

# Substantive Change Proposal

By

Rio Hondo College  
3600 Workman Mill Road  
Whittier, CA 90601

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Prepared by:

Kats Gustafson, Dean, Library and Student Learning  
Support

Fran Cummings, Curriculum Chair

Shin Liu, Virtual College Faculty Coordinator

**Approval to Submit Substantive Change Proposal for Rio Hondo  
College in Accordance to Accrediting Commission for Community and  
Junior College's Substantive Change Policy  
January 13, 2010**

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Ted Martinez, Jr., Ph.D.  
Superintendent/President

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Angela Acosta-Salazar  
President, Board of Trustees

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## **A. BRIEF DESCRIPTION AND RATIONALE FOR PROPOSED CHANGE**

Rio Hondo began offering their first online courses in 1997. Through a state grant, the Virtual College was developed. At the expiration of the grant in June 2005, a proposal (Appendix A-VC Proposal) was written to support continued funding of the program. In November 2005, the Virtual College was institutionalized, having college general funds allocated to its continuance (Appendix B-VC Budget). The Rio Hondo Virtual College has thrived over the years, as the College expanded the online offerings and increased the number of students served. Rio Hondo College underwent an institutional self-study in 2007-2008. It became apparent during that study that “courses constituting 50% or more of a program are offered at a distance” at Rio Hondo and that a Substantive Change Proposal was warranted. While the proposal is being submitted at this time, the College has always followed the guidelines contained within the ACCJC Distance Learning Manual.

Offering courses online supports the mission of Rio Hondo College which is to be a “collaborative center of lifelong learning which provides innovative, challenging, and quality educational offerings for its diverse students and community.” Providing online courses to our students is just one way to meet the need of our diverse population. As a community college, many of our students are working adults and our online program permits such students to progress in their studies while also meeting the demands of both work and family. Consistent with this assertion is the finding that approximately 63% of students enrolled in online general education courses are also taking course on campus (Appendix C-Traditional v. Online). Thus, our online program is serving the students who are physically located in our community and permitting such students to take more

units with less time on campus. As the College is currently involved in large-scale construction projects as the result of the passage of a bond in 2004, the convenience of the online program has become even more attractive.

While the increase in online offerings is technically a change, it is more accurately described as a new option that is more readily available to all students. Rio Hondo's online program has typically served our native students, and we predict that it will continue to do so. It is also hoped that at some point in the future students who are not able to attend on-campus courses due to personal circumstances and /or physical limitations will be able to complete a degree online. Thus, this additional mode of delivery allows us to better serve our community while being innovative and maintaining quality educational offerings.

## **B. DESCRIPTION, NEW PROGRAM**

This is not a new program.

## **C. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS**

As explained, the growth of Rio Hondo College's online program has been an organic one, with the institution making the commitment to "institutionalize" this component of the College's offerings in 2005. Throughout the existence of the Virtual College, the Virtual College Advisory Committee, a sub-committee of the Academic Senate, has guided its progress (Appendix D-Organizational Chart). In response to the growing demand to offer a degree online, the College has moved toward that direction. Eleven (11) (Appendix E-Inventory of Online Courses) degrees as well as the College's general education requirements now have 50% or more of the required coursework

available online. The increased online offerings have allowed the College to meet the learning needs of its changing population as stated in the College Vision Statement:

Rio Hondo College strives to be an exemplary California community college, meeting the learning needs of its changing and growing population and developing a state-of-the-art campus to serve future generations.

#### **D. EVIDENCE OF NECESSARY RESOURCES AND PROCESSES**

Since 2005, the Virtual College has been operating as an independent cost center with an operating budget of \$321,757 which includes funds for staff, supplies, faculty stipends, and licensing fees. Funds are allocated to the Virtual College from the College's general fund as are all non-categorical programs (Appendix B). As a separate cost center, the Virtual College is required to participate in the College's planning processes (Appendix F-2010-2011 Annual Unit Plan).

The College, in cooperation with the Academic Senate, has established a Virtual College Faculty coordinator. The Coordinator has a 40% reassignment to carry out the Virtual College's objectives and goals. The goals are set in consultation with the Virtual College Advisory Committee (a sub-committee of the Academic Senate) made up of faculty representatives from each division. The Committee also provides recommendations and feedback on training, pedagogical concerns, quality assurances, and technical resources. All faculty who teach online are recommended to participate in the appropriate technical and pedagogical training provided by the Virtual College.

The Virtual College employs two instructional assistants: one full-time and the other part-time at 75%. Together, the instructional assistants provide both faculty and students with technical assistance for the online courses. The Coordinator and two

instructional assistants help faculty plan, develop, implement, maintain, and improve online courses. The Virtual College office located in the newly built Learning Resource Center, includes a training room and office space for staff.

All online courses must go through the curriculum approval process. The process includes submitting content, advisories, course objectives, student learning outcomes, and ensuring that the course design meets ADA Section 508 standards. The College employs an alternate media specialist who ensures and verifies that all online courses are Section 508 compliant before they are submitted to the Curriculum Committee.

All online students have access to online student services including counseling and library resources. Students may apply to the College online as well as register for classes online. The Virtual College has a website that students (and faculty) may access with links to the various online services available (<http://online.riohondo.edu/index.htm>). All students have access to computers on campus. There are over 200 computers located in the Learning Assistance Center, Library, and Business Lab where students may access their online courses.

## **E. EVIDENCE OF NECESSARY APPROVALS**

The Rio Hondo Community College District's Board of Trustees has approved the Substantive Change Proposal at their regularly scheduled meeting on January 13, 2011 for submission to ACCJC.

## **F. EVIDENCE OF ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENT FULFILLMENT**

### **1. AUTHORITY**

Rio Hondo College is authorized to operate as an educational institution and to award degrees by the State of California (ref. California Code of Regulations, Title 5,

Division 6). The development and offering of online courses falls within the scope of this authority (ref. California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Division 6, Chapter 6, Subchapter 2, Article 3, §55205 & seq.).

## 2. MISSION

The mission of Rio Hondo College is to be a collaborative center of lifelong learning which provides innovative, challenging, and quality educational offerings for its diverse students and community.

## 3. GOVERNING BOARD

Rio Hondo College is a single college district governed by a five-member Board of Trustees. Each Trustee is elected from specific areas within the district. Each year, the student body elects a student representative to the Board. This student representative or Student Trustee, serves as an advisory-voting member during the school year. The board's oversight of the Virtual College is the same as for any other entity on campus. They approve the College's adopted budget which includes the Virtual College funding.

## 4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The Superintendent/President of Rio Hondo College is Dr. Ted Martinez, Jr. The president's cabinet includes a Vice President of Academic Affairs, Vice President of Student Services, and a Vice President of Administrative Services. The values expressed by the president in the decision making process are:

1. Quality teaching and learning
2. Student access and success
3. Diversity and equity
4. Fiscal responsibility

Offering online courses and programs improves access for Rio Hondo's diverse student population and community.

#### 5. ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY

There is sufficient administrative capacity at the College to provide support for the distance learning program. There are seven instructional deans, one of which is the Dean of Library and Instructional Support. The Dean, Library and Instructional Support oversee the staff and operation of the Virtual College and serves as a permanent member of the Curriculum Committee.

#### 6. OPERATIONAL STATUS

Rio Hondo College has remained in continuous operations, offering degree and certificate programs since 1963. Online offerings represent an alternate mode of delivery for already existing courses and programs.

#### 7. DEGREES

The College offers associate degrees (A.S. and A.A.) and certificates to serve the needs of its students and community. Any courses completed via distance education to fulfill degree and/or certificate requirements are the same as those currently offered on campus.

#### 8. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Degree programs offered at Rio Hondo support the mission of the College by offering students a variety of high-quality educational opportunities. These degree programs include a variety of recognized higher education fields, are of sufficient content and length, and require at least two academic years to complete.

#### 9. ACADEMIC CREDIT

Academic standards for awarding of credit are outlined in the Rio Hondo College catalog (Appendix G-Catalog page 20) and are governed by statutory requirements. The awarding of credit for online courses is the same as credit awarded for on-campus classes.

#### 10. STUDENT LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT

Courses offered via distance education must meet the same standards as face-to-face courses in regard to establishing and assessing student learning objectives (SLO). All courses must have SLO's and assessment rubrics that are housed with the course outline of record in the Student Learning Support Office. Under the guidance of the SLO Committee, the campus is currently developing outcomes, assessments for programs, and institutional goals.

#### 11. GENERAL EDUCATION

General education courses at Rio Hondo College have the required breadth to promote intellectual inquiry and serve as an introduction to major areas of knowledge. The quality and rigor of these courses, whether face-to-face or online, is consistent with the academic standards appropriate to higher education. The College now offers more than 50% of its general education requirements online. Students are now able to complete more than 50% of the coursework for 11 different degrees online.

#### 12. ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Since the courses offered online are equivalent to those taught on campus in all regards based on our curriculum process for approval to offer a course online, academic freedom is equivalent to academic freedom for all courses on campus.

#### 13. FACULTY

Faculty have been involved with the Virtual College from its inception. There is faculty representation on the Virtual College Advisory Committee. In addition, the Virtual College Faculty Coordinator makes regular reports to the Academic Senate. Faculty are offered various scheduled technical and pedagogical training throughout the year, both online and in-person. In addition, one-on-one training and assistance is readily available from the Virtual College staff. All faculty teaching online must meet the same minimum qualifications required by the discipline.

#### 14. STUDENT SERVICES

The college has had an online counseling component to the Virtual College since the online program began. Students may access an online counselor by going to: <http://www.riohondo.edu/students/counseling/index.htm>. Students may ask questions or receive advice from the qualified counselors. Student assistance is also available through the Virtual College staff via telephone.

#### 15. ADMISSIONS

Students have the ability to apply and register online. Students may view the schedule of classes and college catalog online. A student need not come to the campus in order to complete the admissions process.

#### 16. INFORMATION AND LEARNING RESOURCES

Library resources are readily available to online students. Students have 24/7 access to the library catalog and databases. Students may either call the librarian at the Reference Desk or chat with a librarian. Access hours are restricted to the hours of operation of the library, however, a student may email the librarian after hours and will

receive a response the next day. Online tutorials on using the library web resources are available on the library website at: <http://library.riohondo.edu>.

#### 17. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The College has an adequate budget to fund the Virtual College and has done so since 2005. College funding, like all California community colleges, comes from State revenues. A tentative College budget is prepared in June and presented to the Board of Trustees. The adopted budget usually takes place in September. A 5% contingency reserve is kept as required by the Board and in accordance with state law.

#### 18. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The Virtual College has the same fiscal accountability as any other cost center. As with all other budgets, the College reviews expenditures on a systematic basis while the account holders ensure that expenditures are made in accordance with board policy, GAAP, and other agencies that govern the institution's accounting practices and procedures.

#### 19. INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND EVALUATION

The Virtual College was developed as a result of the vision of Superintendent/President Dr. Jess Carreon in the summer of 1997. Dr. Carreon assigned the new initiative to Dr. Andy Howard, faculty member, Dr. Lyla Eddington, Dean, educational Program Development, and Dr. Ding Jo Currie, Vice President of Economic and Community Development. They assembled a Virtual College Steering Committee by calling together all the stakeholders for an organizational meeting in September, 1997. As a new initiative, members of the steering committee participated in staff development activities in order to better understand online education and to establish the infrastructure

for the Virtual College. The initial goal was to develop a Virtual College comprised of individual courses in the areas of Public Safety, Health Science, Environmental Technology, and Teacher Training as well as an associate of arts/science degree in Environmental Technology, International Business, and Public Safety.

The implementation plan for the Virtual College was based on a questionnaire distributed to the stakeholders. Issues that needed to be addressed were grouped into three priority lists and an action plan was developed. Project staff assumed the responsibility for addressing each of the issues identified. During the Summer, 1997, a small cohort of faculty were trained in the use of a course management system called Topclass. During the fall 1997, ECON 102 (principles of microeconomics) and various Administration of Justice, Corrections, and Police Academy courses were piloted. The diversity of course offerings expanded somewhat in the spring 1998 semester to include HUMAN 135 (The World We Live In), ECON 101 (Principles of Macroeconomics), and two sections of ENGL 101 (Approaches to Writing, i.e., English Composition). There were a total of 21 different courses with a student count of 322 students. Six years later, during spring 2004, there were 77 different courses with 5,403 students—over 15 times more students than at the inception of the program.

The success of the initial efforts at establishing a Virtual College emulates from being awarded a five-year grant from the State Chancellor's Office for California Community Colleges, establishing Rio Hondo College as a California Virtual Campus (CVC) Region II. The CVC grant paid for a faculty coordinator, faculty trainer, web master, web designer, and clerical support staff. In addition, funds were allocated to develop an online counseling component. Simultaneously, Rio Hondo College made an

initial investment in computer hardware and software and set aside \$71,000 of district funds to support the Virtual College cost center. These dollars allowed stipends to be awarded to faculty who were willing to develop courses to be delivered via the Internet. A portion of the stipend was paid at the completion of the development of the course and the remainder paid upon offering the course online. The initial project administration attributed the success of the development of the Virtual College on the availability of stipends for faculty and support staff. The Virtual College continued to benefit from state funds and changed in size and structure as the amount dollars allocated by the state declined. In fall 2005, Rio Hondo assumed full responsibility for the funding of the Virtual College, allocating a budget from general funds. The allocation provided for staffing, release time for a faculty coordinator, and sufficient funds for the licensing of the course management system.

Although the Virtual College does not evaluate the courses taught online, online instructors are evaluated according to the faculty contract.

## 21. PUBLIC INFORMATION

The College makes available information on the online course offering in the printed and online schedules. The schedule of classes has two pages that are dedicated to our online program. An overview of the program is contained within the college catalog.

The Virtual College also maintains a web presence at:

<http://online.riohondo.edu/index.htm>.

## 22. RELATIONS WITH THE ACCREDITING COMMISSION

The College is an accredited college and follows the guidelines of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. The College underwent a Self-Study

in October 2008. The College was put on “warning” and deficits were addressed in November 2009 during a site visit by the Accreditation Team. The results of the team visit have not been publicized as of this writing.

## **G. ACCREDITATION STANDARDS**

Accreditation standards will be fulfilled related to this change. All courses taught online at Rio Hondo are considered a different mode of delivery. All online courses use the same outline and content as face-to-face courses and meet the same rigor. In addition, the state of California requires that an additional level of scrutiny be applied to our online offerings through our curriculum processes and have locally established a process that ensures the accessibility of one courses (Appendix H-Curriculum Forms).

### **Standard I: Institutional Mission and Effectiveness**

The online offerings are in line with the institution’s mission statement by providing quality educational offerings for its diverse students and community. The increase in the online offerings has addressed students’ needs for better access to education that fit their schedules.

### **Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services**

All students, whether they take courses online or face-to-face, have the same access to student support services including the library, counseling, admissions and records, and financial aid. Online tutorials are also available for students to access in learning to use the library resources. Counselors and Librarians are also available via online services.

### **Standard III: Resources**

The College has provided staff to assist both faculty and students in the Virtual College. Training in technical and pedagogical considerations for the online environment are provided to faculty on a regular basis. Online students may call in for technical assistance. In addition, students may also access their online course on campus using over 200 student access computers. The College's Information Technology Services has developed plans for the replacement of equipment (Appendix K-IT Plan). The College has permanently allocated operating funds for the Virtual College in its overall budget. The Virtual College is an independent cost center that is overseen by the Dean, Library and Student Learning Support.

#### Standard IV: Leadership and Governance

The Virtual College is overseen by the Dean, Library and Student Learning Support. The Virtual College Advisory Committee helps to develop goals and objectives in order to guide the online program. The Virtual College Advisory Committee is a sub-committee of the Academic Senate. The Virtual College Faculty Coordinator serves as a liaison between the Academic Senate and College administration. In shared governance, the constituent groups are able to move the online program forward toward educational excellence.

#### **H. OTHER INFORMATION-NEW INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY MODE**

- Description of the analysis undertaken to determine need for the new instructional delivery mode: The distance education program at Rio Hondo grew over the years. As the enrollments in online courses have increased, the College has responded by also increasing its offerings. A more detailed look at enrollments is

included in Appendix J-Online Statistics. The average enrollment is about two enrollments per student per semester.

- Evidence of official approval by the Governing Board: The Rio Hondo Community College District Board of Trustees approved the Substantive Change Proposal at their board meeting on January 13, 2010 (Appendix L-Board Minutes).
- Evidence of sufficient fiscal and physical resources to initiate and maintain the new delivery mode: The Virtual College has been in existence since 1997 and has been funded as a regularly funded cost center since 2005. In 2009, the Virtual College moved into its new spaces located in the newly built Learning Resource Center. The Virtual College, in addition to office space for permanent staff, has a training room that is equipped with computers and development software. The annual budget for the Virtual College is \$321,757 and increases for software licensing are adjusted accordingly (Appendix B-VC Budget).
- Evidence that delivery systems and modes of instruction are designed to and do in fact meet student need: The Virtual College Faculty Coordinator is trained in the use of the course management system (Blackboard). The Coordinator's skills are updated on an annual basis. The instructional assistants help students with their technical issues and are able to make necessary changes to formatting when the need arises.
- Description of how satisfaction of the need will be assessed: The College is not at the point of offering a degree fully online. Before it does, a survey will be administered to determine student need for such a program. In addition, as part of

the faculty evaluation process, students are asked to fill out a survey to determine overall effectiveness. In the current academic year, the Virtual College Advisory Committee will revisit the survey and make recommendations to the Academic Senate on survey questions that speak specifically to online learning.

- Description of how effectiveness of the delivery mode will be assessed; how the delivery mode will be reviewed compared with other delivery modes:

Comparison data have been reviewed throughout the history of distance education at Rio Hondo. Success rates for online courses were much lower during the beginning stages of distance education. From 2001 to 2006, success rates evened out and in some cases were even better than face-to-face courses. During the last three years, there has been a slight difference in success rates between face-to-face courses and online courses. There is a large discrepancy between the two modes that have emerged during the summer and intersession terms. Students taking online courses are 10 points less successful than those who attend face-to-face classes. During the regular terms, however, students show greater success in the online courses (Appendix J-Online Statistics).

- Description of student and faculty support for the mode of delivery: The increase in enrollment and in online course offerings show a positive reception to the online program at Rio Hondo. Online courses make up about 14% of the total enrollment. Almost one third of all students are also enrolled in a web-enhanced course. Hybrid, online, and web-enhanced courses account for almost 30% of all enrollments at Rio Hondo (Appendix M-VC Spring 09). The Virtual College Advisory Committee, made up of faculty and administrators with student

representation, is a sub-committee of the Academic Senate. Virtual College staff also attend meetings to report on specific technical problems encountered by both faculty and students.

- Plan for equipment acquisition and maintenance: The Virtual College just moved into a new space in the recently built Learning Resource Center. Replacement of equipment is included in the Information Technology Services Plan (Appendix K).
- Description of faculty training needed and implemented: The Virtual College Faculty Coordinator develops and implements workshops that address pedagogical and technical concerns by faculty. The Virtual College staff also provides additional technical assistance to both faculty and students. Software training to enhance distance education courses such as Respondus, MakeQUIZ, Robodemo, and Camtasia are also offered to faculty on a semesterly basis.
- Description of how mode is considered in curriculum development process: Prior to a course being taught online, it is submitted to the Curriculum Committee to ensure that the course outline of record will be adhered to and that the course is ADA, Section 508 compliant. The course web content is reviewed by the alternate media specialist (Appendix H).
- Evaluation of marketing efforts and evidence of their integrity: Marketing efforts have been through the College website and class schedules.
- Evaluation of information provided to students regarding the new delivery mode: Information is provided to students via our schedule, website, and catalog. The College website serves as the main vehicle for information concerning online

offerings including hybrid courses. A section in the class schedule is dedicated to informing students on how to access an online course, orientation information, and technical requirements. As students call into the Help Desk at the Virtual College, information is incorporated into the FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page (Appendix N-VC Class Schedule).

- Description of college accommodations for any requirements that students in distance learning courses come to campus: Students may enroll in Rio Hondo via the Internet. Students will receive confirmation of their enrollment sent via email as well as registration dates and information. Online orientations are available as well as instructions on how to access courses. Students need not come to campus, however, if they prefer, they may attend an in-person orientation (Appendix N-VC Class Schedule).

#### **CONSIDERATIONS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS:**

The Virtual College's growth is clear from the charts in Appendix J. Since spring 1998, the number of new courses offered online has increased from 102 to 311 courses in 2003-2004. The total number of sections offered has increased from 112 in 1998-99 to 659 in 2008-09. The number of students enrolling in online courses has increased even more dramatically from 1,093 students in 1998-99 to 12,302 students in 2008-09. The number of online registrations is now averaging a little over two online courses per student. Similarly, the number of faculty trained and currently teaching one course has increased as the delivery mode becomes increasingly popular with students.

Of even more importance than the growth of the program is the success that students find in an online program. For the purpose of this report, success is defined as

the ratio of the number of students earning an A, B, C, CR or P to the number of students who were enrolled in a section after the first census date. Retention is the ratio of the number of students who receive a grade (A, B, C, D, F, CR or P, NC, or NP, or I) to the number of students enrolled past census date. The last measure is completion and the definition being used is the ratio of students who stayed in the course from beginning to end, and the number of students who began the course.

With respect to success, the College has seen an improvement from the early years of the online program. In comparing success from fall 1998 to present, the average for all courses for fall, spring, and summer online class is 57.35% (without intersession figures) compared to 62.5% for face-to-face classes. However, if we omit the beginning years of the program (1998-2000), the average success rates for online versus face-to-face were surprisingly close (fall: 57.8% v 57.5% and spring: 57.6% v. 56.6%, respectively). When comparing similar online courses to face-to-face courses, the overall retention rate for online is higher (89.6 versus 75.8) while the overall success rate is lower (57.2 versus 71.8).

From the charts in Appendix J, it is clear that there is little difference in retention and complete rates since the inception of the online program. In addition, the complete rate over the years has hovered around 71.8% for online courses and around 78.5% for face-to-face courses. The online retention rate has averaged 79.4% since the 1998-99 academic year and 80.8% average for face-to-face courses.

With the change to Banner, the new student record information system in fall 2009, students apply for admission and register for classes via the Internet. Students are able to access their records, request transcripts and fill out graduation applications online.

As mentioned earlier, students have had access to online counseling since the inception of the online program. The Virtual College provides on-site orientations for online students at the beginning of each term (including summer). Online orientations are also available to students. Students may contact the Virtual College via email or phone or in-person. Faculty are offered various scheduled technical and pedagogical training throughout the year. In addition, one-on-one training and assistance is readily available from the Virtual College support staff. Library resources and financial aid information are available online via the College website at <http://www.riohondo.edu>. The Virtual College Advisory Committee helps to ensure instructional quality and integrity in online offerings as does the Curriculum Committee. Rio Hondo's online program has progressed and will continue to provide students with quality and accessible education.