

ASSIST Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal

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Nature of the Request

This Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal (BCP) is being submitted to the California Education Round Table, Intersegmental Coordinating Committee on behalf of the ASSIST Board of Directors to request \$1,100,000 from the State general fund annually in order to augment the funding of the Articulation System Stimulating Interinstitutional Student Transfer (ASSIST). These new funds would be combined with the current \$1,179,000 of combined California Community Colleges (CCC), California State University (CSU), and University of California (UC) segmental allocations for ASSIST to:

- 1) Support the existing central operations of ASSIST (\$1,300,000)
- 2) Increase the number of students who use ASSIST (\$79,000);
- 3) Make ASSIST easier for students to use (\$170,000);
- 4) Integrate ASSIST information with other statewide web-based resources such as CaliforniaColleges.edu (\$100,000);
- 5) Ensure 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week availability (\$200,000); and
- 6) Increase the input of new course articulation, especially preparation for major articulation (\$430,000).

This BCP represents the details of a funding plan developed by the ASSIST Board of Directors whose membership includes faculty, system office, and campus representatives from CCC, CSU and UC systems as well as the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC). The ASSIST Board has developed this funding plan in response to a number of factors, including the most recent external evaluation of ASSIST; ongoing strategic plans for ASSIST; the endorsement of ASSIST as California's official repository of articulation and transfer information by the leaders of the CCC, CSU and UC systems and CPEC; and the current fiscal crisis facing ASSIST.

Executive Summary

ASSIST is a Web-based transfer planning tool that shows students which courses to complete at California Community Colleges so that they can successfully transfer to a CSU or UC campus. This information – called course articulation – is the vital "transfer road map" for California Community College students. Since its inception as a voluntary, pilot activity in 1985, ASSIST has grown substantially and has evolved into California's official repository of course transfer and articulation information as recognized by the California Education Round Table. All CCC, CSU, and UC campuses are required to maintain their most current articulation information in ASSIST. Over 40,000 students are served each month by ASSIST via the Internet where students, faculty, and staff are now requesting and receiving over 300,000 reports each month (ASSIST receives over 5 millions hits per month).

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Course articulation data from ASSIST is used to support numerous statewide and campus systems including:

- CaliforniaColleges.edu Student Transfer Planner
- UC Pathways on-line admissions application system
- UC Dual Admissions Program (DAP) Course Compendium
- CSU and UC campus degree audit systems
- IMPAC (Intersegmental Major Preparation Articulated Curriculum)
- CAN (California Articulation Number System)
- IGETC and CSU GE-Breadth (Statewide general education programs)

The successful and timely transfer of community college students toward a baccalaureate degree is one of the State's highest priorities in postsecondary education. Without an up-to-date, constantly-maintained repository of accurate course transfer information such as ASSIST, community college students will not know which courses meet university requirements. Time and money will be wasted taking extra courses assumed to transfer that in reality do not apply to university major requirements.

Established in 1985, ASSIST received a State funding augmentation in 92-93 and has been operating at that funding level since. The ASSIST Board of Directors seeks to structure the funding and operations of ASSIST in the most efficient and effective ways possible to ensure the long term success of this important new part of California's public higher education/student transfer infrastructure. The ASSIST Board believes that this funding request is essential in order for ASSIST to achieve its primary goals of providing complete, accurate and up-to-date articulation at a time when extensive articulation and efficient student transfer are seen as key components to managing California's growing population of students in higher education.

The importance of ASSIST is growing as CSU and UC campuses place more emphasis on admitting fully prepared Community College transfer students. Students and counselors require easy access to complete and current course articulation in order to effectively plan transferable coursework. Only the most well prepared students are being admitted to increasingly competitive universities and major programs.

The ASSIST Board has developed a comprehensive new funding plan to facilitate this. Key aspects of this plan include:

- 1) ***Support the Existing Central Operations of ASSIST (\$1,300,000)***: Existing funding will be augmented with some new funding to maintain the core operations of ASSIST.
- 2) ***Increase Direct Student Use of ASSIST (\$79,000)***: New funding will be used to market ASSIST directly to students to increase the number of students who use it regularly.
- 3) ***Make ASSIST Easier for Students to Use (\$170,000)***: New funding will be used to make ASSIST easier for students to use. Using information collected directly

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from students via focus groups, enhancements to the system will be designed and developed to better meet the changing needs of students in the area of transfer planning.

- 4) ***Integrate ASSIST Information with Other Statewide Web Resources (\$100,000)***: New funding will be used to seamlessly integrate course articulation, including major preparation articulation agreements, with other Statewide web-based resources such as CaliforniaColleges.edu (the Student Friendly System), campus web sites, and system office web sites. New funding will also be used to support providing raw data from ASSIST to other computerized information systems, such as university degree audit systems, that can use the information to increase efficiency.

- 5) ***Assure Availability (\$200,000)***: New funding will be used to ensure that ASSIST is available to students at any time, 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week. This will be accomplished by stabilizing the existing Internet hardware, software and networking that support the operations of ASSIST to ensure that demand for ASSIST services can continue to be met as more students require increased access to course transfer information.

- 6) ***Increase the Input of Course Articulation Data (\$430,000)***: New funding will be combined with existing funding that is currently being applied to this area. These funds will ensure that as colleges and universities create new and update existing agreements the information will be entered into ASSIST in a timely manner so that students always have access to all of the most current information. Specific focus will continue to be placed on the importance of universities developing major preparation articulation.

Current ASSIST base funding through the CCC/CSU/UC systemwide offices totals \$1,179,000 annually. This funding plan requests an additional \$1,100,000 from the State general fund. With these additional new funds California will be able to ensure that all of the most up-to-date, complete and accurate articulation information is always available to students, faculty, staff and others who rely on this information to facilitate the seamless transfer of students.

ASSIST has been in a fiscal crisis since 2000-01 and has been working with the Intersegmental Coordinating Committee of the California Education Round Table to secure a permanent funding augmentation for ASSIST. ASSIST operations have been reduced to the bare minimum required to maintain core services and further expansion is not possible. In the near future ASSIST will not have enough funding to maintain core services. For the 2001-02 State budget the Legislature approved a \$1.1 million augmentation for ASSIST but due to the worsening economic climate the augmentation was rescinded. In 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 the UC systemwide office diverted a significant amount of funds in order to maintain the base functionality of ASSIST. In 2001-02 the CSU systemwide office provided a one-time supplement of \$100,000 to help maintain operations. In 2002-03 and 2003-04 ASSIST has contracted

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with other projects to provide one-time special services in return for funds to maintain base operations.

Without the new funds requested in this BCP, the CCC, CSU, and UC systems will not be able to ensure that students and counselors will continue to have access to even the most basic ASSIST services.

Background

An effective student transfer process remains a top priority among the CCC, CSU, and UC systems as is called for in the California Master Plan, a wide range of legislation, and systemwide/campus policies and practices. One of the most important cornerstones to an effective transfer process is articulation information that identifies how courses are transferable among campuses of the three systems of California public higher education.

Over the years a number of different types of articulation information have been developed to identify transferability of courses for elective credit, general education, major preparation, and more. While responsibility for creating and maintaining articulation agreements is vested with the universities (since they ultimately grant baccalaureate degrees), there is substantial work for both colleges and universities in developing and reviewing articulation. Each university establishes its own practices for the number and types of agreements they maintain and the frequency with which they are updated.

ASSIST, the Articulation System Stimulating Inter-institutional Student Transfer, is a computerized information system which operates as the official repository of articulation information for the State of California. The mission of ASSIST is to facilitate the transfer of CCC students to CSU and UC by providing an electronic system for academic planning which delivers accurate, timely and complete information.

Project History and Current Status

ASSIST began as a pilot project in 1985 funded by a combination of segmental and Transfer Center Project resources. At the conclusion of the pilot in 1988, the program moved into an implementation stage, and over the years ASSIST has grown to the point where all CCC, CSU, and UC campuses are actively participating.

Day to day operational support for ASSIST including software development and maintenance, technical support, training, user support and general coordination is provided by the ASSIST Coordination Site, located in Irvine. ASSIST is governed by the ASSIST Board of Directors, whose membership includes representatives from the CCC, CSU and UC systemwide offices, faculty and campuses, CPEC, and the ASSIST Coordination Site.

All of the articulation information in ASSIST is entered and maintained by individual colleges and universities throughout the state using ASSIST software, and all CCC, CSU, and UC campuses participate in ASSIST. The ASSIST Board of Directors has established specific goals and policies to help ensure that all of the most current articulation that has been established between California public colleges and universities is available in ASSIST.

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In order to better support the long term needs of ASSIST, and in response to the last external evaluation of ASSIST in 1996, the ASSIST Board of Directors has adopted an ongoing strategic planning process. With the first ASSIST Strategic Plan, ASSIST achieved three important goals. 1) The ASSIST database was expanded to include all of the most current articulation that had been established between all CCC, CSU and UC campuses. 2) All of the data in ASSIST was made available via the Internet at www.assist.org. 3) ASSIST was established as the official repository of articulation information for the State of California by the leaders of the three public systems of California higher education.

In February 1999, CCC Chancellor Nussbaum, CSU Chancellor Reed, UC President Atkinson, and CPEC Executive Director Fox signed a joint resolution endorsing ASSIST as California's official source for articulation. This endorsement emphasized the ongoing need for articulation and the importance of making it available directly to students in a comprehensive, readily accessible manner.

As ASSIST has developed into a statewide repository, it has initiated a number of active collaborations to help ensure coordination among related transfer initiatives.

- The Student Friendly System (CaliforniaColleges.Edu) and ASSIST collaborate to support the IGETC/CSU GE-B Transfer Planner function of CaliforniaColleges.edu.
- The Intersegmental Major Preparation Articulated Curriculum (IMPAC) project and ASSIST collaborate in a number of ways to support intersegmental, interdisciplinary faculty discussions about course articulation and student transfer.
- The California Articulation Number System (CAN) project and ASSIST collaborate in a number of ways to exchange data and present CAN information more effectively to students.

ASSIST also collaborates with other segmental and campus initiatives to provide data and software to help these initiatives meet their goals. Such initiatives include: UC Pathways, UC Dual Admissions Program, CSU OSCAR system for IGETC and CSU GE-B review, CSU and UC campus degree audit systems.

These collaborations are essential for leveraging the State's existing investments in student transfer and for increasing overall State efficiency.

Project Funding

In 1985 the three year pilot for ASSIST was funded with a combination of Transfer Center Project and system office funds. At the conclusion of the pilot in 1988, the CCC, CSU, and UC system offices each permanently allocated a portion of funding to support the operation of ASSIST. In 1992-93 the Legislature approved a \$325,000 augmentation for ASSIST via a Budget Change Proposal to the Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. ASSIST is currently funded at a level of \$1,179,000 annually which supports

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Coordination Site operations. The segmental breakdown for current annual funding is: CCC \$589,000, CSU \$70,000, UC \$520,000.

Since 1992-93 there have been no further permanent funding increases for ASSIST and the number of staff at the central ASSIST office has remained at the same level. However, since 1992-93 ASSIST has undergone fundamental changes including expansion to all colleges and universities and a conversion of all technologies to being fully Internet-based. Operational and technology costs have continued to rise as the project has evolved. The University of California, as fiscal agent for ASSIST, has provided some additional funding to ensure that central operations continue (as reflected in the current UC ASSIST funding of \$520,000).

As of 2000-01 ASSIST operational costs have grown beyond available funding and ASSIST has dramatically scaled back operations and plans to help ensure that core services remain viable. In addition to reducing ASSIST operations to the bare minimum, the CCC, CSU, and UC system offices have redirected small amounts of interim funding in order to maintain the viability of ASSIST. However, given the importance of ASSIST to student transfer and many related activities, the project must be funded on a more secure basis at a level adequate to meet State goals.

Knowing that ASSIST operational costs would eventually grow beyond available base-funding, the ASSIST Board has been working for many years to secure additional State funding in order to meet the full mission and vision for ASSIST. As an intersegmental project, ASSIST has been working with the Intersegmental Coordinating Committee of the California Education Round Table to secure a funding augmentation via an Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal. In 2001-02 the State Legislature approved a \$1.1M augmentation for ASSIST (under the University of California budget) but due to the worsening economic climate the augmentation was rescinded.

The operational costs for ASSIST continue to rise each year as student use increases and the technologies required to operate ASSIST continue to advance. As a technological project, ASSIST relies on a number of expensive server computers to support the current numbers of users. These computers must be maintained and replaced over time in order to ensure the viability of ASSIST and to serve a growing number of students. Due to limited resources ASSIST has not been able to provide a number of important services that students, faculty, and staff have been requesting. The ASSIST Board has not been able to make progress on meeting their strategic vision for ASSIST as a central, integrated and student-centered information resource for the State. Without additional funding, ASSIST will not be able to maintain even the most basic services it is now providing.

In order to meet the current and future expectations of California students, the California Legislature, and the leaders of California public higher education, ASSIST must to be fully supported, improved, and continue to grow to meet changing needs. By augmenting the central operations of ASSIST, the ASSIST Board will be able to ensure that 1) articulation information will be available to students 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week, 2)

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articulation information in ASSIST will be complete, up-to-date and accurate, 3) more students will be served by ASSIST, and 4) ASSIST information will be integrated with other web-based systems to make more efficient use of existing resources.

State Level Considerations

An effective transfer function between CCC, CSU, and UC campuses remains a high priority for the State. Numerous sections of the State Education Code address specific ways in which colleges and universities are to collaborate to achieve success in this area. Some of these activities include maintaining specific ratios of transfer and non-transfer students at universities and the development of course articulation agreements between colleges and universities. Additionally, recent efforts such as the 1998 CCC/UC Memorandum of Understanding regarding increasing student transfer, and a similar MOU between the CCC and CSU systems, reflect high level commitment to and support of an increasingly effective transfer function.

There are over 1.4 million students attending California Community Colleges, many of whom are interested in transferring to a CSU or UC campus. There is a significant number of students who, for a wide range of reasons, are unable or unwilling to use the services of trained counselors and advisors in preparing for transfer. For these students, easily accessible, complete, and up-to-date articulation agreements are even more important as this may be the only information they use in making academic planning decisions.

The California public higher education systems are working hard to fix weaknesses in the current system by rebuilding efforts that have been damaged in earlier years due to conflicting priorities and restricted resources. Some of these include system efforts to restore full-time articulation officers and transfer center coordinators, and to make out-dated articulation agreements current.

The importance of ASSIST is growing as CSU and UC campuses place more emphasis on admitting fully prepared Community College transfer students. All CSU campuses are moving to give priority to students who have completed 60 semester units including 39 in General Education prior to transfer. UC campuses already give priority to students who have completed their lower division major requirements prior to transfer. Students and counselors require easy access to complete and current course articulation in order to effectively plan transferable coursework. Only the best prepared students will be admitted to increasingly competitive universities and major programs.

Complete and up-to-date articulation agreements continue to be one of the fundamental components of an effective student transfer process in California. To best serve Community College students, CSU and UC must keep existing articulation agreements up-to-date and create more new agreements with colleges, especially major preparation agreements. Due to competing priorities and shrinking budgets, some universities are lowering their priority on articulation which is resulting in fewer agreements with

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colleges. Augmented ASSIST funding will provide additional leverage to ensure complete data and will signal universities that the State supports expanding articulation efforts.

Curriculum at colleges and universities are continually changing to meet the needs of local students and changing institutional priorities. These curricular changes require a great deal of work for college and university staff to keep existing articulation agreements up-to-date. As changes are made and new agreements established, it is critical that this information be disseminated and made readily available. Other than ASSIST, there are no effective methods in place for disseminating articulation agreements. Historically, colleges and universities have relied on paper distribution, which represents significant problems with lag-time, inflexibility, and access.

ASSIST collaborates with other transfer and articulation related statewide efforts such as CAN, IMPAC and CaliforniaColleges.edu. Information from CAN is represented in ASSIST and the CAN System Office uses ASSIST to help verify articulation. ASSIST provides detailed articulation information for use in IMPAC and the IMPAC Steering Committee is seeking regularly updated information from ASSIST to identify gaps in articulation for the IMPAC disciplines. CaliforniaColleges.edu uses regularly updated data from ASSIST in order to support the new "Student Transfer Planner" that helps students track IGETC and CSU GE certification progress.

Many CSU and UC campuses are beginning to use raw data directly from ASSIST with the implementation of their local degree audit systems. By using regularly updated data from ASSIST, universities can more easily adapt these systems to evaluate students who have attended community colleges and other universities

ASSIST and course articulation are at the heart of all California transfer initiatives. Information from ASSIST is key to the operations of many initiatives and it is the most accurate source for course articulation data for many other computer systems. ASSIST is a well-established and well-run project that has a proven track record of effectiveness. The utility and effectiveness of ASSIST are easily measured and ASSIST provides key research information to help the State and system offices answer many questions about articulation. The project is poised to support further expansion and further integration of related activities to reduce duplicative effort and leverage existing investments. As California's official source for articulation information, students, faculty, counselors and others rely on ASSIST for efficient academic and transfer planning. In order to meet the State's mission and vision for ASSIST, it must be fully supported and readily available on the Internet for a high volume of users 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week.

Justification

California's Master Plan requires a transfer function that works well for all students, whether or not they take advantage of professional counseling and advising services. With articulation agreements as one of the primary tools for students to use in transfer

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planning, ASSIST has been established as the only official repository for California articulation information. ASSIST was designed specifically to address issues of information access and dissemination, and has continued to evolve as a tool that is actively used by all California public colleges and universities.

ASSIST has already realized wide acceptance and success, and it has developed significant momentum. However, given the ever-changing nature of technology and the growing need for more articulation, there are some significant challenges facing ASSIST.

1. ASSIST technologies need to be supported to ensure an ongoing, production-oriented service

As the official repository for California articulation information, ASSIST needs to be a reliable service that students can expect to be available throughout the year, 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week. While all ASSIST services have been designed to meet this goal, the technology infrastructure at the central ASSIST Coordination Site needs to be supported to provide a fault-tolerant technical environment and reliable, high speed access to the Internet. Also, Internet technologies will continue to undergo rapid change in the future. It is very important that ASSIST technologies are not allowed to lag too far behind. This has already happened once with ASSIST (and been rectified) and the ASSIST Board is committed to ensure that it does not happen again. The most common method for managing technical change is to maintain and continually review focused technology plans (which ASSIST already does) and to support a three-year life cycle for key equipment.

2. ASSIST and articulation need to be made easier for students to use, and more students need to be served

Historically, articulation agreements have been designed for use by administrative staff at colleges and universities. The current format for presenting articulation information is often quite confusing and complex for students to take full advantage of this important information. The Coordination Site intends to conduct detailed student focus groups to determine more useful ways of presenting articulation information to meet specific student needs. The ASSIST software would then be enhanced to meet both the needs of students and the needs of administrative staff in communicating articulation information.

By taking advantage of newer technologies, the ASSIST Board of Directors believes that ASSIST can dramatically increase direct use by students and make articulation less confusing. Students who use professional counseling and advising services at colleges are better prepared and have more useful and efficient interactions with these counselors if they have spent time collecting and analyzing information from ASSIST. Students who do not use college services for transfer planning need to know that ASSIST is the primary resource they should use for locating articulation information. The ASSIST Coordination Site

needs to continue to evolve the ASSIST software to best meet the changing needs of students.

3. All of the most current articulation agreements need to be entered and maintained in ASSIST

While universities are responsible for entering final articulation agreements into ASSIST, colleges and universities are required to maintain updated curricular information in ASSIST each term. While all of the colleges and universities in the State enter their respective data in ASSIST, many institutions have had to restructure funding and dedicate additional resources to support these activities, sometimes at the cost of impeding other articulation activities.

In keeping with goals of the CCC/UC MOU and other agreements between the segments, new and increased numbers of articulation agreements will be established over the next several years, with special emphasis being placed on major preparation articulation. Ongoing curricular changes require specialized work by trained staff who can work with ASSIST to keep agreements accurate and up-to-date.

The articulation information provided through ASSIST must be kept complete and up-to-date in order for students to have confidence in the data and continue using this service. Now that ASSIST has proven that it operates under a successful model and the leaders of California public higher education have endorsed it as the official repository of articulation information for the State, the ASSIST Board of Directors wants to ensure that the ASSIST database is kept complete and up-to-date as articulation and curriculum are updated.

4. ASSIST information needs to be integrated with other statewide web-based systems

In the past 10 years there has been an explosion in the number web-based resources available to students. While many of these systems provide a broad array of useful information and services to meet their primary goals, they do not include detailed information on course articulation. Many of these systems desire to add such functionality but realize that it would be a very complicated and resource intensive undertaking. Alternatively, the organizations that provide these web-based systems seek to integrate information from ASSIST in a seamless manner. Such integration of ASSIST information and features with existing web-based information systems would provide students and advisors with the highest level of functionality in an easy to use and most efficient manner.

One example of such integration would be with the CaliforniaColleges.edu web site – the Student Friendly System initiated by the California Educational Round Table and operated by the CSU system. This system currently provides extensive information about postsecondary education opportunities throughout California. Students and parents can use this site to help identify colleges, universities, and

majors that would best meet their needs. However, at a certain level, this system only provides information on which majors a university offers. By integrating ASSIST information and features with this site, users would be able to further learn more about those majors and see what courses at Community Colleges can be taken to more effectively prepare for transfer.

There are many other examples of current and future systems that would benefit from easier integration with ASSIST. Integration with other systems is a key goal of ASSIST and is the best way to leverage State resources. It allows respective agencies to focus on what they do best while ASSIST focuses on maintaining a single, official, and easy to access source of course articulation data.

5. ASSIST operations need to be supported in the most effective ways over time

During the initial 15 years of ASSIST, each of the three public systems have allocated specific funds to support central and campus ASSIST operations. The systems continue to support ASSIST at the highest levels and fully intend to maintain their current financial commitments to support ASSIST in the long term.

However, as described in the most recent external evaluation of ASSIST, sponsored by CPEC and conducted by the Carrera Consulting Group, the current structure of intersegmental funding for ASSIST served the project well in the initial years, but is now a liability as it makes ASSIST too susceptible to changes in segmental priorities. ASSIST has already experienced (and recovered from) these types of problems, and if it is to be a reliable resource for students, this issue should be addressed.

CPEC has recommended that if the State is to allocate additional funds to ASSIST, those funds should be allocated from the general fund directly to the University of California, as the fiscal agent for the ASSIST Coordination Site. Any new funding would be combined with all existing funding to continue the support of ASSIST operations.

Analysis of Feasible Alternatives

In considering the future for ASSIST, the following alternatives have been discussed.

1. Status Quo

The sources and amount of ASSIST funding could remain at the current annual level (CCC \$589,000, CSU \$70,000, UC \$520,000). These funds would continue to be pooled together to support central ASSIST operations and a minimum level of the total CSU and UC data maintenance costs.

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Implications: As of 01-02, these funds were insufficient to continue operating ASSIST at required levels to meet student and campus needs and additional interim funding was sought.

- If base funding remains at the current level the central staffing of ASSIST would need to be reduced dramatically.
- There would be no available funds to maintain existing equipment and there would be insufficient staff to handle equipment and software problems as they arise.
- While the public web site and the data entry systems may be able to continue functioning at their most minimal level, ASSIST would be operating under the most tenuous conditions and its continued operations could not be assured.
- As technology advances and increasing emphasis is placed on establishing more articulation, ASSIST would not be able to maintain the core services it now provides to students and campuses, and requests for increased collaboration and new ASSIST features would not be able to be met.
- As the base technologies that support ASSIST continue to evolve, the Coordination Site would be unable to keep up. New technologies require increased support for operational personnel as well as hardware and software. ASSIST technologies would lag behind, and the Coordination Site would be unable to provide the types of services expected by students and institutions.
- Eventually, ASSIST technologies would become obsolete and could no longer be supported. At that time, it would take substantial effort to redesign ASSIST and re-implement it using current technologies.

As evidenced in many forms including the recent CCC/UC MOU regarding increasing the total number of CCC transfers to UC, the total number of articulation agreements between colleges and universities is expected to substantially increase over the coming years. While there is a high volume of articulation currently established in California, there are many holes between institutions where students traditionally have not transferred. There is substantial work for both colleges and universities in establishing new articulation agreements and updating existing ones. This behind-the-scenes work is critical to the process. It will be increasingly important that those new and updated agreements be entered in ASSIST. As the amount of new and updated articulation increases, it will not be possible to keep these data updated in the ASSIST database.

2. Augment central ASSIST operations with new funding

An alternative would be to augment current annual ASSIST allocations by an additional \$1,100,000 from the State general fund directly to the University of California as the fiscal agent for the ASSIST Coordination Site. The current \$1,179,000 of segmental allocations for ASSIST would be combined with the

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new allocation to support the following core operations and new activities at a total annual amount of \$2,279,000:

- Ongoing central operations at the ASSIST Coordination Site
\$1,300,000 – salaries/benefits/core operating expenses
- Enhance the ASSIST software to make it easier for students to use and support the more complex technical environment at the central ASSIST Coordination Site
\$170,000 – focus groups/additional salaries/benefits/operating expenses
- Ensure that central ASSIST server computers and software technologies remain current
\$200,000 – annual replacement of 1/3 of hardware plus software upgrades
- Integrate ASSIST information with other Statewide web-based systems
\$100,000 – collaboration expenses/additional salaries/benefits/operating expenses
- Increase student use of ASSIST
\$79,000 – marketing activities and public relations materials
- ASSIST articulation database data entry/maintenance
\$360,000 – UC data maintenance
\$70,000 – CSU data maintenance (added to the current \$290,000 currently allocated for ASSIST data maintenance in CSU campus base budgets)

Implications: This alternative would ensure that as technology continues to progress and as colleges and universities establish more articulation agreements, ASSIST would be able to keep pace and provide the expected level of service to California's growing population of students who are depending on an effective transfer process to meet their academic goals.

This alternative would also provide support to meet the primary goals for ASSIST and expand ASSIST to meet ever changing needs among students, faculty, and the campuses. Increased numbers of students would be served by ASSIST. ASSIST would be made easier for students to use. Articulation information in ASSIST would be kept current as courses and requirements change. And, ASSIST information would be integrated with other statewide web-based systems to increase their effectiveness and leverage the State's current investments in more efficient ways.

With this new funding structure which combines segmental allocations and State allocations from the general fund, ASSIST would continue to be guided by and accountable to the intersegmental ASSIST Board of Directors.

Recommended Alternative

The ASSIST Board of Directors recommends the second alternative detailed above for the following reasons.

First, this alternative provides the greatest benefit for the State as it addresses the full range of needs raised earlier in this proposal, including:

- Making ASSIST easier to use and increasing the use of ASSIST and articulation by students to facilitate "trouble-free" student transfer
- Providing State-level funding of ASSIST core operations to ensure ongoing operations
- Integrating ASSIST information with other statewide web-based systems
- Supporting ASSIST technologies by:
 - Maintaining high speed network access to central ASSIST server computers
 - Maintaining a fault tolerant technical environment for central ASSIST server computers
 - Ensuring that ASSIST hardware and software technologies remain current
 - Supporting the more complex ASSIST technical environment
- Ensuring that all of the most current articulation agreements are always maintained in ASSIST

Second, this alternative demonstrates a carefully planned expansion of ASSIST activities in key areas that are aligned with State priorities. By building on and maintaining the positive momentum that ASSIST has generated over the past years, the State is more likely to experience benefits within the first year of funding as well as long term improvements with this alternative.

Third, this alternative continues to reinforce the collaborative nature of ASSIST. It emphasizes and promotes intersegmental cooperation. It continues to emphasize that articulation is a critical aspect of a trouble-free student transfer process. And it encourages CSU and UC campuses to continue creating new and updating existing articulation agreements.

Timetable for Implementation

Since ASSIST already has an established infrastructure of central services, all of the activities in this proposal would begin in the first budget year. By the end of the first budget year, there should be a modest but noticeable increase in student usage and

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number of agreements in the database. After the second budget year, more significant increases in usage and the amount of data should be evident.

The improvement of central ASSIST operations toward a reliable, production-oriented service would be less visible to the outside observer. By the end of the first budget year, the Coordination Site should complete the upgrade to a fault-tolerant technical environment for ASSIST Internet server computers. This will ensure that central ASSIST services continue to be available over time as technology evolves and unexpected circumstances arise. Also during this first budget year, the Coordination Site will conduct student focus groups and other related activities to determine specific ways in which the ASSIST software can be enhanced to make it easier for students to get the information they need most. Depending on the types of changes required, the Coordination Site should be able to complete the development of most new software capabilities by the end of the second budget year.

In subsequent budget years, ASSIST will have the available resources to continue focusing central operations on changing technologies and other important new priorities that are sure to develop. The ASSIST Board of Directors will continue to use a strategic planning model with effective monitoring and accountability to guide the ongoing operations of ASSIST.