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Response to ACCJC Accreditation Recommendation #4
On Distance Education
Prepared by: The Institutional Committee on Distance Education

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Following receipt of the accreditation Evaluation Report from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), Monterey Peninsula College, through the shared governance process, formed the Institutional Committee on Distance Education (ICDE). Subsequently, the ICDE was tasked with providing recommendations in preparation for developing and implementing a plan in response to ACCJC accreditation recommendations on distance education.* To this end, the committee assessed current practices, policies, and procedures for online instruction at MPC, reviewed the ACCJC "Guide to Evaluating Distance Education and Correspondence Education," and examined "best practices" implemented at other colleges. Each member on the committee researched a particular area of concern in the accreditation report and presented his/her findings to the committee. This research served as the foundation for the recommendations identified throughout this report.

ACCJC Recommendation #4 states:

*To increase effectiveness of distance education offerings, the team recommends the college follow through with a plan to design an evaluation process and evaluation tool to provide students an opportunity to evaluate the learning experience specific to online courses. Further, the team recommends that the Distance Education Task Force** develop clear protocols and strategic goals for distance education learners that meet the institutional outcomes of the college and ACCJC policy on distance education.*

In addition to recommendation #4, the committee reviewed all of the references to distance education in the Monterey Peninsula College accreditation Evaluation Report and has developed this paper in response to the distance education comments in the entire document.

In developing these recommendations, the committee recognized that online instruction is not for every student or teacher, nor for every course or program. This delivery mode is best determined by faculty and the departments and divisions that support their efforts. These recommendations focused on creating a long-term plan that will be implemented incrementally with its primary objective on serving the educational needs of the online student at Monterey Peninsula College and supporting distance education faculty.

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* Collective bargaining issues are not addressed in this document and will be examined by the ICDE at a later date.

** The reference to "Distance Education Task Force" refers to the Academic Senate Task Force on Distance Education, which was established prior to the accreditation Comprehensive Evaluation visit. After the accreditation Comprehensive Evaluation visit the Task Force was dissolved; the Institutional Committee on Distance Education was formed and charged with preparing a response to recommendation #4 on Distance Education.

The committee believes that this emphasis aligns the MPC distance education program with the Monterey Peninsula College Mission Statement and Institutional Goal #1 and Objectives (a) and (b), which read as follows:

MPC Mission Statement

Monterey Peninsula College is committed to fostering student learning and success by providing excellence in instructional programs, facilities, and services to support the goals of students pursuing transfer, career, basic skills, and life-long learning opportunities. Through these efforts MPC seeks to enhance the intellectual, cultural, and economic vitality of our diverse community.

Institutional Goal 1:

Promote academic excellence and critical thinking across all areas and disciplines.

Objectives:

a. Support faculty and staff development for effective teaching, learning, and service delivery.
b. Expand distance education by providing leadership, technical assistance, services, and training opportunities, and by exploring partnerships, and designing quality control mechanisms.

I. *Distance Education Mission and Goals*

ACCJC Recommendation: *A more formal structure is needed to support the development and quality of distance education with a clear mission and strategic goals aligned to the institutional outcomes.*

ICDE Response: The Institutional Committee on Distance Education has developed the following mission statement and goals:

Mission Statement

The mission of MPC Online is to support the development and delivery of quality online courses and programs.

Goals:

Establish "MPC Online" as a campus center that:

a. Secures funding for Center operations through the MPC planning and resource allocation process.

b. Provides support services and information to students taking online courses.
c. Provides support for instructors at all stages of development and implementation of online courses and programs.
d. Creates an MPC Online Website that provides links to critical academic, advising, financial, and counseling support services and programs to online students.
e. Provides evaluation tools and establishes processes that secure relevant feedback on online course design, implementation, and student learning.

The ICDE further recommends that MPC distance education goals be developed in consultation with the shared governance groups to ensure that they are aligned with institutional outcomes. The ICDE acknowledges that the decision to offer complete online programs rests with the institution taking into consideration such questions as the District's capacity in fiscal, human, and technology resources.

II.   *Administration Structure*

ACCJC Recommendation: *The team suggests that the College ensure that the effective delivery of classes as well as technology support be administered as two separate and complementary components administered by the appropriate college entities.*

ICDE Response:

a. The Institutional Committee on Distance Education should continue to function as an advisory and support group to the Online Education Coordinator after the Follow-up Report on Recommendation #4 is filed with and approved by the ACCJC.
b. The current interim reporting alignment whereby the Online Education Coordinator reports directly to the Vice President of Academic Affairs should be continued.
c. The current Instructional Technology Specialist should report to the Online Education Coordinator and also serve as a member of the Institutional Committee on Distance Education and the instructional lab tech group.
d. The Dean for Information Technology should continue serving on the Institutional Committee on Distance Education and work collaboratively with the Online Education Coordinator in meeting the technology needs of online courses and programs.

III.   *Planning and Funding for MPC Online*

ACCJC Recommendation: *Growth and development of distance education at MPC could be strengthened by incorporating distance education functions and support into the planning and funding processes of the college.*

ICDE Response: The Committee recommends establishing an MPC Online Center through the planning and resource allocation process that supports the pedagogical and technical needs for online course development, teaching, and learning, which would probably require:

    a. Half-time online faculty coordinator
    b. Full-time instructional designer/technology specialist
    c. Full-time webmaster for the College
    d. Student assistants
    e. Professional development for online instructors and administrators
    f. Software and technology updates

IV. *Website for MPC Online*

ACCJC Recommendation: *The organization of the distance education website makes it difficult to locate information. Website needs to provide appropriate referrals to student support services.*

ICDE Response: Recognizing that the MPC College website is a vital link to campus programs and services for all students and especially online students, it is critical that <u>all</u> campus sites are updated and reviewed for accuracy on a systematic basis. To online students the MPC College website is their virtual world of the MPC campus. Therefore, it is vital that all information and services be accurately and professionally represented as well as easily accessible. The following recommendations pertain to the MPC Online (formerly Distance Learning) webpage that will serve as a bridge to all programs and services offered at Monterey Peninsula College:

    a. Redesign the "MPC Online" campus webpage with a focus on providing information to students and faculty that supports successful online learning and teaching.
    b. Change the link title on MPC College Home Page to 'MPC Online' to initiate a higher profile for MPC online courses and programs.
    c. Create informational links that are up to date and complete, and that support easy navigation of the entire MPC College website.
    d. Populate the "MPC Online" webpage with information that includes but is not limited to the following:
        1. Student assessment for online readiness
        2. Current online course offerings
        3. Transfer paths to online and traditional programs at four-year institutions
        4. Direct access to online registration in courses
        5. Support services – academic, counseling, financial aid, etc.
        6. Tips on navigating online course platforms
        7. MPC degree and certificate programs

V. *Student Services Access and Success*

ACCJC Recommendation: *Online students might not have the same access to student support services and programs as students enrolled in on-ground classes.*

ICDE Response: In reviewing the MPC campus website, it was apparent that some student services offered on-ground are not accessible to the online student (i.e. academic tutoring, counseling, financial aid), and many online services that are currently offered are very difficult to access. Given these observations, the ICDE recommends:

a. Review college services offered to on-ground students and evaluate the appropriateness of offering them online.
b. Review and update all program and student service webpages for accuracy and the ability for online students to easily access their offerings.
c. Provide direct links from the MPC Online webpage to online advising/counseling.
d. Provide direct links to all Student Services tailored to the online learner.
e. Design a Readiness Assessment to assess technology skills, access to technology and study habits for the online learner.
f. Develop an online student handbook addressing necessary information and skills for student success in an online course environment.

VI. *MPC Online Course and Instruction Evaluations*

ACCJC Recommendation: *Team recommends the college follow through with a plan to design an evaluation process and evaluation tool to provide students an opportunity to evaluate the learning experience specific to online courses.*

ICDE Response: Recognizing that course and instructor evaluations are negotiable items the following recommendations were made as a basis for examination:

a. Review the tool and process used for online student evaluations to make sure students can and do provide relevant feedback on their online learning experience.
b. Review best practices for online course construction and implementation as a basis for developing general guidelines/standards for instructor peer evaluations and CAC online course reviews.
c. Educate peer evaluators and evaluatees on expected general guidelines and standards for online course design and implementation.

VII.   *Protocols and Goals for Online Learners*

ACCJC Recommendation: *The team recommends that the Distance Education Task Force develop clear protocols and strategic goals for distance education learners that meet the institutional outcomes of the College and ACCJC policy on distance education.*

ICDE Response: In reviewing this recommendation, the committee focused on the necessary steps needed by students to successfully navigate the educational environment to achieve their academic goals including learning outcomes, program completions, and successful transfer or job attainment.

    a. Goal: Prepare and support students for the academic environment they are to enter.
        1. Develop a matriculation process specifically for the online learner to include processes for Application, Assessment, Orientation, Advising, Registration, and Follow-up (Early Alert)
    b. Goal: Provide continuing support to online students throughout their academic career.
        1. Provide online access to Student Services including counseling, advising, financial aid
        2. Provide online academic support including academic tutoring and library services
        3. Provide supportive services to students with disabilities
    c. Goal: Establish clear academic pathways for the online learner to achieve educational goals.
        1. Review and develop programs that can successfully be offered online
        2. Establish online pathways to programs at four-year institutions

VIII.   *Training and Development*

ACCJC Recommendation: *Task Force members should explore program opportunities, revise the Distance Learning Handbook, develop methods to facilitate student access to support services, and provide teaching strategies and training on DE technology.*

ICDE Response: Recognizing that faculty development is critical for effective teaching and learning in the dynamic environment of online education the committee recommends providing the following:

    a. Dedicated webpage for faculty training resources
    b. Updated Online Learning Handbook
    c. Funding for faculty development in both technology and pedagogy for online instruction
    d. Mentoring program for new online instructors
    e. Systematic offerings of campus workshops on online design, implementation, and technology usage for online instructors
    f. An examination of the appropriateness of certification for online instructors

Summary

The ICDE recognizes that these aforementioned recommendations go much further than simply updating online instruction at MPC. It is apparent that a successful online student needs an online campus community. To achieve this will take a collective campus commitment, institutional support, and long-term plan.

Thank you to all the members of the ICDE -- Steve Albert, Elizabeth Bishop, Steve Bruemmer, Caroline Carney, Sharon Colton, Courtney Frost, John Gonzalez, Leslie Procive, Stephanie Tetter, Susan Walter, Maribel Quiroz, and Rosaleen Ryan -- who gave their time, talent, and unwavering commitment to online education.   More information and supporting documentation regarding this proposal can be accessed on the Institutional Committee on Distance Education website at:

http://mympc.mpc.edu/Committees/DistanceEdCommittee/default.aspx