCCD Online Learning Pathways also sponsors Online Faculty Mentors with 2.0 released time at each College and Continuing Education to be the peer experts on distance education teaching. Regularly scheduled events such as the Online Teaching Excellence Symposium, Faculty Showcase and Expo, and Breakfast of Champions are forums for new and experienced faculty to collaborate and learn about the components of distance education quality.

To assess a faculty member’s readiness to teach a distance education course, several instruments, modeled after the Quality Matters® program, are provided: Blackboard Vista Proficiency Checklist, Online Teaching Proficiency Checklist, Checklist of Course Readiness, and Online Syllabus Checklist. In addition to these checklists, Accessibility Guidelines for Distance Education Courses, Guide to Using Copyrighted Materials, Intellectual Property Agreement are

additional resources reviewed during faculty training and posted to the Faculty Resources Site at <http://www.sdccdonline.net/faculty/resources>.

Ongoing faculty support is provided throughout the stages of training, course development, course delivery and course revision. Online faculty are also part of a collaborative community available via the Online Faculty Resource Site, which is a Blackboard Vista site where online faculty have discussions, share tips, ask questions, and have access to shared learning objects, articles, Distance Education Guidelines, links to share with students, news, tutorials, recommended new instructional tools and program updates. The SDCCD Online Learning Pathways Newsletter and the EdTech Innovations Newsletter are additional sources of information for the faculty: <http://www.sdccdonline.net/newsletter>

Institutional Context and Commitment

The San Diego Community College District has established the division of Online and Distributed Learning for supporting the Colleges and Continuing Education to meet their mission of providing accessible, high quality learning experiences to meet the educational needs of the San Diego community. The division of Online and Distributed Learning is led by Dr. Andrea Henne, Dean of Online and Distributed Learning, an experienced online educator and leader in the field of distance education. The Vice Chancellor of Instructional Services and Planning, Dr. Otto Lee, oversees the division of Online and Distributed Learning.

A Districtwide Distance Education Steering Committee, chaired by the Dean of Online and Distributed Learning, meets monthly to review and advise the SDCCD Online Learning Pathways program. The Committee is comprised of Academic Senate representatives, Online Faculty Mentors, online faculty, Access Technology Specialists, Director of DSPS, Librarians, Directors of Library and Technology, Vice Presidents of Instruction, and SDCCD Online Learning Pathways staff. The membership list and meeting minutes are posted to: <http://www.sdccdonline.net/handbook>.

The institutional commitment is evidenced by resources that the SDCCD has dedicated to distance education. In addition to the Dean, the division includes a full-time Senior Secretary, Curriculum Technician, and two Instructional Design Coordinators. SDCCD Online Learning Pathways has a faculty training lab with up-to-date hardware and software on 10 workstations and is given access to computer classrooms at the colleges for trainings, workshops, and events. The budget for Online and Distributed Learning includes funding for the four Online Faculty Mentors from City, Mesa, Miramar Colleges and Continuing Education.

An instructional design coordinator from SDCCD Online Learning Pathways conducts scheduled weekly faculty instructional design appointments at City, Mesa, and Miramar Colleges.

SDCCD Online Learning Pathways funds at 2.0 released time four Online Faculty Mentors for each of the Colleges and Continuing Education.

The online faculty production lab at SDCCD Online Learning Pathways has up-to-date hardware and software and a staff member on duty from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday-Friday.

The technical infrastructure is located at the SDCCD District Computing Warehouse in the data center, where it is monitored 24/7 and supported by the Information Technology Department. A dedicated network technician oversees the day-to-day performance of the system.

The Information Technology Department is also responsible for managing the system integration of the student information system and the course management system. They have developed a dynamic process that updates the course rosters in Blackboard Vista every two hours throughout the day/evening/weekend to ensure that enrolled students have access to their online and web-enhanced courses and dropped students no longer have access.

The District commitment also includes a contract with Presidium Learning for 24/7/365 technical support for online students and faculty via toll-free phone, live chat, web ticket, or knowledge base at <https://www.sdccdonline.net/help>. Customer service feedback is collected regularly to continually improve the service.

Students and Support Services

Student Preparation for Success

An essential component in assuring online course quality is the preparation of students for online learning success. As a first step, new online students are encouraged to complete the Online Learning Readiness Assessment, which is an interactive set of 20 questions that yields a score indicating the level of online learning readiness and the steps to take to get ready. <http://www.sdccdonline.net/assess.htm>. There is no requirement that online students demonstrate their readiness, either for the readiness to learn online or the technical skills required. Students are directed to the webpages for Online Learning Success at <http://www.sdccdonline.net/students/training> in the class schedule, at the SDCCD Online Learning Pathways website and in an email sent to the registered students the week before the course starts.

Providing information about each online course such as faculty contact information, required materials, course objectives, syllabus, and expectations and class procedures is another method that SDCCD Online Learning Pathways uses to promote online student preparation for success. Each online faculty member is recommended to prepare a Course Information Page that is displayed on the SDCCD Online Learning Pathways site, linked from the homepage to <http://www.sdccdonline.net/infoPages.cfm>. Creating the pages is made easy through a web-based form that the faculty member fills out on the Blackboard Faculty Gateway at <http://www.sdccdonline.net/faculty/gateway.cfm>.

A section of the SDCCD Online Learning Pathways website at <http://www.sdccdonline.net> is devoted to student training and resources. Included are:

- Online Learning Readiness Assessment
- Technical Requirements for Online Learning
- Student Login and Troubleshooting Guide for Blackboard Vista
- Netiquette Guidelines for Online Students
- College Policies – Student Code of Conduct

Tutorials about using the Blackboard Vista system and also tutorials for areas that need additional support such as, printing the syllabus, locating test results and assignment grades, sending an email within the course, submitting an assignment are also provided.

To prepare students for the online learning environment, a sample course is provided that takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. The sample course illustrates the navigation and basic content areas of an online course offered by the colleges.

Face-to-face student orientations are conducted during the first week of the 16-week semester, and also at the start of the mid-semester 8-week courses at each of the campuses and via CCCConfer by an SDCCD Online Learning Pathways staff, including the Dean. Students are given individual attention to accessing their course and also receive tips for online student success. For those students who cannot attend one of the scheduled synchronous orientations, a self-paced audio-visual orientation is always available via the Students Training website: <http://www.sdccdonline.net/students/training>.

Essential Student Support Services

- Admissions/Registration: (fully available online)
- Counseling/Advising
- Financial Aid: (information available online)
- Assessment
- Tutoring

- Library (online access)
- Bookstore (fully available online)
- 24/7/365 Technical Support (fully available online via Presidium Learning at <https://www.sdccdonline.net/help>)

Each of the Colleges and Continuing Education is responsible for providing support services to the online students. However, the areas of Counseling/Advising, and Tutoring are offered on a limited basis. Assessment still requires an oncampus visit.

SDCCD Online Learning Pathways partners with the District DSPS division and the City, Mesa, and Miramar Colleges Access Technology Specialists to provide captioning services for instructor-created online multimedia content. They have set up a captioning studio to perform the captioning for online faculty and also train faculty in how to do their own captioning to comply with accessibility requirements for online students.

Online Student Authentication

As stated in Section 496 of August 14, 2008, Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA):

Accrediting agencies must require institutions that offer DE or correspondence education to have processes to establish that the student who registers is the same student who participates in and completes the work and gets the academic credit.

All students who are enrolled in distance education courses at the San Diego Community College District are issued a secure username and password for access to the Blackboard Vista system. The username and password are generated from the student information system registration rosters and are unique to each student. Access to the user database for assisting students with login issues is restricted to several key staff members of SDCCD Online Learning Pathways and to the Presidium Helpdesk.

To answer the question, “*What academic integrity and student verification practices and what course design approaches are faculty at City, Mesa, and Miramar Colleges using to ensure student authentication,*” online faculty were surveyed in February 2009 to collect information about their current practices that discourage academic dishonesty such as plagiarism, unpermitted collaboration, unauthorized help, impersonation and cheating among online students.

245 faculty teaching online courses in regular Spring 2009 session at City (93), Mesa (85), and Miramar (67) Colleges were asked to complete the survey. A total of 54 surveys were completed, which equals a 22% response rate. The complete results of the survey are posted to the Online Faculty Resource Site where faculty have a forum to discuss the results and share best practices.

The following are examples of the prevention strategies and course design techniques our online faculty use to promote student authentication:

The majority (95%) of the faculty include a statement about academic integrity in their course syllabus.

Student assignments are checked for plagiarism (62%) and for cheating (56%).

The majority of faculty (87%) require written work from the student (for example, papers, online discussions, exam essay questions).

The majority of faculty (95%) use a variety of assessments (for example, quizzes, projects, portfolios, group work).

Information about avoiding academic dishonesty (for example, learning how to cite sources) is included in their courses by 77% of the instructors.

Setting a time limit on exams, another strategy for limiting collaboration and cheating, is done by 77% of the faculty.

Randomizing the quiz or exam questions so that no two students receive the same set of questions is performed by 64% of the faculty.

Additional class procedures and course design strategies were reported in the open-ended questions; such as,

- Requiring multi-part projects or progressive submissions of in-process work.
- Recognizing student's work through trends and writing styles.
- Using multiple measures of writing and assessing.
- Classmates reviewing each other's "published" essays.
- Students explaining their work in the class discussions.

Technical strategies for authentication is another area that the Districtwide Distance Education Steering Committee has been reviewing by examining the tools offered by vendors such as Acxiom, Bio-Pen, Securexam Remote Proctor, and Kryterion WebAssessor to determine their feasibility and potential for verifying student identity in distance education courses.

Evaluation and Assessment

Course review is conducted during the formal departmental faculty evaluation process following the procedures set forth in the AFT Guild-College Faculty Agreement.

Faculty who choose to participate in course preparation workshops and one-to-one course design appointments are provided with assistance for continual improvement of their online courses. Evaluation checklists are provided to guide faculty in developing quality online courses. Faculty training and course design emphasize best practices using the web-based assessment tools and creating assessments to effectively measure student learning in the online course.

SDCCD participated in the 2008 and 2009 CCC State Chancellor's Office Surveys of Distance Education Satisfaction and the 2009 Distance Education Retention Survey. We have not yet received the results from the Distance Education Satisfaction surveys.

The data from the 2009 CCC State Chancellor's Office Distance Education Retention Survey aligns closely with the feedback we have received in our annual Online Student Feedback Surveys, conducted by SDCCD Institutional Research. (Results posted to <http://research.sdccd.edu>) Students report a mostly positive experience taking online courses. However, many of the responses to the open-ended question, "*What would you change about the course you took?*" point to the need to improve faculty-student interaction and provide more timely faculty feedback. This feedback is shared with the online faculty and the techniques for promoting communication in the online class as well as strategies for motivating and retaining online students are ongoing topics of discussion and workshops.