

**Improving ASSIST and Articulation for California's Students
in an Internet-worked Environment
2000-2001 Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal**

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Introduction

Since 1985, use of ASSIST as a primary tool to manage and disseminate articulation information among public colleges and universities has been increasing throughout the State. The ASSIST database now includes all of the most current articulation that has been established between California Community Colleges and California State University and University of California campuses. The base technologies for ASSIST are being updated to take advantage of recent advances in Internet and database technology. These new base technologies are expected to have a significant impact on articulation processes at colleges and universities throughout the State. They are also expected to open new possibilities for presenting articulation information in ways that better meet the needs of students for their individual academic planning.

It is now time to build on the success of ASSIST and set new goals to continue serving the needs of California students.

The intersegmental ASSIST Board of Directors has established new goals for ASSIST that call for improving the usability of ASSIST for students, increasing direct student use of ASSIST, and improving the overall quantity and quality of articulation information. In order to meet these goals new software needs to be developed and additional work needs to be supported at campuses.

This Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal is being submitted by the ASSIST Board of Directors to request \$6,200,000 of additional annual funding in order to improve the usability of ASSIST and articulation information for California's students, and to enable California Community College, California State University and University of California campuses to take advantage of advances in ASSIST technology and improve the overall quantity and quality of articulation information.

Background

A smooth student transfer process has remained a top priority among the California Community Colleges, California State University, and University of California as is called for in the California Master Plan and a wide range of legislation and systemwide and 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. While responsibility for creating and maintaining articulation agreements is vested with the universities as receiving institutions, there is substantial work for both colleges and universities in developing and reviewing articulation. Over the years a number of different types of articulation information have evolved and each university has established their own practices for the number of agreements they maintain and the frequency with which they are

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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 California Community College students to California's public 4-year universities by providing an electronic system for academic planning which delivers accurate, timely and complete information. In March 1999, the leaders of California's three public higher education systems endorsed ASSIST in this capacity.

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. ASSIST is governed by the ASSIST Board of Directors which includes representatives from the CCC, CSU and UC systemwide offices and campuses, the California Postsecondary Education Commission, and the ASSIST Coordination Site.

All of the articulation information in ASSIST is entered and maintained by the individual colleges and universities throughout the state, and all California Community College, California State University and University of California 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.

History

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 with an increase in the number of participating colleges and universities, the creation of an intersegmental governance structure, expansion of the Coordination Site to serve a greater number of participants, and the establishment of stable funding by each of the systemwide offices.

After 3 years as an operating project, in 1992 the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office secured a Budget Change Proposal for ASSIST to augment existing funding by \$325,000 annually. This augmentation provided for increasing the number of Community College participants and providing additional technical support to Community Colleges. ASSIST is currently funded at a level of \$1,309,000 annually which supports Coordination Site operations and a small offset of data entry costs for each UC and CSU campus. The segmental breakdown for current annual funding is: CCCCCO \$589,000, CSUCO \$360,000 and UCOP \$360,000.

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In order to better support the long term needs of ASSIST, in 1996 the CCC, CSU and UC systemwide offices again enhanced the governance structure of ASSIST to provide more stability and to facilitate long range planning and decision making. At that same time, the ASSIST Board of Directors established an ongoing strategic planning process which results in a dynamic planning document that defines the mission, vision, goals, objectives and activities for ASSIST in two-year cycles.

As evidenced by the results of the 1996-1998 ASSIST Strategic Plan, ASSIST achieved three very 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) ASSIST was established as the official repository of articulation information for the State of California by the three public systems of California higher education. 3) All of the data in ASSIST was made available via the Internet at www.assist.org.

The success of the 1996-1998 ASSIST Strategic Plan led the ASSIST Board of Directors to establish new goals to continue meeting the needs of California students. Three of the primary goals in the 1998-2000 ASSIST Strategic Plan are to 1) improve the usability of ASSIST for students, 2) improve the quality of data in ASSIST and 3) increase the use of ASSIST by students. These are in addition to the ongoing goals of maintaining complete and up to date articulation information in ASSIST. These goals are consistent with current Legislative and segmental priorities related to transfer and articulation where there has been a great deal of interest in expanding the amount of major preparation articulation.

Needs Assessment

Prior to ASSIST, students had to go to college or university counseling centers or admissions offices to try and access paper copies of articulation agreements. This was often a very difficult task as few students knew about articulation and few colleges and universities supported easy access to this information for students. Additionally, the administrative processes for sharing curricular information, coordinating the analysis of articulation, recording faculty decisions and disseminating final agreements were manual and slow. While ASSIST has focused primarily on facilitating the dissemination of articulation, it has also provided new capabilities for facilitating these other processes. As the Internet has become a permanent and reliable tool at most colleges and universities, the ASSIST software has been redesigned to take advantage of modern database and networking technologies. This redesign has initially focused on the base technologies used for ASSIST, in support of data maintenance, and is setting the stage for new and promising developments in other areas of articulation and student services.

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Improving the Usability of ASSIST for Students

While all of the current articulation information in ASSIST is universally accessible on the Internet, this information is still presented in ways that were originally designed to meet administrative needs at campuses. The current format of articulation information is often quite confusing and complex for students to take full advantage of this important information. Additionally, while the user interface for accessing articulation over the Internet addresses the needs of staff and faculty, students would prefer a system that helps them access the information in ways that meet their needs.

To address these concerns, the ASSIST Board of Directors will be conducting student focus groups during the 1999-2000 academic year to collect detailed information on how articulation agreements and the ASSIST user interface could be improved to meet the needs of students. Once concluded, the ASSIST Board will propose a detailed set of new software capabilities that, when developed, should help to increase the overall usability of ASSIST and articulation for California students.

Increased Support for Articulation Analysis

Due to a number of inter-related factors, the demand for additional and up-to-date articulation has put a strain on many colleges and universities as they cannot keep up with the requests for analyzing new and reviewing changing articulation. Some of these factors are listed below.

- An increase in the overall awareness that articulation is the key to a smooth transfer process (especially when considering the impact of Tidal Wave II)
- Increases in intersegmental faculty collaboration to facilitate articulation and student transfer
- The ability to immediately publish articulation updates and changes via ASSIST
- Increasing demand by Community Colleges for major preparation articulation from all UC and CSU campuses

Sharing Curricular Information

The ASSIST database requires each college and university to maintain detailed curricular information each term that identifies how courses are changing from one term to the next. This information is the foundation for all other parts of the ASSIST database that reference courses. While ASSIST supports an interface for colleges and universities to provide this curriculum information electronically each term, few colleges and universities are able to use this process because their local curriculum systems were not designed to meet the needs of articulation. While ASSIST provides mechanisms for all colleges and universities to provide this information manually, the campuses, systemwide offices, and Coordination Site are most interested in seeing

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all of this information provided electronically. For Community Colleges, the most promising solution involves linking with the CCCCCO MIS data collection process already in place. However, analysis has shown that this process will need to be augmented at the local and central level as it was not originally designed to meet the needs of articulation processes.

Increased Support for Articulation Data Maintenance

While ASSIST has enabled many universities to manage a greater quantity of articulation by providing them with an electronic data management system, the university support staff who use this system must have a greater level of technical skills and abilities in order to do their work. ASSIST's shift to exclusively Internet-based software using current database technologies adds to the need for support staff who can use these newer technologies. This rise in the level of support staff has put a strain on the available resources at many universities as the staff who are able to do this work are often called on to work on other campus priorities such as the implementation of local degree audit systems.

Intersegmental Budget Proposal

The ASSIST Board of Directors is seeking additional funds to meet the needs described above to 1) improve the overall usability of ASSIST and articulation information for students and 2) ensure accurate, up to date, and plentiful articulation for students by increasing support for colleges and universities in developing and managing articulation information.

The ASSIST Board is requesting a total of \$6,200,000 annually in additional funds. The following is a break-down of how those funds will be used.

Improving the Usability of the ASSIST software:

As mentioned above, the ASSIST Board of Directors is collecting detailed information on improvements that should be made to articulation and the ASSIST user interface. In order to implement these changes, new software will need to be developed at the ASSIST Coordination Site. Additional resources are needed to develop additional Web-based software for easier student access and to provide a more stable technical environment at the ASSIST Coordination Site for supporting new Internet-based services.

The ASSIST Board of Directors is requesting the following additional funds for the ASSIST Coordination Site to develop and support these new capabilities:

- \$187,500 for additional salaries and benefits
- \$22,500 for additional supplies and operating expenses
- \$80,000 for additional Internet server computers and software

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Increasing Support for Articulation Analysis and Data Entry at CSU and UC Campuses:

Recent analysis at CSU and UC campuses has shown that the average university dedicates 1 FTE to articulation analysis and coordination and .5 FTE to articulation data entry. However, the articulation staff at most universities are also called on to work in other service areas such as outreach, admissions evaluations and degree audit implementation. In addition to the regular articulation staff, university faculty and their support staff are integral to the articulation process and spend a significant amount of time analyzing requests for new and updated articulation.

In order to provide more stable support to university articulation activities, the ASSIST Board of Directors is requesting the following additional funds for each of the 8 UC and 22 CSU campuses:

- \$30,000 for additional articulation analysis
- \$30,000 for additional articulation data entry
- \$15,000 for additional technical support
- \$15,000 for additional faculty support

This additional \$90,000 per campus (total of \$2,700,000) will be provided to CSU and UC campuses each year in the form of grants administered through the ASSIST Coordination Site. The ASSIST Board of Directors will establish and monitor specific performance criteria each year in order for universities to receive these funds.

Increasing Support for Articulation Analysis and Curriculum Maintenance at California Colleges:

In addition to participating in articulation analysis activities with universities, California Community Colleges are also an important focus for increasing student access to and use of ASSIST. In order to provide more stable support to college articulation activities and to help increase student access to ASSIST, the ASSIST Board of Directors is requesting \$30,000 in additional funds for each of the 107 California Community College campuses.

This additional \$30,000 per campus (total of \$3,210,00) will be provided to California Community College campuses each year in the form of grants administered through the ASSIST Coordination Site. The ASSIST Board of Directors would establish and monitor specific performance criteria each year in order for colleges to receive these funds

Impact of Zero Funding

The activities described above were designed as a package to take a dramatic step forward in providing students with the most useful, complete and up to date articulation information possible. The ASSIST Board of Directors has generated a great deal of positive momentum in

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these areas and California is poised to take advantage of this energy. Without the additional funding requested in this intersegmental BCP, there will be a number of inter-related opportunities that will be lost and the overall effect will be that colleges and universities will be unable to meet the fast rising expectations of students, legislators and administrators.

Without a new user interface to present articulation information in ways that are much more useful and friendly, students will continue to be confused by the complexities of articulation. And, without more complete, major preparation articulation, students will continue to see holes in the transferability of courses and have to continue guessing at how courses might transfer. This type of guesswork is difficult enough for experienced college counselors and it has continued to result in students taking too many classes for which they will not get university credit. This wastes their time and money as they have to retake similar courses after being accepted at their target institution.

Without additional funding to support articulation analysis and data entry at colleges and universities, California will never be able to achieve the seamless transfer system that is called for in the Master Plan for Higher Education and numerous legislative acts. In the past, individual colleges and universities have had to make very difficult decisions about where to apply available funding in admissions, outreach and other student services areas. Because of the complex, behind-the-scenes nature of articulation, it is often overlooked and underfunded at the local level, even though it provides one of the most important cornerstones for a successful transfer process. By providing funding for these activities in the outcomes-oriented manner proposed in this BCP, California will be able to expect a substantial and measurable amount of articulation that will be responsibly maintained each year. The mechanisms for developing and maintaining articulation in California are well established and quite refined. The primary shortcoming has been the availability of sufficient funding for staff and faculty to perform as much of this important work as is possible each year.

Without additional support, ASSIST will continue to function and serve the needs of students, faculty and staff as it has for the past 14 years. However, expectations for more and better services in the areas of articulation, transfer and other student services continue to rise and the technologies needed to support baseline and new activities is changing rapidly. ASSIST's ability to respond will diminish as it has to balance the need for new services against the need for continued support of baseline services.