
The OEI: Improving quality, student success and lowering costs through statewide collaboration

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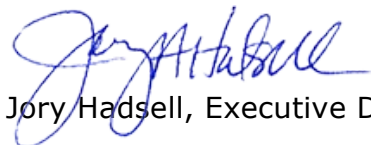
FORWARD BY OEI MANAGEMENT

As the Online Education Initiative for the California Community Colleges continues to implement new online learning and technology resources, promote instructional innovation, and drive groundbreaking system-wide collaborations, we are appreciative of the Board of Governors' commitment to expansion of high quality online learning opportunities for students. We are excited about this opportunity to share an update and shed light on how the OEI may greatly enhance other system initiatives also aimed at supporting our changing student population based on the effective use of technology and support structures.

We have asked MindWires, LLC, a market analyst and strategic consulting company, to help us write a description and analysis of the current and potential impact of the OEI on improving outcomes while also lowering costs. MindWires brings a wealth of experience from inside California and across the nation leveraging their knowledge and experience working with other online initiatives. We regularly benefit from their market analysis through the e-Literate blog.

In reading their analysis, we hope you will see the larger picture of system-wide institutional collaboration and efficiencies including collaboration that brings faculty out of institutional silos into a larger community of practice benefitting online learning beyond the borders of a single college. The OEI is truly a *social and technological infrastructure* with significant potential to continue serving as a conduit of innovation to and from the 114 California Community Colleges while creating fiscal and operational efficiencies that benefit both institutions and the students they serve.

Regards,



Jory Hadsell, Executive Director

on behalf of the OEI management team

ANALYSIS

The Online Education Initiative (OEI) program design has brought to bear substantial long-term and system-wide benefits in terms of both efficiency and effectiveness. One needs to look no further than the adoption of a common course management system (Canvas) by 111 colleges in just over two years to understand the importance, synergy, and cost-saving potential in fostering technological and programmatic collaboration across a system as large as the CCC. The OEI has sometimes been characterized as primarily an infrastructure sharing initiative, due to an early focus on tool selection and systems integration, including the dramatic success of the common course management system adoption. Looking beyond these factors, we believe OEI is cleverly designed to get maximum impact out of the infrastructure funding by promoting effective teaching and technology innovations that also help colleges overcome specific local budgetary pressures which have historically created obstacles to high-quality and cost-effective education. The program's layered design fosters positive organizational change both by easing these pressures and by creating new incentives and support for quality improvement.

Even the first major infrastructure change of the program—selecting and subsidizing a common course management system—has had substantial impact on educational practices by reducing friction for collaboration between the campuses and with CCC:

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- I now know that I can ring up any other [Distance Education] Coordinator and we'll be speaking the same "language" regarding the use, training, and administration of the [course management system]. I'm also really looking forward to faculty being able to share ideas and resources via Commons.*
- Director of Distance Education, Santa Rosa Junior College

Our Professional Development Coordinator is encouraging the creation of Pro Dev workshops in [common course management system] Canvas, such as health and wellness ("dealing with difficult people"), how to create Open Educational Resources, how to use [Student Learning Outcomes] for better teaching, and a lecture on science and its assumptions. What is developed at Butte can be instantly shared with other schools, and vice versa. I see a renaissance of Pro Dev opportunities!
- Technology Mediated Instruction coordinator, Butte College

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- *We are also using the [common course management system] Canvas trainings that were written by the [CCC] OEI. We have incorporated the Introduction to Canvas with the Introduction to Online Teaching and Learning for faculty new to teaching online and it is part of our certification process. In addition, because a lot of faculty taking the courses and many on those of the [Distance Education] Subcommittee are not yet teaching online, they have reported that these resources are actually helping them be better teaching in their face-to-face classes as well in the way they present information and organize their materials. This is certainly an added benefit we never expected.*
- Faculty Senate Curriculum Chair, College of the Desert
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The last quote is particularly illustrative of similar feedback we have heard from other programs where faculty receive training for online teaching. We frequently hear from faculty in programs throughout higher education that high-quality training for teaching online improves their traditional classes as well. Professional development opportunities for faculty, such as those provided by OEI, provide exposure to research-backed pedagogy, regardless of the course delivery method, to which the participants often had no exposure in graduate school.

CCC OEI is already becoming a vector by which faculty learn effective teaching practices that impact not only a college's online offerings but potentially all courses, whether or not they are online, that are taught by faculty who are trained in the practices promoted by the program.

But that is just the beginning. The full potential of OEI can only be fully and properly evaluated in the context of the larger collaboration goals of the program and the various other components that work together to enable these goals. To fully appreciate the potential impact of that program design, it is helpful to look at it in the context of the state's goals for the California Community College System as a whole. In this year's Higher Education Analysis report, the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) calls out several efficiency concerns for the California Community College system:

- Excess unit-taking
- A mismatch between course offerings and student needs at individual colleges
- Growth and volatility in enrollment

These issues are linked. Growth and volatility in enrollment at the individual campus level makes academic resource planning more difficult and less efficient. This difficulty is exacerbated by changes in student majors and concentrations with each academic cohort, partly in response to evolving local job markets. Because of these challenges in resource planning, course offerings are inevitably sub-optimized for student needs on any given campus in any given year. When students cannot get the courses they need to graduate as a result of these sub-optimizations, they take longer to complete their degrees and often take more classes in order to maintain financial aid status, thus driving up excess unit taking (and student debt).

The OEI Course Exchange provides a critical tool for addressing these challenges by enabling schools to share course capacity across the system, thus improving responses to growth and volatility in enrollment, improving the match between course offerings and student needs, and reducing excess unit-taking.

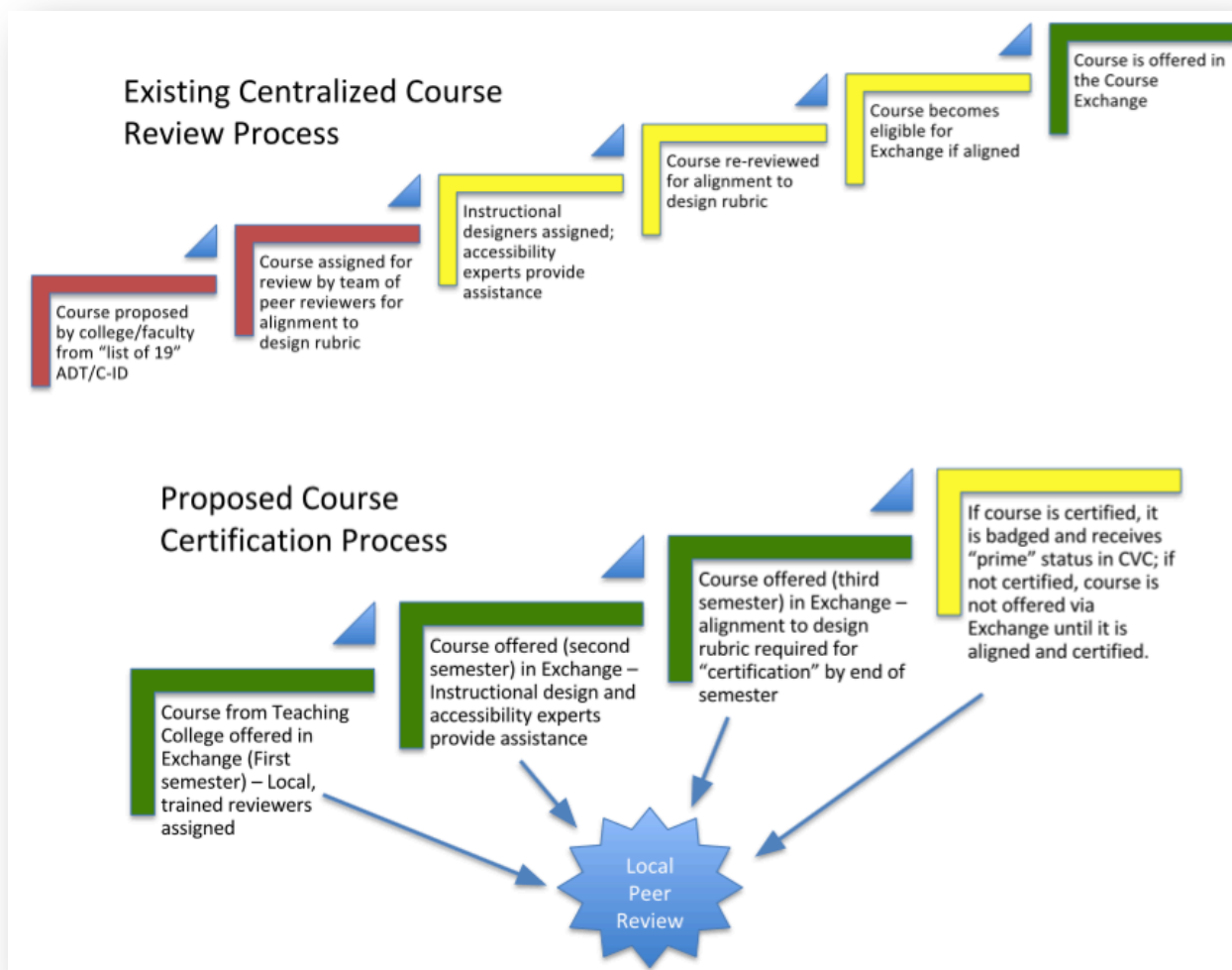
Improving efficiency through the Course Exchange, as it begins to scale beyond its initial pilot and integrate with other system tools, may also improve degree completion in and of itself. The degree completion rate drops as the time-to-degree rate increases. In other words, the longer it takes a student to complete her degree, the less likely she or he is to do so. If more students are able to complete their degree requirements quickly because of increased access to required courses through the Course Exchange, then degree completion should improve. To that end, the Course Exchange provides support to system-wide efforts like Guided Pathways, by filling gaps on students' program maps that inform and guide their continued studies and advancement toward careers. Initial results look promising; the RP Group's 2015-16 OEI Enrollment, Demographics and Outcomes Summary reported improved success rates for different groups of online learners in OEI courses. By providing campus leaders with a new tool to address efficiency challenges due to over- and under-enrollment, the Course Exchange simultaneously offers the possibility of improving effectiveness.

But improving course availability is not the only element in the OEI program with the potential to boost educational effectiveness. OEI's course review program and Course Design (Rubric) take advantage of the incentives driving participation in the Course Exchange to encourage campuses to take steps that should improve the quality of the

courses themselves. All courses in the Course Exchange must be certified to align to the Rubric, which means that all faculty who design or teach courses on the exchange will be exposed to the best practices in the Rubric (including practices for accessibility compliance, which enables greater equity while reducing potential legal liability). The more courses that are taught through the Course Exchange, the more these practices will be spread.

This process will accelerate as CCC OEI begins to successfully transition from the current, centralized process for reviewing proposed Course Exchange courses for alignment with the Rubric to a distributed, college-centric process.

With this process, not only faculty who design or teach courses on the Course Exchange but also those involved with reviewing proposed courses for certification will be trained in the best practices represented in the Rubric.



Once the Rubric is embedded into the fabric of course design on the campuses via the Course Exchange, it can continue to function as a conduit for improvement as new research-backed practices are identified and included in the Rubric design. For example, CCC OEI commissioned MindWires to collect and analyze current effective practices for improving equity of outcomes in online programs. Findings from research efforts such as this one can be incorporated into future versions of the Rubric and ripple out to the campuses, and some of those new discoveries may likely impact face-to-face in addition to online courses. In effect, the OEI program design layers a social infrastructure on top of the technical infrastructure that has been provided by the common course management system and related technology investments. It is the social infrastructure that has the most long-term potential for enabling better student outcomes at a lower taxpayer cost. The technology and budgetary support are enablers and incentivizers.

Here is another example of how the program design fosters improvement of practices on individual campuses: To achieve maximum benefit from the Course Exchange, participating campuses are shifting costs from technical infrastructure to social infrastructure—e.g., from LMS licensing to faculty and staff release time, additional online student services, and professional development. In particular, the OEI focus on student services aligns well with initiatives like the Guided Pathways Project's student-centered approach. Feedback from OEI-participating campuses suggests that they are using the funding from the common course management system licensing subsidization to make these investments:

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- *Our courses are much improved. In one year we have had 75% of current online instructors are fully certified. Almost 80 additional faculty are in process of being certified. We have approved 46 online course sections and reviewed or are currently review this semester another 35-40 courses. Without the resources from OEI and @one, we could not have made this happen.*

- Faculty Senate Curriculum Chair, College of the Desert

Funding that would be used for [the common course management system] can be redirected to training for faculty who need extra help learning HOW to teach online.

- Dean, Business, Technology, and Career Technical Education, Ohlone College

- Part of the people/resources that Coastline was able to shift, include our new Faculty Success Center, whose staff was able to create a new online course template in Canvas that helps faculty design a quality course. In addition, we were able to devote trainers to help faculty learn to use [the common course management system]. In this environment, our Academic Senate then felt comfortable mandating training for online instructors, something we never had before. I believe all this would not have happened if we had to pay for the [the common course management system] license....*

So, continued state/OEI support for the...license will be critical for us to continue to train/support faculty and disseminate the use of these [OEI support] apps and support services....

One thing we were able to do, due to the free license, is pay all District faculty a stipend for the completion of [course management system] training.

- Associate Dean, Distance Learning, Coastline Community College

Measuring Adoption Rates

One measure of the overall health of an initiative such as OEI is the rate at which colleges adopt and embrace resources. In this regard, the OEI has produced impressive results in a relatively short timeframe. The table below contains information provided by OEI showing college adoptions of resources provided by the OEI either at no or reduced cost through statewide negotiated agreements.

Resource Implemented/Deployed	Impact
Canvas – Common Course Management System	108 colleges
“Quest for Online Success” Online Student Readiness Assessment Program	47 colleges
NetTutor 24x7 Online Tutoring	68 colleges
Cranium Café Online Counseling Platform	58 colleges
OEI Rubric – Faculty Trained	38 colleges

Proctorio Online Proctoring and ID Verification System	28 colleges
Online Course Exchange	6 colleges (17 additional in implementation)
Online Counseling Network (professional development aligned to National Board of Certified Counselors standards)	19 colleges
CCC Regional Proctoring Network	18 colleges
VeriCite Online Plagiarism Detection Tool	17 colleges

Additionally, the Course Exchange is completing its initial, limited pilot this year while technical feedback is provided and student-friendly improvements are developed. A listing of the 23 colleges participating in the OEI Consortium and their status in the Course Exchange pilot is provided in Appendix A.

Measuring Impact on Student Success

Using the depth of experience of the Research and Planning Group (RP), a third-party evaluation and research firm with community college expertise, the OEI was able to determine reach and impacts thus far as it pertains to student success and completion rates.

The state has measures by which it can monitor the return on its investment. In the short term, growth in Course Exchange participation and demonstrated improvements in outcomes from courses that follow the Rubric are metrics that CCC OEI is providing and can continue to provide. In the longer term, it should be possible to see the effects that a scaled exchange has on efficiency and effectiveness across the system. Initial results are promising; the RP Group’s 2015-2016 OEI Enrollment, Demographics, and Outcomes Summary reports the following:

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- *Overall, students enrolled in OEI courses achieved a success rate 5.5 percentage points higher than the statewide rate.*
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- *OEI students between the ages of 30 and 39 had a success rate 18.0 percentage points greater than the statewide rate for this age group (87.8% compared to 69.8%).*
 - *Success rate for African-American students taking OEI courses was 26.6 percentage points greater than the statewide rate for this group (80.0% compared to 53.4%).*
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These results are still very early and should be taken as suggestive of program potential rather than dispositive of assured long-term results. The important point for current purposes is the state is already being provided with tools for auditing the impact of their investment. These measures will become increasingly valuable as the program scales.

Challenges Faced

The greatest challenge OEI faces is the need for patience and flexibility, particularly with the establishment of the Course Exchange. OEI has taken a fully collaborative approach aimed at helping any individual California Community College to improve its own online offerings rather than making new online courses the primary focus. The Course Exchange is a critical piece in OEI's offerings, but enabling and supporting change across a system as complex and as historically autonomous in academic strategy as the CCCs takes time.

A second challenge that OEI faces is navigating California regulations that historically have made it difficult for colleges to collaborate. AB637 is a major step in helping in this area - allowing for reciprocity of residency determinations and student-authorized data transfer between OEI Consortium colleges, thereby allowing students to enroll in Course Exchange sections in real-time. The enactment of AB637 will allow the OEI to develop a streamlined student experience that will allow the Course Exchange to scale more dramatically once implemented. OEI may need additional regulatory flexibility to more fully enable inter-college collaboration.

Potential to Support Development of a Fully Online College

The California and national data argues that California needs a multi-pronged approach to better serving working adults, typically over age 25, and development of a fully online workforce-oriented college built for online learning from the ground up could have a

significant impact. The OEI has generated numerous lessons-learned and could operate as a supporting technology and social infrastructure to a new online college.

The existing infrastructure of OEI may even help a fully-online college get off the ground quicker and enable shared lessons in the long run.

Given the nature of social and technology infrastructure developed by OEI, the initiative will be able to support the new fully-online college regardless of the precise form to be recommended to the Governor. This infrastructure support could also be bi-directional in nature, both making it easier and faster for the new college to develop its programs and services, and also providing a conduit for innovation from the new college *back to* the existing 114 colleges.

Summary

In summary, early evidence strongly suggests that OEI's holistic design is enabling campuses to simultaneously improve their efficiency by reducing over- or under-enrolled classes, reduce the number of bottleneck courses that prevent students from graduating on time (or at all), and increase investment in faculty professional development around evidence-based course design. This would be a remarkable set of accomplishments under any circumstances but is particularly remarkable given OEI has no authority to mandate any actions be taken by the campuses, except as a condition of their voluntary participation in the OEI program. The program is able to have this impact because its designers made the effort to understand the pressures and constraints campuses face well enough to design a program that helps bring budgetary imperatives more in line with mission-related goals. If this promising start continues to bear fruit, we believe OEI could become a national model.

APPENDIX A: COURSE EXCHANGE COLLEGES

Colleges are involved in the course exchange implementation as follows:

Colleges currently live:

Butte College
Coastline Community College
Foothill College
Fresno City College
Lake Tahoe Community College
Ventura College

Colleges currently engaged in implementation:

Antelope Valley College
Barstow Community College
Cabrillo College
Columbia College
College of the Canyons
Hartnell College
Imperial Valley College
Mira Costa College
Monterey Peninsula College*
Mt. San Antonio College
Mt. San Jacinto College
Ohlone College
Pierce College
Rio Hondo College
Saddleback College*
Shasta College
West Los Angeles College

**Colleges experiencing delayed due to non-standard (custom) student information systems.*