Distance Ed Plan

Taft College
West Kern Community College District Mission

Taft College is committed to creating a community of learners by enriching the lives of all students we serve through career technical education, transfer programs, foundational programs, and student support services. Taft College provides an equitable learning environment defined by applied knowledge leading to students’ achievement of their educational goals.

Introduction

Distance Education (DE) provides support for instruction that is not face-to-face, with students physically separated from the instructor. Due to the growing demand for DE courses, what was once an exception has become the rule. Courses that are not online, and not hybrid, are increasingly using online methods and tools both in the classroom and out. In this regard, Distance Education has changed from being a specialty, to becoming the norm. This trend is only accelerating.

It is not surprising then that Distance Education plays a vital role in sustaining the mission of Taft College. The purpose of this Distance Education Plan is to establish a vision and a path whereby our online and offline “community of learners” are provided with the “equitable learning environment” that our college mission statement promotes. More specifically, the goal of this Distance Education Plan is to provide the access, training and practice for technology and other college resources that meet the instructional and the-student service needs of the students.

The distance education (DE) students at Taft College generally fall into two categories. The largest category of DE students participates in their classes via the Internet, or “online”. A smaller, but growing, category of DE students is mostly made up of local incarcerated students who participate in their college classes via correspondence, or “offline” along with the assistance of a Taft College Instructional Aid.

The online DE students make up almost 38% of Taft College's 2015-2016 FTES, per the CCCC O DataMart site (http://datamart.cccco.edu/). In comparison, the average percentage of FTES from DE enrollments statewide for 2015-2016 was 11%. Clearly the percentage of DE students at Taft College is disproportionally high, which only emphasizes the tremendous responsibility to ensure not only the instructional integrity and quality of online classes, but to
also ensure the integrity and quality of student support services offered to our online distance education students.

The offline DE students enroll in classes at Taft College for many of the same reasons that the online DE students enroll in classes at Taft College. Even though many of our incarcerated students once deemed higher education degrees as unattainable or beyond their ability, these students begin to view education as a key to improving their lives not only for their future, but also while in their present circumstances. The number of incarcerated students enrolled at Taft College has increased from 50 students from one facility three years ago to 150-200 students between two prison facilities.

Distance education at Taft College complements and enhances the mission of the college by providing flexible learning options that allow the pursuit of degrees, certificates, and vocational goals that might otherwise be impossible for many of our students. Taft College is committed to improving the instructional quality and the student support services offered to our distance education students.

Past and Present Status of Distance Education at Taft College

Taft College DE (Distance Education) supports the needs of students that may not be physically present. The term “Distance Education” evolved to specify modes of instruction that were not face-to-face (F2F). However, the scope of DE has grown along with the realization that this also involves “Distance Registration,” “Distance Orientation,” “Distance Counseling,” “Distance Library” and “Distance Student Life” and distance “everything else”. Moreover, the so-called “distance” modalities mix and match with in-person and on-campus modalities depending on availability and individual student preference.

Enrollment in DE classes at Taft College has risen dramatically over the last ten years. In 2006-2007, 18% of the total FTES came from DE classes. By 2015-2016, the percentage of FTES coming from DE enrollment was at 37.5%. During the same time frame, the percentage of FTES coming from DE enrollment across the California Community College system went from 4.5% in 2006-2007 to 11% in 2015-2016 (see Table 1).

Table 1

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<tr>
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<th>'06-'07</th>
<th>'07-'08</th>
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<th>'09-'10</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taft DE FTE's</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-wide DE FTE's</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
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Historically, success rates and retention rates have been, and continue to be, lower in DE classes than in traditional on-campus classes (See Figure 1). This is true both at Taft College and systemwide across the state.

![Taft College Credit Success Rate DE vs. F2F](image)

*Figure 1*

When comparing the success rates and retention rates of DE classes taught at Taft College with the CCC system, the success rates of DE students at Taft College are about the same as the CCC system, and the retention rates of DE students at Taft College are higher—up to almost 10 percentage points higher by 2015-2016 (See Table 2).

**Table 2**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft DE</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>87.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-wide DE</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
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While the Taft College DE success rates are on par with the statewide average, there remains a large gap between the Taft College DE success rates and the success rates of face-to-face classes at the college (See Figure 1). It has been a consistent goal of the college to narrow these success gaps.
Distance Education Office

The Distance Learning Support Team at Taft College consists of a Distance Education Coordinator, an Integrated Technology Support Technician, a DE Instructional Aid, and a student worker. This support team is in place to ensure the effectiveness of the technology and other support mechanisms that mediate the distance between the Taft College instructor and the distance education student.

With assistance from Student Services, Taft College provides extended hours of support to all DE students primarily at the beginning of each term in order to diminish confusion and to retain enrollment. This is achieved through phone support, on-campus help stations, and Online Workshops.

Instructional Modalities

Distance Education encompasses the infrastructure, technology and services for students who are not physically present. This include both synchronous and asynchronous, and for Taft College is taken to include both “mediated” (correspondence) and non-mediated (traditional) modalities. This can be shown using the following diagram:

The College recently adopted the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS), and is engaged in providing the training and support for faculty and staff who use the LMS. The use of Moodle and Etudes will be phased out - by Fall 2017, all online, hybrid and web-enhanced offerings will use the Canvas LMS.

The college welcomes its partnership with the CCC OEI, in part, due to being able to participate in the buying power of the CCC system. With this partnership, the college is able to adopt technological resources that have been vetted, piloted, and negotiated for a substantial cost savings to the college. Some of the technology resources that the college has already adopted include the Canvas LMS and Cranium Café. Future implementations will include the
adoption of NetTutor (an online tutoring service) and possibly Proctorium (an online proctoring service).

The College offers a number of correspondence courses primarily to support the inmate population at both the Taft Correctional Institution (TCI) and Metropolitan Correctional Center Facility (MCCF). These courses are supported with a full-time classified staff member who facilitates the movement of offline course materials between offline course instructors and inmate students, as well as by a .5 FTE appointment of a Counselor.

DE Web Page

The Taft College Website was recently redesigned, and provides a newly designed, comprehensive DE home page at http://www.taftcollege.edu/distance-education/. When students visit the DE website, they will have available to them various resources that will guide them through the enrollment process, important phone numbers for assistance, and much more. The college will continue to refine the functionality and the relevance of the website for distance education students.

Support Services

All distance education students are encouraged to contact and meet with a counselor. Each division at Taft College has an assigned counselor that is able to strategically guide both traditional on-campus students and distance education students in the best path toward their educational goal.

As of this writing, there is not a system in place to track the number of DE students who meet with their counselors. Based on the 198 respondents to the Taft College Fall 2016 DE Student Survey, 18% of the DE students who responded indicated that they needed more assistance from their counselor.

We are currently in the process of implementing the use of Cranium Café to facilitate the interface between our counselors and our DE students. We are also looking to partner with CCC OEI’s Online Counseling Network once it is ready to launch to the system.

Distance Education Tutoring

Based on the Taft College Fall 2016 DE Student Survey, 21% of the DE students responded that they needed tutoring support for their online classes. Previously, tutors were available to DE students via Skype. This resource was under-utilized and likely under-promoted.
We are currently in the process of implementing the use of Cranium Café to facilitate the interface between our tutors and our DE students. This resource will be displayed and accessible from online Canvas courses, and from the Taft College website. Knowing that DE students often fit their time of studying around full work and family schedules, we look to continue to build on our partnership with the CCC Online Education Initiative and add NetTutor as an additional tutoring option for our DE students for after-hours and weekends.

**Technology support**

Technology support is available from the Distance Education office in the form of troubleshooting, direct support for LMS issues. Further support for technology such as computer questions, network connectivity, general MS Office Support, and the like is available by phone, and through an online trouble ticketing systems accessible by sending an email to IT help desk.

Direct technology support to students is available. Students can get help with network issues, and with downloading Microsoft Office.

**Accessibility**

The DE Instructional Support team works with our DSPS and our faculty to maximize the accessibility of our DE classes. This effort has not always been consistent and we are looking to establish a stronger institutionalized process whereby new DE classes and DE classes up for review will undergo greater scrutiny for accessibility issues.

The College has brought two nationally recognized experts to campus for training and system development. Jayme Johnson, Director of Accessibility and User Experience for the OEI, and Gaeir Dietrich, Director of the High Tech Center Training Unit, have visited Taft College campus, most recently with Gaeir’s in-service with faculty and staff in Fall 2016.

**Professional Development**

Taft College has provided numerous professional development events specifically for DE faculty. These events were conducted through the use of online Learning Management Systems so that the faculty could gain more experience with being an online student. The DE Instructional Support team has conducted most of the professional development events, but the faculty are also encouraged to seek out other DE professional development opportunities, such as with @One.
Where We Want to Go, and How We Are Going to Get There

**DE Goal 1**: Expand and improve access to online educational programs and services for distance education students.

1.1 In collaboration with Student Services, develop and implement a process for systemic improvement of all online counseling and other student support services.

1.2 Continue to partner with the CCC OEI on the adoption of technological resources that facilitate student services to DE students.

1.3 Ensure that all DE classes are fully accessible.

**DE Goal 2**: Strengthen effective teaching and learning for distance education students.

2.1 Continue to expand the professional development opportunities for DE faculty.

2.1.1 Establish a minimum threshold of professional development that all DE faculty will complete every two years.

2.2 Add additional DE Instructional Support personnel to facilitate just-in-time trainings and support for faculty and students.

2.3 Continue to partner with the CCC OEI in adopting technological resources that have been vetted and piloted.

2.4 Invite the DE faculty who provide instruction to our prisons to conduct some or all of their class sessions in-person at the facility.

2.5 Narrow the achievement gap between online and traditional on-campus classes.
Oversight

AP 4105; AP [evaluations]; AP [technology];
Administrative oversight of committee policies and procedures
Academic Senate
Governance Council
ACCJC Eligibility Requirements, Standards, Recommendations
Title 5