

**Los Medanos College**  
**Distance Education Strategic Plan 2009**

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**Presented by the Distance Education Strategic  
Planning Task Force  
February 2010**

# Los Medanos College Strategic Planning Task Force Members

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# **Los Medanos College: Distance Education Strategic Plan 2009**

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the Los Medanos College Distance Education Strategic Plan is to provide recommendations and direction to the college in providing online services of rigor, breadth and depth that are substantiated through an ongoing cycle of planning, assessment and improvement.

## **Mission and Vision**

### **Mission**

#### *College Mission*

Los Medanos College is a public community college that provides quality educational opportunities for those within the changing and diverse communities it serves. By focusing on student learning and success as our first priorities, we aim to help students build their abilities and competencies as life-long learners. We create educational excellence through continually assessing our students' learning and our performance as an institution. To that end, we commit our resources and design our policies and procedures to support this mission.

#### *Distance Education*

Los Medanos College is dedicated to providing learning opportunities in both traditional and non-traditional environments to a diverse community of learners. To promote innovation and increased access, the college will develop and revise programs and services based on student need, workforce demand, institutional strength, and the ability to operate effectively and efficiently.

## **Vision**

### *College Vision*

Los Medanos College provides the premier educational opportunity for East County residents, where learning matters most.

### *Distance Education Vision*

Online learning is an integral part of Los Medanos College's educational services that promotes learner success through innovative, interactive teaching, learning and technology. Los Medanos College strives to provide access to quality online programs that meet the needs of a diverse population and address curriculum and student services, as well as faculty and student training, in a consistent and effective way. Students will receive advanced education that is seamless in delivery and access to instructional components as well as student services, regardless of delivery mode (face-to-face, online, or hybrid).

## **History and Future Plans**

Los Medanos College is part of a multi-campus district that provides service to the eastern part of Contra Costa County, with Diablo Valley College serving the Central County and Contra Costa College the West County. DVC is the largest of the three colleges, and offers the most online sections, with 176 offerings in fall 2009. Online courses have been offered by Los Medanos College since 2000, with 62 completely online sections in fall 2009. Contra Costa college has the fewest online options with 20 sections offered in fall 2009<sup>1</sup>.

Distance education at LMC has evolved from the ground up with innovative and dedicated faculty who began to offer online courses. Since the inception of online courses there has been minimal professional development, technical support, planning or administrative oversight. It is anticipated that this strategic plan, along with the collaboration of the districtwide workgroup, will provide strategic direction for the future of distance education at Los Medanos College and across the district.

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<sup>1</sup> Online courses at DVC may or may not include mandatory on-campus meetings, particularly in math and for assessment purposes. Online courses at CCC include hybrid courses.

## **Current Status**

Due to work schedules, family commitments and transportation challenges, many students have an increased interest in online education and are better served with alternative approaches. In fall 2009, LMC offered 62 online courses in both GE and Career Technical areas. However, while access and expanded opportunities for enrollment options are important, student outcomes have been mixed. A report by the LMC Office of Institutional Research in Fall 2009 indicated that success and retention rates were lower for students enrolled in online courses compared to the same courses offered face-to-face. These follow state and national trends in online education. The report also found that students had higher success and retention rates in hybrid courses than comparable online course. However, the results of hybrid courses compared to face-to-face courses were mixed. The college will need to continue to track the data in course offerings, as well as the underlying causes, as it expands and promotes offerings and addresses gaps in students' abilities to obtain their educational goals.

While distance education may provide another venue for students taking courses, the college and the state are currently in a new strategic enrollment management paradigm. Budgets have been drastically reduced across the state, with many colleges reducing the number of course offerings, ultimately impacting the number of students that are served. The college is now in a position to think strategically about the role of distance education in its delivery of quality education.

Strategic planning based on research and evidence will help position the college to respond to changing needs in the community and provide exceptional educational opportunities when the current budget challenge stabilizes. In fact, evaluating distance education offerings and enrollment management may help alleviate stress on physical resources. Finally, working with the district on infrastructure and online offerings across the three colleges may or may not result in coordinated efforts in technology, as well as a breadth of offerings that may not be offered by any one college and that will ultimately better serve students.

## **S.W.O.T Analysis**

### **Strengths**

- Dedicated faculty and staff committed to providing online opportunities
- Recently added administrative/managerial staff to promote institutional planning and support
- Opportunity to collaborate with district on commonalities and economies of scale between the 3 colleges, including infrastructure
- A core of trained, knowledgeable faculty currently offering online courses
- A faculty-led Distance Education committee (DEC) that has representation from all constituents on campus, including students, and meets regularly to discuss relevant topics, conduct research, and create policies in online education

### **Weaknesses**

- Lack of dedicated budget or resources
- Lack of systematic technological and pedagogical training for faculty teaching online
- Lack of orientation/ training for new online students
- No clearinghouse for determining what is working and what is not, and to respond to issues
- Need review and dissemination of processes and procedures for online offerings

### **Opportunities**

- The strategic plan will provide much needed direction and will position the DE committee to apply for potential grants and other funding opportunities
- Support from district and sister colleges to evaluate infrastructure and consider economies of scale
- Opportunity to capitalize on current resources, including using tools such as CCC Confer, peer training, other college resources, online tutoring and other free sites
- Respond to fiscal constraints by strategically evaluating course offerings in terms of location
- Market LMC online instruction
- Complete research regarding the feasibility of offering an online AA/AS degree(s)
- Improve persistence and retention

### **Threats**

- Budget crisis in the state prohibits growth and innovation, calls for limited to no enrollment growth
- Faculty or staff not uniformly trained or educated in online education
- Resistance from some faculty and staff
- Faculty or staff with the perception that all online is beneficial (without reviewing data or research)

- No consistency within the course management system (Blackboard) for instructional design.

## **Goals and Strategies**

**College Goal #1:** Improve the learning of all students.

### **Online Education**

The online education programs and services offered at Los Medanos College will improve the learning of all students by offering additional modes of delivery to meet the educational goals of a diverse population. Support structures for students and faculty will be integral to providing quality educational opportunities. Students will receive orientation for online courses to help determine their ability to succeed.

### **D.E. Strategic Plan Goal # 1 and Recommended Strategies: Educational Offerings and Delivery**

#### ***Objectives***

1. Improve and increase access to educational courses and services for all students<sup>2</sup>.
2. Provide quality online educational opportunities that meet the needs of all students.
3. Create and implement innovative and relevant curriculum delivery systems.

#### ***Recommended Strategies***

- A. Peer and Self Review – provide peer support, coaching and mentoring.
- B. Develop a rubric to assess how online courses, processes and procedures consistently meet curriculum criteria for program improvement and SLO's.
- C. Survey students to determine the demand for online courses that fit their educational goals.
- D. Strategically evaluate gaps in course scheduling that lead to completion of student goals, including AA/AS degrees, certification and transfer, and work to fill in those gaps within the district.
- E. Develop an infrastructure plan, possibly in coordination with the sister colleges and the district, to ensure sufficient technical support.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Southern Maine Community College Strategic Plan*, [www.smccme.edu](http://www.smccme.edu), downloaded 11/26/2008

- F. Provide a central place, or clearinghouse, to address technical and pedagogical issues.
- G. Research technological innovations to use for enhancement of classes and student services<sup>3</sup>.
- H. Use labor market data to determine the local workforce needs in online education.

### **D.E. Strategic Plan Goal # 2 and Recommended Strategies: Student Services**

LMC will provide appropriate student services that meet the needs of a diverse student body for their academic, career and personal needs, and will ensure online access to support services comparable to those offered onsite.

#### **Objectives**

1. Increase success, retention and persistence of students taking online courses.
2. LMC will provide appropriate student services to all students whether online or face-to-face.

#### **Recommended Strategies**

- A. LMC has documented current student services that are available electronically. The DE Strategic Planning Task Force will use the checklist of services that indicates which services are offered online, as well as the S.W.O.T analysis, to work with student services to ensure all services that are appropriate are offered online, or that there are plans and timelines for implementation.
- B. The DEC, in conjunction with student services, should review and assess available services annually.
- C. Create a support/resource center for online students, including access to an online library, orientation to distance education courses, and opportunities to communicate and collaborate with the online student community.
- D. Use results of a student survey to determine student awareness and access of services.

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<sup>3</sup> See UW Platteville *Distance Education Strategic Plan Approved by Academic Affairs Council 4/24/2006*

### **D.E. Strategic Plan Goal # 3 and Recommended Strategies: Faculty Training and Support**

To ensure high quality online instruction, LMC will provide sufficient training to all faculty interested in teaching online prior to teaching, as well as ongoing. Training will be provided to address both pedagogical and technical needs. Districtwide training, support and incentives will be explored where possible.

#### **Objectives**

1. Provide quality online educational opportunities by trained professionals that are seamless in delivery both pedagogically and technically.

#### **Recommended Strategies**

- A. Provide professional development opportunities for all faculty who teach online courses, both prior to and during the semester, by sharing experiences from webinars, conferences, trainings, listservs, best practices and more, including @One trainings.
- B. Develop, coordinate and disseminate a resource library for faculty teaching online – or those considering teaching online.
- C. Coordinate with the sister colleges and the district to capitalize on training opportunities.
- D. Market and encourage the use of the current training materials, including the Distance Ed Policies, Online Supplement to the COOR, Best Practices Guide, LMC Blackboard Handbook, the Blackboard 8 Instructor Manual and Blackboard 8 Grade Center Guide.

### **D.E. Strategic Plan Goal # 4 and Recommended Strategies: Communication, Collaboration, and Dissemination**

#### **Objectives**

1. Provide quality online instruction and services through collaboration on and dissemination of policies, procedures, guidelines and best practices.
2. Educate the community (internal and external) on the pros and cons of using online educational services using evidence-based research.

3. Respond to community and student needs for online education.

***Recommended Strategies***

- A. Revamp the online website for internal and external audiences, considering different technical options such as SharePoint.
- B. Disseminate information on student resources available for online use (library e-books, etc.).
- C. Disseminate information on current policies and procedures across the campus.
- D. Use college committees, faculty meetings and College Days to educate the internal community on distance education.
- E. Expand and maintain relationships with high schools and four-year colleges.
- F. Work with local business and industry to both increase awareness of college offerings and to respond to industry needs.

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