



DISTANCE EDUCATION PLAN 2024-2027

SWC ACADEMIC SENATE'S DISTANCE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Approved by the Academic Senate 9/24/24

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About this Edition

The Distance Education (DE) Plan is produced by the Academic Senate's Distance Education Committee and updated on a three-year cycle. It was approved by the Senate on 9/24/24.

The DE Plan is available to the Southwestern College community on the [DE Policies, Procedures & Guidelines](#) page of the college website.

2024 Distance Education Committee members:

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Southwestern College Mission Statement

Southwestern Community College District is the premier public institution of higher education in Southern San Diego County that serves a diverse community of students by providing quality academic programs, comprehensive student support services that ensure equitable access and clear pathways to student success.

Southwestern Community College District promotes learning and success to prepare students to become critical thinkers and engaged life-long learners/global citizens. The District is committed to continuous improvements through the use of data-informed planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Southwestern Community College District utilizes a variety of instructional modalities to provide educational and career opportunities in the following areas: Associate degree and certificate programs, transfer, professional, technical and career advancement, foundational skills, personal enrichment, and continuing education.

Governing Board approved March 10, 2020

SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE DISTANCE EDUCATION MISSION STATEMENT

Southwestern College supports faculty and staff in developing and delivering quality online learning experiences for successful student outcomes.

About the Distance Education Plan

HISTORY

In 2013, in response to significant and ongoing changes in the distance education mode of instructional delivery, the Distance Education Task Force was formed as a sub-committee of the Curriculum Committee to develop a comprehensive Distance Education Plan, Handbook, and curriculum processing procedure to meet instructional needs. The first DE Plan was approved by the Curriculum Committee and Academic Senate in Spring 2014, and the DE Task Force has since become the Distance Education Committee, a permanent committee of the Academic Senate.

PURPOSE AND TIMELINE

The Distance Education Plan reflects the Southwestern College Mission, Strategic Plan, and Educational Vision Plan. Its purpose is to establish common goals and criteria for quality online instruction, identify infrastructure and technology needs, set standards for training faculty, and make recommendations for continuous improvement.

The DE Committee evaluates the Distance Education Plan annually and updates it on a three-year cycle—in consultation with the DE Coordinator, Online Learning Center, and Academic Senate. This plan will guide institutional planning and online instruction over the course of the next three academic years, 2024-2027.

Developing the DE Plan is a three-step process:

1. **Planning:** The current DE Plan is presented at a DE Committee meeting, where participants identify sections to be deleted, updated, or added. Suggestions for changes

are documented. The DE Committee chair establishes a timeline and guides preparation of the first draft of the plan by the group.

2. **Review:** The first comprehensive draft is offered to relevant groups such as the Online Learning Center and/or Academic Senate Executive Committee for review and feedback.
3. **Final Revision & Approval:** The DE Committee prepares the final draft of the plan based on the feedback collected during the review process. The final draft is then submitted for approval to the Academic Senate.

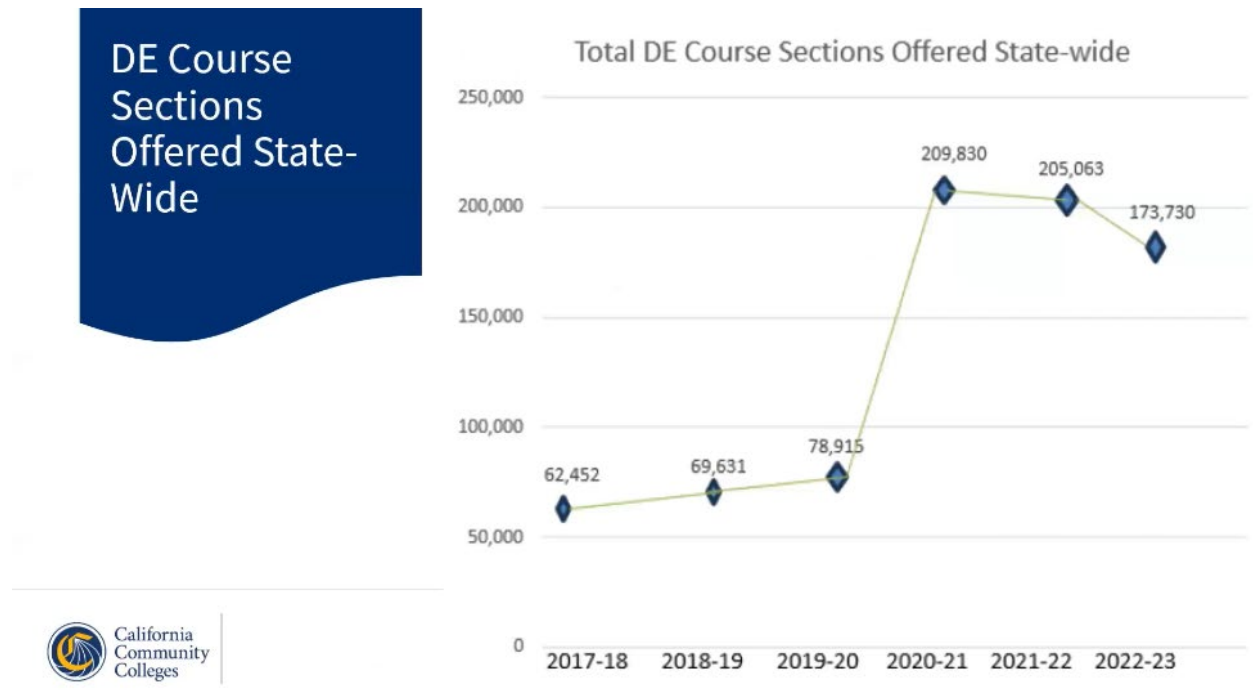
Distance Education in the California Community Colleges

Distance education has experienced steady growth for decades, and that growth dramatically accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. While CCC campuses have reopened and in-person classes have resumed, DE offerings have remained a sizable percentage of college offerings, and demand for DE is stronger than ever. Another notable development stemming from the pandemic is an increased number of DE modalities, including several synchronous formats.

ENROLLMENT GROWTH

The forthcoming 2024 CCC Board of Governors Distance Education Report notes that while the number of DE classes has gone down slightly since the pandemic peak of 209,830 in 2020-21, the number of DE course sections in 2022-2023 remains much higher than pre-pandemic levels: 173,730 DE sections in 2022-23 compared to 78,915 in 2019-20. (See Figure 1 below.)

Figure 1: DE Course Sections Offered in California Community Colleges, 2017-2023

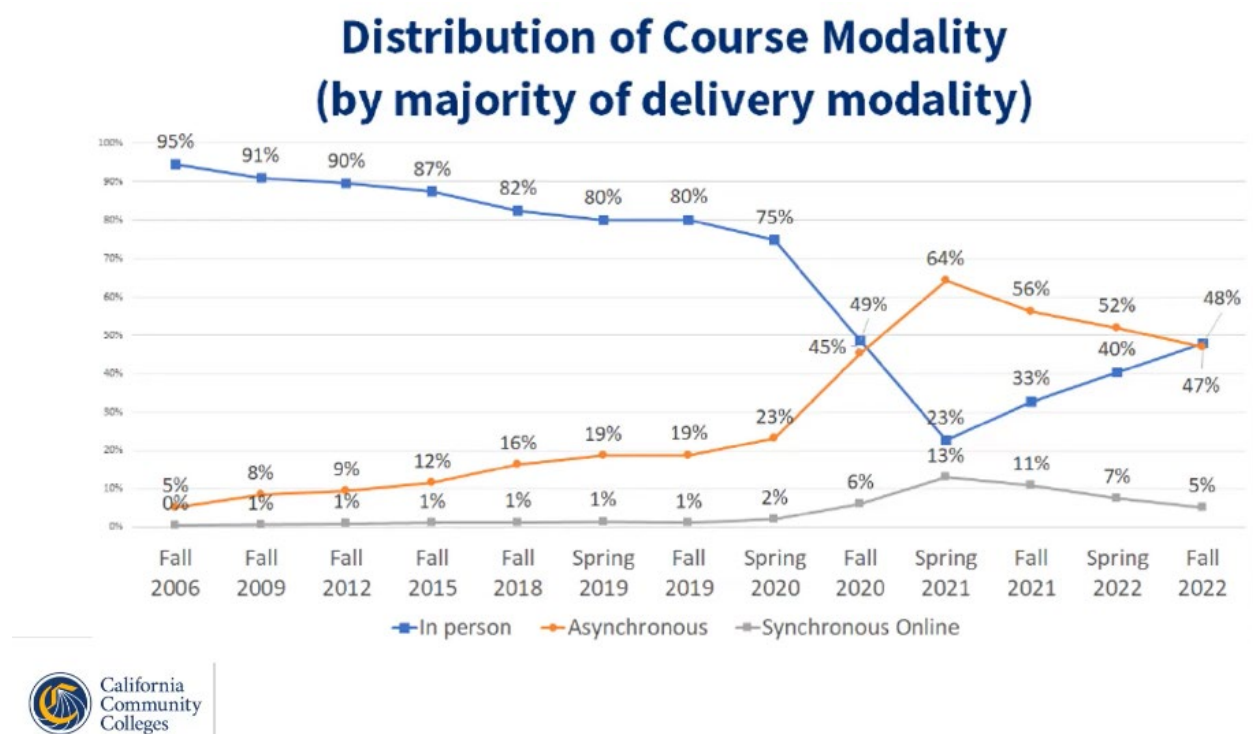


Source: December 2023 Chancellor's Office presentation by Chad Funk

Growth is fueled by demand. Students with ubiquitous access to web and mobile technologies value, and expect, the convenience of access to course content anywhere, anytime. When looking at DE sections as a percentage of total CCC credit course sections (Figure 2), we see a steady increase each year until the pandemic, at which point asynchronous online classes jumped from 23% to 64% of system offerings. Synchronous online classes grew from 1% to 13%, while in person, which had been losing 1-5% share each year, dropped to a low of 23%. The most current Chancellor's Office data is for Fall 2022, which provides the following distribution of course modality:

- In person: 47%
- Asynchronous online: 48%
- Synchronous online: 5%

Figure 2: Distribution of Course Modality in California Community Colleges, 2006-2022



Source: December 2023 Chancellor's Office presentation by Chad Funk

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE ON ONLINE LEARNING AND ENROLLMENT

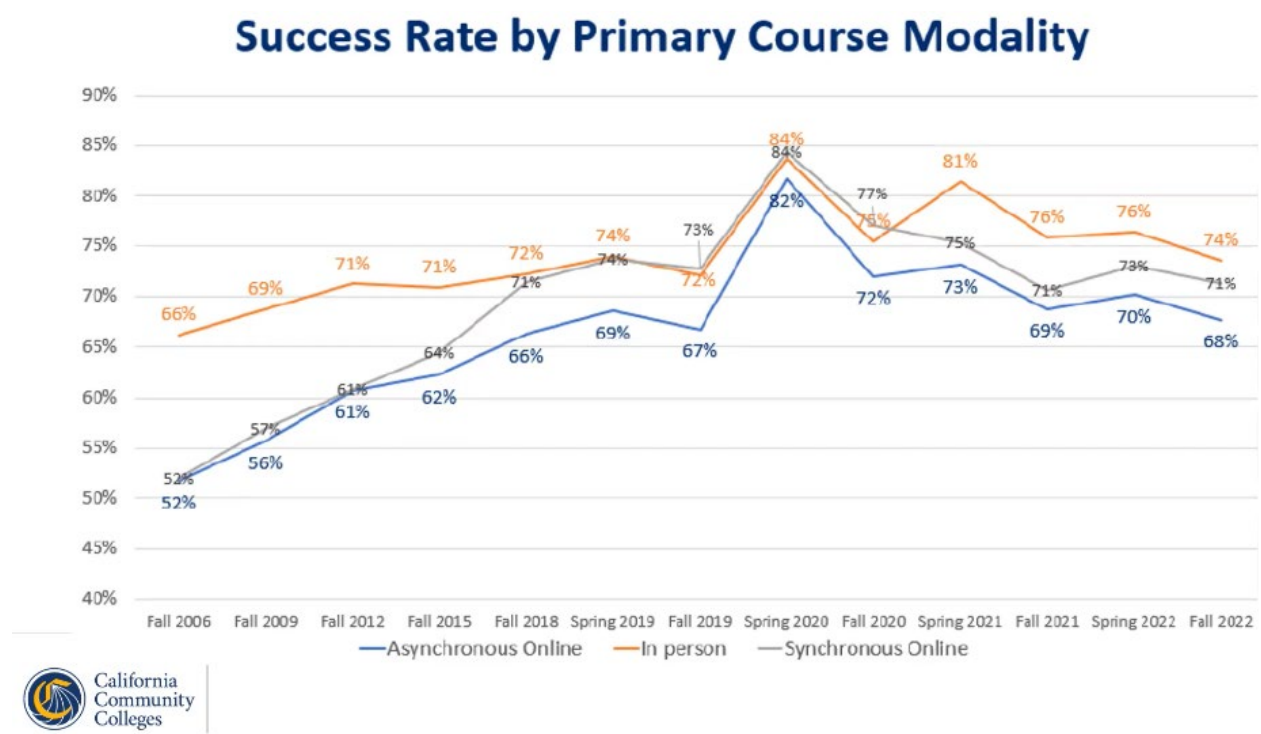
State survey results show that California higher education students choose distance education because internet-based courses facilitate access to a college education and integrate more easily with other aspects of their lives. Flexible learning schedules permit students to arrange work, family, and other personal obligations to suit their individual needs. In fact, according to The RP Group's [2022 Statewide California Community College Student Enrollment Survey](#), the top factor influencing students' decision to withdraw from courses is having to prioritize work (33%). Chancellor's Office student survey data consistently finds that a top reason CCC students choose distance education is "convenience with their work schedule," as seen most recently in 2017. (*Distance Education Report*, 2017, p.31). Students take distance education courses because they provide a way to continue college while managing work schedules and personal and/or family needs.

A [2023 California Competes study](#) found that “3.9 million Californians who intend to enroll in college are interested in exclusively online courses.” Moreover, “Access to online courses is the top motivator for enrollment in California’s Community Colleges.” (*Reimagining Online Education in California: A Roadmap for Advancing Access and Quality*, 2023, p. 2). Simply put, student demand for online learning in the CCCs has been consistently growing for years and has been accelerated by the pandemic.

SUCCESS AND COMPLETION RATES

Distance education success rates have steadily increased statewide. As seen in Figure 3 below, the gap between in person and asynchronous online success narrowed from 14% in Fall 2006 to 6% in Fall 2018. By Fall 2019, the last complete semester before the pandemic, the gap was 5%. Data becomes less reliable after this date due to pandemic impacts and then the rise in fraudulent enrollments, but the most recent numbers from Fall 2022 show a 6% difference between in-person and asynchronous success rates and a 3% difference between in-person and synchronous success rates.

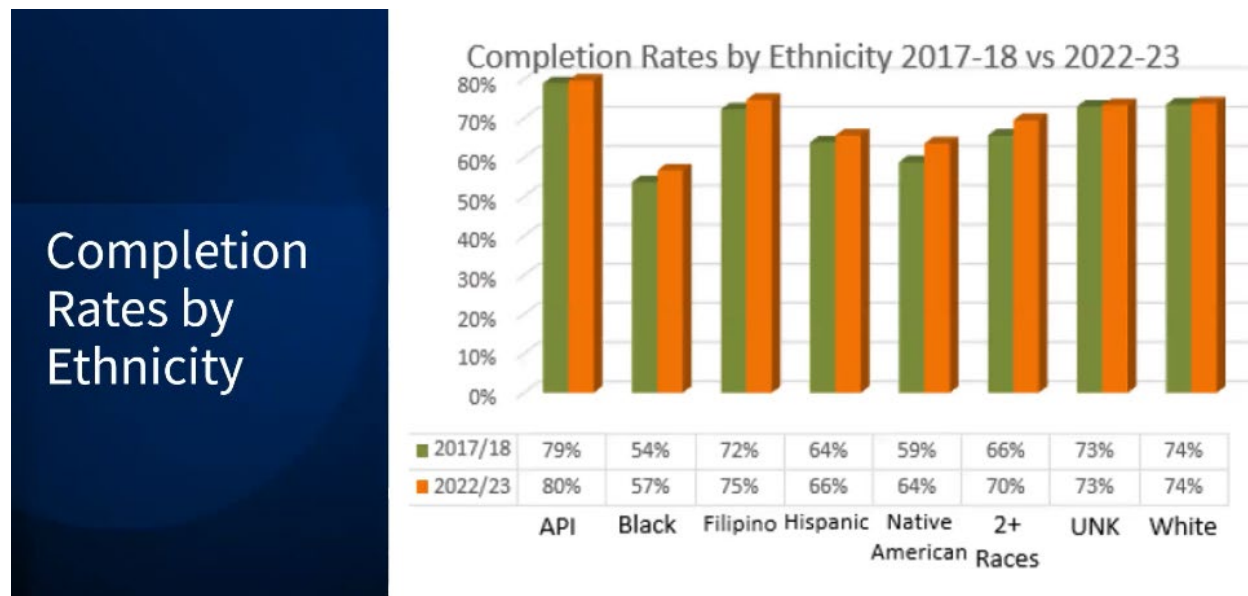
Figure 3: Success Rate by Course Modality, 2006-22



Source: December 2023 Chancellor’s Office presentation by Chad Funk

Data disaggregated by ethnicity shows statewide completion rates in distance education either improving or holding steady across all ethnicities between 2017-18 and 2022-23 (Figure 4). Rates improved by 5% for Native American students, 3% for Black and Filipino students, 2% for Hispanic/Latinx students, 1% for Asian and Pacific Islander students, and 4% for students identifying as multiracial. Completion rates held steady for White and “unknown” students.

Figure 4: DE Completion Rates by Ethnicity, 2017-18 vs. 2022-23



Source: December 2023 Chancellor’s Office presentation by Chad Funk

CHALLENGES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Research from the CCC Chancellor’s Office, the Instructional Technology Council (ITC), the EDUCAUSE *Horizon Report* and others identify common challenges facing post-secondary distance education, including:

- Faculty training and support needs, especially in equitable online teaching strategies
- Section 508 accessibility compliance support
- Online success and retention rates
- The impact of generative artificial intelligence (AI) on teaching and learning
- New and changing distance education modalities

Distance Education at Southwestern College

SWC's Educational Vision Plan 2030 notes that 32% of SWC students "are online-only students," and 45.7% take a mix of in-person and DE classes, including online, hybrid, and live online. In total, over 77% of our students are involved in online learning.

- **Institutional Benefits:** The institutional and administrative motivators for offering distance education classes include the efficient use of physical space, increased FTES, and the need to offer an alternative delivery method for those who cannot come to campus. Special populations served by distance education include students with children, working students, military students, and students with disabilities.
- **Program Benefits:** Southwestern College programs have implemented distance education for a variety of reasons, including improved access for current students, attracting new students, and program growth. Numerous programs are developing fully online pathways to degrees and certificates.
- **Student Benefits:** Student reasons for taking distance education classes include a flexible academic schedule, reduction of commuting time and transportation expenses, learning experience, and, for students with physical disabilities, accessibility. Mixing DE classes with in-person classes can empower students to take more classes and finish degrees faster.
- **Faculty Benefits:** Faculty members decide to teach via distance education for a variety of reasons, including enhancement of instructional methods, enrollment demand, growth of programs through increased access, and increased opportunities for flexibility and creativity.

Distance Education Definitions

Distance Education at Southwestern College refers to the delivery of online, live online, and hybrid courses. The College-adopted course management system, Canvas, is also widely used for web-enhancement of in-person classes.

STATE DEFINITION AND REQUIREMENTS

Title 5 § 55200 of the California Code of Regulations defines distance education as follows:

“Distance education” means education that uses one or more of the technologies listed below to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor(s) and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and instructor(s) either synchronously or asynchronously.

Per this same section, “The definition of ‘distance education’ does not include correspondence courses.”

§ 55200 further defines “accessible” as meaning “a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. The person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally and independently as a person without a disability. Although this might not result in identical ease of use compared to that of persons without disabilities, it still must ensure equal opportunity to the educational benefits and opportunities afforded by the technology and equal treatment in the use of such technology.”

Title 5 § 55206 of the California Code of Regulations notes the procedure for the approval of online classes as follows:

- a) If any portion of the instruction in a new or existing course is to be provided through distance education, the course outline of record or an addendum to the official course outline of record shall address how course outcomes will be achieved in a distance education mode and how the portion of instruction delivered via distance education meets the requirement for regular and substantive interaction as specified in section 55204.
- b) The course design and all course materials must be accessible to every student, including students with disabilities. The distance education course outline of record or

addendum shall be approved according to the district's adopted curriculum approval procedures.

ACCREDITING COMMISSION DEFINITION

In its 2024 document, *Policy on Distance and on Correspondence Education*, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) notes, “The Accreditation Standards require that all learning opportunities provided by accredited institutions must have equivalent quality, accountability, and focus on student outcomes, regardless of mode of delivery.” Its policy for distance education incorporates federal and state language to define distance education and set DE standards, including a focus on regular and substantive interaction (RSI):

An institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency—

a) Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and regular basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and

b) Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student (34 C.F.R. § 600.2).

APPLICATION OF DEFINITIONS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AT SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE

Southwestern Community College District Procedure AP 4105 notes the following definitions for each delivery mode of online instruction:

Online

An online class section is instructed entirely online and asynchronously, with no required synchronous class meetings in person or via video conferencing. The class is conducted using the college-adopted Course Management System (CMS) where asynchronous instruction,

interaction, activities, and assessments occur. Instruction and academic engagement follow a predictable pattern. Southwestern College uses 500-level section numbers for online sections.

Definition for students in the College Catalog: An online class is entirely online and asynchronous, with no required class meetings in person or via videoconferencing. Online classes use Canvas for asynchronous instruction, interaction, activities, and assignments. While there are weekly due dates, online classes offer flexibility in where and when these activities are completed. Southwestern College uses 500-level section numbers for online sections (501, 502, etc.).

Live Online

A “live online” class section provides instruction and academic engagement entirely through live videoconferencing, with no campus meetings or required use of the college-adopted Course Management System (CMS). Class meeting days and times are regular and noted in the schedule of classes. The class meets using college-adopted videoconferencing software, such as Zoom, where synchronous instruction, interaction, activities, and assessments occur. The CMS may be used to offer students access to class materials, communication, grades, and resources online, and the CMS may also be used for supplemental activities, homework, and electronic submission of coursework and assessments. The CMS or other online resources or activities may not be used to replace required synchronous online instruction. Southwestern College uses 400-level section numbers for live online sections.

Definition for students in the College Catalog: A live online class meets at set dates and times, which are published in the class schedule. All of these class meetings take place through videoconferencing in Zoom - there are no in-person requirements. While instruction, discussions, and activities happen in Zoom, Canvas may be used to provide class communication, resources, activities, homework, and grades. Southwestern College uses 400-level section numbers for live online sections.

Hybrid

A hybrid section provides a portion of instruction asynchronously online and a portion synchronously. The asynchronous portion adheres to the “online” modality definition above.

The synchronous portion of a hybrid section may be in one of two formats:

In-Person Hybrid: This format provides a portion of instruction asynchronously online and a portion synchronously in person. Required in-person meetings follow a regular pattern (on the same day[s] of the week and at the same time) and are published in the class schedule. Southwestern College uses 600-level section numbers for in-person hybrid sections.

Live-Online Hybrid: This format provides a portion of instruction asynchronously online and a portion through live videoconferencing. Required live-online meetings follow a regular pattern (on the same day[s] of the week and at the same time) and are published in the class schedule. Southwestern College uses 700-level section numbers for live-online hybrid sections.

Definition for students in the College Catalog: A hybrid class is a mix of online and live formats. The online part is asynchronous in Canvas, just like an online class. The live part has set meeting dates and times, which are published in the class schedule. Both components are required for all hybrid classes.

In-Person Hybrid Classes: This hybrid class is a mix of required online learning in Canvas and required in-person class meetings in a campus classroom or lab on listed dates and times. Southwestern College uses 600-level section numbers for in-person hybrids.

Live-Online Hybrid Classes: This hybrid class is a mix of required online learning in Canvas and required virtual class meetings using Zoom videoconferencing on listed dates/times. Southwestern College uses 700-level section numbers for live-online hybrids.

In Person

An in-person section is taught entirely face-to-face, in a physical classroom or laboratory environment. An in-person section may have web-enhanced activities or class information housed in the college's Course Management System (CMS). These web-enhanced sections may offer students access to class materials, grades, and resources online, and they also may offer supplemental activities and homework online as well as online communication and electronic submission of coursework. These courses may not use Internet-based resources or activities to replace required in-person instruction or in-seat contact hours.

Distance Education Academic Attendance

In asynchronous online instruction, attendance is defined not by physical attendance or "logging into an online class" but by "academic engagement" in the class. As defined by the Code of Federal Regulations ([34 CFR Part 600](#)), this is "active participation by a student in an instructional activity related to the student's course of study" and includes, but is not limited to:

- "Attending a synchronous class, lecture, recitation, or field or laboratory activity, physically or online, where there is an opportunity for interaction between the instructor and students;
- Submitting an academic assignment;
- Taking an assessment or an exam;
- Participating in an interactive tutorial, webinar, or other interactive computer-assisted instruction;
- Participating in a study group, group project, or an online discussion that is assigned by the institution; or
- Interacting with an instructor about academic matters."

SYLLABUS REQUIREMENT FOR ATTENDANCE

A distance education attendance statement, in accordance with the College's attendance policy and Department of Education regulations, must appear in each course syllabus specifying how

absences are managed. Details and sample statements are provided in the [Distance Education Handbook](#).

LAST DATE OF ATTENDANCE (LDA)

The last date of academic attendance, commonly known as the Last Day of Attendance (LDA), is the date the college uses to determine the amount of financial aid, if any, that must be returned to the Department of Education due to student withdrawal. The Department of Education specifically directs institutions to use “a student's last date of attendance at an academically-related activity” as the withdrawal date, and the language also specifies that “the institution documents that the activity is academically related and documents the student's attendance at the activity” ([34 CFR Part 668.22](#)).

Activities where students may be present but exhibit no evidence of academic engagement are excluded from determining First Date of Attendance and Last Day of Attendance, for example, “Logging into an online class or tutorial without any further participation; or Participating in academic counseling or advisement” ([34 CFR Part 600](#)).

LAST DAY OF ATTENDANCE DOCUMENTATION

Faculty members must document student academic engagement via the CMS and record student withdrawals in Colleague Self-Service. This documentation must be stored with grades and other official course records following Southwestern College record keeping policy.

Documenting engagement and recording withdrawals ensures that Southwestern College is in compliance with [Title 5, Section 58004](#): “Districts shall, according to procedures adopted by the governing board, clear the rolls of inactive enrollment.” Inactive enrollment is defined as a “no show” or a “student no longer participating in the course, except if there are extenuating circumstances.”

Regular and Substantive Interaction

“In distance education classes, regular and substantive interaction ensures that students benefit from their instructor’s presence online as they would in person, both as a content expert and as

a facilitator of student learning. Regular and substantive interaction among students ensures that students are part of a community of learners, just as they would be in their in-person classes” (Southwestern College’s Procedure 4105, pg. 1).

Instruction for distance education must comply with all applicable federal and state regulations. Title 5 section 55204(a) states, “Any portion of a course conducted through distance education includes regular and substantive interaction between instructor(s) and students, (and among students, if described in the course outline of record or distance education addendum) either synchronously or asynchronously,” and it further explains that the term “substantive interaction” means “engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion” (5 CCR § 55204).

This requirement for regular and substantive interaction is affirmed in Southwestern College’s Procedure 4105 and detailed in Procedure 4115: Distance Education Regular and Substantive Interaction. The procedure provides definitions, types of instructor-initiated and student-to-student interaction required and documented at SWC, and frequency requirements to meet local, state, and federal standards.

REGULAR AND SUBSTANTIVE INTERACTION DOCUMENTATION

The College must be able to demonstrate how regular and substantive interaction is achieved and documented, per Southwestern College’s Procedure 4115. This documentation should be maintained in the Course Management System and must demonstrate that instructors are interacting with their students at least as frequently as they would in the equivalent in-person class section to ensure that students “are accessing course materials, that they understand the material and what is required of them, and that they are participating regularly in the activities of the course” (Procedure 4115, p. 2).

Distance Education Enrollment at Southwestern College

Figure 5 below provides a snapshot of DE Full-Time Equivalent Students (FTES) over the most recent 5-year period. While DE enrollment has been steadily increasing for many years, the

COVID-19 pandemic’s shuttering of CCC campuses drove the dramatic increase in DE enrollment at SWC beginning in Spring 2020.

Figure 5: Distance Education FTES

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
DE FTES	2,537	2,823	3,753	5,510	6,056

Source: Source: CCCCCO Data Mart Distance Education (DE) Full Time Equivalent Students (FTES) Summary Report, Delayed Interaction (Internet Based), accessed 7/9/24

As with FTES, sections designated as distance education experienced steady growth pre-pandemic. When classes were moved to online delivery during the pandemic, this number swelled to the majority of Southwestern College’s offerings. We see the number of DE sections decreasing as the college gradually returned to in-person operations, but distance education FTES and course sections remain well above pre-pandemic levels, with more than twice as many DE sections in 2022-23 than in 2019-20.

Figure 6: Distance Education Course Sections

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
DE Sections	562	800	4,097	1,926	1,963

Source: Cummings Report at census, prepared by ISS Supervisor, accessed 2/29/24

Distance Education Success and Retention

STUDENT SUCCESS

Successful student completion of a course is defined as performance with a passing grade or a grade of “C” or better (A, B, C, Credit, or pass).

The data initially shows a steady increase in online success rates, following the pattern of the previous five years. Data beginning in Spring 2020 becomes less reliable due to impacts of the pandemic, including moving classes to “emergency remote instruction” and a temporary change in CCC grading policies. Data may also be impacted by the rise of suspected fraudulent enrollments beginning in 2023.

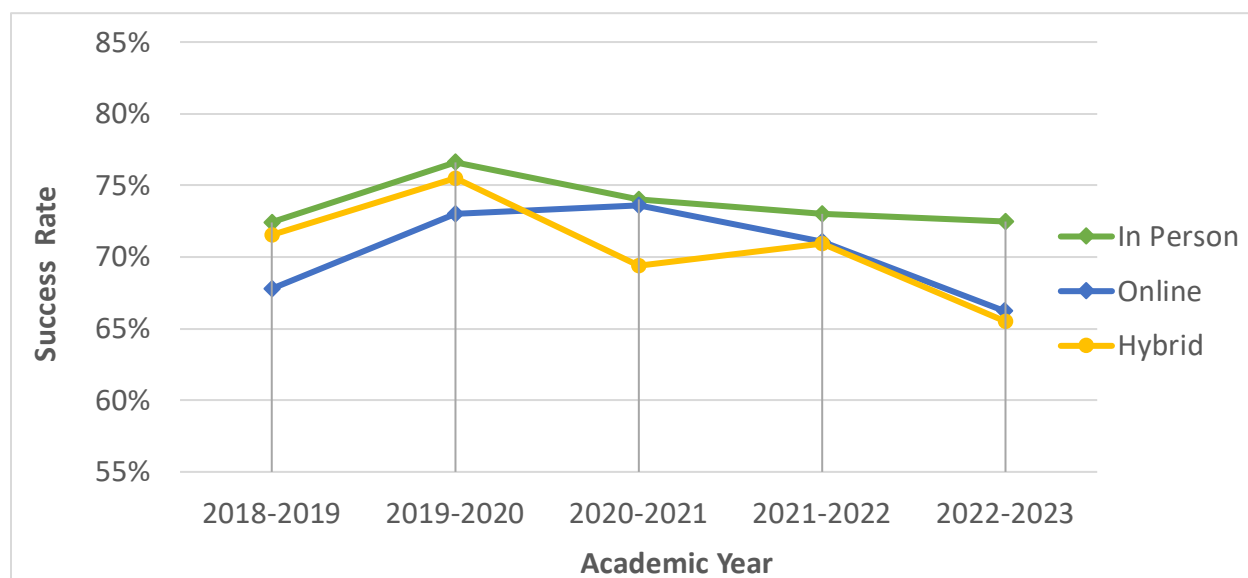
Figure 7: SWC Student Success Rates Table, 2018-2023

Academic Year	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Online	67.8%	73%	73.6%	71.1%	66.2%
In Person	72.4%	76.6%	74.0%	73.0%	72.5%
Hybrid	71.5%	75.5%	69.4%	70.9%	65.4%
Overall	71.6%	75.9%	73.8%	72.3%	69.3%

Source: Southwestern College BusinessObjects end-of-term courses and grades (Course Completion & Success Rates by Modality [Academic Year] Program Review Report), Accessed 7/9/2024

Cautions regarding data: Course outcomes data from Spring 2020 should be interpreted with caution due to collegewide changes in grading policies in response to the COVID19 pandemic. The district suspects some fraudulent enrollments are present in Spring 2023 that may affect these data but no official determination has been made.

Figure 8: SWC Student Success Rates Chart, 2018-2023



Source: Southwestern College BusinessObjects end-of-term courses and grades (Course Completion & Success Rates by Modality [Academic Year] Program Review Report), Accessed 7/9/2024

Cautions regarding data:

1. Course outcomes data from Spring 2020 should be interpreted with caution due to collegewide changes in grading policies in response to the COVID19 pandemic.
2. The district suspects some fraudulent enrollments are present in Spring 2023 that may affect these data but no official determination has been made.

RETENTION

Retention rates are calculated based on student drops. Students who drop a course with a “W” grade are counted as not having been retained.

The retention rate for online courses has improved yearly 2015-2021, with a slight decrease in of .3% 2021-2022 and a drop of 2% in 2022-2023. Hybrid courses experienced the highest retention rates compared to online and in person 2018-2021.

That said, data beginning in Spring 2020 should be interpreted with caution due to impacts of the pandemic, including moving classes to “emergency remote instruction” and a temporary change in CCC grading policies. Data may also be impacted by the rise of suspected fraudulent enrollments beginning in 2023.

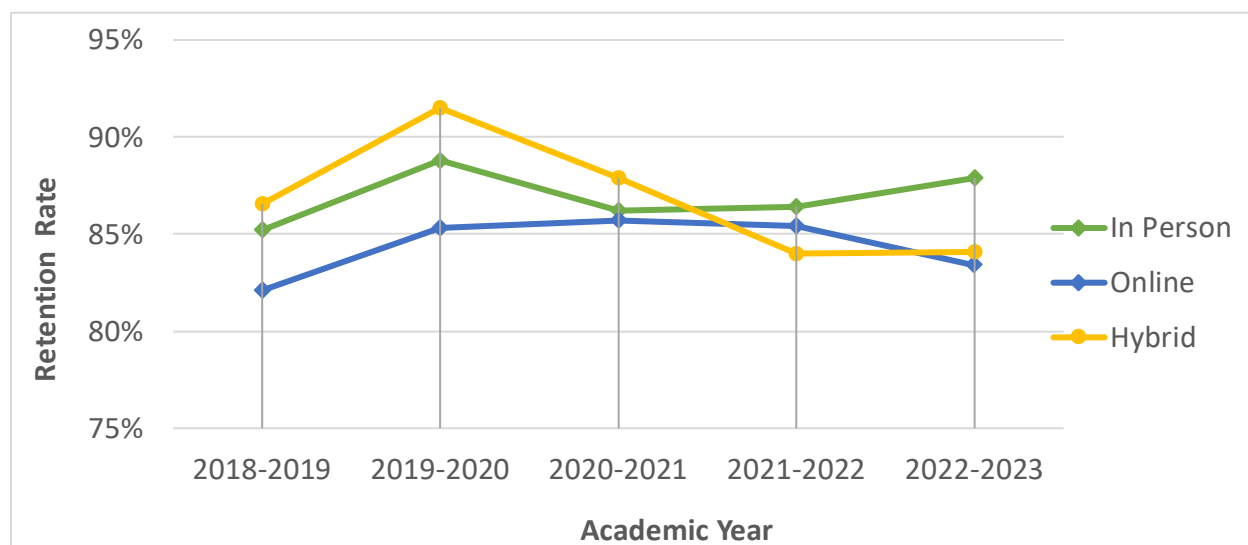
Figure 9: SWC Student Retention Rates Table, 2018-2023

Academic Year	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Online	82.1%	85.3%	85.7%	85.4%	83.4%
In Person	85.2%	88.8%	86.2%	86.4%	87.9%
Hybrid	86.6%	91.5%	87.9%	84.0%	84.1%
<i>Overall</i>	<i>84.8%</i>	<i>88.3%</i>	<i>86.0%</i>	<i>85.8%</i>	<i>85.7%</i>

Source: Southwestern College BusinessObjects end-of-term courses and grades (Course Completion & Success Rates by Modality [Academic Year] Program Review Report), Accessed 7/9/2024

Cautions regarding data: Course outcomes data from Spring 2020 should be interpreted with caution due to collegewide changes in grading policies in response to the COVID19 pandemic. The district suspects some fraudulent enrollments are present in Spring 2023 that may affect these data but no official determination has been made.

Figure 10: SWC Student Retention Rates Chart, 2018-2023



Source: Southwestern College BusinessObjects end-of-term courses and grades (Course Completion & Success Rates by Modality [Academic Year] Program Review Report), Accessed 7/9/2024

Cautions regarding data:

1. Course outcomes data from Spring 2020 should be interpreted with caution due to collegewide changes in grading policies in response to the COVID19 pandemic.
2. The district suspects some fraudulent enrollments are present in Spring 2023 that may affect these data but no official determination has been made.

PROGRAM PLANNING FOR RETENTION AND SUCCESS

While student success rates for in-person classes are slightly higher than in online classes at Southwestern College and across the state, it is important to acknowledge both the improved success in DE courses and the decrease in the disparity between DE and in-person courses prior to pandemic disruptions, especially in the hybrid delivery format. For planning purposes, it is also crucial to target the root causes of this disparity in order to support best practices that can improve success and retention.

There are many reasons that retention and success remain a challenge for distance education. Students tend to withdraw from classes for a range of reasons, including personal and professional issues (California State Chancellor's Office, 2013), and we see this post-pandemic as well, with CCC students reporting that the top two factors leading to dropping a class are prioritizing work and prioritizing mental health (RP Group, 2023). Students drawn to distance

education tend to have more personal and professional obligations than traditional students, which may cause them to drop classes at higher rates than others (Steenhausen, et al., 2010).

Given that equity gaps can be exacerbated online, it is important to highlight practices that research shows can have a positive impact on online retention and success, particularly for students of color. Research by Luke Wood & Frank Harris III, Laura Rendón, and others find that instructor-student relationships are crucial in supporting first-generation students and men of color, and that using video to foster instructor presence and student engagement has an outsized impact on men of color in the online classroom (Palacios & Wood, 2015).

These studies build on the earlier work of Carolyn Hart, which found that the key motivators to persist in online education include a sense of belonging to a community and communication with the instructor (Hart, 2012). This research speaks to the importance of “regular and substantive interaction,” which is a federal and state requirement but also the foundation of this college’s approach to faculty training, both for certification to teach online and for ongoing professional development.

It is also important to ensure that DE students have access to online student services, which include counseling, personal instructor feedback, academic advising, and career services (Pullan, 2011). Student services play a direct, vital role in success, including academic performance, psychological growth and program or certificate completion (Pullan, 2011). Southwestern College offers all core student services online, and in 2020 these services expanded dramatically due to the COVID-19 college closure. Online library and tutoring services have been especially lauded by faculty and students alike.

Research has also shown a correlation among retention, student orientation, and the effective use of learning strategies in postsecondary education (Weng, Cheong & Cheong, 2009). Quest for Online Success, a self-paced student introduction to online learning success skills, was adopted at SWC to support student retention and success; indeed, it was an objective in the 2013-2017 Distance Education plan. This Canvas mini-course can be accessed from the college website of Student Support hub in Canvas, and it is often provided by faculty as a Week 1

assignment; the certificate of completion emailed to students can be submitted for credit or extra credit.

Distance Education Support at Southwestern College

Canvas, the CCC system's Common Course Management System, was adopted by Southwestern College in April of 2016 as its official course management system. All distance education and in-person courses offered at Southwestern College have a course shell in Canvas.

Canvas is increasingly used for student clubs and departmental resource sites as well. While use of Canvas is not required for in-person classes, Canvas is commonly used by in-person faculty across the fields of study, and so the Online Learning Center designs and provides training and support for these non-DE faculty as well.

COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM THROUGH MANAGED HOSTING

Southwestern College Board Policy 4105 requires that DE courses be conducted in the college's official course management system. System maintenance, monitoring, upgrades, technical support, and systems administration assistance are all part of the contract for Canvas, which is managed through the Chancellor's Office. The state contract with Canvas includes 24/7 access to Canvas experts for system admins, faculty, and students. In addition, managed hosting safeguards against network outages through the use of redundant servers and industry standard safeguards from threats to physical and data security. Remotely hosting the system also protects against data loss through natural disasters.

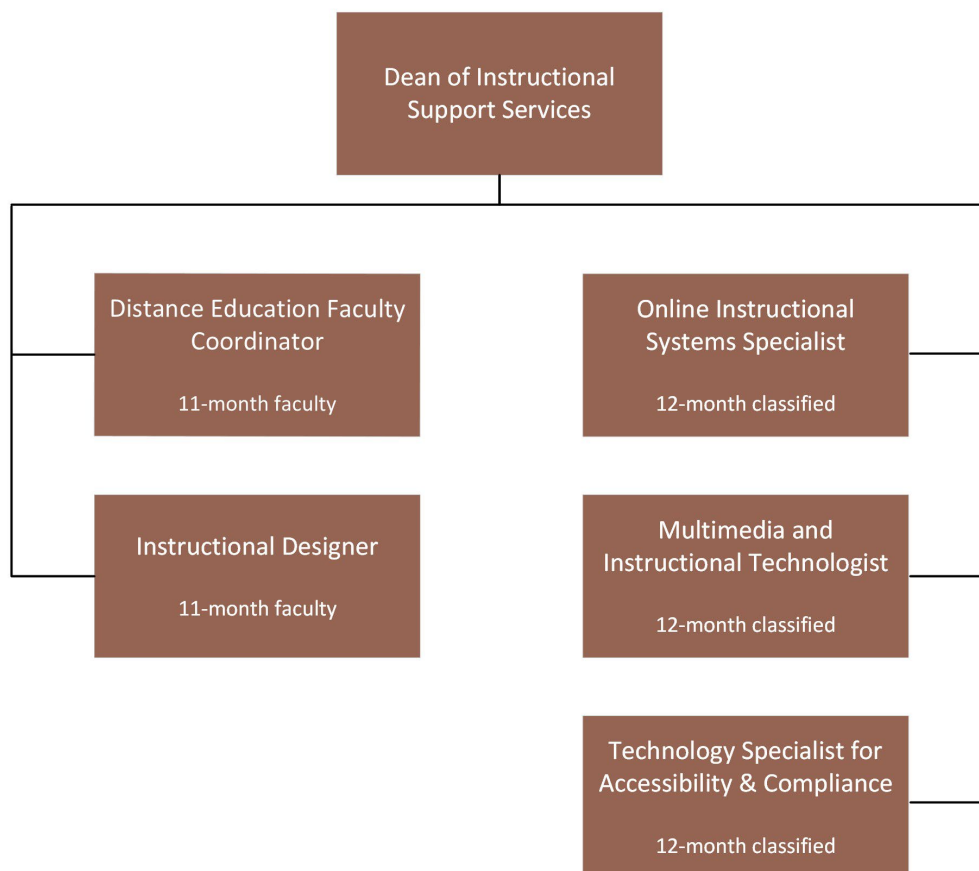
Information Technology provides automated course shell creation and transfer of faculty and student enrollment information from Colleague to Canvas.

SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE SUPPORT FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance Education faculty and students are supported by five positions in the Online Learning Center: Distance Education Faculty Coordinator, Instructional Designer, Online Instructional Systems Specialist, Multimedia and Instructional Technologist, and Technology Specialist for Accessibility and Compliance. The personnel in the Online Learning Center are responsible for

maintaining the course management system and related instructional technology, providing stable access, continually monitoring all technical systems related to online program delivery, and providing training and support to all faculty, staff, and students in use of the CMS.

Figure 6: Online Learning Center Organizational Chart



Additionally, the Online Learning Center provides robust professional development and individual and group support in the areas of online teaching and learning, equitable online teaching strategies, educational technology like Canvas Studio and VoiceThread, and accessibility. This includes Camp Canvas workshops, the HOW TO Academy, custom training, and presentations.

All faculty may take one or both of SWC’s facilitated online classes for DE faculty. The DE Faculty Coordinator administers the Distance Education Faculty Training (DEFT) program, which provides training and feedback in online course design and instruction to DE faculty through a 5-week online course taught in Canvas. The Instructional Designer manages and facilitates

Synchronous Online Learning Instructional Design (SOLID), a 2-week training that prepares faculty to teach Live Online classes via Zoom.

As a Teaching College in the California Virtual Campus (CVC) Exchange, Southwestern College also offers Peer Online Course Review (POCR), which is advanced professional development to align online classes with the CVC Course Design Rubric with Equity. SWC's CVC-certified POCR program pairs faculty with trained, certified POCR mentors to support alignment work, and all members of the OLC team provide alignment support as well, including page scans, accessibility guidance and remediation, and instructional design support. Aligned courses earn the CVC's "Quality Reviewed" badge, which prioritizes the class in the CVC Exchange search engine. POCR will be open to all SWC faculty upon institutionalization; it is currently offered to faculty participating in SWC's grant-funded Zero Textbook Cost program. Instructional support has also historically been provided through the DE Mentor Program, but funding for this program was halted in Fall 2023.

On-demand, self-paced faculty training is also available through the Faculty Resources hub in Canvas and includes video tutorials and the following self-paced courses: Intro to Teaching with Canvas, Creating Accessible Content, Making Instructional Videos, and Design to Align with POCR.

All students are invited to Canvas and Zoom orientations, which are offered in person and online at the start of each term. Student organizations, college programs, and departments using Canvas course shells are also provided training and support.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC SENATE

Education Code recognizes the right of Academic Senates to assume primary responsibility for making recommendations in the areas of curriculum and academic standards (§ 53200, 2009).

Title 5 further defines these areas to include "curriculum ... standards or policies regarding student preparation and success, ... policies for faculty professional development activities ... [and] processes for program review." This Distance Education Plan recognizes the role of the Academic Senate in these areas, and the DE Coordinator works with the Academic Senate and

its Distance Education Committee to ensure that goals, objectives, and final outcomes in these matters receive the Senate's approval.

DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM LEVEL LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Distance Education program-level learning outcomes address student technical competency and academic support awareness:

1. Distance Education students will use the basic features of the Southwestern College CMS at a proficiency level sufficient to access course materials, interact with the instructor and fellow students, complete course assignments and assessments, and monitor learning and grades during the semester.
2. Distance Education students will be aware of student academic and support services as a result of direct access to links to those services available on Southwestern College CMS course sites or the Online Learning area of the college website.

A Note on Course-Level Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs): Southwestern College instructional programs incorporate student learning outcomes into each course during the curriculum approval process. Distance Education course SLO assessment occurs as part of a department's established course-level SLO assessment process. The process of instructional assessment is not part of the Distance Education program review or this plan.

Program Goals and Objectives

Distance Education goals and objectives direct the program's development and improvement process during each 3-year period. The Online Learning Center is committed to offering only those new products and services that can be supported and funded with adequate technical, financial, and staffing resources.

GOAL 1: STUDENT SUPPORT & SERVICES

Provide the support and services necessary to support students in online learning.

1.1 Objective: Provide search functionality in Canvas, as requested by students, either through Canvas feature request/advocacy or through third-party solution.

- ✧ 1.1.a Person(s) responsible: DE Coordinator and Online Learning Center
- ✧ 1.1.b Timeframe: Fall 2025-Spring 2026
- ✧ 1.1.c Additional fiscal resources needed: Possible funding for third-party tool

1.2 Objective: Create a CVC Exchange webpage for students detailing how to use the CVC Exchange to find additional online classes and finish degree pathways faster, in support of EVP Subgoal 1.3's focus on increasing retention and completion.

- ✧ 1.2.a Person(s) responsible: CVC work group, DE Coordinator and Dean of ISS as co-leads
- ✧ 1.2.b Timeframe: Fall 2024-Spring 2025
- ✧ 1.2.c Additional fiscal resources needed: None

1.3 Objective: Advocate for SDSU to update Transfer Admission Guarantee to specifically include CVC Exchange courses, in support of EVP Subgoal 3.1's performance measure of improving "equitable graduation/transfer rate."

- ✧ 1.3.a Person(s) responsible: CVC work group, District leadership
- ✧ 1.3.b Timeframe: Fall 2024-Spring 2026
- ✧ 1.3.c Additional fiscal resources needed: None

GOAL 2: FACULTY SUPPORT & SERVICES

Provide the support and services necessary for faculty to create successful online learning experiences for students.

2.1 Objective: Institutionalize the DE Mentor Program to provide individual and small-group mentoring for faculty teaching online, preparing to teach online, or using Canvas with non-DE classes in support of EVP Subgoal 3.1: "Prioritize and Support Teaching Strategies" which "Accelerate Institutional Performance to Close Student Achievement Equity Gaps."

- ✧ 2.1.a Person(s) responsible: SCEA/District negotiation teams, DE Coordinator, Instructional Designer

- ✧ 2.1.b Timeframe: Fall 2024-Spring 2025
- ✧ 2.1.c Additional Fiscal resources needed: Funding for DE Mentor hourly pay

2.2. Objective: Institutionalize Peer Online Course Review (POCR) program to support the alignment of online courses with the CVC Course Design Rubric w/Equity, which is required of SWC as a Teaching College and supports district equity goals, such as EVP Subgoals 3.1 and 3.6.

- ✧ 2.2.a Person(s) responsible: DE Coordinator, Dean of ISS, VP of Academic Affairs
- ✧ 2.2.b Timeframe: Fall 2024-Spring 2027
- ✧ 2.2.c Additional fiscal resources needed: Funding for faculty alignment stipends and POCR Mentor hourly pay

2.3. Objective: Increase use of the CVC Course Design Rubric w/Equity as a tool to increase equity, retention, and success through increased professional development opportunities and mentoring (outside of POCR), in support of EVP Subgoals 1.3, 1.4, 3.1, and 3.6.

- ✧ 2.3.a Person(s) responsible: DE Coordinator, Instructional Designer
- ✧ 2.3.b Timeframe: Fall 2024-Spring 2026
- ✧ 2.3.c Additional fiscal resources needed: funding for DE Mentor hourly pay

GOAL 3: LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Continually monitor and revise program requirements to meet state and federal laws and guidelines that apply to distance education in California higher education.

3.1 Objective: Expand faculty adoption of new Pope Tech Dashboard, a Canvas application that scans entire courses for accessibility and assists in fixing errors, through increased training, outreach, and support.

- ✧ 3.1.a Person(s) responsible: Instructional Designer, Technology Specialist for Accessibility and Compliance
- ✧ 3.1.c Timeframe: Spring 2025-Spring 2026
- ✧ 3.1.d Additional fiscal resources needed: Recruitment of vacant Technology Specialist for Accessibility and Compliance position

3.2 Objective: Institutionalize in-house document remediation service after successful 2023-2024 pilot to ensure SWC is meeting state, federal, and accreditation accessibility standards.

- ✧ 3.2.a Person(s) responsible: Dean of ISS, Technology Specialist for Accessibility and Compliance
- ✧ 3.2.c Timeframe: Fall 2024-Spring 2025
- ✧ 3.2.d Additional fiscal resources needed: Funding for student workers, recruitment of vacant Technology Specialist for Accessibility and Compliance position

GOAL 4: PROGRAM QUALITY

Maintain a quality DE program through continuous program improvement based on the evaluation of instruction, procedures, practices, and accessibility.

4.1 Objective: Analyze CVC Exchange data to identify patterns and support SWC's success as a Teaching College, including: goals and needs of SWC students taking classes via the Exchange, courses and programs CCC students are taking via the Exchange; support opportunities to improve retention and success of students using the Exchange.

- ✧ 4.1.a Person(s) responsible: CVC work group, DE Coordinator and Dean of ISS as co-leads
- ✧ 4.1.b Timeframe: Fall 2024-Spring 2025
- ✧ 4.1.c Additional fiscal resources needed: None

4.2 Objective: Create a process for capturing data from students withdrawing from online and hybrid courses to better understand the reasons students withdraw and then target support to address these reasons, in support of EVP Subgoals 1.3, 1.4, and 3.1 targeting retention rates.

- ✧ 4.2.a Person(s) responsible: Dean of ISS, Online Learning Center, Enrollment Services, Institutional Technology
- ✧ 4.2.b Timeframe: Fall 2026-Spring 2027
- ✧ 4.2.c Additional fiscal resources needed: Unknown

4.3 Objective: Conduct research on the impact of Peer Online Course Review (POCR) on student retention and success, including disaggregated data to assess how POCR can be used to close

equity gaps. Use this data to support EVP Subgoals 1.3, 1.4, and 3.1 targeting retention, completion, and success.

- ✧ 4.3.a Person(s) responsible: DE Coordinator, DE Committee, Institutional Research
- ✧ 4.3.b Timeframe: Fall 2024-Spring 2025
- ✧ 4.3.c Additional fiscal resources needed: None