

Quality Enhancement Plan Champion Paper

Online Success

Karla Damron

Glenda Easter

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2010

ONLINE SUCCESS

The problem we have with distance education is a composite of several ingredients, but simply stated it is that we need to insure greater student success. Data show that the average success rate for the College is currently about 67% while the non-distance success rate is about 77%.¹ Elements of the problem that need to be examined include the role of students, the role of faculty, tools and structures that may enhance the process, and administrative oversight that can help spot improvement areas.

At least one previous QEP project has contributed to the literature a discussion of the need for a multi-faceted and adaptive approach to improving online instruction in what is always a challenging and complex environment.² That approach was adopted in this paper and that previous QEP may provide more insight as we move forward.

The character of distance education changes, perhaps even more than in-person education, largely because both the technology and the regulatory environment changes. As an example there is the immediate change that may affect some DE courses due to a Federal requirement to adequately identify distance learners when they are testing and completing tasks where accountability is important. The "Dear Colleague Letter" from the Department of Education states in part:

"Effective July 1, 2010, the regulations in 34 CFR §602.17(g) will mirror the statutory language and elaborate on it by describing how the agency would meet the student verification requirement. An agency would be in compliance if it requires institutions to verify the identity

¹See Appendix 1.

²Anitsal, M. Meral, et al. "Achieving quality enhancement program (QEP) objectives: impact of on-line and on-ground course characteristics by undergraduate student personality traits." *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal* 14.1 (2010): 37+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 15 Dec. 2010.

of a student who participates in class or coursework by using methods such as a secure login and pass code or proctored examinations, and new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identity. The agency is required to make clear, in writing, that institutions must use processes that protect student privacy and must notify students at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional student charges associated with the verification of student identity.“

Within the scope of El Centro's distance education (DE) there is great diversity. Students enroll locally to enter classes when all in-person sections are full, students from areas outside the county take classes to fulfill both personal and degree goals, and local students take courses to meet life-long learning needs.

Four objectives have been suggested as a means of focusing our efforts to achieve greater success:

- Community Building where students would encounter more support services availability
- Tripwires would be placed in registration to improve evaluation and encouragement of student readiness
- Readiness of students taking DE courses would be augmented by structuring readiness into prerequisite and concurrent courses
- Faculty and staff development needs to insure that faculty are prepared to apply a thorough understanding of DE communication needs, course structural concepts, and active learning strategies

Methods that may provide means to effect a change include:

- Developing more detailed course descriptions that include information about the time and resources required to successfully complete the course
- Making a readiness test a prerequisite for all DE courses - work with the District to see if this is possible
- Develop short introductory / remedial sessions for those that do not pass the readiness test, offering at least one session somewhere in the District each week during preregistration
- Encourage students to develop personal support systems and planned study times that will help them complete online courses.
- Insure that gateway classes address DE study skills - in particular work with EDUC 1300 and PSYT 1313 instructors to insure courses align with the preparation needed to take DE courses
- Convene off-campus and on-campus cohorts for selected courses to build community and enhance them with speakers, industry representatives, service

learning opportunities and meetings as disciplinary groups. Bressler's study indicates that learning communities and expanded group contact may expand the "hope, optimism and goal setting" needed for online students.³ Use "literature circles" in selected courses.⁴

- Developing "master teacher" courses for instructors that would help them discover additional technology skills, active learning methods, communication best practices, and course pacing factors as Griffin and Lockwood iterate.⁵
- Embedding librarians, tutors, and possibly advisors in key courses to increase the granularity and to have a team approach
- Routinely supply faculty with information about which students are participating in DE for the first time. The number of students taking online courses for the first time is increasing steadily:
 - Fall 2008: students taking online course (including home/host): 2,393
 - students taking online course for first time: 786, 33%
 - Fall 2009: students taking online course (including home/host): 3,319
 - students taking online course for first time: 979, 30%
 - Fall 2010: students taking online course (including home/host): 3,768
 - students taking online course for first time: 1,031, 27%
- Routinely supply faculty with information about which students are first time in college as well as first time in DE
- Develop an online shell for El Centro and insure that it is routinely deployed for new online instructors as the default for their courses.
- Educate administrators in how to supervise DE and to encourage best practices

From these improvement processes it should be possible to determine that improvement has occurred if some of the following outcomes provide upward trending indicators:

³Bressler, Linda A., Mark E. Bressler, and Martin S. Bressler. "The role and relationship of hope, optimism and goal setting in achieving academic success: a study of students enrolled in online accounting courses." *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal* 14.4 (2010): 37+. Academic OneFile. Web. 15 Dec. 2010.

⁴Kilbane, Clare R., and Natalie B. Milman. "Using literature circles to provide support for online discussions." *Distance Learning* 7.2 (2010): 65+. Academic OneFile. Web. 15 Dec. 2010.

⁵Griffin, Charles A., and Chris A. Lockwood. "Creating active learning applications and opportunities for an on-line leadership course." *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal* 14.3 (2010): 77+. Academic OneFile. Web. 15 Dec. 2010.

- Increased completion rates for DE courses
- Improved student satisfaction measured through surveys
- An increase in grade averages for completers
- Accomplish specific infrastructure improvements such as first timer printouts and an ECC course shell
- Development of teaching teams that stay together for multiple semesters
- Establishment of master teacher courses
- Improvements made in detecting and improving readiness of students

The resources to accomplish improvement in DE success may require increased staff to assist the DE coordinator. Some choices may be needed to establish priorities in support units to determine which DE courses are targeted for the most support. Changes to address readiness and staff notification may require programming effort at DSC. Staff development may require release time, incentives, and additional effort by supervisors.

APPENDIX 1.

	Online Success Rate	Not Online Success Rate
2007-08	.649	.734
2008-09	.672	.739
2009-10	.672	.772

From statistics supplied by the Office of Planning, Assessment and Research