



Distance Education Plan

2017 - 2020

West Kern Community College District Mission

Taft College is committed to creating a community of learners by enriching the lives of all students we serve through career technical education, transfer programs, foundational programs, and student support services. Taft College provides an equitable learning environment defined by applied knowledge leading to students' achievement of their educational goals.

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Introduction

Distance Education (DE) provides support for instruction that is not face-to-face, with students physically separated from the instructor. Due to the growing demand for DE courses, what was once an exception has become the rule. Courses that are not online, and not hybrid, are increasingly using online methods and tools both in the classroom and out. In this regard, Distance Education has changed from being a specialty, to becoming the norm. This trend is only accelerating.

It is not surprising then that Distance Education plays a vital role in sustaining the mission of Taft College. The purpose of this Distance Education Plan is to establish a vision and a path whereby our online and offline “community of learners” are provided with the “equitable learning environment” that our college mission statement promotes. More specifically, the goal of this Distance Education Plan is to provide the access, training and practice for technology and other college resources that meet the instructional and the student-service needs of the distance education students.

The distance education (DE) students at Taft College generally fall into two categories. The largest category of DE students participates in their classes via the Internet, or “online”. A smaller, but growing, category of DE students is mostly made up of local incarcerated students who participate in their college classes via correspondence, or “offline”, along with the assistance of a Taft College Instructional Aid.

The online DE students make up almost 38% of Taft College's 2015-2016 FTES, per the CCCC DataMart site (<http://datamart.cccco.edu/>). In comparison, the average percentage of FTES from DE enrollments statewide for 2015-2016 was 11%. Clearly the percentage of DE students at Taft College is disproportionately high, which only emphasizes the tremendous responsibility to ensure not only the instructional integrity and quality of online classes, but to also ensure the integrity and quality of student support services offered to our online distance education students.

The offline DE students enroll in classes at Taft College for many of the same reasons that the online DE students enroll in classes at Taft College. Even though many of our incarcerated students once deemed higher education degrees as unattainable or beyond their ability, these students begin to view education as a key to improving their lives not only for their future, but also while in their

present circumstances. The number of incarcerated students enrolled at Taft College has increased from 50 students from one facility three years ago to 150-200 students between two prison facilities.

Distance education at Taft College complements and enhances the mission of the college by providing flexible learning options that allow the pursuit of degrees, certificates, and vocational goals that might otherwise be impossible for many of our students. Taft College is committed to improving the instructional quality and the student support services offered to our distance education students.

Past and Present Status of Distance Education at Taft College

Taft College DE (Distance Education) supports the needs of students that may not be physically present. The term “Distance Education” evolved to specify modes of instruction that were not face-to-face (F2F). However, the scope of DE has grown along with the realization that this also involves “Distance Registration,” “Distance Orientation,” “Distance Counseling,” “Distance Library” and “Distance Student Life” and distance “everything else”. Moreover, the so-called “distance” modalities mix and match with in-person and on-campus modalities depending on availability and individual student preference.

Enrollment in DE classes at Taft College has risen dramatically over the last ten years. In 2006-2007, 18% of the total FTES came from DE classes. By 2015-2016, the percentage of FTES coming from DE enrollment was at 37.5%. During the same time frame, the percentage of FTES coming from DE enrollment across the California Community College system went from 4.5% in 2006-2007 to 11% in 2015-2016 (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

Figure 1: DE FTE Percentage Comparison: Taft College compared to State-wide

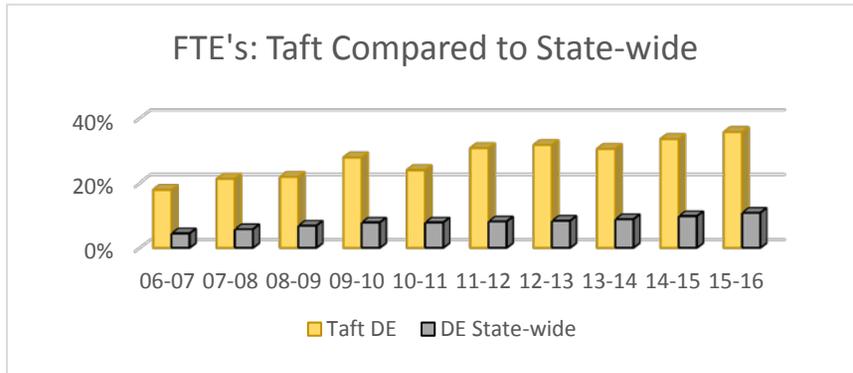
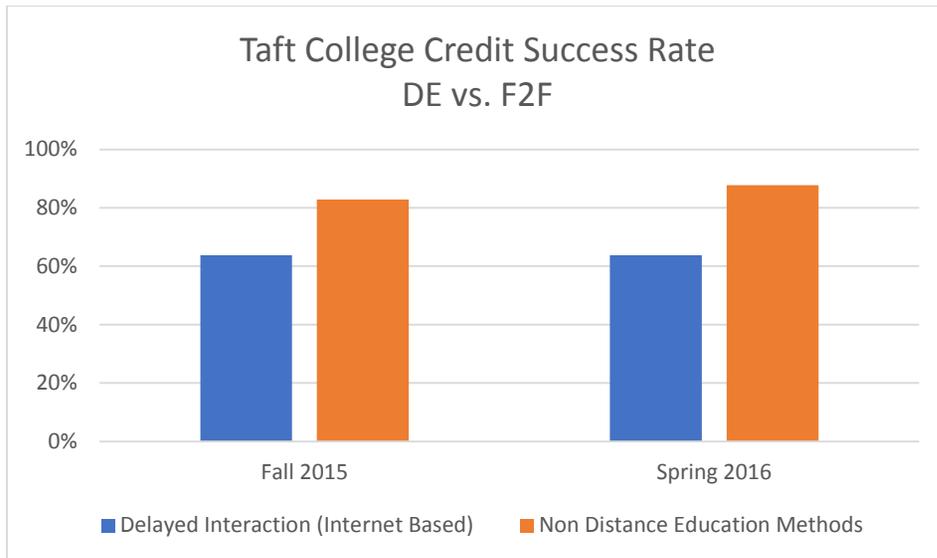


Table 1: DE FTE Percentage Comparison: Taft College compared to State-wide

	'06-'07	'07-'08	'08-'09	'09-'10	'10-'11	'11-'12	'12-'13	'13-'14	'14-'15	'15-'16
Taft DE FTE's	18%	21.2%	21.8%	27.8%	23.9%	30.7%	31.7%	30.5%	33.5%	35.7%
State-wide DE FTE's	4.5%	5.8%	6.9%	7.9%	7.9%	8.2%	8.4%	8.9%	9.8%	10.9%

Historically, success rates and retention rates have been, and continue to be, lower in DE classes than in traditional on-campus classes (See Figure 2). This is true both at Taft College and system wide across the state.

Figure 2: Course Success Rates and Retention Rates of Distance Learning and Face to Face Courses



When comparing the success rates and retention rates of DE classes taught at Taft College with the CCC system, the success rates of DE students at Taft College are about the same as the CCC system, and the retention rates of DE students at Taft College are higher-- up to almost 10 percentage points higher by 2015-2016 (See Figure 3 and Table 3).

Figure 3: Success Rates and Retention Rates Taft College versus California Statewide

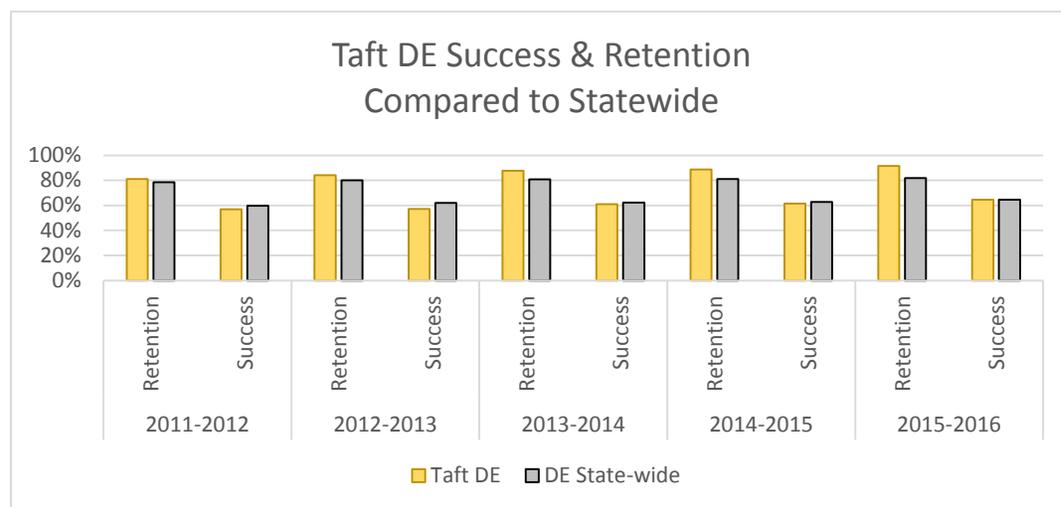


Table 3: Success Rates and Retention Rates Taft College versus California Statewide

	2011-2012		2012-2013		2013-14		2014-15		2015-16	
	Retention	Success								
Taft DE	81%	56.8%	84.2%	57.1%	87.6%	61%	88.7%	61.5%	91.4%	64.5%
State-wide DE	78.6%	59.7%	80.1%	62%	80.8%	62.3%	81%	62.8%	81.9%	64.4%

While the Taft College DE success rates are on par with the statewide average, there remains a large gap between the Taft College DE success rates and the success rates of face-to-face classes at the college (See Figure 1). It has been a consistent goal of the college to narrow these success gaps.

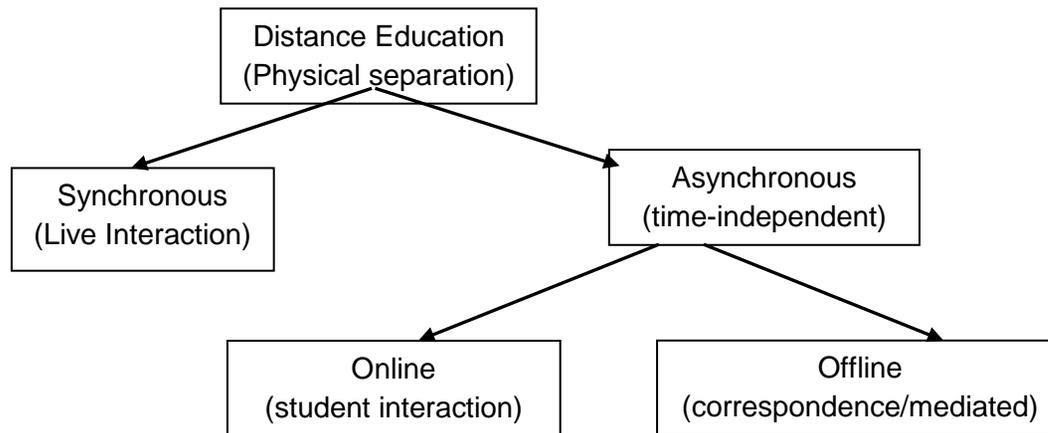
Distance Education Office

The Distance Learning Support Team at Taft College consists of a Distance Education Coordinator, an Integrated Technology Support Technician, a DE Instructional Aid, and a student worker. This support team is in place to ensure the effectiveness of the technology and other support mechanisms that mediate the distance between the Taft College instructor and the distance education student.

With assistance from Student Services, Taft College provides extended hours of support to all DE students primarily at the beginning of each term to diminish confusion and to retain enrollment. This is achieved through phone support, on-campus help stations, and Online Workshops.

Instructional Modalities

Distance Education encompasses the infrastructure, technology and services for students who are not physically present. This include both synchronous and asynchronous, and for Taft College is taken to include both “mediated” (correspondence) and non-mediated (traditional) modalities. This can be shown using the following diagram:



The College recently adopted the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS), and is engaged in providing the training and support for faculty and staff who use the LMS. The use of Moodle and Etudes will be phased out - by Fall 2017, all online, hybrid and web-enhanced offerings will use the Canvas LMS.

The college welcomes its partnership with the CCC OEI, in part, due to being able to participate in the buying power of the CCC system. With this partnership, the college is able to adopt technological resources that have been vetted, piloted, and negotiated for a substantial cost savings to the college. Some of the technology resources that the college has already adopted include the Canvas LMS and Cranium Café. Future implementations will include the adoption of NetTutor (an online tutoring service) and possibly Proctorium (an online proctoring service).

The College offers several correspondence courses primarily to support the inmate population at both the Taft Correctional Institution (TCI) and Modified Community Correctional Facility (MCCF). These courses are supported with a full-time classified staff member who facilitates the movement of offline course materials between offline course instructors and inmate students, as well as by a .5 FTE appointment of a Counselor.

DE Web Page

The Taft College Website was recently redesigned, and provides a newly designed, comprehensive DE home page at <http://www.taftcollege.edu/distance-education/>. When students visit the DE website, they will have available to them various resources that will guide them through the enrollment process, important phone numbers for assistance, and much more. The college will continue to refine the functionality and the relevance of the website for distance education students.

Support Services

All distance education students are encouraged to contact and meet with a counselor. Each division at Taft College has an assigned counselor that is able to strategically guide both traditional on-campus students and distance education students in the best path toward their educational goal.

As of this writing, there is not a system in place to track the number of DE students who meet with their counselors. Based on the 198 respondents to the Taft College Fall 2016 DE Student Survey, 18% of the DE students who responded indicated that they needed more assistance from their counselor.

We are currently in the process of implementing the use of Cranium Café to facilitate the interface between our counselors and our DE students. We are also looking to partner with CCC OEI's Online Counseling Network once it is ready to launch to the system.

Distance Education Tutoring

Based on the Taft College Fall 2016 DE Student Survey, 21% of the DE students responded that they needed tutoring support for their online classes. Previously, tutors were available to DE students via Skype. This resource was under-utilized and likely under-promoted. We are currently in the process of implementing the use of Cranium Café to facilitate the interface between our tutors and our DE students. This resource will be displayed and accessible from online Canvas courses, and from the Taft College website. Knowing that DE students often fit their time of studying around full work and family schedules, we look to continue to build on our partnership with the CCC Online Education Initiative and add NetTutor as an additional tutoring option for our DE students for after-hours and weekends.

Technology support

Technology support is available from the Distance Education office in the form of troubleshooting, direct support for LMS issues. Further support for technology such as computer questions, network connectivity, general MS Office Support, and the like is available by phone, and through an online trouble ticketing systems accessible by sending an email to IT help desk.

Direct technology support to students is available. Students can get help with network issues, and with downloading Microsoft Office.

Accessibility

The DE Instructional Support team works with our DSPS and our faculty to maximize the accessibility of our DE classes. This effort has not always been consistent and we are looking to establish a stronger institutionalized process whereby new DE classes and DE classes up for review will undergo greater scrutiny for accessibility issues.

The College has brought two nationally recognized experts to campus for training and system development. Jayme Johnson, Director of Accessibility and User Experience for the OEI, and Gaeir Dietrich, Director of the High-Tech Center Training Unit, have visited Taft College campus, most recently with Gaeir's in-service with faculty and staff in Fall 2016.

Professional Development

Taft College has provided numerous professional development events specifically for DE faculty. These events were conducted using online Learning Management Systems so that the faculty could gain more experience with being an online student. The DE Instructional Support team has conducted most of the professional development events, but the faculty are also encouraged to seek out other DE professional development opportunities, such as with @One.

Distance Education Goals & Objectives for 2017 – 2020

Educational Master Plan Recommendation Area 1: Student Learning/Success

According to the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges ([RP Group](#)), research demonstrates that “...students are more likely to succeed when they are directed, focused, nurtured, engaged, connected, and valued.” These six “Success Factors” are challenging enough for colleges to implement with students who regularly come to campus much less with distance education students who less-regularly or never travel to campus for their classes, or for the student support services they require.

This Distance Education Plan seeks to enhance the six Success Factors not only in the DE classes between instructors and students, but also with the distance education students and the larger college community of student support services and student organizations.

DE Goal 1: Expand and improve access to effective online educational programs and services for distance education students.

Taft College will implement the use of Cranium Café communication platform to establish *Tele-proximity* with its DE students. Themeli and Bougia (2016) define Tele-proximity as “human to human (embodied) interaction through tele-operations to promote learning objectives, improve communication, and bridge transactional distance in online courses” (p. 150). Cranium Café is an academic communications software that allows for “micro meetings” between students and college personnel. These micro meetings are facilitated through video conferencing and screen sharing sessions which are accessed through the college’s website or through the Canvas Learning Management System.

DE students will be able to use Cranium Café to “knock” on the virtual doors of the on-campus personnel they need to talk with. If that person is not available, the students can leave a message. If the student contacts the college personnel at a time that is not convenient, the faculty or staff member can schedule a meeting time with the student. The goal of this communication platform is to enhance the human to human interaction between the DE students and the college and thereby increase the likelihood that the DE students gain a greater sense of being directed, nurtured, engaged, connected and valued with the college community.

With the implementation of Cranium Café, the number of student interactions with college personnel within the Cranium Café platform will be collected and analyzed. Moreover, the length of interactions as well as the topic of the interactions will be collected and categorized. The data collected from this implementation will provide direction for future resource allocations.

DE Goal 2: Strengthen effective teaching and learning for distance education students.

The effectiveness of the teaching and learning occurring in distance education classes will be strengthened in the following ways:

- 1) Connect DE faculty with engaging professional development events related to DE.
- 2) Hire additional DE support personnel to assist DE faculty and DE students.
- 3) Establish a more substantial process of evaluating and designing/redesigning new and existing DE classes.
- 4) Partner with CCC OEI to adopt appropriate technological resources that have been vetted, piloted, and in most cases, offered at a reduced cost to the college.

DE Goal 3: Strengthen effective teaching and learning for incarcerated students.

The effectiveness of the teaching and learning occurring in the classes offered at our local prison facilities will be strengthened in the following ways:

- 1) Invite the DE faculty who provide instruction to our prisons to conduct some or all their class sessions in-person at the facility.
- 2) Partially fund a prison-staff/college employee at each facility to assist with the movement of assignments and instructor communication with the incarcerated students.
- 3) Fund the implementation of high-speed scanners/printers to be located inside each prison facility to be used by the prison-staff/college employee to mediate the communication between the instructors and the incarcerated students.

DE Goal 1: Expand and improve access to effective online educational programs and services for distance education students.

Objective	Action Step	Due Date	Outcome	Champion
1.1	Implement the use of the Cranium Café academic communication software platform to facilitate connections between the DE students and various on-campus support services.	Sept. - 2018	50% of all DE students will utilize Cranium Café to access on-campus student support services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • Dean of Student Services • VP of Student Services
1.1.1	Collect and analyze data collected from the use of Cranium Café to direct the allocation of future resources	June 2020	Future allocations of resources will be based, in part, on the analysis of the data collected from Cranium Café.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VP of Instruction • VP of Student Services
1.2	Continue to partner with the CCC OEI on the adoption of technological resources that facilitate the delivery of student services to DE students.	June 2020	When the adoption of technological resources is appropriate for meeting the needs of our college, the college will collaborate with OEI to implement the resource and to provide training on using the resource effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • VP of Student Services

DE Goal 2: Strengthen effective teaching and learning for distance education students.

Objective	Action Step	Due Date	Outcome	Champion
2.1	Continue to expand the professional development opportunities for DE faculty.	Beginning Summer 2017 – ongoing	DE faculty will engage with DE professional development opportunities via face-to-face (in-services, Brown Bags, Conferences, Just-In-Time trainings) and/or via online modality (webinars, workshops, classes, and Just-In-Time trainings).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • DE Committee
2.1.1	Establish a minimum threshold of professional development that all DE faculty will complete every two years.	June 2019	80% of all full-time DE faculty and 50% of all DE adjunct faculty will attend at least one professional development event related to DE.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • DE Committee
2.2	Hire additional DE Instructional Support personnel to facilitate just-in-time trainings and to provide support for DE faculty and DE students.	Aug. 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire a part-time Integrated Technology Support Technician • Hire an additional student worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • VP of Instruction • Dean of Student Services
2.3	Continue to partner with the CCC OEI in adopting technological resources that have been vetted and piloted.	June 2020	When the adoption of technological resources is appropriate for meeting the needs of our college, the college will collaborate with OEI to implement the resource and to provide training on using the resource effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • VP of Instruction • VP of Student Services
2.4	Ensure that all DE classes are fully accessible.	June 2018	All new and existing DE classes will use the OEI Course Design Rubric to determine their accessibility. All DE classes with accessibility concerns will be revised with the assistance of the DE Coordinator and/or the High Tech Access Specialist.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • High Tech Access Specialist

Objective	Action Step	Due Date	Outcome	Champion
2.5	Newly proposed DE classes will go through a more substantial approval process before they are available online to students.	June 2018	1. The DE committee and the Curriculum committee will review DE Course Approval Forms submitted by departments. 2. Courses approved for DE will be designed and built within Canvas with the assistance of the DE Coordinator using the OEI Course Design Rubric as a guide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • DE Committee
2.6	Evaluations of DE classes will include the use of an established rubric.	June 2018	A DE evaluation rubric will be adopted by the DE Committee. The rubric will likely be based on the OEI Course Design Rubric and/or the Quality Matters rubric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • DE Committee
2.7	With the adoption of the action steps already mentioned, the achievement gap between online and traditional on-campus classes will narrow.	June 2020	The overall Success Rates of DE classes will increase to 69%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • VP of Instruction

DE Goal 3: Strengthen effective teaching and learning for incarcerated students.

Objective	Action Step	Due Date	Outcome	Champion
3.1	Invite the DE faculty who provide instruction to our prisons to conduct some or all their class sessions in-person at the facility.	Each semester	20% of the DE faculty who teach classes for our incarcerated population will conduct at least one class session inside the prison.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator
3.2	Partially fund a prison-staff/college employee at each facility to assist with the movement of assignments and instructor communication with the incarcerated students.	June 2018	A prison-staff/college employee at each facility will facilitate instructional support and student support services to the incarcerated population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • VP of Instruction • VP of Student Services
3.3	Fund the implementation of high-speed scanners/printers to be located inside each prison facility to be used by the prison-staff/college employee to mediate the communication between the instructors and the incarcerated students.	June 2018	Increase the timeliness of communication exchanged (syllabi, handouts, assignment submissions, and other instructional communications) between the instructor and the incarcerated students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Coordinator • VP of Instruction