

1 Quality Focus Essay

2 The accreditation self-evaluation process at Santa Monica College has involved the campus
3 community in reflecting on and identifying ways in which the College might continue to improve
4 its institutional effectiveness and student learning and achievement. Since the last accreditation
5 visit the College has engaged in significant new statewide initiatives, the advent of new grant
6 programs and other student success-oriented projects, ongoing annual and strategic planning, and
7 annual assessment and evaluation. In this context and through the self-evaluation process, Santa
8 Monica College has identified two major Action Projects to fulfill the mission, increase the
9 success of all students, and engender institutional effectiveness.

10 This Quality Focus Essay begins with a description of the process the campus community
11 engaged in to select the two Action Projects. The relationship between the Action Projects and
12 the related plans that emerged from the self-evaluation are described as well as the framework
13 the College will use to engage in the Action Projects. Each Action Project is explained including
14 the responsible parties, timeline, anticipated measurable and observable outcomes, and the
15 potential impact of each on academic quality, institutional effectiveness, and continuous quality
16 improvement.

17 **Process for Action Project Selection**

18 As part of the self-evaluation process, the Accreditation Steering committee engaged in a
19 thorough review of the critical college documents that guide the College's planning processes.
20 These included: The Master Plan for Education, overarching annual program review reports, the
21 annual Institutional Effectiveness report, Academic Senate annual objectives, and the Board of
22 Trustees priorities and goals. As a result of that review and the self-evaluation process, several
23 major themes emerged for continuous quality improvement as well as potential growth and
24 innovation for the College. These themes were shared via consistent updates and reports to the
25 District Planning and Advisory Council, Board of Trustees, Senior Staff, and Academic Leaders.
26 In addition, members of the Steering Committee held Flex Day workshops at each institutional
27 day for the past 18 months as well as "brown bag" discussions for the campus community related
28 to each of the standards. From these themes, two major action projects were identified that align
29 with critical priorities for the College. These projects align with the standards and several of the
30 improvement plans identified in the self-evaluation report (see Table 1 below). In both cases, the
31 project is focused on the integration of various efforts at the College to improve student success
32 and institutional effectiveness.

33 The first Action Project is the Integrated Student Equity and Success Plan. The objective of this
34 project is to integrate the many activities that support student success and equity. By doing so,
35 the College will leverage its financial and human resources in new ways to maximize the number
36 of students served and student achievement outcomes. This action plan is a direct outgrowth of
37 Santa Monica College's long held commitment to student equity. For many years, the College
38 has used disaggregated data about its students and their achievements to increase the college

community’s awareness of the disparities in student achievement among various student subpopulations. More recently, both the state of California and the College have engaged in this work with an even greater commitment as a result of new statewide initiatives, grant opportunities, and a national focus on promoting participation and academic achievement for traditionally underrepresented and underserved groups. While Santa Monica College has many programs and activities aimed at achieving increased levels of student achievement while reviewing Standard IIC, the steering committee came to recognize that these services tend to work in parallel to one another, rather than synergistically, leveraging their resources, strengths and effective practices. Thus, students are faced with a “cafeteria model” college with myriad options for both academics and student services and little information or direction as to how to choose the appropriate major or support service (Bailey et al). By integrating these efforts, Santa Monica College intends to become a “pathways model” college, one that “uses an integrated, institution-wide approach to student success, based on intentionally designed, clear and coherent educational experiences, informed by evidence” (Bailey et al).

The second Action Project is the Transformative Technology Planning initiative. Technology continues to evolve and develop in ways that have the potential for increasing the College’s effectiveness. Many departments and programs seek technology solutions to streamline and improve their operations. Through this Action Project, the College will prioritize the effective use of technology in support of student success, institutional effectiveness, and continuous quality improvement. The College will identify technology needs and seek to develop criteria and methodologies for incorporating appropriate and effective solutions. This project was driven by the findings in the self-evaluation report in Standard IIIC as well as the work of the Technology Planning subcommittee of the District Planning and Advisory Council.

The findings from this self-evaluation reveal pockets of excellence throughout the College, and they also illustrate the potential that could be reached if there were better integration of these efforts. Table 1 lists plans for improvement emerging from the self-evaluation which directly relate to the Action Projects and the standards in which these plans can be found.

Table 1. Related plans for improvement emerging from the self-evaluation

Action Project	Related Plans for improvement emerging from self-evaluation	Standards
Integrated Student Equity and Success Plan	To reduce equity gaps in student achievement as identified in Student Equity Plan, Program Review, and Institutional Effectiveness reports	IIA3 IIA8
	Reduce time to completion of academic goals	IIA5
	Ongoing implementation and assessment of Student Equity Plan	IIA7
	Use contextualized instruction and other evidence-based methods from the Basic Skills Innovation and Transformation project to improve success	IIA11
	Hire a diverse faculty and staff that reflects the SMC student population	IIIA10

	Prioritize the Student Equity and Success plan in the new strategic planning cycle to be initiated in Fall 2016	IVA1
	Research, implement, and evaluate a single tutoring tracking and assessment system college-wide	IIB3
Transformative Technology Plan	Engage in assessment of online Counseling services and integrate with the new Canvas course management system	IIC3
	Integrate MyEdPlan system with the new version of ASSIST when it is available	IIC6
	Explore ways in which the College can expand “virtualization” to increase student access anytime to services and functions	IIIC1
	Review the ways in which existing technologies may or may not be integrated with the Canvas course management system to maximize efficiencies	IIIC4
	Review the staffing needs for Information Technology and develop a plan to meet the needs	IIIA10
	Prioritize the integration of existing technology to maximize impact and leverage resources as part of the new strategic planning cycle to be initiated in Fall 2016	IVA1

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68 **Organizational Learning**

69 Santa Monica College will take an organizational learning approach to the selected Action
70 Projects. This is a deliberate and thoughtful approach which involves creating and utilizing new
71 knowledge to improve practice and institutional effectiveness over time. Not only will this lead
72 to the successful completion of these projects, but it will also embed organizational learning as
73 an effective approach to problem solving at the College long term. Hewlett-Packard’s (HP)
74 former chairman, Lew Platt, has been quoted as saying “if only we knew what we know at HP”
75 (Brown & Duguid, 2000, p. 123). While many programs enjoy great success in facilitating
76 student achievement or implementing technology solutions, the information is not widely shared
77 to benefit the institution more broadly on a consistent basis. These Action Projects will enable
78 the College to share and implement the best practices of each program, service, and department
79 on a larger scale and in an integrated manner—making explicit the sum of what the faculty,
80 administrators and staff *know* to benefit all.

81 Higher education institutions are notoriously slow to change, typically making incremental
82 adaptations to response to changes in the environment (Cameron, 1984). As an alternative to this
83 type of change, intentional and purposeful learning activities focused upon improving a
84 particular organizational problem, referred to as “episodic learning” is more impactful. For these
85 Action Projects, the College will employ episodic learning techniques to ensure that the plans are
86 efficiently and effectively implemented and that stated goals are realized in a shorter span of

time. In the case of the two Action Projects, teams of college personnel will identify problems and actively engage in facilitated activities designed to improve performance in a specifically identified area. The expectation is that positive changes, with measurable outcomes, will take place as a result of each “learning episode” and lead to fundamental change with long lasting impact.

Further, the College will employ two examples of effective, group-based organizational strategies: the “community of practice” (Wenger and Snyder, 2000) and the concept of “networked improvement communities” (Bryk et al., 2015). *Communities of practice* are typically small groups within larger organizations that congregate due to “expertise and passion” (Wenger and Snyder, 2000, p. 139) in a particular area, such as issues related to retention and transfer of students, and meet on a regular basis over an extended period of time. Those who engage in communities of practice “share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems” (p. 140). *Networked improvement communities* (NICs) unite “the conceptual and analytic discipline of improvement science with the power of networked communities to innovate and learn together” (Bryk et al., p.7). Both of these approaches will be studied and considered as mechanisms for the implementation of the Action Projects to bring about effective, targeted, and significant organizational learning which will make dramatic contributions to student achievement, institutional effectiveness, and continuous quality improvement at Santa Monica College.

Integrated Student Equity and Success Plan

Since the last accreditation self-evaluation the College has participated in or implemented numerous statewide mandates and initiatives such as the Basic Skills Initiative, SSSP, Student Equity, Senate Bill 1440 and 440, and the Strong Workforce Task Force recommendations. The College has also utilized federal, state, and private funding to launch several new programs and services, including the Center for Teaching Excellence, the Science and Research Initiative/STEM Scholars Program, Guardian Scholars, a collaborative pathways grant in Career Technical Education, the GRIT strategic initiative, embedded tutoring, MyEdPlan, an auto-award program for earned degrees and certificates, and many more. While each of the student success-oriented programs and initiatives make important contributions to student success and institutional effectiveness, to some extent they operate in silos—in parallel to one another rather than in an integrated fashion. As more and more such efforts have been initiated over the past several years (and in anticipation of more in the future), it became clear that the College would have a more profound impact on student success if these efforts were better coordinated.

As a result of the annual planning cycle and the accreditation self-evaluation process, the Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs, Enrollment Development, and Student Affairs convened a group of faculty, staff and administrators from across the institution to explore the notion of creating an *integrated* student equity and success plan that would leverage the best practices and achievements of the many student success efforts and programs across campus as well as the human and fiscal resources dedicated to them. The anticipated outcome of this effort is twofold. First, the College seeks to impact as many students as possible to improve student achievement. Second, the College is committed to engaging in a redesign of academic programs and student support services in order to create clear, guided pathways for students. To launch the campus conversation, the group read Redesigning America’s Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to

Student Success by Bailey, Jagers, and Jenkins (2015). The authors write, “The guided pathways approach to redesign starts with the students’ end goals in mind, and then rethinks and redesigns programs and support services to enable students to achieve those goals.”

Using Redesigning America’s Community Colleges (Bailey et al, 2015) as a starting point, college members will evaluate current college practices, initiatives, and academic pathways under four broad categories: intake and student supports, developmental education, program structure, and instruction and instructional support. Bailey et al assert that these “four components... are consistently characterized by a lack of interaction and alignment toward students’ end goals” (p. 15). An initial listing of campus efforts by category is included in Table 2 below. In contrast, high performing organizations, “implement their ‘core functions’ in a coordinated, complementary fashion that is aligned with organizational goals” (p. 15). To initiate this work, the members of a newly formed “community of practice” at Santa Monica College will work together to create a cross-walk table of the many student success efforts which will include the goals, objectives, and indicators that serve as evidence of success, as well as recent data reflecting outcomes. The Student Learning Outcomes of each student support service will be analyzed to categorize both what is held in common as well as what is unique. Also included in the cross walk will be the ways in which each of these supports the mission, vision, goals, institutional learning outcomes, and Master Plan for Education at the College. Through this exercise the commonalities and potential for integration across programs will be identified and prioritized.

Table 2. Current Student Success Efforts by Category

Intake and Student Supports	Developmental Education	Program Structure	Instruction and Instructional Support
Student Equity Plan projects	Student Equity Plan projects	Student Equity plan projects	Student Equity Plan projects
SSSP	Basic Skills Initiative	Center for Teaching Excellence	Analysis and review of the Learning Resource Centers
Outreach	Basic Skills Innovation and Transformation grant	STEM/SRI	Center for Teaching Excellence
Counseling	Center for Teaching Excellence	Career Pathways Advisory Committee	Supplemental Instruction and embedded tutoring
Special programs for target populations, e.g. Veteran’s Resource Center, Guardian Scholars, Adelante	Supplemental Instruction and embedded tutoring	Career Pathways Trust, “LAHITECH” collaborative grant	STEM/SRI
Financial Aid	STEM/SRI	Adult Education Block Grant	Open Educational Resource initiative
Psychological and Health services; related grants	“Multiple measures” assessment; Common Assessment	Associate Degrees for Transfer and Course-ID (SB 1440)	
“Back to Success”		Curriculum-related	

Intake and Student Supports	Developmental Education	Program Structure	Instruction and Instructional Support
follow up workshops		grants	
"Success Navigator" partnership with ETS			

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152 The implementation of this Action Project has been conceptualized as follows.

153 *Responsible parties:* Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Enrollment Development, Faculty
 154 Leadership, Student Equity Committee members, Student Success Committee members, Student
 155 Instructional Support committee members, Curriculum Committee members, Basic Skills
 156 Initiative members, grant leaders, Career Pathways Advisory Committee members, College
 157 Resource development team

158 *Phase I—Identification (2016-17)*

- 159 • Form a community of practice made up of experts from across the College. Form
 160 subcommittees around categories of inquiry. Establish regular meeting schedule(s).
- 161 • Engage in professional development related to curricular pathway development.
 162 Capitalize on the work of the LA HITECH grant, Career Technical Education committee,
 163 and Career Pathways Advisory Committee related to pathway development in
 164 Information, Communication, Technology, and Entrepreneurship (ICTE) disciplines.
- 165 • Present pathway development to the instructional Department Chairs, Curriculum
 166 Committee. Ask representatives to communicate with their respective departments.
- 167 • Create cross-walk table of the goals, objectives, indicators, and outcomes data for
 168 programs and projects across campus to identify commonalities and opportunities for
 169 collaboration and innovation.
- 170 • Review Student Learning Outcomes and related assessment data for all programs.
- 171 • Identify and evaluate the financial resources for each related program/area/department.
- 172 • Research best practices in the field which support integration and redesign focused on
 173 clear pathways for students.
- 174 • Present findings to the District Planning and Advisory Council, Institutional
 175 Effectiveness Committee, and other campus groups each semester.
- 176 • Seek opportunities to incorporate the Action Project with the strategic planning process
 177 Fall 2016.

178

179 *Phase II—Planning (2017-18)*

- 180 • Begin planning for redesign based on Phase I results.
- 181 • Develop timeline, benchmarks, responsible parties and anticipated outcomes as dictated
 182 by the plan for redesign.
- 183 • Identify existing fiscal resources as well as opportunities for resource development in
 184 support of the plan for redesign.
- 185 • Develop an annual assessment plan for the Action Project.
- 186 • Identify Key Performance Indicators reflecting observable and measurable outcomes to
 187 be incorporated in the annual Institutional Effectiveness report, Student Success

- 188 Scorecard, and Student Equity Plan related to the integrated student equity and success
189 plan.
- 190 • Develop and implement communication and training strategies for the college community
191 for the effective adoption of redesign plan.
 - 192 • Propose an annual objective for the Master Plan for Education update related to the
193 implementation of the redesign plan.
- 194

195 *Phase III—Implementation (2018-19, ongoing)*

- 196 • Implement redesign plan.
 - 197 • Continue communication and training strategies for the college community to ensure
198 effective adoption and implementation of the plan.
 - 199 • Evaluate solutions semi-annually through Key Performance Indicators, relevant data, as
200 well as outcomes data.
 - 201 • Report regularly to the District Planning and Advisory Council and relevant college
202 committees.
- 203

204 *Phase IV—Monitor Performance (ongoing)*

205 *Phase V—Evaluate and Refine (ongoing)*

206

207 **Transformative Technology Planning**

208 The purpose of this Action Project is in alignment with the findings of the self-evaluation as well
209 as the Technology Planning Committee’s vision statement, adopted by the District Planning and
210 Advisory Council in April 2015 to prioritize the effective use of technology in support of student
211 success, institutional effectiveness, and continuous quality improvement. The vision statement
212 reads as follows:

213 The technological transformation underway compels SMC to cultivate a college
214 culture that empowers its faculty and staff and prepares its students to master the
215 skills, knowledge and abilities required to excel in the digital world. The effective
216 use of technology is a priority in every function that the college performs and is
217 an essential aspect of all current and future improvements to the college.

218 Santa Monica College cultivates a college culture that is responsive to this rapid
219 transformation. SMC should be a leader and innovator for technology at the
220 community college level. The college is committed to being a forward thinking
221 leader, to inform planning how technology will improve the institution, and to
222 make institutional decisions based on these technology needs

223 The Technology Planning Committee operationalized this vision statement in Spring 2016 with
224 recommendations to the District Planning and Advisory Council which included the following:

- Promote a wider campus awareness of the transformational potential of technology.
- Promote greater mobile availability.
- Promote greater access to “Single Sign On” services for faculty, staff and students.
- Promote digitization, organization, distribution and archiving of learning on campus.
- Promote improved college-wide technology infrastructure.
- Promote Accessible Digital Educational Resources.

Using this vision statement and recommendations as a guide, a Networked Improvement Community (NIC) will be established to identify technology needs and solutions as well as opportunities for growth and innovation. Special attention will be paid to the alignment of systems such that the impact may be maximized. The areas identified will be prioritized and plans to address the needs will be developed. Current technology solutions in place will be evaluated and assessed. Key performance indicators related to technology adoption and implementation at the College will be considered for the annual Institutional Effectiveness report. The new solutions will be implemented and subsequently evaluated on a regular basis to assess effectiveness and impact.

At every step the opportunities for integration of technology solutions will be examined. An exemplar of the type of alignment and effectiveness that might result from this Action Project is MyEdPlan. MyEdPlan was created in direct response to the requirement that all students have an educational plan in place as part of the SSSP statewide initiative. Those on campus charged with responding to the Student Success act requirements identified the need for a technological solution to this problem in order to provide high quality, accurate, real-time information to students that would facilitate achievement of their academic goals. The tool was developed in-house with a group made up of individuals from each of the functional areas involved in the solution—Management Information Services, Enrollment Development, and Counseling. MyEdPlan is integrated with the student information system such that it is connected to degree audit and reflects all of the current degree, certificate, general education requirements, and prerequisite information date stamped for each catalog year. Future plans include connecting the system to ASSIST (the official repository of articulation for California’s Public colleges and universities) so that all transfer information reflects accurate, real time data as well.

The counter example is the adoption of CurricUNET. CurricUNET is an online curriculum system adopted widely across the California Community Colleges. The College adopted it based upon a 2010 accreditation recommendation. This platform operates in parallel to the student information system (ISIS) rather than in concert with it such that there are redundancies. Student Learning Outcomes must be updated both in ISIS and in CurricUNET as do the course description, prerequisites, and other critical course information. While this situation does not create real barriers to curriculum development and revision, it does create redundancies for which there should be a technological solution that would streamline these processes and ensure accuracy.

Technological solutions exist for many of the areas in which the College seeks to improve in terms of both effectiveness and efficiency. However, jumping to quick solutions without

systematic and intentional review can lead to unintended consequences and lack of integration and alignment between systems. A metaphor might be the comparison of a hastily formed pile of bricks versus a constructed wall. Both create a barrier, but one is more effective than the other in that the bricks are laid together in an integrated and systematic fashion such that they work together to solve a problem. A pile of bricks contains the same elements for the solution but is much less effective.

Anticipated outcomes for this Action Project include:

- Evaluate high-speed connectivity across all district campuses.
- Develop guidelines for “bring your own device” and best practices recommendations to address related security issues, support, and recommended devices.
- Provide services that accommodate the increasing use of mobile devices by students, faculty, and staff
- Create a list of easily integrated services and a plan for their integration such as additional faculty tasks as links in mProfessor (faculty) and Corsair Connect (students) for ease and efficiency of use.
- Retrofit one or more classrooms for filming, recording and lecture capture.
- Develop a searchable archive of digital content and editing for ease of use by faculty, students and the larger community.
- Identify outdated systems and create a plan to include costs and timelines for improvements.
- Improve resources for universal design for instruction to improve accessibility for all students.

The implementation of this Action Project has been conceptualized as follows.

Phase I—Identification (2016-17)

Responsible Parties: Users; Information Technology leadership in consultation with Technology Planning sub-committee, Purchasing

- Begin to identify areas in which the department, project, or program is seeking a technological solution to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and service to students. Review Information Technology and Technology Planning subcommittee objectives and goals.
- Catalog existing technology solutions already implemented on campus, including “off the shelf” software packages and internally developed solutions.
- Present findings to relevant campus groups including the Technology Planning sub-committee of the District Planning and Advisory Council.

Phase II—Evaluation and Assessment (2017-18)

Responsible Parties: Information Technology leadership, Institutional Research, users and user groups on campus

- 305 • Continue to identify areas in which the department, project, or program is seeking a
- 306 technological solution to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and service to students.
- 307 • Evaluate and assess current solutions.
- 308 • Evaluate whether current solutions could be leveraged to address needs.
- 309 • Develop plans to address identified needs.
- 310 • Determine resource allocations as well as opportunities for resource development to meet
- 311 identified needs.
- 312 • Develop an annual assessment plan for the Action Project.
- 313 • Consider Key Performance Indicators related to technology for the annual Institutional
- 314 Effectiveness Report in alignment with the Action Plan.
- 315

316 *Phase III—Implementation (2018 and ongoing)*

317 *Responsible Parties:* Information Technology leadership; Institutional Research

- 318 • Implement solutions.
- 319 • Evaluate solutions semi-annually through Key Performance Indicators, relevant data, as
- 320 well as user feedback.
- 321

322 *Phase IV—Monitor Performance (ongoing)*

323 *Phase V—Evaluate and Refine (ongoing)*

324

325 As stated above, each of the Action Projects will be presented to the strategic planning
326 subcommittee of the District Planning and Advisory committee for consideration as part of the
327 next five-year strategic plan. In addition, each project team will be required to identify Key
328 Performance Indicators for the annual Institutional Effectiveness report in order to ensure
329 ongoing evaluation of the projects. Each Action Project will also develop an assessment plan and
330 produce reports for the District Planning and Advisory Council annually.

331 The Santa Monica College community is ready to engage in and prioritize the Integrated Student
332 Equity and Success plan and the Transformative Technology Planning initiative. These action
333 projects address the findings and plans of the self-evaluation report, enhance the institution's
334 ability to fulfill the mission, and will have a significant and positive impact on academic quality
335 and institutional effectiveness.

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