

COM JOINS CALIFORNIA VIRTUAL CAMPUS—ONLINE EDUCATION INITIATIVE

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California
Community
Colleges

California Virtual Campus – Online Education Initiative

College of Marin (COM) will join the California Virtual Campus—Online Education Initiative (CVC-OEI) in January 2021 with three entirely online career pathway programs in Business, Multimedia, and Hospitality, giving students more options in how they can complete degrees and certificates in these fields.

The CVC-OEI is an online collaborative effort of several California community colleges that offers a shared website of high-quality online courses to students from these colleges. This shared website provides students the ability to enroll in online courses that might be difficult to get into or not offered at their home college that they may need for their program, degree, or certificate. There are currently around 30 colleges in the CVC-OEI, and eventually the state's community college system would like to see all of California's 116 community colleges participating in it.

Additionally, the CVC-OEI puts their courses through a Peer Online Course Review (POCR) process to ensure it meets a quality standard rubric. Once certified, the course receives a badge certificate symbol, letting students know it is a peer-reviewed, quality course. All courses in this platform are offered asynchronously, meaning while students have deadlines to meet, there are no set class times they must attend to complete the course.

COM started revamping and expanding their Online Learning courses in April 2019 when they procured the Improving Online CTE Pathways grant through the CVC-OEI. Prior to the grant, while they had some strong policies for online teaching, COM didn't have a clear structure to determine how courses should be organized and accessed. The grant gave them the CVC-OEI scaffolding they needed to move online learning to the next level.

Assistant Vice President for Instruction Cari Torres-Benavides and Instructional Designer Stacey Lince first started creating clear pathways for students to follow to complete online degrees and certificates and improve student success. Lince and COM's Distance Education Coordinator Kathleen Smyth worked with faculty to bring missing courses online that students would need to complete a certificate or degree, including having general education courses online that also meet UC and CSU requirements for transfer.

Since faculty in Career and Technical Education programs happened to have created more courses online than other programs, these programs became the first complete pathways for the grant project. Students can now complete a certificate or degree online for Business, Multimedia, and Hospitality.

"Career and Technical Education happened to be one of the areas where we had more faculty who completed online courses that lead to complete degree and certificate pathways, and faculty who completed

online training in Online Learning,” says Lince, who helps faculty adapt their face-to-face courses to the online platform and co-authored the grant with Torres-Benavides.

The grant established and institutionalized how online courses were created to ensure the Online Learning course offerings at COM would meet the state standards of what was considered a quality course. Faculty interested in teaching online were able to attend a 12-week training offered through the CVC-OEI Online Network of Educators (@One) to learn how to create a quality course. After faculty met those standards, the course would be peer-reviewed by COM colleagues and finally sent to CVC-OEI for a final POCR review.

Then, COVID-19 forced the entire College faculty to move their coursework online in March 2020. In what was called a Herculean effort, Lince and Smyth found themselves adapting and condensing the 12-week training into two-week sessions with cohorts of between 30 to 80 faculty at a time. At first, many faculty only wanted to teach synchronously in Zoom during their regularly scheduled class times and found the transition to online teaching difficult.

“It’s a process; it’s an evolution,” states Smyth. “It’s not like face-to-face when you could give the same lectures each semester with few tweaks. You can’t do that online. You must be more creative, and you must keep adjusting what you’re doing to ensure your course is well designed, engaging, and accessible. It’s truly an evolution.”

Both Lince and Smyth found that once faculty realized they were going to remain online for the fall semester, they became more invested in providing quality online courses. Many are now choosing to take the expanded 12-week training and get their courses certified. They understand the challenges of teaching online and want to ensure their students are presented with courses that promote student success by creating content that builds an inclusive community in the online environment.

“We have a new generation of faculty coming on board,” Torres-Benavides adds. “Now that there is a growing interest in online education by our faculty, we hope that more faculty will participate in the process to fully develop their courses. In a year or two, we anticipate an expanded cross-section of online course offerings that meet general education and major preparation requirements.”

Along with getting more courses certified, Lince and Torres-Benavides are also making online learning more accessible. They, along with COM’s Guided Pathways Committee members, will be overhauling the academics webpages to add interest clusters as a way to introduce students to academic majors, instead of using program names they may not be as familiar with.

This way, a student who knows they enjoy working with people may choose the “People, Culture, and Society” interest cluster as a starting point to explore majors and potential careers that fall within that general area. Once a specific program is chosen, it will show options of how to take the classes, such as online or face-to-face, and what next steps they need to enroll at COM and register for classes. It gives students a centralized place to get the information they need. The Interest Clusters webpage is being developed with focus groups that include students and faculty and will be accessible online next year.

As the grant comes to a close December 31, Lince and Smyth, with support from Torres-Benavides, have done tremendous work this year. Not only did they help almost every COM faculty member create high-quality online courses, but through the grant they connected with CVC-OEI’s resources to establish a peer-reviewed rubric system for these courses, created clear career pathways aligned with the development of interest clusters, and provided students more quality online options to ensure COM student success.

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