

ASSIST Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal

August 13, 2001 – Page # 1

Nature of the Request

This Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal (BCP) is being submitted by the University of California (UC) on behalf of the California Education Roundtable to request \$1,100,000 of general funds annually in order to augment the funding of ASSIST. These new funds would be combined with the current \$1,309,000 of combined California Community Colleges (CCC), California State University (CSU), and UC segmental allocations for ASSIST. New funding would be used to 1) increase student access and make ASSIST easier for students to use, 2) ensure 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week availability, and 3) increase the input of new course and preparation for major articulation.

This BCP represents the details of a new funding plan that has been developed by the ASSIST Board of Directors whose membership includes faculty, system office, and campus representatives from CCC, CSU and UC 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; and the recent 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.

Executive Summary

ASSIST is a Web-based transfer planning tool that shows students courses they must 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 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. Thousands of students are served daily by ASSIST via the Internet where students, faculty, and staff are now requesting and receiving over 150,000 reports each month (ASSIST receives over 3 millions hits per month). ASSIST also collaborates with other efforts such as the Student Friendly System (CaliforniaColleges.edu) which uses data from ASSIST to operate its "Student Transfer Planner" component.

The successful, timely transfer of Community College students 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 experience increased difficulties and delays in preparing themselves for transfer to the California State University and University of California.

ASSIST Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal
August 13, 2001 – Page # 2

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 request is essential in order for ASSIST to achieve the primary goals of providing complete, accurate and up-to-date articulation at a time when extensive and efficient articulation and student transfer are seen as key components to managing California's growing population of students in higher education.

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

- 1) ***Increase Direct Student Use of ASSIST:*** New funding will be used to make ASSIST easier for students to use. Using information collected directly 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. New funding will also be used to market ASSIST directly to students to increase the number of students who use it regularly.
- 2) ***Assure Availability:*** 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 augmenting 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.
- 3) ***Increase the Input of Course Articulation Data:*** 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 \$1,309,000 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.

During 2000-2001 the UC systemwide office diverted a significant amount of funds in order to maintain the base functionality of ASSIST. For the 2001-2002 academic year, no external funds are available to divert to ASSIST and significant reductions in central operations and staffing are being implemented in order to try and maintain the most basic ASSIST services. Without the new funds requested in this BCP, the systems will not be able to ensure that students and counselors will continue to have access to even the most basic ASSIST services.

Background/History

An effective student transfer process has remained 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. 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. Each university has established its own practices for the number 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.

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, 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.

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: CCC \$589,000, CSU \$360,000, UC \$360,000. As operational costs have been rising, the University of California, as fiscal agent for ASSIST, has been providing additional funding in recent years to ensure that central operations continue.

ASSIST Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal

August 13, 2001 – Page # 4

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 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.

The ASSIST Board of Directors has been working for a number of years to secure additional State funding in order to meet the full mission and vision for ASSIST. During 2000-2001 the UC systemwide office redirected a significant amount of funds (approximately \$180,000) in order to maintain the core functionality of ASSIST. In 2001-2002 no external funds are available to help support ASSIST. At least two current staff will be terminated, all central operations will be reduced to their most basic levels, no central equipment or software will be upgraded, no ASSIST features will be enhanced or added, and only a small amount of funds will be available in the case of equipment failures.

The primary computers that run ASSIST are between 3 and 5 years old (which is beyond their recommended life span) and are not fast enough to serve the increasing numbers of students who request ASSIST services. In Spring 2001, many students and counselors complained at the slowness of ASSIST. If these computers are not replaced with more current equipment the performance of ASSIST will continue to diminish with increasing numbers of student users.

The operational costs for ASSIST continue to rise each year as student use increases and the technologies required to operate ASSIST continue to advance. Due to limited resources ASSIST has not been able to do a number of important activities that students, faculty and staff have been requesting and the ASSIST Board has not been able to make significant 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 needs 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)

ASSIST Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal
August 13, 2001 – Page # 5

articulation information will be available to students 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week, 2) articulation information in ASSIST will be complete, up-to-date and accurate, and 3) improved technologies will result in more students being served by ASSIST.

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.

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.

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 Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal

August 13, 2001 – Page # 6

ASSIST also 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.

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 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 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 augmented 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 augmented 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.

ASSIST Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal

August 13, 2001 – Page # 7

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 could 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 Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal
August 13, 2001 – Page # 8

ASSIST Board of Directors wants to ensure that as articulation and curriculum are updated, the ASSIST database is kept complete and up-to-date.

4. 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 intersegmental relations. 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 \$360,000, UC \$360,000). 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.

Implications: In 2002-2003, these funds will be insufficient to continue operating ASSIST at required levels to meet student and campus needs. 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.

ASSIST Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal

August 13, 2001 – Page # 9

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.

New technologies require increased support for operational personnel as well as hardware and software. As the base technologies that support ASSIST continue to evolve, the Coordination Site would be unable to keep up. 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

A second 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 \$1,309,000 of segmental allocations for ASSIST would be combined with the new allocation to support the following core operations and new activities at a total annual amount of \$2,409,000:

- Ongoing central operations at the ASSIST Coordination Site
\$1,099,000 – salaries/benefits/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
- Establish high speed network access to central ASSIST server computers

ASSIST Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal
August 13, 2001 – Page # 10

\$60,000 – annual lines and equipment

- Upgrade to a redundant fault tolerant technical environment for central ASSIST server computers
\$190,000 – hardware and software
- Ensure that central ASSIST hardware and software technologies remain current
\$170,000 – annual replacement of 1/3 of hardware plus software upgrade contingency
- ASSIST articulation database data entry/maintenance
\$360,000 – UC data maintenance
\$360,000 – CSU data maintenance

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.

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
- Augmenting ASSIST technologies by:
 - Establishing high speed network access to central ASSIST server computers
 - Upgrading to a fault tolerant technical environment for central ASSIST server computers
 - Ensuring that ASSIST hardware and software technologies remain current

ASSIST Intersegmental Budget Change Proposal

August 13, 2001 – Page # 11

- 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 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.