Program Review
Executive Summary
Counseling Department & Transfer Counseling Center
Spring 2013

General Comments
The Counseling Department and the Transfer Counseling Center provide a broad range
of services that address the educational, developmental, psychological, and social
needs of the entire student population. In addition to the Transfer Counseling Center,
twenty two centers, satellite sites, departments and/or programs offer specialized
counseling services. Each specialized program submits a separate program review
report, but all counseling services ultimately fall under the auspices of the Counseling
Department, which provides oversight, coordination, and training for all counselors
regardless of assignment.

Santa Monica College provides an exceptional level of student services with broader
and more in depth counseling services than any other community college in the state.
The numerous support services offered by the Transfer Counseling Center are pivotal to
consistently maintaining the highest transfer rate in the state. It should be noted that
new and first year students are initially directed to the Welcome Center and the primary
focus of the Transfer/Counseling Center is to support students once they have enrolled.
That said, many prospective students seeking information on transfer also visit the
Center, but not all ultimately enroll. It is not clear how many students visit the
Transfer/Counseling Center and also utilize counseling services offered by specialized
and targeted programs.

The Transfer Counseling Center serves around 38,000 students per academic year.
Even with a relatively large counseling staff, during heavy enrollment periods there can
be long waits to see a counselor. Pressure will increase as new state rules regarding
education plan requirements are implemented. One successful mitigating strategy
employed by the Center has been an express counseling service for quick questions.
Once the new Student Services building is completed there will be an opportunity to
review service delivery during peak enrollment periods. With all counseling services
located in the same building it will be easier to synchronize hours and schedule
specialized counseling services to support peak enrollment needs.

The Counseling instructional offering includes several courses. Of these, Counseling 1
(Developing Learning Skills), Counseling 20 (Student Success Seminar), and
Counseling 88A-C (Independent Studies in Mentorship) are coordinated through the
Transfer Counseling Center. Since the last review enrollment in Counseling 20 courses
has increased significantly and now represents the second highest course enrollment at
the college. Other Counseling courses are more specifically focused and therefore are
included in the reviews of the coordinating area (ex, Career Services, International
Education Counseling Center, and DSPS). Since the last review, Counseling
developed an on-line version of Counseling 20 Student Success Seminar which has
proved very popular.
The Counseling department has adopted technology and social media popular with students and views these as effective tools for reaching out to students and providing more accessible support. For example, Counseling now has a Facebook page with relevant, up-to-date information, as well as links to the transfer web page; “e-blasts” have supplanted large mailings to students. On-line counseling is available for students who prefer that method or who can’t get to campus to see a counselor in person.

The range of student success workshops offered is comprehensive and impressive and cover such varied topics as “Stress Management”, “Self-Compassion and Body Image”, “Networking Your Way to a Job Through Social Media”, “Tips of Writing your Personal UC Statement”, “Test Anxiety”, “How to Transfer to Private, Elite Universities”, to name just a few. Application labs offer students direct assistance in completing on-line transfer applications.

With strong support from Information Technology, the Counseling Department has implemented a “record-keeping” program which allows any counselor to access electronic counseling transactions on one screen (course repetitions, educational planning, unit overload approvals, etc.). Counselors can complete transactions and enter accompanying notes within the session thereby making a “counseling history” available. These are significant improvements that are beginning to provide better and more consistent data on which to base discussion around program improvement.

Passage of SB 1456, the Student Success Act of 2012, has significant implications for Counseling – especially with the increased emphasis on educational planning. The College will have to determine the level and type of resources to be directed toward implementation. Technology resources to develop necessary programming for such services as transcript evaluation – more critical than ever for educational planning – as well as adequately functioning computers, printers etc. will be critical to Counseling moving forward. The department has thoughtfully identified and mapped out objectives to address these external mandates.

Budget reductions in recent years reduced academic offerings and therefore enrollment and also counseling hours. Yet the demand for counseling services remained high, in part because SMC was one of the few community colleges to maintain some level of intersession offerings. This places pressure on Counseling to continue to explore new and innovative ways to deliver services as resources will never fully meet demand, especially during peak enrollment periods. Given its track record, the department seems up to the challenges.

Program Evaluation
Counseling submits an annual review to the Vice President of Student Affairs. This has provided another impetus for reflection, goal setting, and program improvement. Another trigger for program improvement comes from students in the form of dilemmas posed or the questioning of practices and policies. The department also holds twice monthly meetings, another venue for suggesting program improvements. Counseling has been very thoughtful and responsive to every issue raised through any and all routes.
The Counseling Department has served as model for development and assessment of SLOs for student support service programs. The department maintains a continuous cycle of creating and assessing both instructional and service SLOs and effectively uses assessment data for program improvement. For example, an overarching goal of Counseling is to teach students self-responsibility and self-advocacy and teaching students specific steps to achieve this is the focus of one SLO. As part of the assessment process, at the end of a counseling session, students are asked to state the action steps they are going to take. This has proven to be a powerful motivator for students.

SLOs have also been developed for each Counseling course and are assessed and modified with the same frequency. Changes made as a result of assessment results include shifting the assessment process from an in-class quiz to a rubric. Student mentors provide Counseling 20 students with peer support for educational planning. As a direct result of assessment results, additional targeted training for the mentors is planned. Counseling 20 instructors collaborate as a group and have modified SLOs as well as teaching strategies and learning resources. These changes all appear to have positively impacted mastery of SLOs.

If proficiency drops below 85% on any assessment measure a review is triggered, generally resulting in modification to the counseling process or relevant course lesson being assessed. Some of the workshops now delivered by Counseling are the direct result of assessment review. The department is able to track the correlation between changes and improvement in assessment results.

In response to recommendations from the previous review, Counseling has completed several longitudinal studies looking at the impact of counseling services on retention, persistence and student success, the effectiveness of the “Back to Success” program for probationary students, the impact of enrollment in Counseling 20, participation in VIP Welcome Day, and the correlation of success to the number of counseling visits. Each activity was shown to significantly increase persistence and student success.

Although the frequency of Counseling Department discussions and review requires an intensive time commitment, the results are impressive and demonstrate departmental commitment to student success. Additional longitudinal studies are planned.
Commendations
The Counseling Department and the Transfer Counseling Center are models for continuous, collaborative engagement aimed at program improvement and are commended for:

1. Serious and continual engagement and efforts of the whole department in the cycle of SLO assessment, evaluation, and program improvement for both instruction and services.
2. Collaboration among staff to respond to problems identified from all sources.
3. Maintaining SMC as the #1 transfer institution in the state.
4. Offering a diversity of student success workshops.
5. Implementing technological solutions such as on-line counseling and social networking.
6. Regular training of all counselors on a wide variety of issues.
7. Commitment to researching effectiveness of counseling programs and strategies.
8. Demonstrated impact of Counseling 20 and Back to Success on persistence and student success.
9. Innovative and collaborative contributions to the STEM initiative.
10. Involvement of counseling faculty in campus, community, and statewide activities.

Recommendations for Program Strengthening
The Counseling Department and the Transfer Counseling Center are ultimately responsible for all counseling services at the college and as such lead the collaborative effort to find innovative strategies and solutions to the demand for services. As the new Student Services building comes closer to being a reality, there will be new opportunities for envisioning service delivery. The committee recommends the department consider the following to further strengthen an already effective program:

1. Explore ways to improve efficiency of service, especially during peak enrollment.
2. Work with MIS to add capacity to existing processes and systems.
3. Investigate the possibility of developing some level of automated transcript evaluation as a first step in the process.
4. Ensure annual objectives are measurable.
5. Consider SB 1456 mandates as a source for longitudinal assessments.
6. Develop strategies for limiting the impact of increased demands generated by technological innovations intended to streamline and improve services and processes.
7. Consider the efficacy of limiting transcript evaluation before enrollment at SMC.

Recommendations for Institutional Support
1. Support the need for additional technology resources to address the mandates of SB 1456.

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