**California Governor Calls for New Online College**

California Community Colleges Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley. (Photo: CCC)

By Ellie Ashford June 21, 2017   Print

California Gov. Jerry Brown has asked the California community college system to “take whatever steps are necessary” to establish a new, online-only community college.

Brown directed [California Community Colleges](http://www.cccco.edu/Home.aspx) (CCC) Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley in a recent memo to “create a plan to design and deploy a fully online college” and submit it to the governor’s office by November.

Noting that the system has significantly expanded the number of online courses, Brown said, “I believe it is time now for our community colleges to increase even further the availability of online courses and degree programs – and make college far more accessible and affordable.”

**Reaching more students**

“The governor has been interested in realizing the promise of online education for a number of years,” Oakley said in an interview with *CCDaily*. He added that Brown also wants a way to reach more nontraditional students.

“We have literally tens of thousands of working adults with some college and no credentials and a couple of million working adults who are unemployed or underemployed,” Oakley said. “This is a wonderful opportunity to reach a population that really needs a community college to achieve economic mobility.”

The new college would also serve students affected by the closing of various for-profit institutions in the state, such as Corinthian Colleges and ITT Technical Institute. Thousands of former students were left with big debt loads and no degree.

CCC will consider other existing models of online community colleges and determine “what could work for California,” Oakley said. “Our plan is to convene a group of thinkers from our system and other systems to help us think about what that would look like.”

Whatever is developed should fit in with the CCC mission and with the system’s guided pathways agenda, Oakley said.

**What it may look like**

While many of the 114 community colleges in California offer online options, their primary mission is traditional bricks-and-mortar education supplemented with online courses, Oakley said. The new entity’s mission would be strictly online.

The new college would differ from CCC’s [Online Education Initiative](http://ccconlineed.org/about-the-oei/) (OEI), a collaborative effort sponsored by the [Foothill-De Anza Community College District](http://www.fhda.edu/) in partnership with the [Butte-Glenn Community College District](http://www.butte.edu/). OEI aims to increase the number of students completing their educational goals by improving access and success rates in high-quality online courses.

The online courses offered through OEI are constrained by the structure of an academic calendar, Oakley said. The new college would most likely be more in line with [Rio Salado College](http://www.riosalado.edu/Pages/default.aspx), an online-only community college in Arizona that allows students to enroll at any time.

“It wouldn’t replace or compete with other online community colleges,” Oakley said. What it would do is allow nontraditional students and those displaced by changes in the economy to navigate a course of study that best meets their needs and fits in with their work schedule. “This would be a resource to reach more and different kinds of students,” he said.

Oakley added: “The feeling from the governor is that the only way we can be truly competitive with other private or nonprofit fully online colleges is to make this the core mission of the institution – and to provide the infrastructure to deliver instruction that is difficult to provide at traditional colleges.”

**Various options**

The new entity could be organized as a virtual college or could leverage existing online content, Oakley said. Although some courses of study, such as manufacturing, are difficult to run in an online-only format, there are high-quality examples of fully online degree programs in healthcare, cybersecurity and many other areas.

Other issues to be determined include whether the new institution would offer bachelor’s degrees, as well as associate degrees and certificates; whether it will be housed within an existing college; what types of brick-and-mortar facilities might be needed; what technology infrastructure should be used; and how to leverage all the work that has already been done with online education.

Another issue to consider is whether to seek state, national or international accreditation. The intent is to provide more access and more opportunities for Californians, but once the program of studies is developed, out-of-state or international students could also likely enroll.

The intent is to provide a handful of options to the governor in November. Brown would then “choose an option that is a best fit for what they want to accomplish and put that in the governor’s January budget to make that a reality,” Oakley said.

CCC is identifying experts – including faculty and administrators within community colleges in California and other states – with experience in online education, online content delivery systems and online education technology to serve on a committee charged with developing recommendations. That group will convene in mid-July and would present a draft of recommended options in late October.