EXTENDING OUR STRENGTHS

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Accountability Reporting in the Community College Annual Report 2008-09
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Purpose
The purpose of this narrative is to briefly demonstrate how ARCC functions as a mechanism to drive change and improvement at SMC. In particular, this narrative describes the ways in which ARCC has: 1) shaped activities that better inform institutional understanding of SMC students; 2) created opportunities for dialogue on topics related to student success and learning; and 3) contributed to new understandings that are reflected in institutional priorities and activities.

The narrative begins with a brief description of ARCC, its measures, and a synopsis of the ARCC 2008-09 institutional self-assessment. The synopsis of ARCC contained in this narrative describes two areas, basic skills and vocational education, in more detail because they have been identified by the college as requiring deeper reflection and analysis. The narrative concludes with a summary of SMC’s local response to the ARCC report and planned institutional activities.

ARCC Overview and Measures
Accountability Reporting in the Community Colleges (ARCC) contains seven measures of student progress and achievement as they relate to the broad mission of the California Community Colleges to support transfer, degree and certificate completion, and basic skills. The measures developed for ARCC reflect a refinement of some of the measures from previous accountability initiatives, such as the Partnership for Excellence (PFE), as well as an expansive consultation process with education scholars and community college practitioners from the field.

It should also be noted that the measures developed for the ARCC system rely on a data collection and reporting process already in place in the California Community Colleges, specifically the Chancellor’s Office Management Information System (COMIS). As such, the measures developed for ARCC from the COMIS provide a useful starting point for discussions about state and local performance; however, they are limited in terms of providing meaningful understanding of performance at the local level. To the extent that resources are available, meaningful understanding of performance and improvement at the local level requires that local institutions engage in supplemental data collection, analyses, and dialogue -- a process which began at SMC during 2007-08.

Since the pilot year (2007-08), there have been many colleges that have reported issues with ARCC data. One significant issue has been the coding of classes. This issue is significant because several ARCC measures (e.g. those related to basic skills, ESL, and vocational education) are defined in ways that rely on course coding schemes at the local level. For these measures, course coding schemes determine whether or not student enrollments in a particular course are counted for the purpose of ARCC. For example, when examining fluctuations between the 2007 and 2008 ARCC
reports in the basic skills measures, SMC identified a course coding issue with its COMIS data. Specifically, data supplied for ARCC measures by SMC for the pilot year (2007) did not capture all of the basic skills courses offered by the college. This coding error was corrected by SMC during the statewide Curriculum Reporting in the Community Colleges (CRCC) project. Because of this correction, it is likely that the 2008 ARCC report represents a more accurate picture of college performance.

It is important to understand that ARCC has illuminated weaknesses in the COMIS reporting mechanism. Through COMIS, data are collected at the local level and then aggregated at the state level. COMIS then, reflects the multiplicity of ways that colleges at the local level respond to their student populations, deliver services, and report their activities. In creating ARCC as a measurement system, the Chancellor’s Office recognized the inaccuracies present in COMIS data, particularly course coding data, and the imperative created by ARCC to standardize definitions and reporting. CRCC can be viewed as the first effort by the Chancellor’s Office to standardize reporting through COMIS and develop data at the state level that is valid and reliable. At this time, the Chancellor’s Office does not report on the reliability of the data that forms the basis of the ARCC performance measurement system.

Finally, ARCC is intended to provide indicators of system level performance not only to legislators and policy makers but to the general public as well. Consequently, the full report for the system (http://www.cccco.edu/Portals/4/TRIS/research/ARCC/arcc_2008_final.pdf) and a shorter report, which can be customized to include only Santa Monica College performance (https://misweb.cccco.edu/arcc_reports/seldist.aspx), are available online at the California Community College website. Appendix A also contains an excerpt from the SMC ARCC customized report that is readily accessible online at the web site referenced above.

The legislation for Accountability Reporting in the Community Colleges (ARCC) requires that a college’s local Board of Trustees annually review the college’s ARCC report. No action is required by the Board; this narrative, and the selection of material contained in Appendix A, fulfills this legislative requirement.

**Synopsis of 2008-09 ARCC Local Assessment**

Local performance is best understood in three ways. First, it represents an individual college’s contribution to the entire system’s performance. Second, local performance functions as a diagnostic tool by enabling colleges to understand their performance and engage in dialogue about program quality and opportunities for improvement. Finally, local performance is also understood within the context of local conditions. That is to say, contextual factors such as reductions or expansions of scheduled offerings (e.g. SMC’s significant reduction in course offerings during the 2003-2004 academic year) can and do have an effect on local performance measures over time.

In an effort to facilitate understanding of the ARCC data, the Chancellor’s Office has developed peer college groupings for each of the ARCC measures. Theoretically, the groupings cluster colleges together that are more alike than different in terms of environmental characteristics demonstrated to have a statistically significant effect in predicting each of the outcome measures. As a result, peer
groups vary by measure and may not conform to a college’s perception of its peers geographically or historically. It is important to note, that the Chancellor’s Office did not intend for the peer groupings to be used as a ranking system among the colleges. (Appendix A of this report contains all of the local measures as well as SMC’s 2008 response to the local measures). It is also important to note that the peer groupings for SMC from 2007 and 2008 experienced fluctuation; i.e. the peer groups for each of the measures are different between the two reports. At this time it is unclear why these fluctuations were observed since the Chancellor’s Office does not report on the reliability or stability of its statistical models for the peer groups.

The 2008-09 ARCC report shows that Santa Monica College demonstrates above average performance in relation to its peers on five of the seven college performance indicators. These indicators include: the student progress and achievement rate, the percent of students earning 30 units, the fall to fall persistence rate, and the improvement rates for basic skills and ESL courses. Additionally, the college exhibits improved performance over the baseline year in the student progress and achievement rates and the percent of students earning at least 30 units (see Appendix A).

SMC attributes its performance on these measures to its tradition of integrating student support services with instruction; a well-established practice at SMC and one that is grounded in empirical research. Consistent with the established body of scholarship in this area, above average progress and achievement rates of SMC students can, in part, be attributed to the resources SMC invests in high quality instructional support programs and the implementation of innovative and effective student services programs.

Overall, college performance over the period and in relation to its peers is good; however, the successful course completion rates in vocational education and basic skills warrant further institutional reflection and analysis. In these areas the college performs below the peer group average as well as exhibits decreased performance over the baseline year (see Appendix A for detail).

Creating Meaning: Local Responses and Future Activities Institutional Efforts and Activities

To support meaningful understanding within the college community of the vocational and basic skills successful course completion data and trends, the college will continue to engage various campus constituent groups in dialogue. To that end, a series of presentations and activities has been planned for 2008-09. Table 1 presents the schedule of planned presentations, discussions, and activities.

The college has also started the process of supplementing its information resources in an effort to achieve a richer understanding of students and performance. The online application has been revised (as of July 2008) and is now capturing additional information such as first-generation college student status, income, and whether English is the student's first language. A profile of entering students using these new measures will be available during Spring 2009.
Similarly, Institutional Research supports a broad range of committees including the basic skills committee, the vocational education committee, the student learning outcomes committee, and the program review committee. ARCC data has been presented to the Basic Skills Committee and at the Academic Senate. Presenting data to constituent groups ensures that supplemental analyses, required to enrich local understanding, are identified by a broad and diverse audience and can be prioritized for further study and presentation.

Further developed analyses related to matriculation and assessment will also be developed in 2008-09. These studies will provide a more complete picture of the preparation levels of our students and the ways in which preparation affects performance in coursework.

Finally, the draft 2008-09 Master Plan for Education identifies basic skills, vocational education, and research related to student retention and success as institutional priorities.

Vocational education. With regard to vocational education, during 2007-08, the college renewed its focus on revitalizing occupational programs and addressing the needs of vocational students. This process has included efforts to align vocational programs with community needs and provide support services for the students enrolled in those programs.

During 2008-09, the vocational program area will be examining the performance of various student subgroups on the Vocational and Technical Education Act’s (VTEA) Core Measures and beginning discussions of strategies to improve student outcomes and performance on these measures.

Basic skills. In terms of Basic Skills, throughout 2007-08 the college engaged in an institutional assessment and developed an action plan to improve outcomes as part of the Basic Skills Initiative. This included developing baseline data and analyses. The institutional self-assessment and action plan were aligned with empirically-based proven practices for achieving improved student outcomes within developmental education. The assessment and action plan are also aligned with the baseline data. Both the ARCC data and the Basic Skills Baseline data were presented and discussed at the Basic Skills committee in Spring 2008.

More discussions related to data and trends within the basic skills area are planned for 2008-09. An exploration of the benefit of implementing a study of Basic Skills students using the Learning and Study Skills Inventory (LASSI) will also continue; and as previously mentioned, profiles of student preparation levels and the relationship of preparation to course performance will also be developed.

Summary
At SMC, the presentation of ARCC measures as well as data and trends stemming from other accountability initiatives has served as a starting point for engaging the campus community in dialogue about the meaning of the measures and our local efforts to improve outcomes for all students. Discussions about instruction, support services, and the integration of support services and instruction have occurred across the campus. Specifically, these discussions have taken place and
will continue to take place in the vocational education committee, the basic skills committee, the program review committee, the student learning outcomes committee, and the Academic Senate, in addition to others.

At SMC, ARCC can be viewed as a mechanism that drives change and improvement. It has inspired understanding through the development of more in-depth analyses that will assess the effects of programs and services. It has also engaged the college in dialogue about local trends, SMC students, and our programs and services. SMC is committed to continuing the process of understanding and improving student outcomes through the development of supplemental data sources and analyses; the results of which will be used in an ongoing and systematic effort to improve student learning and achievement.
## Table 1. 2008-09 Schedule of Presentations and Activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Date Scheduled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARCC Report</td>
<td>Caroline Sheldon, Dean Institutional Research</td>
<td>Academic Senate, BSI Committee</td>
<td>Fall 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTEA Core Measures</td>
<td>Caroline Sheldon, Dean Institutional Research</td>
<td>Vocational Education Committee</td>
<td>Fall 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Assessment Profile of Entering Students</td>
<td>Caroline Sheldon, Dean Institutional Research &amp; Victor Manchik, Director Matriculation Research</td>
<td>BSI Committee</td>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort Analysis of Under-prepared students progress and achievement</td>
<td>Caroline Sheldon Dean, Institutional Research &amp; Victor Manchik, Director, Matriculation Research</td>
<td>BSI Committee</td>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile of entering students w/ new measures</td>
<td>Caroline Sheldon, Dean, Institutional Research</td>
<td>BSI Committee, Vocational Education Committee, Enrollment Development Team</td>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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