Master Plan Focus Group: Classified Staff Retreat

Tuesday, March 12, 2013

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Ventura College and DAC staff participated in a retreat activity that included the Master Plan focus group activity. The activity included the SWOT assessment relative to challenges facing the district, and the brainstorming/prioritizing activity in answer to the six questions being posed.

**SWOT RESPONSES (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)**

The larger group broke into four small groups, and all were asked to brainstorm about the district’s readiness to respond to the following issues:

Changes in regulations that have:

1. Eliminated repeatability of successfully completed classes

2. Established a retroactive three-strikes rule for unsuccessful course attempts

3. Reduced by one-third the lifetime eligibility for federal Pell Grants (from 18 full-time equivalent semesters to 12)

Proposals/Issues on the horizon:

1. Proposal to cap state support at 90 units

2. Proposal to shift funding from census enrollment to completion

3. Proposal to shift adult education and/or apprenticeship programs to the community colleges.

4. Proposal to establish a statewide virtual campus

5. Expanding discussion o0f the use of MOOCs (massive open online courses) to provide core courses

Following are the responses:

**STRENGTHS**

Dedicated and knowledgeable staff (longevity is a plus!)

Resourceful, collaborative and intelligent staff

We are a community college

90-unit cap on funding will reduce the number of perpetual students

We offer a variety of unique classes

We offer special programs that are critical to the community (e.g. water science)

Our new Chancellor

New President

Our location

New facilities

Our reputation

Availability ??

Resources/Technology

We love learning

Balanced budget (for now!)

**WEAKNESSES**

We are a community college

Inflexibility of faculty

Loss of student enrollments due to budget cuts

Not enough staff to provide services

Longevity of staff – we lose history and knowledge with their retirements

Staff reductions

New President

Budget cuts (a cumbersome, redundant process)

Paperwork – too much, and confusing

Reliability

Communications

Lack of continuity in course offerings between the colleges

Divisions between campuses

**OPPORTUNITIES**

Moving adult ed. to community colleges offers potential for increased college enrollment, a way to offer remedial and basic skills classes and respond to restrictions on repeatability/course repetition, and to offer adult vocational education classes.

Grant funding

Internships

Scholarships

International students

90 unit cap provides opportunity for us to serve students better, and to provide services to students who are focused.

Networking and teamwork opportunities

Better retention and graduation results

“Change is good”

More online classes – allow us to increase revenue without increasing overhead

Better communication with/from DAC

**THREATS**

Our sense of identity is being threatened by the changes and challenges – who are we? A community college, a junior college, a vocational college, or ???

Too many changes threaten the quality of education

Moving adult ed. to community colleges without funding would be a burden

Increased online courses re: Virtual campus/MOOCs – online courses are problems for financial aid students and in residency determination.

Budget cuts

Governor’s “plan” for community colleges

Competition in online courses from virtual campus, MOOCs

State regulations

Reduced ability to serve students

The 90 unit cap will have a disparate impact on students in high-unit programs like nursing, STEM

Focus on completion-based funding can lead to grade inflation

Increasing violence on campuses

The four focus groups each discussed one of the following questions, then did individual brainstorming using post-it notes. Group members were then allowed to move on to the other five questions and repeat the brainstorming activity. Once all questions were addressed, participants “spent their dots” to prioritize what they felt were the most important suggestions or ideas**. Top priority responses are in bold print.**

1. In light of increased state and national emphasis on student completion, what might be done in order to create clear pathways to degrees, certificates and transfers?

**Better accountability at the faculty/counseling level – create a “transfer/completion task force”**

**Have counselors for specific careers, more specialties than general**

**More and better counseling and academic advisement – accuracy, consistency, complete information about what is required to get to goal**

**Communicate early and often to students about pathways**

**Create pathway charts for students – clearer picture of what they have to do to complete degrees, certificates, transfer**

**Create brochures**

**Create a student-friendly portal**

**Require academic (student ed.) plans before registering for courses**

**Counselors – i.d. new students, create ed plan with 90 unit cap in mind**

**Offer more opportunities through Career Center, more internships**

**Work closely with high schools to develop, share pathways**

**Work closely with high schools to make sure students are prepared for college (basic skills, pathways)**

**Develop a “pathway pilot” program that follows cohort of students from beginning to end**

**Recognize that not all students are ready to be focused; create exploration opportunities for them**

**Need uniform degree requirements district wide, common courses and units for same,**

Use Career and interest-based testing

Form student support groups, offer workshops by major, use YouTube (videos)

More outreach at local high schools for seniors – this has taken a hit due to budget cuts

Create more AA and AS transfer degrees

Develop interactive matrix, “click here, do this…”

2. In light of proposed unit caps and penalties for unsuccessful course attempts, what might be done in order to decrease course withdrawals and failing grades?

**Increase opportunities for tutoring and supplemental instruction**

**Instructors i.d. and refer struggling students to tutoring**

**Increase counseling opportunities to help struggling students**

**Inform students about the new regulations (e.g. the 3-strikes limitation on course repeats)**

**More and better counseling of freshman students**

**Require assessments to make sure students are in the right classes**

**Require basic skills education if needed per assessment tests**

**Perform learning disability testing early in college process**

**Instructors should recognize struggling students and intercede – withdraw them before deadline**

**Do more orientations to inform students of the expectations and options**

**Make better use of early alert**

**Have students identify their ability to meet the hours and work for the courses they will take (create questionnaires)**

**Charge for withdrawals**

**Require all students to: do assessment and meet with counselor to review results, meet with a counselor to develop a comprehensive educational plan**

Restore services to students, e.g. EAC, SI

Stop budget cuts

Hold VC classes at local high schools for basic skills foundation

Address substance abuse issues with students

Offer interim or exploratory semester for students that are not ready to make the commitment – no harm, no foul, no penalty

Develop interventions targeting “habitual offenders”

Develop or rewrite courses that truly help students, and measure the correct level of the course

3. Is there anything about our relationships with our educational partners that could be improved or that needs to change?

**Work closely with high schools to make sure their students are prepared for college**

**Build better community between faculty and staff (as internal partners)**

**All three district colleges should offer the same core courses with the same value (e.g., English 1A is the same at all colleges)**

**Develop common course numbering at all three colleges**

**Start seeing each other as support institutions instead of competitors**

**Communication, communication, communication – between departments at sister colleges, with high schools to understand and enhance each other’s strengths, with DAC (publish committee minutes when possible)**

**Develop more training and internships with local businesses**

Do a better job of communicating changes

Offer courses that reflect the needs of major employers in our district

More campus activities that promote links between the colleges and our educational partners

Look at government facilities like our port with whom to partner

So much emphasis on group work at high schools does not prepare students for individual work at college level

High school students need better English and math preparation

4. In light of rapid technological advancements and increased options available to students on both the state and national level, what do we need to do to remain competition in the online arena?

**Develop an online core transferrable degree; make core courses available online for working people**

**Develop effective faculty that can teach online**

**Increase course options while developing ways to identify/reduce fraud (financial aid, cheating)**

**Work on the user-friendliness of the online platform**

**Offer extension classes, e.g. TESOL**

**Combine online with full time**

Put more resources into developing competitive online courses, required training and collaboration

Offer student workshops, interactive videos to prepare students for the time needed to do online courses, and to gather feedback from students

Offer online tutoring in materials, computer skills needed to succeed in online courses and to teach students the skills if necessary

Better online services and more advertisement of classes

Need good IT support, up to date equipment, training to use new technology, faster & better servers to access courses

Increases offering of on-ground classes as not all students are comfortable with online setting

Combine online with face-time

Offer social media training

Develop 100% identity verification for federal funding purposes

Offer classes that people in the community want to sign up for

Keep courses current and instructors up to date on technology

Limit online courses due to financial aid issues, residency issues, and lack of student services for online students

Training, training, training – faculty, students, staff

Develop a way to give a “hands-on” experience to those who see online as a “foreign” environment

Create a ½ unit course that students must take their first semester online to teach all of the tools, etc. that they need to succeed in online classes.

5. What should be the relationship of the three colleges in our district to each other?

**Develop continuity of procedures between the three colleges – seamless transition for students**

**Quit reinventing the wheel and collaborate more**

**Better communication and collaboration – help each other**

**More uniformity in courses – align courses that are common, more uniformity in course numbering, prerequisites and units**

**Embrace each college’s uniqueness**

**Collaborate between colleges to apply for grants**

**Provide more advantages for staff who want to complete a higher degree – leads to more knowledgeable, intelligent and creative staff**

Offer complimentary courses

Create an atmosphere of mutual respect

Colleges and DAC should interact more – start with a district-wide classified retreat

We should be “sister” colleges in the true sense of the word-students should feel as though there is continuity of courses and purpose

Cohesive

Equal

Each college focuses on its own target for excellence

6. What must we do to retain organizational vitality?

**Maintain (or in some cases, reinstate) adequate staffing**

**Communication, team building, sharing information throughout the organization**

**Eliminate silos**

**Offer more staff training**

**Have more district wide events**

**Encourage more collaboration across the district**

**Share organizational charts of all four district sites**

**Keep students as our priority, not ego**

**Convince middle-management to support classified participation in events**

**Offer more collaborative retreats – creates a sense of cohesiveness**

**Offer more professional development opportunities for all**

Allow & encourage participation in classified senate

More thinking outside the box – let’s get rid of some of the old processing

Be current with what other schools outside our district are doing

Better recognition (everyone)

Accept the change

Foster a sense of pride in the organization

Respect each other

Develop district groups to set goals and work on them – builds bonds, consensus

Meet the needs of the community we serve

Reduced workload