Since the Online Education Initiative (OEI) was announced in Fall 2013, many questions have arisen: When will the first classes be offered? What are the requirements for participation? When will the Common Course Management System (CCMS) be operational, and will it live up to the promise of being a system that meets the needs of all online faculty and students across the state? Will a separate online community college be the end result of this project? Throughout the course of numerous meetings during the past months, answers to many of these questions have been clarified.

First, a brief history of the OEI is in order. In January 2014, the governor proposed funding in his 2014-2015 budget for expanding access to the CCCs, CSUs and UCs through the offering of massively open online courses (MOOCs) for credit. Many educators felt that this proposal was a massively bad idea. Opening online credit courses to hundreds or thousands of students through a MOOC is contrary to good practice in online education and accreditation standards, and doing so would violate state and federal requirements for regular and effective contact. Fortunately, the governor was convinced instead to fund the expansion the existing online education that the California community colleges already do quite well and have been doing since the 1990s.

With the passage of the 2013-2014 budget, the Online Education Initiative (OEI) was born, along with the Common Assessment Initiative and the Education Planning Initiative, both of which were recommendations from the Student Success Task Force. All three projects were funded by competitive grants. The Request for Applications (RFAs) for each initiative was released to the field by the Chancellor’s Office on September 1, 2013. The OEI grant was awarded to the Foothill-De Anza CCD/Butte-Glenn CCD consortium in November 2013, with Foothill-De Anza CCD acting as the fiscal agent. The project funding is $16.9 million for the first year, with

3 The original RFAs, with detailed project requirements, can be found at http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/TechResearchInfoSys/Telecom.aspx
Faculty contended that the pace of the project was too fast to be workable, with little opportunity for local senates to weigh in on whether or not their colleges should participate in the project.

ongoing funding of $10 million per year for the remainder of the grant project; the total grant period is five years.

The overarching purpose of the OEI is to create an Online Course Exchange in order to provide seamless access to the online courses and services students need, with the following key elements:

- Focus on ADT (associate degree for transfer) courses
- Development of a common course management system (CCMS) for use at little or no cost to participant colleges and built to specification
- Providing faculty professional development in online pedagogy
- Providing student support tools such as online tutoring
- While concerns have been expressed that the end result of the OEI will be the creation of a separate, independent online community college, the project directors and the Chancellor’s Office have given assurances that no such separate college is planned or expected.

The OEI Steering Committee was established as a representative, constituent-based body of 26 voting members, including nine faculty appointed by the Academic Senate, and six ex-officio members representing the fiscal agent and the Chancellor’s Office. The committee has met twice monthly since April, in person and online. The committee acts as the governance body for the project and has purview over all policy recommendations for the OEI project. The committee is subdivided into workgroups on academic affairs, student services, professional development, the common course management system, and the pilot colleges’ consortium.

The selection of Pat James (previously Dean of Instruction, Library and Technology & Distance Education, Mt. San Jacinto) as the permanent Executive Director of the OEI in June marks an important milestone for the project. A former member of Academic Senate Executive Committee, James is highly regarded as a preeminent expert in online education. Most importantly, she holds as her guiding principle doing what is best for students. Prior to her selection, the Steering Committee was encouraged to select pilot colleges in the summer and start offering courses in the fall. Faculty contended that the pace of the project was too fast to be workable, with little opportunity for local senates to weigh in on whether or not their colleges should participate in the project. In the interest of doing what is best for students and developing a pilot that offers the highest quality online education experience possible, the new executive director made the much-needed decision to push the start of the pilot to the Spring of 2015, with the selection of pilot colleges being announced in August.

The selection of the pilot colleges was completed in late July. Fifty-eight colleges responded to the initial interest questionnaire; of those, forty-four provided requested additional information. The original plan was to select eight pilot colleges. Instead, the selection team made a recommendation to select 24 colleges for the pilot to participate on three tracks,  

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For more information about the OEI, go to http://ccconlineed.org
with eight colleges in each track: piloting the student readiness modules, the online tutoring system, and the full experience on the new CCMS. The OEI Steering Committee approved this recommendation, and thus the number of pilot colleges was expanded. The criteria used for selecting the pilot colleges were as follows:

- Currently use Open CCC Apply
- Have established online education programs
- Require or have substantial professional development for online faculty
- Geographical and college size diversity (north, south, urban, suburban, rural, size)
- Diversity of CMS used
- Accreditation status – the participant colleges cannot be on Show Cause
- Capacity to add online courses to their schedules
- Participation in the piloting of other projects – Common Assessment, Education Planning

The colleges selected to test the student readiness modules and the online tutoring system will offer at a minimum two courses each and will use their existing course management systems. This level of involvement will allow these colleges to focus on testing the effectiveness of these specific components. Piloting of the student readiness modules and online tutoring system is on schedule to start in Spring 2015. The colleges selected for the “full launch” will offer courses and test the aforementioned services components within the new CCMS. These offerings are currently on schedule to start in Summer 2015.5

The “full launch” will mark a major milestone for the OEI project because at that time the CCMS will go live. The successful development and launch of the CCMS as a system that meets the needs of faculty and students alike will likely be the key to success for the overall OEI project. While the efficacy of the components of the course exchange, the provision of faculty professional development, and the link to the Education Planning and Common Assessment Initiatives are all important, the success of the OEI and the establishment of a fully operational Online Course Exchange will certainly hinge on the quality and utility of the CCMS. If the CCMS does not support the needs of online faculty and the students they serve, then faculty will likely offer little support for participation in the future Online Course Exchange.

Because of the importance of the CCMS to this project, a workgroup under the purview of the OEI Steering Committee has been established for the purpose of identifying the needs of online faculty and developing the technical specifications for the CCMS, developing the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the selection of vendors to build the CCMS, and reviewing

5 The reason for launching in summer instead of fall is that a period is needed to test the system with fewer classes and fewer students active. Summer is also a lighter period for the CCC Technology Center, and thus the summer launch will allow technical issues identified in summer 2015 to be addressed before Fall 2015 begins.

Because the end goal of this project is to create an Online Course Exchange that will allow students a seamless experience, the project is very complex and includes many issues to be resolved.
and rating the proposals. This workgroup will include faculty from the OEI Steering Committee, faculty with expertise in the area of teaching and developing course management systems, and faculty from the pilot colleges. All faculty appointments will be made by the Academic Senate.

Because the end goal of this project is to create an Online Course Exchange that will allow students a seamless experience, the project is very complex and includes many issues to be resolved. For example, while courses offered are required to be C-ID-approved, the initial group of courses still needs to be identified. Important considerations include the need to strike a balance between high-demand courses needed for general education and graduation requirements and courses needed to complete ADTs. Differences between participant colleges in registration dates and local enrollment priorities need to be addressed, as do the differences between colleges in enrollment limits, placement assessment, business services policies, and other policy and operational differences.

The quality of course design must be assured. Courses that are to be offered will first be reviewed by a workgroup of the OEI Steering Committee to assure that they meet minimum quality standards for course design established by the OEI Steering Committee. The four main categories for evaluation are as follows:

- Course design – structure of the course, learning objectives, organization of content, and instructional strategies
- Interaction and collaboration – communication between students and instructors that requires interdependent group work

### OEI PILOT COLLEGES

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<tr>
<th>Student Readiness (Spring 2015)</th>
<th>Online Tutoring (Spring 2015)</th>
<th>Full Launch (Summer 2015)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Antelope Valley</td>
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<td>Hartnell</td>
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<td>West Los Angeles</td>
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<td>Ventura</td>
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Local senates should be consulted on continued participation in the Exchange, regardless of whether or not they were consulted on participation in the pilot.

- Assessment – instructional activities designed to measure progress towards learning outcomes, provide feedback to students and instructor, or enable grade assignment
- Learner (student) support – support resources made available to students taking the course

Within each main category are sub-categories, such as learner engagement, communication strategies, assessment design, and orientation to course and course management system. Ultimately, the rating rubric assesses whether or not students are receiving regular and effective contact when taking the course. The rubric categories then reflect how quality design of the various components of an online course results in regular and effective contact for students and how that regular and effective contact improves the learning experience for the students.

The faculty assigned to teach the courses must also be prepared for teaching in the online learning environment. One of the components of the OEI is to provide professional development opportunities that will allow faculty to improve their skills in course design and teaching in the online environment. As the project matures from the pilot phase to the established Exchange and more colleges become involved, this aspect of the initiative will provide a real opportunity to allow more faculty to participate in professional development activities that will improve their skills in the online environment and thus improve the quality of online education across the system.

As this project progresses, faculty throughout the state must stay informed regarding developments and issues. Because the project involves areas of faculty purview under the 10+1 such as curriculum, degree and certificate requirements, student preparation and success, and faculty professional development, local senates should have been consulted before their colleges committed to participation in the OEI. Given that the solicitation of potential pilot colleges began in early May, some of the senates at the pilot colleges may not have been consulted before participants were selected. Thus, local senates at the pilot colleges should strongly urge that their administrations explain what impacts participation in the pilot may have on the college and provide regular status reports during the pilot. Furthermore, participation in the pilot should not mean automatic continued participation in the Exchange after the pilot phase ends. Local senates should be consulted on continued participation in the Exchange, regardless of whether or not they were consulted on participation in the pilot. Finally, local senates should remember that faculty primacy on academic and professional matters extends to the OEI at both the local and state level. While the Academic Senate represents the faculty statewide on the OEI Steering Committee, local senates at participant colleges do not lose their right to collegial consultation because of participation in the OEI. Should participation in the OEI pilot or the future Exchange prompt governing boards or administrators to propose changes to local policies and procedures covered under the 10+1, local senates must be collegially consulted. ■

6 Resolution 7.01 F13: http://asccc.org/resolutions/academic-senate-participation-online-course-exchange