



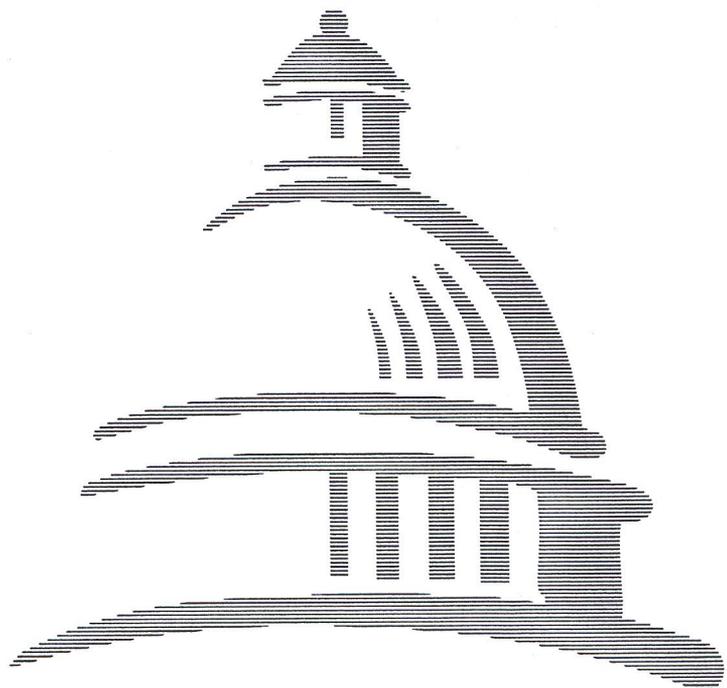
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## Using Distance Education to Increase College Access and Efficiency

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L E G I S L A T I V E   A N A L Y S T ' S   O F F I C E

Presented to:  
California Student Aid Commission





## What is Distance Education?

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- “Courses in which faculty and students do not have to be in physical proximity to each other for instructional purposes, and communicate using technology.”
  - **Synchronous:** Students and classroom instructors communicate in real time.
  - **Asynchronous:** Students choose when to access lessons and send communications to their instructor.
  
- Levels of Distance Education
  - All or nearly all course content delivered via distance education.
  - Hybrid (blended) courses.
  
- Traditional courses enhanced with technology are *not* considered to be distance education.



## Current State of Distance Education at the Three Public Higher Education Segments

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- California Community Colleges
  - Distance education has grown significantly over the past decade, from 1 percent of enrollment in 2000-01 to 10 percent in 2010-11.
  
- California State University (CSU)
  - All campuses offer some distance education.
  - Systemwide enrollment data are unavailable.
  - Notable providers of distance education: East Bay, San Marcos, Chico, and San Diego.
  
- University of California
  - Small amount of state-supported instruction using distance education.
  - Pilot project under way.



## Assessing the Effectiveness of Distance Education

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- Distance education courses subject to same standards as on-site counterparts.
- National research suggests similar learning outcomes for distance education courses.
  - United States Department of Education study.
  - Other research.
- Retention a challenge for distance education.
- Continuing skepticism by many faculty, particularly at four-year institutions, of distance education's value and legitimacy.



## How Does the Cost to Deliver Distance Education Compare With Traditional Classroom Instruction?

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- Instructional costs generally similar.
- Difference in technology costs has narrowed considerably.
- Lower facilities-related costs, particularly long-term.
- Significant opportunities for savings through intercampus collaboration.
  - Shared online courses.
  - Joint academic departments.
  - Public-private partnerships (such as Western Governors University—Indiana).



## Our Bottom Line

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- In the coming years, we expect that a large majority of students will receive at least a portion of their postsecondary education via distance education (hybrid, fully online courses, or fully online programs).
  
- Though not a panacea for public higher education, distance education provides the state with an important tool for advancing the Master Plan's core principles.
  - Expanding access, particularly for nontraditional students.
  - Complementing existing delivery formats to enhance student learning.
  - Containing physical-infrastructure costs.
  - (Potential) sharing of instructional resources among campuses.
  
- The state has generally allowed the segments and campuses to develop their own policies concerning distance education. Campuses' distance education programs often operate in isolation of one another.



## LAO Recommendations

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- Adopt standard definition of distance education for the state's three public higher education segments, and require segments to report periodically on student enrollment and performance in distance education courses.
- Establish competitive grants to develop repository of online coursework made available to faculty throughout the state.
- When reviewing proposed new academic programs, consider the possibility of shared distance education programs.
- Direct Chancellor's Offices of CSU and community colleges to study feasibility of establishing online degree-completion program for state residents who earlier started college but never obtained a degree.
- Create a task force to pursue development of a Western Governors University "virtual campus" in California.