



**ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

February 9, 2011

Dr. Karen Solomon  
Vice President for Accreditation Relations  
The Higher Learning Commission  
230 South LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500  
Chicago, Illinois 60604-1413

Dear Dr. Solomon,

As a follow-up to your campus visit in January, Estrella Mountain Community College has recently submitted a Substantive Change Application to grandfather thirty-one distance delivery programs that were established and offered at the College prior to July 1, 2010.

Grandfathered distance delivery programs at Estrella Mountain comprise more than 35% of the offered degree and certificate programs. Our distance delivery program is continuing to expand and we are currently preparing to offer our students a new online Gifted Teacher Education degree and certificate. With this new program addition, it is my understanding that a comprehensive visit of our distance delivery program by the Commission is required.

Estrella Mountain is already scheduled for an accreditation visit November 7 – 9, 2011. As a result, I would like to formally request a Level 4 comprehensive visit of our distance delivery programs to occur at the same time as our scheduled fall accreditation visit.

Please let me know if this request is possible. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Ernest Lara, Ph.D.  
President

## Substantive Change Application, Part 1: General Questions

### Distance Delivery

*Note: Wherever distance delivery is mentioned it means distance or correspondence delivery.*

**Institution:** Estrella Mountain Community College, **State:** Avondale, Arizona

**Name of person completing this application:** Dr. Rene' Willekens, Dean and Ms. Polly Miller, E-Learning Coordinator

**Title:** Dean of Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness, E-Learning Faculty Coordinator

**Phone:** 623-935-8069, 623-935-8154 **Email:** rene.willekens@estrellamountain.edu

**Requested Change(s).** *Concisely describe the change for which your institution seeks approval.*

**Classification of Change Request.** Check all boxes that apply to the change.

*Note: not every institutional change requires prior review and approval. Review the "Overview of Commission Policies and Procedures for Institutional Changes Requiring Commission Notification or Approval" to make certain that current HLC policy requires you to seek approval.*

<p><b>Change in mission or student body:</b></p> <p>Change in mission Change in student body</p>	<p><b>Contractual or Consortial Arrangement:</b></p> <p>Outsourcing 25 – 50% of a contracted program to an organization not accredited by a USDE-recognized agency Offering a program as part of a consortium of institutions</p>
<p><b>Request for new additional locations:</b></p> <p>in home state in other state(s) or in other country(ies) new or additional campus(es)</p>	
<p><b>Offering a new academic program(s) requiring HLC approval:</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> certificate                      bachelor's diploma                                      master's/specialist associate's                                      doctorate</p>	<p><b>Other:</b></p> <p>Request for access to Desk Review for additional locations Request for access to Notification Program for locations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantial change in scope or level of distance education activity Substantially changing the clock or credit hours required for a program</p>
<p><b>Offering five or more courses:</b></p> <p>at a degree level not now included in the institution's accreditation at an out-of-state or foreign location</p>	

**Institutional Context for Substantive Change Review.** *In 1-2 paragraphs describe the key dynamics — institutional mission and internal or external forces — that stimulated and shaped the change.*

**Special conditions.** *Underline YES or NO attesting whether any of the conditions identified below fit your institution. If you underline YES, explain the situation in the box provided.*

Is the institution, in its relations with other regional, specialized, or national accrediting agencies, currently under or recommended for a negative status or action (e.g., withdrawal, probation, sanction, warning, or show-cause, etc.)?	YES <u>NO</u>	
Is the institution now undergoing or facing substantial monitoring, special review, or financial restrictions from the U.S. Dept. of Education or other federal or state government agencies?	YES <u>NO</u>	
Has the institution's senior leadership or Board membership experienced substantial resignations or removals in the past year?	YES <u>NO</u>	
Is the institution experiencing financial difficulty through such conditions as a currently declared state of exigency, a deficit of 10% or more, or a default or failure to make payroll during the past year, or consecutive deficits in the two most recent years?	YES <u>NO</u>	
Is the institution experiencing other pressures that might affect its ability to carry out the proposal (e.g., a collective bargaining dispute or a significant lawsuit)?	YES <u>NO</u>	

**Approvals.** *Check those approvals required prior to implementing the proposed change and attach documentation of these approvals with your request. Indicate the filename of the documentation.*

Internal (faculty, board) approvals (filename: \_\_\_\_\_ )

System approvals (for institutions part of systems) (filename: \_\_\_\_\_ )

State approval(s) (filename: \_\_\_\_\_ )

Foreign country(ies) approvals, if overseas program or site (filename: \_\_\_\_\_ )

*Is the program approved by a specialized accreditor? If yes, please identify the accreditation and outline the process and timeline for seeking the other accreditor's approval.*

## Substantive Change Application, Part 2: Topic-Specific Questions

### Distance Delivery

*Note: Wherever distance delivery is mentioned it means distance or correspondence delivery.*

#### Understanding Commission Expectations for Distance Delivered Courses and Programs

Whenever it comprehensively reviews an institution, the Higher Learning Commission examines the institution's capacity to provide education to its students and the quality of its performance in doing so, whether via distance delivery or traditional face-to-face modes. Comprehensive reviews examine curriculum, staffing, support services, access to appropriate laboratory and library resources, and all other facets of quality higher education.

Between comprehensive reviews, Higher Learning Commission policy requires an institution to seek the Commission's *prior approval* if the institution anticipates a shift from its current level of activity in delivering courses and programs via distance delivery to a substantially higher level. When such a transition is anticipated, an institution must submit a **substantive change** request describing the characteristics and projected magnitude of the change, and including appropriate documentation that it has the capacity to continue to provide quality education using distance delivery at the higher level.

An institution violates the Commission's accreditation requirements if it increases its distance delivery activity to a level higher than that for which it is currently approved—whether intentionally or accidentally—without first seeking and receiving Higher Learning Commission's approval.

#### Commission Definitions

The Higher Learning Commission uses the following definitions for the purpose of applying this policy to its accredited and candidate institutions:

**Distance delivered programs** are those in which 50% or more of the required courses may be taken as distance delivered courses. (For more details and FAQs, see [defining distance-delivered programs](#).)

**Distance-delivered courses** are those in which all or the vast majority (typically 75% or more) of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence, or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other. (For more details and FAQs, see [defining distance-delivered courses](#).)

**Substantive change** in distance delivery is defined through the chart below as initial entry at Level 1 or a shift from any numbered level to the next highest level, based on at least one condition in that level being met.

Level of development or activity	Conditions for Determining Level		
	% of total institutional credit hours in distance-delivered courses	% of degree programs delivered as distance delivery	Organizational Structure
4	More than 50%	More than 35%	
3	50% or less	35% or less	separate organizational component identified (e.g., online division, office of distance education, virtual campus)

2	25% or less	15% or less	
1	5% or less	5% or less	

Thus, if 35% (or more) of an institution's degree programs are available through distance delivery, an institution is operating at level 4—regardless of other conditions. Similarly, an institution advertising an "Online Program Center" is operating at level 3, even if it only offers 5% of its programs and fewer than 10% of its courses via distance delivery.

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### Submitting Your Substantive Change Request

Attach the "Substantive Change Application—General Questions" as page one of your application. That completed form and your answers to the questions below will constitute your request for approval of a substantive change. It will be provided to future HLC review processes.

The questions are designed to elicit brief, succinct, detailed information, rather than a narrative or references to extensive supporting documents. Do not attach other documents unless they are specifically requested in the questions. Your total submission should be no more than 8-10 pages. Submit your completed application as a single electronic document (in Adobe PDF format) emailed to [changerequests@hlcommission.org](mailto:changerequests@hlcommission.org).

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Name of Institution:

### Part 1. Characteristics of the Change Requested

1. At which of the four levels defined above do you currently operate distance delivery? Level 4 for percentage of degree programs, Level 2 for total percentage hours online in distance delivery.
2. At which of the four levels defined above are you requesting permission to operate distance delivery? Level 4
3. Do you currently have a separately identified unit for providing or marketing your distance delivery education? ( ) Yes (X) No  
The college has a separate marketing department which supports both traditional and distance delivery.  
The Center for Teaching and Learning supports traditional, alternative delivery, and distance delivery courses.  
If **yes**, what do you call it?
4. Are you planning to begin operating a separately identified unit for providing or marketing your distance education? ( ) Yes (X) No  
If **yes**, when?

Under what name?

5. If you are planning any involvement by external organizations (other than accredited higher education institutions) in key operations as identified below, provide the information requested for each planned
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involvement. (Note that such involvement by a parent company or by one of its subsidiaries external to the institution in any of these operations should be reported.)

Type of involvement	Name(s) of external organization(s)	% of Involvement
A. Support for delivery of instruction	Blackboard LMS	100%
	Presidium Help Desk	100%
	Smartthinking	40%
	WIMBA Live Classroom	25%
B. Recruitment and admission of students		none
C. Course placement and advising of students	WIMBA Live Classroom	10%
D. Design and oversight of curriculum		none
E. Direct instruction and oversight		none

6. If you are planning any involvement with other accredited higher education institutions in key operations identified above, provide the name(s) of the other institutions and the nature of the involvement. Estrella Mountain Community College is part of the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) Blackboard Consortium which supports the Blackboard LMS initiative on all ten Maricopa campuses.

7. Operational Data

Operational Data	Last year (2009-2010) (actual tallies)	This year (estimate) 2010-2011	Next year (projected) 2011-2012
A. Total annual (academic year + summer) student credit hours generated	104,996	115,496	127,045
B. Total annual student credit hours generated in distance-delivered courses	10,084	12,605	15,756
C. Percentage of student credit hours in distance-delivered courses (B/C, or B divided by A, rounded up to the nearest integer)	10%	11%	12%
D. Total number of academic programs (i.e., counting different majors at all levels)	78	84	86
E. Total number of programs in item D above available via distance delivery (i.e., 50% or more of courses available as	31	31	33

distance-delivered courses)			
F. Percentage of programs available via distance delivery (E/D, or E divided by D, rounded up to nearest integer)	40%	38%	41%

## **Part 2. Institution's History with Distance Education**

8. Briefly describe your institution's experience with distance education.

Eighteen members of the Estrella Mountain Community College (EMCC) took eight months (November 11, 2001 - June 2, 2002) to conduct a broad investigation into the best practices related to learning with technology. The Charge Statement from the College's Senior Leadership stated that the [E-Learning Task Force](#) shall, "consider all relevant aspects of E-Learning so that EMCC charts the right course in the rapidly expanding world of educational technology.

Members of the E-Learning Task Force presented recommendations which included a vision statement, definition, institutional goals and recommendations to the EMCC Leadership Council in May 2002.

A visual timeline of E-Learning processes and faculty development opportunities at EMCC can be viewed at <http://www2.estrellamountain.edu/academics/elearning/hlpt/HLPTimeline.html>

In January 2007, EMCC applied for and was granted a matching \$250,000.00 Alfred P. Sloan Foundation grant to expand the E-Learning program. The [Sloan grant](#) provided needed funds to support a comprehensive E-Learning Program at EMCC.

In the fall of 2007, EMCC faculty initiated a review of the E-Learning program of the College.

The full report is located at

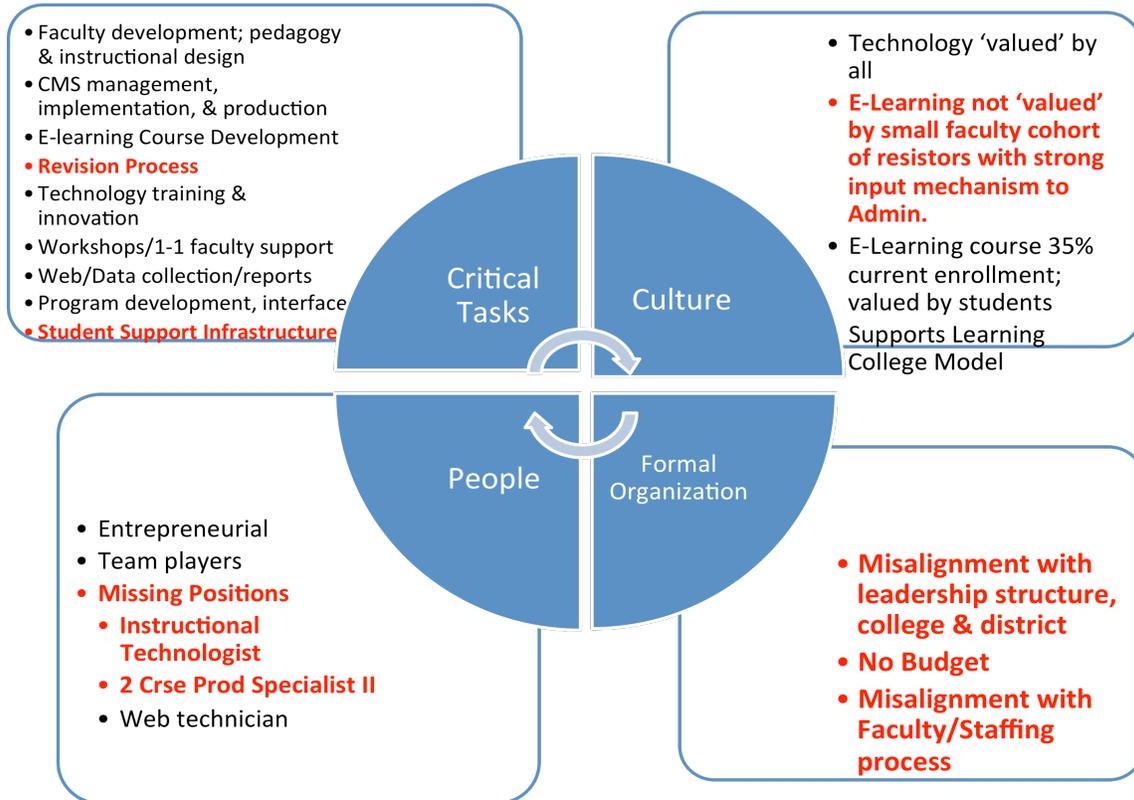
[http://www2.estrellamountain.edu/academics/elearning/taskforce/pdf/ELEARNINGWHITEPAPER08\\_FINAL\\_May08.pdf](http://www2.estrellamountain.edu/academics/elearning/taskforce/pdf/ELEARNINGWHITEPAPER08_FINAL_May08.pdf)

9. If the Higher Learning Commission approves you to operate at the next highest level, what future growth do you anticipate (e.g., in the next six months, three years, 10-20 years) for distance delivery? Anticipated growth will be in the development of online math and science courses, specialized Occupational Education programs, online modular courses such as ENG091, 101, and 102, mobile computing, and simulation. Anticipated growth and expansion will support a distributed learning model across multiple sites.
10. How do you plan to manage this growth? Estrella Mountain Community College (EMCC) planning documents such as Strategic, Instructional, Budget, Master Plan, Enrollment Management, Technology and Learning, and Program Review coordinate the College's response to enrollment growth which includes distance education. The E-Learning budget is distributed throughout the Center for Teaching and Learning, VPAA Instructional, Learning Support Services, and Occupational Education division budgets. As needs are identified, resources are allocated. E-Learning processes are developed strategically and systemically to leverage resources in order to provide both faculty and students positive learning experiences. Whenever possible, online practices are incorporated into established processes and procedures.

## **Part 3. Institutional Planning for Distance Education**

11. What impact might the proposed program(s) have on challenges identified as part of or subsequent to the last comprehensive visit or reaffirmation panel and how has the institution addressed the challenge(s)? Resources will be needed for additional staff, training, course development and revision processes, and software and hardware. Increased budget allocation for virtual student support services such as online tutoring. Organizational alignment needs to be addressed in order to efficiently and effectively manage growth and change initiatives. The *E-Learning Program Congruence Model* was presented at the Feb. 26, 2010 E-Learning Advisory Committee Meeting to identify

challenges existing within the current E-Learning structure. (Tushman and O'Reilly, 1997, 2002) *red text denotes program gaps*



12. How do you determine the need for a distance-delivered course or program? If you offer a traditional program now, how do you decide whether to start offering this program via distance delivery? This decision resides with the faculty and the divisions. We have developed [guiding principles](#) for E-Learning course development. Through program review, division planning, Advisory Committees, and input from all stakeholders including Instructional Councils, Deans, and Vice-Presidents, faculty submit development proposals in the fall and spring which are reviewed by Division Chairs and approved by the appropriate Dean. The electronic form may be viewed at <http://www2.estrellamountain.edu/ctl/grants/>

13. How do you plan for changes and future expansion of the role distance delivery plays in your institution? Who is involved? How do new ideas and initiatives originate, and how are they examined and evaluated? The E-Learning Advisory Committee meets monthly to promote quality and access to learning and services to students. The committee, comprised of faculty division representatives, both deans of Academic Affairs, Learning Support and Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness staff, and the E-Learning Faculty Coordinator, work collaboratively to recommend general guidelines, plans, and policies to enhance the development, delivery, management, and assessment of E-Learning courses and programs offered by EMCC. The E-Learning Faculty Coordinator facilitates this process. This process is done in conjunction with EMCC planning and budgetary processes. You may view the current organization chart at [http://www.estrellamountain.edu/sites/estrellamountain.edu/files/site\\_images/org-chart.pdf](http://www.estrellamountain.edu/sites/estrellamountain.edu/files/site_images/org-chart.pdf)

14. How do you ensure that financial planning and budgeting for your distance-delivered courses and programs are realistic? What are your projected revenues and expenses? The E-Learning Faculty Coordinator works through different divisions and support units, including the Center for Teaching and Learning, and administrators to get E-learning resources included in appropriate areas. Once in the appropriate area, it is up to the different stakeholders, including the Budget Development Steering Team and the Faculty Senate Faculty/Staffing committee, to prioritize and recommend what moves

forward for funding.

15. How do you assure that promotion, marketing, and enrollment of your distance-delivered courses and programs stay in balance with your actual resources and technical capabilities? As part of the Sloan grant, a comprehensive marketing plan was developed with 'reusable resources' and strategic messaging. Online is included in marketing message tags. We have developed a comprehensive E-Learning site; <http://www.estrellamountain.edu/academics/distance-learning> Enrollment is monitored closely by faculty and division chairs. Adjunct faculty are hired and trained to teach in the online environment as demand dictates. [The Preparing to Teach Part 1&2 supports adjunct training.](#)

16. What controls are in place to ensure that the information presented to students in advertising, brochures, and other communications will be accurate? E-Learning Faculty Coordinator collaborates with marketing and administrators to ensure appropriate messaging. E-Learning Faculty Coordinator oversees E-Learning site; <http://www.estrellamountain.edu/academics/distance-learning>

#### **Part 4. Curriculum and Instructional Design**

17. How do you assure good instructional design in your distance-delivered courses and programs? How are your faculty and quality control mechanisms involved in the instructional design process? Faculty are required to attend a series of workshops in preparation for designing an online course; [course development process](#). An online course template is used which supports sound instructional design principles and an experiential constructivist learning approach. The template includes the following; [Getting Started](#), [Orientation](#), Syllabus Module, ['Top Student' video and time management module](#), [Learning Styles modules](#), Learning Outcomes, reflection activities, formative assessments, rubrics, learning support, course evaluation, and a Student Experience survey. The E-Learning Faculty Coordinator collaborates with faculty during the development and pilot semester to ensure instructional design and program practices are met. Upon completion of the development process, the [Learning Outcomes Assessment Form](#) and the [SAAC EZ](#), the institutional assessment documentation process, are completed. Feedback from students and faculty are used for content, instructional design, and faculty development workshop improvement. The E-Learning Advisory committee and E-Learning Pedagogy Luncheons also provide input to the continuous improvement process. The E-Learning Advisory Committee has had a Course Revision Process on the table for the past three years; it is a spring 2011 priority to recommend course revision guiding principles.

18. What processes and procedures will you use for technology maintenance, upgrades, back up, remote services, and for communicating changes in software, hardware or technical systems to students and faculty? Two full-time Course Production Specialists IIs, (one board approved, one temporary) are dedicated to student and faculty E-Learning course support. Technology maintenance, upgrades, back up, remote services, and communication of changes in software, hardware and technical systems to students and faculty is managed through a collaborative effort between the Center for Teaching and Learning, EMCC's IT department, and the MCCC Blackboard Alliance team.

19. How do you ensure that you provide convenient, reliable, and timely services to students or faculty needing technical assistance, and how do you communicate information about these services? Students are notified of technical assistance processes in the following ways; New Student Orientation, Advising, Blackboard login site, Online Course, Syllabus, support links within the course, Course Orientation, and faculty. Students are encouraged and referred to the Information Commons for timely technical support. Here is the ['Getting Started](#) and [Learner Responsibilities Orientation'](#) link which are included in the New Student and Course Orientation and published on the EMCC web site. Technical assistance for faculty is provided in the following ways; one-on-one, small group, workshops, tutorials, and when necessary, entering the online course to resolve technical issues.

20. What is your institution's experience, if any, in collaborating with other institutions or organizations to provide distance-delivered education? none

21. If you are planning partnerships or agreements with external organizations or institutions as identified

in Questions 5 and 6, how will you ensure that students can use these services effectively? Collaborate with Learning Enhancement Center and Information Commons to ensure all learning modalities are supported. Links to these support areas are embedded within the course template. Tutorials are included in the course template. Provide training and ongoing support for faculty and staff so they can support students.

### **Part 5. Institutional Staffing and Faculty Support**

22. How do you staff distance-delivery courses and programs? How does this differ from your processes for staffing traditional courses and programs? Staffing resides with the divisions; it is the same process as traditional courses and programs.
23. What is your process for selecting, training, and orienting faculty for distance delivery? What special professional development, support, or released time do you provide for faculty who teach distance-delivery courses and programs? Here is the recommended training and orientation process for online courses; <http://www.estrellamountain.edu/academics/distance-learning/faculty> Additional workshops and training sessions, including the E-Learning Pedagogy Luncheon, are offered during the year based on need; [http://www2.estrellamountain.edu/ctl/ws\\_index.asp](http://www2.estrellamountain.edu/ctl/ws_index.asp) Adjunct faculty are paid the instruction non-classroom hourly amount to attend workshops. Residential faculty who develop online courses may choose between reassign time and stipend; the amount is the course load. Adjunct faculty receive a stipend for course development. Faculty approved to develop online courses meet weekly with the E-Learning Faculty Coordinator during the design and pilot phase, and with assigned support staff in the Center for Teaching and Learning based on development needs such as video, podcasting, webinar features, etc..
24. How do you assure copyright compliance and keep distance delivery faculty aware of institutional policies on using others' intellectual property? We include copyright compliance in the Online Redesign Workshop, we regularly offer a copyright workshop for faculty, and the Center for Teaching and Learning Staff educates faculty on copyright compliance when working with faculty on course development projects. MCCC Center for Learning and Instruction and Legal Services also regularly offers workshops for faculty on copyright compliance and institutional policies on using others' intellectual property. The college/district owns the online course, not the faculty.

### **Part 6. Student Support**

25. How do you assure that distance-delivery students have access to necessary student and support services (e.g., institutional information, application for admission, registration, tutoring or academic support, advising, financial aid, tuition payment, career counseling and placement, library resources, complaint processes)? These services and process are all on the EMCC website. We have incorporated pertinent information into the course template and orientation processes. We use Smartthinking for tutoring and writing support as well as EMCC Learning support processes. How do you provide them information about using these services, and how do you monitor and evaluate their use of these services? Through the EMCC website, orientation, and online course design and activities, students are provided with this information. Functional areas, such as Learning Support, monitor services and provide feedback to stakeholders. Also, the student course evaluation included evaluative questions on support services offered to students; these are reviewed by the E-Learning Faculty Coordinator.
26. How do you measure and promote interactions among distance delivery students and faculty (e.g., email, online chats, discussion groups, phone or streaming audio, "office hours," cyber buddies/mentors and tutors)? Interactions among distance delivery students and faculty are promoted through workshops, course development, instructional design practices, and faculty to student and faculty to faculty learning. Interactions among distance delivery students and faculty are measured through the following vehicles: Blackboard Course Management System, First Week Feedback survey, Syllabus Survey, Student Experience Survey, Course Evaluation, Faculty Evaluations, student focus groups, and E-Learning Faculty Coordinator weekly sessions during the pilot semester.

27. How do you assure that the distance delivery students you enroll and to whom you award credit and credentials are the same ones who did the work and achieved your learning goals? In the online environment we encourage faculty to develop formative assessments which support multiple learning styles. During the first week, students have several reflective writing assignments which provide faculty many opportunities to evaluate the student. Whenever possible we develop project based/problem based assessments. Also, in several classes we use the WIMBA voice tools and webinar features which allow faculty to see and hear their students. Included in the Blackboard LMS is a plagiarism tool which faculty may use to detect plagiarism on writing assignments. Financial Aid processes are used as an additional safeguard to authenticate the student. How do you protect student identity and personal information? An authentication process which includes a unique Maricopa Enterprise ID and password.

### **Part 7. Evaluation and Assessment**

28. How do you assess, review, and evaluate quality in distance-delivered courses and programs? The Week 4 and Week 15 evaluation surveys allow the 'student voice' to be incorporated into the continuous feedback and improvement process. Week 4 and Week 15 Experience Surveys can be viewed at <http://www.estrellamountain.edu/academics/distance-learning/prog-dev> The Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (OPIE) annually compiles E-Learning enrollment and completion data which is included in Academic and Occupational program review. The reports are posted on the E-Learning website at <http://www.estrellamountain.edu/academics/distance-learning/prog-dev> Student Course Evaluations; located in the template in week 15. E-Learning Faculty Coordinator reviews all evaluations for improvement strategies and forwards to appropriate personnel. [Learning Outcomes Assessment Form, an instructional design punch list](#). Faculty discussion and feedback via E-Learning Advisory Committee, Pedagogy Luncheons, workshops, and course development session. Division chairs have access to online courses and periodically enter the course to conduct faculty evaluations; this information is used exclusively by the division chair for faculty development and rehire decisions. Course Revision Process, in progress, to be completed spring 2011.
29. How are the measures and techniques you use for distance-delivered courses and programs equivalent to those used to assess and evaluate traditional face-to-face courses and programs? If there are difference, why are these differences appropriate? Enrollment and completion data are equivalent to those used to assess and evaluate traditional course and programs. The other tools used are different for the following reasons; the majority of faculty are hired for content expertise and have a very limited teacher education background. Through our instructional design processes we have developed a comprehensive faculty development program which includes an instructional design punch list. In the online environment, it is important to capture the student voice at the program level to capture improvement. Distance learning best practices recommend a course revision process to ensure course are current, well-designed, and support faculty and student learning.
30. How do you assess the learning of the students you educate in your distance-delivered courses and programs to ensure that they achieve the levels of performance that you expect and that your stakeholders require? The same as our traditional courses; assessment of learning outcomes, [rubrics](#), and the [EMCC General Education Abilities Matrix](#) (included in the online course template). As part of the online development process a [SAAC EZ](#) form is completed.
31. How do you encourage and ensure continuous improvement of your distance-delivered courses and programs? Faculty and student input at the course and program level. Faculty development processes, instructional design standards, and enrollment and completion data. Ongoing dialogue with administration and faculty to identify ongoing strengths, challenges, improvements regarding student learning in the online environment.