

Chapter 4: Challenges and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the challenges the college can anticipate in the coming decade. These challenges arise from factors identified in the District Master Plan 2007-2015 (*Board Objectives updated July 2009*), as well as in the internal and external environments as described in Chapters 2 and 3 of this Educational Master Plan.

Recommendations to address the challenges are framed in broad strokes to provide direction for strategic planning. The specific, measurable steps that will be taken to implement these recommendations will be developed in three-year strategic plans. These strategic plans will outline specific objectives, action steps, timelines, and responsible parties. This approach is further described in the integrated planning process in Chapter 1.

The challenges and corresponding recommendations are delineated in four major areas:

- Student Access
- Student Retention and Success
- Responsiveness to the Marketplace in Career Training
- Volatility of the Economic Climate and California Public Funding

Student Access

The Challenge

Moorpark College traditionally receives about one-third of area high school graduates the semester after their graduation. This flow from high school into the community college has provided stability in enrollment and a predictably younger demographic in the student population. This strong underpinning of enrollment stability, however, is due to shift over the next decade.

The demographic and economic projections of eastern Ventura County predict slow growth over time because of various factors, including:

- Legal constraints to growth (the Save Our Agricultural Resources mandate that development plans must be approved via a public vote);
- Above-average home prices that are out-of-reach for first time buyers and young families; and

- A pattern of departure from the county due to job loss and lack of affordable housing.

These trends translate to an aging population, fewer students entering the K-12 system, and ultimately, fewer high school graduates entering Moorpark College. To sustain the current level of student enrollment, the College must turn to segments of the county population other than recent high school graduates.

The dilemma facing the College is two-fold:

1. To maintain stability in enrollment over time despite the projected erosion in the number of local high school graduates, and
2. To remain relevant and flexible in the delivery of education and services as the demographic and the needs of the student population evolve.

Recommendations

Student Access 1. To develop, implement and annually assess enrollment management strategies to ensure stability and sustainability.

Student Access 2. To continue the College's strong reputation for supporting student success in transfer rates by developing, implementing, and assessing strategies to increase the support for students interested in transferring.

Student Access 3. To offset demographic shifts and possible loss of the current traditional student base by developing, implementing and assessing outreach strategies to identify, recruit, and retain non-traditional students.

Student Access 4. To stabilize funding by developing, implementing, and assessing multiple strategies, from achieving efficiencies with current revenue, to acquiring additional funding sources beyond apportionment.

Student Access 5. To effectively support degree/certificate completions that will lead to employment by identifying core academic and career/technical programs and focusing resources on them.

Student Retention and Success

The Challenge

Globalization and the evolving workplace demand a highly skilled workforce. An associate degree or higher qualification is required for entry into many of the careers in Ventura County with growth potential. In tandem with technical capability, personal development and mastery of soft skills are essential for graduates to succeed.

Currently, about one-quarter of the College's entering students require basic skills courses in English, mathematics, or both. This is lower than the rate nationally and state-wide where one in three students take at least one basic skills course after college entry. As the College serves a greater number of non-traditional students, these new groups of entering students are more likely to be less prepared for college level work, and consequently students' need for basic skill instruction will rise.

Student success and completion rates in basic skills need to be improved. ARCC (Accountability Reporting for Community Colleges) data from the California Community College Chancellor's Office indicate room for improvement as compared with peer group colleges. Success and completion in subsequent course levels after basic skills remediation require research, analysis and long-term monitoring.

The survey of student engagement indicate that Moorpark College students are less likely than their peers to use faculty interactions to discuss careers and grades and to seek help from on-campus resources. These results reveal a gap in the college's lessons; personal development issues as well as soft skills that are critical to graduates' success have yet to be addressed holistically at the College.

In the area of Distance Education, there has been rapid growth in online and hybrid courses over the last three years. This ability to provide flexibility in the delivery of education and services will be critical to non-traditional students – a segment of the population that is predicted to be an increasingly large proportion of the college student population. At the same time, the completion and success rate for online courses continuous to lag behind on-ground counterparts. While this is mirrored in national and state data, the college must actively remediate this gap if online education is to be a ubiquitous part of quality educational offerings.

Recommendations

Student Retention and Success 1. Develop, implement, and assess programs to increase student engagement in campus life.

Student Retention and Success 2. Identify barriers to student achievement (retention, success, and persistence) at various stages of student engagement by developing, implementing, and assessing programs designed to reduce/remove those barriers.

Student Retention and Success 3. To effectively serve non-traditional populations by identifying and creating strategies to meet key instructional and student services support needs of this student segment.

Student Retention and Success 4. To increase access for traditional and non-traditional students through alternative methods of education and service delivery, including but not limited to online learning. To develop, implement and assess strategies to ensure program improvement, including the currency of technology, student retention and success, and ongoing professional development for faculty.

Student Retention and Success 5. To identify long-term and medium-term goals for the continuing work of the Basic Skills Committee, with periodic self-assessment as defined by the State's Basic Skills Initiative Self-Assessment Tool.

Student Retention and Success 6. To effectively serve new student populations by developing, implementing, and assessing a faculty development program targeted to instructional best practices for working with non-traditional adult students.

Responsiveness to the Marketplace in Career Training

The Challenge

A majority of the occupations projected to grow in the coming decade requires an associate degree or higher for job entry and for career advancement.

While the College has strength and history in university transfer, the college's career programs, with some exceptions in health sciences and animal science, are at the foundational stages of development. As the demographics of the student population evolve, it is critical that the College shore up the career preparation portion of its instructional program and support services.

Recommendations

Responsiveness to the Marketplace in Career Training 1. To develop and implement a systematic review of all career/technical education programs to align program competencies with workplace needs, and to verify that the degrees and certificates are meaningful to job entry. Based on this systematic review, revise and discontinue programs as needed. Use the criteria developed in this review to evaluate proposals for new career/technical programs.

Responsiveness to the Marketplace in Career Training 2. In designing new career/technical programs, create Career Ladders that allow students to logically and cumulatively advance from certificate to associate degree and to more advanced studies.

Responsiveness to the Marketplace in Career Training 3. To develop, assess, and improve promotional materials to clarify for students the role of career/technical degrees and certificates in job entry and job advancement.

Volatility of the Economic Climate and California Public Funding

The Challenge

Community colleges in California are supported by general and categorical funding from the state budget. The health of the state budget is inextricably tied to the vibrancy of the local, regional, and state economy. This revenue fluctuation is further exacerbated by unmanaged structural deficits in the state budget itself. The structural deficits worsened the state financial picture over time, rendering funding more and more unstable. These fluctuations have hampered the College's ability to anticipate growth in a rational, sustainable manner.

Beginning in 2008, the instability of the California state budget was further compromised by a worldwide recession. The collapsed of the financial market, the housing market, and the automotive industry overlaid the already fragile state financial picture to create a perfect storm. State revenue continued to drop throughout 2008 and 2009. The budget deficit for California was reported at \$30 billion during the current fiscal year and state unemployment rates reached double digits in late 2009.

In contrast to the predictable 2-3 year cycle of budget fluctuations, the downturn that began in 2008 is projected to last from 5 to 7 years, the result of which will be permanent budget reductions that will affect the size and operation of the state's community colleges at the end of the cycle. Since this financial projection parallels the

term of this Educational Master Plan, the college must consider this financial perspective here and in medium-term strategic planning.

The challenge is two-fold: To plan with optimism for program vibrancy in both breadth and depth, yet be mindful of the financial realities that may impact planning outcomes.

Recommendations

Volatility of the Economic Climate and California Public Funding 1. In light of the continuing economic decline, fully implement the College's integrated planning process to ensure long-term stability. In particular, adhere to the 3-year Strategic Planning cycle in support of this Educational Master Plan with these additional considerations:

- 1a.** Consider the reality of the economic climate in the writing of the Strategic Plan and accompanying action plans. Dedicate available resources to fund the college priorities.
- 1b.** Re-validate and carry over unmet strategic objectives and action steps from one 3-year Strategic Plan to the next.