



# PCCD Distance Education Committee

Peralta Community College District • 333 East Eighth Street • Oakland, California 94606 • (510) 466-7200

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May 11, 2020

To: Dr. Regina Stanback Stroud, Chancellor, PCCD and Co-Chair of PGC  
Dr. Donald Moore, President, District Academic Senate and Co-Chair of PGC  
Dr. Siri Brown, Vice Chancellor Academic & Student Affairs and Co-Chair of DAASSC  
Tom Renbarger, Co-Chair of DASSC

From: Inger Stark, Chair, PCCD Distance Education Committee

Re: Recommendation on class caps for online and hybrid classes, beginning summer 2020

As you know, the PCCD DE Committee is a subcommittee of both DAS and DAASSC. As such, committee communications and recommendations are normally forwarded to DAS and DAASSC. However, given that DAASSC does not meet again until fall semester, and given the urgency and importance of the committee recommendations below, this letter is being sent also to you, Chancellor Stanback Stroud, for consideration.

Current enrollment practices at PCCD generally cap enrollment in DE classes at about 40 students. **Peralta District Distance Education Committee recommends that enrollment in all online and hybrid classes be capped at no more than 25 students, beginning summer semester 2020.** Online and hybrid classes that are larger than 25 limit faculty's ability to guide valuable student learning, and they impede the kinds of interaction that are required in online classes by ACCJC, Title V,, and the US Department of Education.

Informing the DE Committee's recommendation are five basic concerns:

- The Constructivist Approach central to effective community college virtual instruction ("learning of new content results from complex interactions among students, faculty, and student peers" [Taft, Perkowski, and Martin 2011]). Maintaining a student-centered (rather than teacher-centered) virtual classroom requires an instructor workload directly proportional to the number of students in the class. Extant research indicates that the ideal size for an online class ranges from 12 students [Tomei, 2006] to no more than 30 students [Rovai, 2002], [Dykman and Davis, 2008], with most research indicating that a class size of no more than 20 is best.

- Peralta's commitment to "regular and substantive interaction" required of instructors by federal regulations and "regular effective contact" called for by the state in Title V.
- Practical course-design considerations arising from both the digital divide and the overall relatively low level of student preparedness for online learning that is characteristic of our service area.
- Instructional practices recommended by the CVC-OEI Consortium's rubric, noting that all four Peralta colleges recently submitted applications to join the consortium.
- The additional planning work required for creating an effective online learning environment. [Lowenthal, Nyland et. al, 2019].

Research indicates that failing to limit online course sizes results in a qualitatively, rather than merely quantitatively, different student learning experience; as Dykman and Davis (2008) argue, "the size of the class *determines* the learning objectives and course design," with larger classes involving less instructor feedback on student deliverables, fewer deliverables produced by students, and the establishment of a "sink or swim" mentality among students.

Given the specific learning needs of community college students, and of community college students from our service area in particular, a maximum class-size enrollment cap of 25 students in online and hybrid classes will best serve the learning needs of an overwhelming majority of Peralta students.

Sincerely,



Inger Stark (May 11, 2020)

Inger Stark, Ph.D.  
Chair, PCCD Distance Education Committee