State of Distance Education at Bakersfield College

Introduction:

The last five years have been a period of tremendous growth in the distance education offerings at Bakersfield College. This has been a response to high student demand during a period of time when enrollments were steadily increasing at BC. As the college turns its attention to the completion agenda set out by the state Chancellor’s office, the role of distance learning in student completion will also increase in importance.

The chart above shows the growth in the number of sections, for both hybrid and fully online courses, from fall of 2015 through fall of 2019. The number of online courses has grown 349% during this time, and the number of hybrid sections has more than doubled. Even with this growth in the number of sections, online classes in several general education categories fill to 100% and have completely full waitlists at the start of the semester.
This chart shows the average number of courses taken online and in a hybrid format by students who completed a degree of certificate during each year. The data shows a sharp increase from 2016 to 2018 in the online figure, with the average number of online courses taken by completers doubling during this time frame. This is an indicator of the importance of the college’s online offerings in supporting the completion agenda of the college.

Events and Actions Taken:

In order to support this growth in our online and distance education offerings, the Academic Technology Department undertook several initiatives:

- **Staffing** – The department hired replacement positions for one Educational Media Design Specialist and for a Program Manager – These positions are critical to the maintenance of the high levels of support required by our growth in online and hybrid classes.
- **Professional Development** – The department developed and deployed multiple opportunities for faculty development in the area(s) of online teaching and Canvas use. This was a necessary part of the strategy for scaling our presence in online instruction while maintaining a high level of quality.
- **The Renegade Online Student Hub** – This in-person location for online student support is a response to the fact that between 85-90% of our online students live within driving distance of the Main BC Campus. Many of the students who struggle with online learning belong to special populations. This fact, coupled with their proximity to the college, supports the Hub as an equity initiative.

Looking Ahead:

As the Academic Technology Department looks ahead to the future of distance education at BC, the following growth targets are coming into view:

- **An emphasis on online student onboarding and success** – With online learning playing such a significant role in student completion, it is critical that we continue to pursue higher success rates for our online students. There are a number of factors that contribute to a disparity between face to face and online success rates. These factors will be a focus as we move forward.
- **CTE Programs, Online and Badging** – As part of a $500,000 grant initiative, the college will be bringing several CTE programs fully online in the next year. These programs will utilize badging to track workplace skills for students, and also make courses more available to students by leveraging OERs to reduce the overall cost of the programs.
- **Online Faculty Certification and Peer Online Course Review** – As the college continues to ramp up our participation in the CVC-OEI statewide efforts, we will certify a group of faculty to lead the Peer Online Course Reviews that will enable Bakersfield College to offer courses through the OEI Exchange.