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American River College joins statewide effort to increase digital literacy among underserved California communities

(Sacramento, Calif. – JANUARY 6, 2011) - The Foundation for California Community Colleges has announced American River College as a new partner in California Connects, a program launching this spring that will enhance digital literacy and expand broadband Internet access to more than 61,000 users in California. American River College (ARC) will contribute to the success of California Connects by developing the very tools that will be used to help California residents prepare for 21st century workforce needs.

The free, open-source digital literacy tools will be developed by ARC faculty under the leadership of Dr. Derrick Booth, Dean of Computer Science and Information Technology, and ultimately provided through California Connects. They will help underserved populations with little or no computer knowledge learn how to access and navigate the Web, how to use Web-conferencing tools, the functionalities and benefits of online educational courses, and other techniques for managing and utilizing electronic information.

"California Connects is an important program for our state, and particularly underserved populations, as it will provide real lifelong incentives to individuals who have not previously had access or resources to learn digital literacy skills, acquire computers, or connect to the Internet," says Dr. Paul Lanning, President and CEO of the Foundation for California Community Colleges. "We are thrilled to partner with one of California's Community Colleges to see this program through to success. California Connects will benefit from the expertise of the American River College faculty developing the digital literacy tools."

"As one of the state's largest community colleges, we understand the importance of digital literacy to the success of our students," says Dr. David Viar, President of American River College. "We already serve an amazingly diverse population in our classrooms and labs, as well as online. Now, as a partner in California Connects, we look forward to sharing our faculty's knowledge and expertise with the larger California community."

California Connects will address a significant need and a widening digital divide that exists for many populations. An August 2010 study by the Public Policy Institute of California found that while the digital divide has narrowed significantly among some demographic groups a gap remains for Latinos, especially those from Spanish-speaking and economically disadvantaged households. The report also indicates that Internet and broadband use has increased in all regions of the state except the Central Valley.

The program will generate 61,120 new broadband users through outreach, training and educational support in key communities throughout the state, with a focus on reaching populations for whom computer and Internet access is still a challenge and yet necessary to enhance their lifelong learning ability, improve their economic and health care status and advance their general quality of life.

In addition to the digital literacy tools being developed by American River College, California Connects will involve the collaboration of other agencies to reach its goals. In partnership with the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, California Connects will award laptops to approximately 5,800 socioeconomically disadvantaged students who provide a designated community service and are currently enrolled in Mathematics, Engineering, Science, Achievement (MESA) programs at 33 California Community Colleges. The equipment will help encourage and enable broadband adoption among students, their families, and communities.

Additionally, California Connects will work with the Great Valley Center/UC Merced to provide outreach, training, and learning support to increase digital literacy skills and broadband adoption, targeting historically underserved communities, including an 18-county region in the Central Valley.

California Connects is a three-year program funded by a \$10.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration for Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). Additional details about California Connects are available at www.foundationccc.org/CAconnects.

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The Foundation for California Community Colleges is the official non-profit foundation to the California Community Colleges' Board of Governors and Chancellor's Office. The Foundation's mission is to benefit, support, and enhance the missions of the California Community College system, the largest higher education system in the nation. Incorporated in 1998, the Foundation works with Community Colleges and partner organizations to manage donations, grants, programs, and services that drive excellence in education while saving millions of dollars for colleges each year. The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt non-profit corporation and receives no direct state or public support. For more information, visit www.foundationccc.org

The California Community Colleges is the largest system of higher education in the nation composed of 72 districts and 112 colleges serving 2.89 million students per year. The system is also the largest provider of workforce training in the nation. Nearly 25 percent of all the community college students nationwide are enrolled in a California Community College. The Chancellor's Office provides leadership, advocacy and support under the direction of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges.