ED 432 329   JC 990 455

TITLE	A Workplan for Distance Education Policy: Planning for the California Community Colleges.
INSTITUTION	California Community Colleges, Sacramento. Office of the Chancellor.
PUB DATE	1999-05-00
NOTE	13p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Community Colleges; Cooperation; *Distance Education; *Educational Policy; *Educational Technology; *Institutional Mission; Organizational Objectives; Teaching Methods; Technological Advancement; Technological Literacy; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*California Community Colleges

ABSTRACT

        Distance education offers the potential to further the missions of the community colleges in significant ways. However, the practice of education will not change without corresponding changes in our fundamental views of teaching and learning as they are reflected in state, federal, and institutional policies. This document identifies some of the policy issues facing higher education in the age of distance learning and frames the discussion for the implications of these issues for the community colleges, which include the cost of higher education, equal access to quality technology, technology training for instructors and students, technical staff support, shifts in paradigms, regular personal contact between students and professors, competition, and collaboration. Distance education need not be exclusively an automated and isolated experience. In fact, many distance education projects encourage the use of collaborative learning and other strategies to connect students to communities of learners. The document contains an appendix of supplemental graphs of the data discussed. (TGO)

A Workplan for Distance Education Policy: Planning for the California Community Colleges

California Community Colleges

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Distance education offers the potential to further the mission of the community colleges in significance ways. However, the practice of education will not change without corresponding changes in our fundamental views of teaching and learning as they are reflected in our state, federal and institutional policies. In spite of this the community colleges are better positioned to offer other sectors of higher education a vision for the future. This paper attempts to identify some of the policy issues facing higher education in the age of distance learning and frame the discussion for the implications of these issues for the community colleges.

Distance education promotes educational opportunities that can be conveniently accessed from home or office, and independent from the constraints of time and place. Many common forms of distance education, such as videoconferencing, for example, still require learners to conform to fixed academic schedules and course delivery times. However, students might want to start courses whenever they need to, and to finish whenever they can demonstrate skill proficiencies or the attainment of appropriate learning outcomes.

Distance education modalities do not imply that learning will be exclusively an automated and isolated experience. Many distance education projects encourage the use of collaborative learning and other strategies to connect students to communities of learners, and to ensure that students are meaningfully connected to faculty as well.

Background Role for The Community Colleges

Historically, the Chancellor's Office had a limited role in promoting distance education. Before 1994, the Board of Governors Title 5 regulations on distance education allowed only transfer courses to be offered at a distance by community colleges. This policy severely restricted the ability of community colleges to offer both synchronous and asynchronous distance education. As this was changed it began a major shift in how community colleges offer instruction to students.

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With the advent of the electronic catalogue of the California Virtual University, community colleges collectively became a major provider of distance education. The number of distance education courses reported by California Community Colleges offered in 1996-97 was 3,120. Enrollment data for students enrolled in distance learning courses in the community colleges for 1996-97 was reported at 67,435 and 73,857 in the 1997-98 academic year. This represented 3.0% and 3.2% of all community college enrollments for the 1996-97 and 1997-98 academic years respectively. The reported enrollment figures approximate 14,500 1996-97 credit FTES and 14,700 1997-98 credit FTES. Within ten years the anticipated enrollment in distance learning courses will quadruple nationally and particularly in the California Community Colleges. That is to say that approximately 10% of students attending a California Community Colleges will be enrolled at a distance. This is a trend established by colleges who adopted new technologies early on and developed and applied a broad number of instructional applications to traditional modes of instruction. As technology has changed and institutions have increased their investment in technology this pattern suggests that institutions have shifted from an individual model of technology application to one which integrates distance education instruction and services into a long-term institutional planning framework.

However, in order to achieve the integration of distance education courses and programs which are suitable for creating a true learning environment at a distance, faculty, educational administrators and educational policy makers are facing many challenges. *The potential for cooperation or competition among colleges within higher education, in particular the community college system, will be affected by how issues related to offering courses at a distance will be resolved.* Traditionally curriculum issues are the domain of local college faculty and instructional administrators. However, the move to integrate all functions of the college, including admissions and enrollment services, financial aid, advisement, transfer, library and learning resources including tutorial learning assistance, requires a comprehensive discussion which involves a broader community of the college campus.

The implications for stakeholders (e.g. students, communities and colleges) have a direct impact on the cost to public higher education in California. The impact of state-funded institutions offering courses in other states and abroad, in relationship to competition and cost, as well as

the continuing quality of the courses offered, have emerged as issues to state educational policy makers and will have implications beyond the local community college curriculum process. The ability to provide reliable delivery of distance education will depend on technology networks with redundancy and that can provide servers with sufficient versatility to integrated databases and software at an affordable and functional level.

4CNet, the joint California Community Colleges and California State University network, has established the infrastructure which supports the initial investment and the ongoing maintenance of a statewide integrated data network without enmeshing colleges in dependent relationships with for-profit corporations. The next challenge for state educational policy makers and local college administrations is to provide access to technology for those who are unable to afford it.

This workplan envisions and prioritizes the issues which affect systemwide distance education issues. Through this process we hope to understand the challenges facing the California Community Colleges as the system becomes a more active partner in the global evolution of distance learning.

Current Developments in Distance Education

The growing interest in distance learning within the community colleges has created an expanded role for the Chancellor's Office as an advocate of related issues for the system. The task of coordinating state educational policy issues related to distance education falls to the Educational Services and Economic Development Division Distance Education Program within the Chancellor's Office. The mission of the Office of Distance Education is to promote student access and success by integrating programs and services of the Community Colleges using technology mediated instruction and to develop and promote effective distance learning paradigms.

In 1998 the Title 5 distance education regulations were revised by the Board of Governors to eliminate the "*regular personal contact requirement between instructors and their students.*" This change has resulted in the emergence of technology mediated instruction which allows the use of asynchronous means of contact between instructors and students (e.g., e-mail, chat rooms, faxes, voice mail, etc.) The current regulations

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sunset in June, 2002 during which time the technological evolution in instruction and learning will continue while work progresses on changes to the regulations.

The Distance Education Technical Advisory Committee (DETAC) provides the Chancellor and his staff advice on strategies for the advancement of distance education in the Community College system. The task force's work is to evaluate distance education policies and regulations, and provide advice on technical matters and resource materials on good practices relative to student and instructional priorities in preparation for the reauthorization of the Title 5 regulations.

The task of reviewing the regulations is a process designed to solicit extensive consultation from the community colleges on a number of current and emerging issues. *The race among institutions to develop and offer new distance education courses and programs has surfaced issues which could overwhelm some of the colleges and derail their entire distance education effort.* The complexity of issues (e.g. copyright, intellectual property, on-line assessment, common course numbering, accreditation) are but few of the subjects which will be addressed in the regulatory process.

A seven year study is underway which included three surveys designed to gather information from institutions, faculty and students as part of a longitudinal study. The surveys will determine how institutions, faculty and students are working through some of the current issues, including but not limited to, education on the internet; emerging technologies; learning anytime, anywhere; legal, ethical, and social issues; multimedia in the classroom; staff development and training and technology planning, standards, and implementation. The information will be gathered through 2001. To assist the Chancellor's Office staff in this process, 1997-98 enrollment data will serve as base year data for purposes of this study. Preliminary reporting has provided enrollment trends in distance learning courses by ethnicity, age, gender and disability (Attachment A).

The results of this study will be documented through a series of briefing papers which will highlight trends and identify policy issues. The briefing papers will be considered by members of the DETAC who will make recommendations to the Chancellor's staff regarding statutory revisions. Public meetings will be held when there will be proposed

changes to the regulations. The process of making recommendations for regulatory change has already begun.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights recently sanctioned the California Community Colleges under provisions of the American Disabilities Act. This action accentuated the immediacy to begin the review of current practices and trends in the field and a review of the current statutes affecting distance learning. The process will include a presentation of the preliminary reports from the annual data surveys, 1995-1998.

The level of activity in the area of distance education will accelerate to keep up with the number of policy issues which we plan to address within the next twelve months. Staff will coordinate activities in the presentation of policy issues affecting distance learning and the impact of technology of instruction and learning. In the coming months DETAC will play an expanding role in providing feedback to the Chancellor's Office on issues related to distance education programs. This is done with the goal to identify and promote initiatives for the advancement of distance education systemwide which promote equity and access for student populations.

Visions for the Future

Rapid advances in technology now make it possible for education to be delivered anytime and anywhere. This creates new opportunities to reach individuals who cannot easily access campus-based postsecondary education as well as others for whom traditional courses are a poor match with their education or training needs.

Increasingly, students working full-time seek education that is affordable, convenient, and responsive to the quick pace of change in the workplace. Students want control over their own educational experiences, and they are increasingly unwilling or unable to conform to fixed academic schedules, inconvenient locations, and out of date curricula. *Collaboration with community college practitioners is essential to develop ways to make education opportunities responsive to what learners need and want while still maintaining coherence and quality.*

The explosive growth of distance education has dramatically widened the access of students to college-level courses and degree programs. However few colleges offer on a significant scale learning that
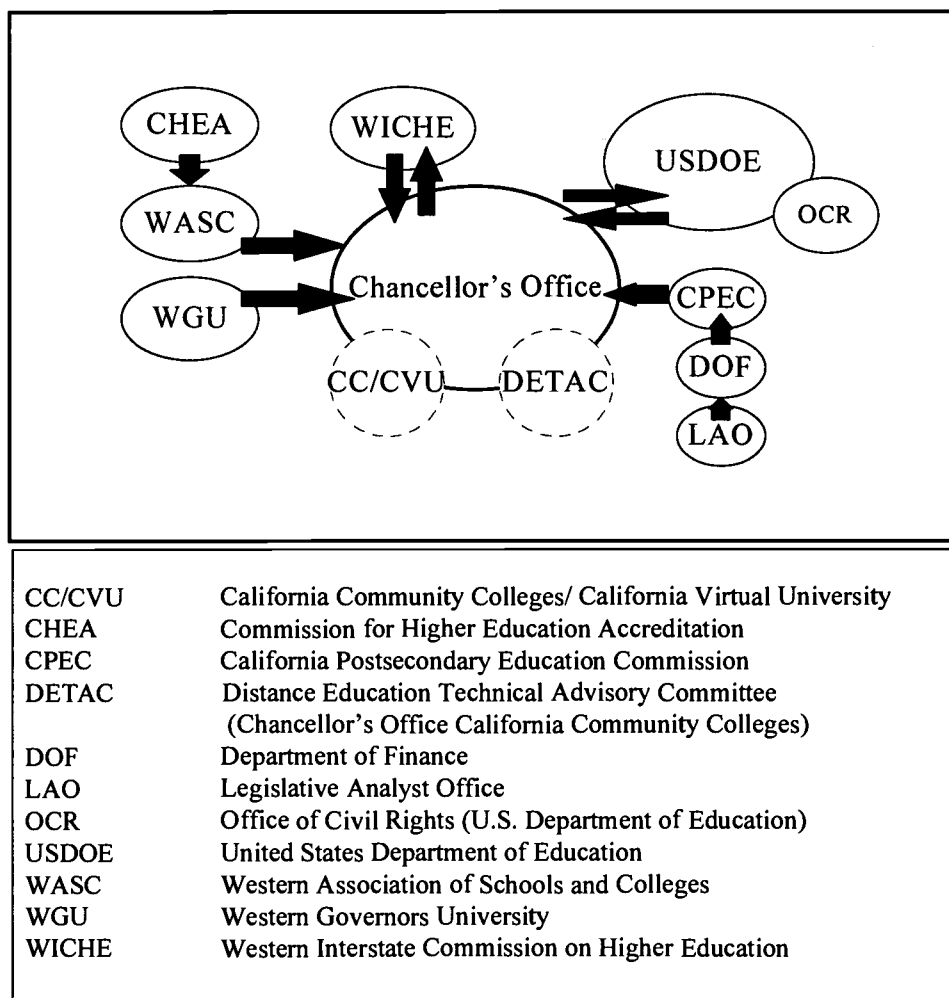
has a high assurance of quality and is available anytime anywhere. Many on-line courses have adopted the same instructional strategies and learning materials that are used in campus-based courses, and many now-common distance formats (such as videoconferencing) remain time or place dependent. *Community colleges must work to modify their offerings into new more flexible formats that are instructionally sound yet scaleable to large enrollments on a cost effective basis.*

State-Level Policy and Planning for Distance Education

CC/CVU	California Community Colleges/ California Virtual University
CHEA	Commission for Higher Education Accreditation
CPEC	California Postsecondary Education Commission
DETAC	Distance Education Technical Advisory Committee (Chancellor's Office California Community Colleges)
DOF	Department of Finance
LAO	Legislative Analyst Office
OCR	Office of Civil Rights (U.S. Department of Education)
USDOE	United States Department of Education
WASC	Western Association of Schools and Colleges
WGU	Western Governors University
WICHE	Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education

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The advent of virtual colleges and the rise of proprietary providers are transforming the competitive environment in higher education. In the hopes of gaining a competitive edge, more and more providers are seeking to reach students in new markets. This desire for a share of the distance learning market has raised issues regarding assurance of quality in courses and programs. To what extent are these providers motivated by profit rather than the quality of learning? Have they prepared their courses and programs carefully?

Although students will have more and more enrollment options, they may have a tendency to draw from multiple providers in an uncoordinated fashion -- with little guidance to help them choose among providers and few protections from poor quality offerings. *Through our involvement with educational providers, institutions and regional accreditation agencies we can safeguard the primary interests of learners.*

The potential for partnerships to promote learning opportunities through distance education are significant. Partnerships can join those with allied interests and encourage them to coordinate efforts, reduce duplication, and leverage resources. Such partnerships can promote the sharing of courses or programs, facilitate exchanges of resources and expertise, and promote economies of scale in program development and delivery.

Partnerships can enable postsecondary education institutions and industry to collaborate on courses and programs that better prepare students for employment and better address employer's labor needs. Postsecondary education institutions and software developers can create larger markets for the development of quality interactive courseware that is responsive to the needs of learners and teaching faculty. New ways of measuring quality and educational progress that will be widely accepted by professional and academic communities can be developed by partnerships. Institutions can strategically refocus their educational missions, reposition themselves in the marketplace, and transform their educational offerings to meet the demand for distance learning.

Creating opportunities for learners and expanding access to all who seek undergraduate education, career-oriented lifelong learning, or who can benefit from the removal of time and place constraints. In the past, some distance education has worked successfully with independent, experienced, and self-motivated learners, but it is critical to serve

individuals with disabilities, who have lost their jobs, are making the transition from welfare to the workforce, seeking basic or technical skills and who are seeking their first postsecondary education experience. *It is essential that community college focus their efforts in serving particular groups of learners who have not always been well served by either traditional campus-based education or common forms of distance education.*

Community colleges must be mindful that student success is predicated on the availability of support services such as counseling, assessment, study skills, and libraries. Can they meet the challenge to provide services anytime and anywhere? The challenge is to devise programs whose aim is not just to open the doors to postsecondary education, but to pave the way to students' successful completion of certifications, degrees, or skills training.

In order to achieve this community colleges must work to achieve quality and accountability in their distance learning programs. American higher education has a long standing tradition of quality assurance based on voluntary, peer review of institutions and programs. Much of the criteria used to assure the quality of institutions and programs is based on traditional course delivery and teaching. The challenge that faces American higher education today is how to maintain the high standards of quality assurance in a context absent of many of these traditional standards.

The challenges are many! How do we measure the progress and attainment of students in this new context? How do we assure the quality of programs and courses that start outside of the context of the traditional academic calendar and are offered across state and regional boarders? How do we measure quality without the traditional parameters of seat time and course credits to help us? The Office of Distance Education will encourage the development of new ways to think about assessment, quality assurance and accountability. Partnerships will be promoted to engage the educational provider, professional associations, and the accreditation community to rethink the issue of quality assurance and accountability to ensure credentials are meaningful, that educational providers are accountable, and that educational courses meet at least the same high standards demanded though traditional means.

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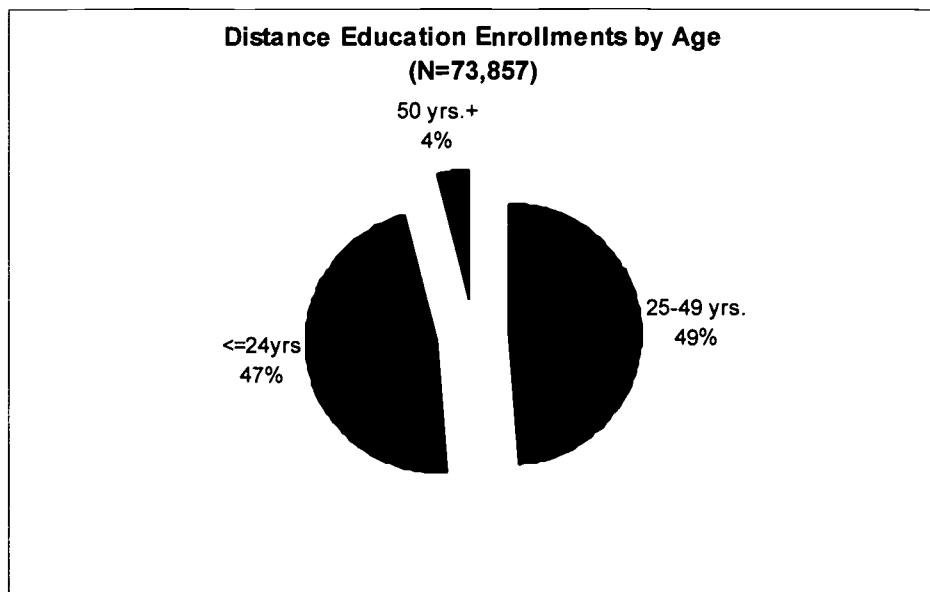
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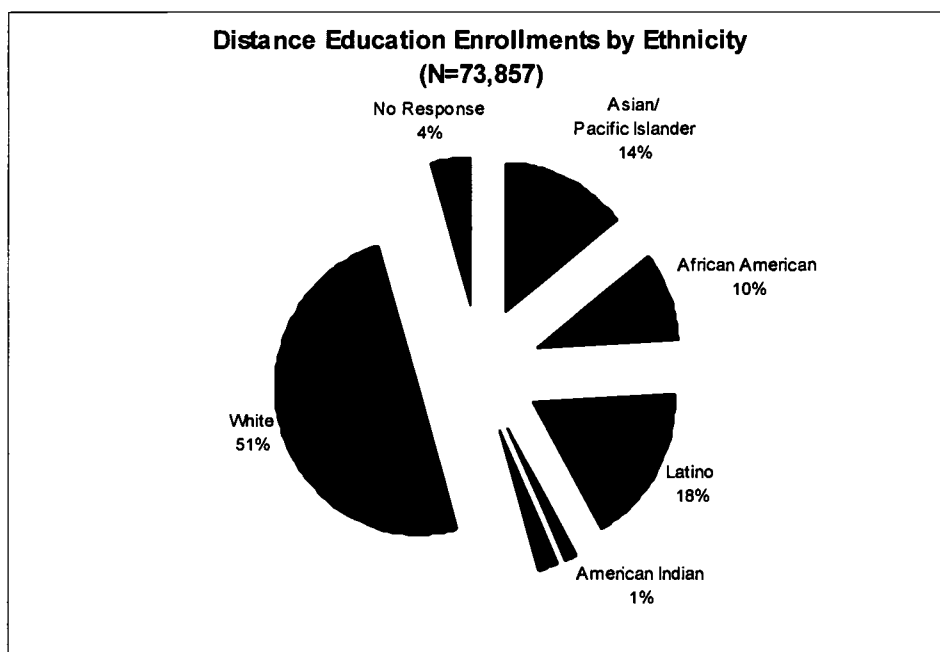
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Figure 1: Age of California Community College Distance Education Enrollees

Distance Education Enrollments by Age
(N=73,857)
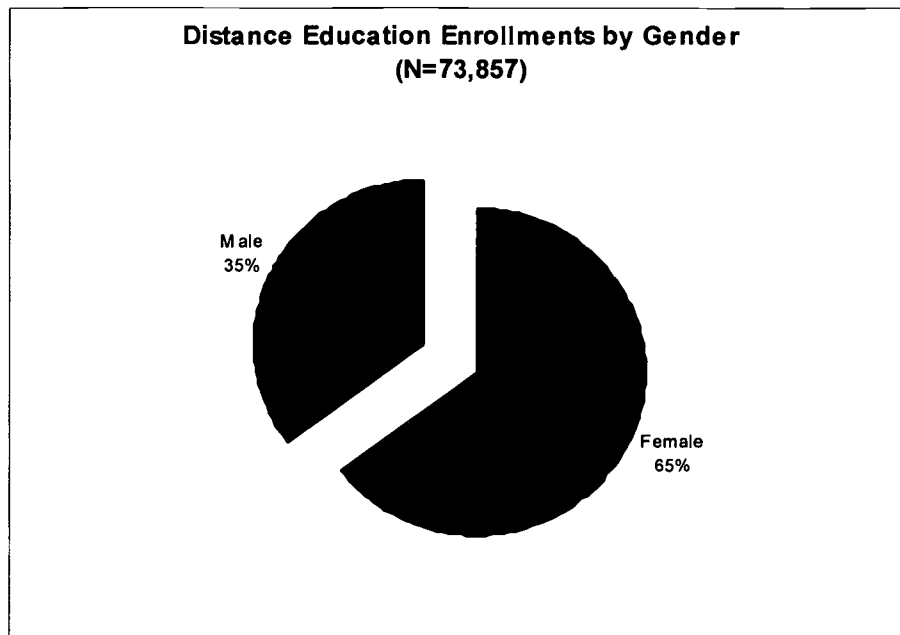

- 50 yrs.+ 4%
- 25-49 yrs. 49%
- <=24yrs 47%

Source: California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office MIS Fall 1997 Data Files

Figure 2: Ethnicity of California Community College Distance Education Enrollees
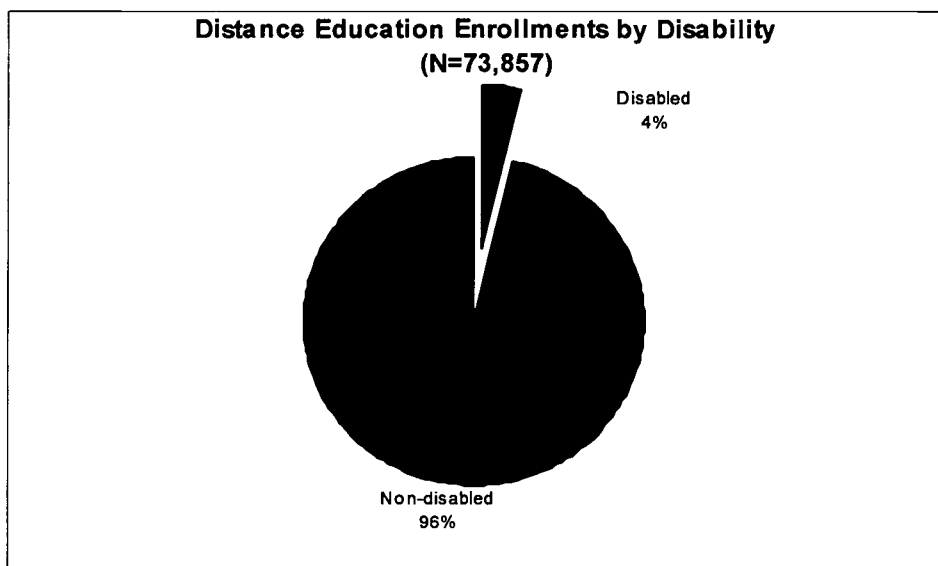
Distance Education Enrollments by Ethnicity
(N=73,857)

- No Response 4%
- Asian/ Pacific Islander 14%
- African American 10%
- Latino 18%
- American Indian 1%
- White 51%

Source: California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office MIS Fall 1997 Data Files

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Figure 3: Gender of California Community College Distance Education Enrollees

**Distance Education Enrollments by Gender
(N=73,857)**

Male
35%

Female
65%

Source: California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office MIS Fall 1997 Data Files

**Figure 4: Percentage of Disabled and Non-Disabled California Community College Distance
Education Enrollees**

**Distance Education Enrollments by Disability
(N=73,857)**

Disabled
4%

Non-disabled
96%

Source: California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office MIS Fall 1997 Data Files

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