

# **A College Perspective from Existing Successful Fully Online Medical Coding Programs**

**By: CHIA Academics Committee**

Recent articles from the Chancellor's Office and other educational resources promote a Medical Coding Program as the first proposed program to be offered at the 115th online college in California's Community College (CCC) District. These articles fail to acknowledge that existing fully online Medical Coding programs within the district are already meeting the workforce needs of the state.

There are currently four community colleges offering fully online Medical Coding programs. The courses within these Medical Coding programs are all part of Health Information Technology (HIT) programs, which are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management (CAHIIM). Each program is taught by credentialed health information professionals.

The fully online Medical Coding program at Fresno City College has been offered since 2014 and has had increasing growth in enrollment. Saddleback College's fully online Medical Coding program is slated to officially begin this fall. The program at Cosumnes River College is doing well and planning to hire another faculty member. Santa Barbara City College (SBCC), has offered a fully online Medical Coding program since 1999, and has more recently accommodated on average 416 enrollments in medical coding courses annually. This program also maintains the American Health Information Management (AHIMA) approval process through the Professional Certificate Approval Program (PCAP). The curriculum required to obtain this approval is extensive, as are the standards set by the approval body. In addition to these fully online Medical Coding programs, traditional on-campus and hybrid coding programs are offered at other California Community Colleges.

Data found in LaunchBoard, one of CCC system's data resources, shows that SBCC served 336 economically disadvantaged student enrollments as compared to approximately 34 non-disadvantaged student enrollments in the 2016/2017 academic year (see graph below). The current fully online programs reach students throughout the entire state of California and the nation.

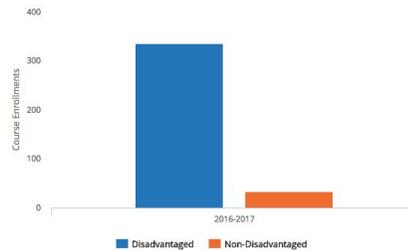
## Strong Workforce Program Metrics

Santa Barbara City College || Health Information Coding (122310) || 2016-2017 (Change Filter?)

Drill down by: Economically Disad...

NUMBER OF COURSE ENROLLMENTS: 370

370 Microregion Median    370 Macroregion Median    49 State Median    370 Top in State



Source: Chancellor's Office Management Information System

Janet Robertson, who has been a full-time faculty member in the Health Information Technology/Cancer Information Management Department at SBCC since 2005 stated, "After teaching in a fully online program for thirteen years, I was excited about the possibility of an online college." Mrs. Robertson had hoped to be a part of its creation and "share her online teaching expertise". The reality is that no one from the Chancellor's Office has contacted the fully online Medical Coding programs for advice. She and other educators in the state were first made aware of the proposed Medical Coding program through the publication of the recent articles.

The related articles imply that the proposed medical coding program will be "honored" by AHIMA. However, as stated on the AHIMA website, <http://www.ahima.org/certification/CCS>,

"Coding accuracy is highly important to healthcare organizations, and has an impact on revenues and describing health outcomes. In fact, certification has become an implicit industry standard. Accordingly, the CCS credential demonstrates a practitioner's tested data quality and integrity skills, and mastery of coding proficiency."

Based on the expertise of the faculty, advisory boards, and industry professionals from all healthcare settings, there is a general consensus that maintaining the quality and integrity of the medical coding profession in an educational program must include an in-depth curriculum to properly educate students in all aspects of medical coding. A broad education in medical coding is necessary due to the continuing evolution of health information management.

It is unclear to current medical coding faculty how the Medical Coding program for the 115th online college, as proposed, will be able to maintain the standards required to meet the workforce demands and maintain the quality of the profession. More importantly, without the quality of education provided by the well-established community colleges, the proposed Medical Coding certificate may not lead to the level of employment anticipated for these students.