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*At City College of San Francisco, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning champions change by actively disseminating accurate information to the campus community, by asking faculty and staff to reflect on the information and then ask important questions, and by providing leadership and support throughout the planning process. In an environment rich in diversity, communication and trust are promoted when information is made available to everyone. This facilitates the planning process and leads to the development of programs and policies that help create student success.*

# **Research and Planning:**

## ***Educating the Campus Community for Institutional Change and Student Success***

City College of San Francisco (CCSF) is one of the top transfer colleges in the state of California. Measured in absolute numbers, CCSF ranks in the state's top five community colleges; by transfer rates, it ranks highest among urban community college in the state. We would like to believe that the reasons for our success include the quality of instruction and the nature of the academic support system at the college. The support system includes an extensive array of learning assistance programs, student support services, as well as peer support among the students themselves. But do faculty, administrators, and staff really know what contributes to this transfer rate? Do they know which support systems work best? Have they considered whether or not students from different backgrounds have different transfer rates? Can asking and answering these questions make a difference in what we do at the college?

City College is an immense institution offering courses in more than 60 disciplines. Over 30,000 students are enrolled in college credit programs and more than 40,000 students in noncredit ESL and adult education classes. CCSF is virtually everywhere in the city of San Francisco, a relatively small area seven miles

wide and seven miles long. There are nine campuses and over 100 other sites throughout the city where CCSF offers classes and programs throughout the year.

We are not only large, we are diverse, with a strong commitment to recognizing and serving this diversity. Our college application lists 27 ethnic groups from which to choose. Our mission statement includes the following: "Respond to the needs of people from diverse ethnic, cultural, economic and educational backgrounds, sexual orientations, including students with disabilities."

Our size and diversity are assets because of the great array of people, resources, and programs at the college. Yet our large numbers and varied cultures challenge our ability to communicate effectively, to be knowledgeable about and understand each other, and to work together in a unified direction. This challenge led to an organizational crisis in 1990. At that time the college comprised two separate and autonomous instructional divisions—a college credit and an adult noncredit—and a district office that sought to direct both. The college organization combined a tightly controlled central bureaucracy with autonomous and sometimes anarchic program operations making no one happy, especially the faculty. Little cooperation or coordination could be found within the college. The crisis prompted the local governing board to establish a process to restructure the institution. The process lasted five years and resulted in the merger of the two divisions, the downsizing of the college administration, and the beginning of an effort to integrate credit and noncredit courses and programs.

The Office of Research and Planning was established during the reorganization to fill an institutional need for accurate information, systematic research, program evaluation, and college-wide planning. While data collection had gone on before, access to the information was severely limited in the tightly controlled bureaucracy. With information being withheld, whether to keep the populace at bay, to hoard information for power, or because of lack of care or knowledge of how to change it, faculty, staff, and students had a difficult time effectively participating in the governing and planning process.

The new Office of Research and Planning set as one of its goals the democratization of information: to bring accurate information to the whole college so that all who desire can participate in positive changes. The Office of Research and Planning also makes every effort to adapt to the size and complexity of the college as we support all three of our institutional mis-

sions: adult education, career education, and the transfer of students to four-year colleges and universities.

During the last three years, the office has established and continually revised annual agendas in an attempt to meet these broad needs. In the last year, the office reviewed its goals and its progress toward meeting those goals. Based on a series of discussions within the office and information we received from a survey to the campus community, we revised our office's mission statement and our goals in an effort to be better prepared to meet the needs of the college. The following discussion may be useful for colleges that want to better use their institutional research and planning offices to enhance the planning process, including improving their transfer rates.

### **Premises**

The intent of the Office of Research and Planning is to help build a college culture capable of utilizing information and research. We start with the premise that an information-rich environment, containing regular feedback loops to faculty, staff, administrators, and students, engages the college community in reflective discussions. An informed college community helps to create a culture that enhances student success, and ultimately promotes higher levels of student outcomes, including transfer success. Such a culture emphasizes the importance of planning as one of the primary mechanisms to support self-reflection, which in turn requires regular, frequent, and accurate information and research.

### **Information and Research as Feedback**

In a clearly-defined, information-rich environment, relevant information is distributed across the college with more detailed information readily available to anyone who seeks it. This information supports departmental and institutional planning, grant development (which in turn supports change), and program review and evaluation (which in turn also supports change). Available information includes not only measures of efficiency, but also measures of client satisfaction and indicators of overall quality and effectiveness. Standard statewide definitions (e.g., course completion rates, transfer rates) are used for all units so that comparisons with other institutions is easy, and additional specialized measures are developed when appropriate.

Beyond providing information, research seeks to answer targeted questions. In our institutional research office, the goal is not simply to study a

situation or phenomenon; but, in conjunction with the college community, to determine how to alter and improve it. We (as well as many other institutional research offices) see institutional research as an important tool for evaluation and planning.

### Planning as Self-Reflection

Too frequently institutions delay making decisions until there is a crisis situation, at which point the decision becomes forced and cursory. The time frame becomes truncated, allowing little or no involvement from ground-level members of the institution. Often those individuals involved in trying to make the decision must proceed without adequate information and/or research.

We define planning as both a learning process and a decision-making activity. When faculty, staff, administration, and students meet to establish plans, a communication channel opens up. A conscious planning process takes into account both political and institutional considerations rather than relying entirely on immediate suppositions or historical direction. Information and/or research is available that is agreed upon and trusted by the college constituencies. Currently, the college has developed an extensive set of planning processes to address college-wide issues including transfer, workforce education and technology, student equity, and facilities.

### What We Do

The following matrix highlights the functions of the Office of Research and Planning:

	<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Reflection</b>
College-wide Activities	College atlas transfer reports Student success reports College graduation reports College-wide research projects	Strategic plan Long-range master plan Education technology plan Student equity plan Transfer function plan Workforce education plan
College Unit/Dept. Activities	Research projects Student satisfaction survey reports Program review databooks	Program review

## Planning

The Office of Research and Planning plays a somewhat unusual role among community colleges in California. Only a handful of offices like ours have been given the authority to promote college-wide planning initiatives and even fewer devote much time to the practice of planning. A recent survey by the research and planning professional association for California's community colleges (the RP Group) indicates that institutional research and planning offices allocate less than 10% of their time on average to planning. CCSF's office spent more than 60% of its staff time to planning during the 1995-96 academic year.

The Office of Research and Planning oversees two types of planning activities. The first type is institution-wide planning; the second focuses upon departmental and program review and planning. In both cases, our office provides information as well as daily assistance in a range of research and planning activities, from helping someone set up a database or a questionnaire for their own research to coaching a department chair through the program review process.

Institution-wide planning is supported by seven major planning initiatives developed by faculty, staff, students, and administrators, and approved by the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees. These plans include an institutional strategic plan and plans for facilities, technology, workforce education, affirmative action, student equity, and improving transfer. The Office of Research and Planning contributes to and coordinates the development of these plans as well as providing support to implement the plans and assessing any outcomes. Whenever possible, we provide information and research at all levels of the planning process, including assistance in identifying grant funds as well as support in developing and writing grant proposals that help make plans become reality.

The second type of planning activity occurs through the program review process that all college units must undergo every three years. There are over 100 instructional departments, programs, student service and administrative units within the college. Program review includes a self-assessment of the prior three years' activities and current activities based upon both quantitative and qualitative indicators. It also includes the development of a plan for the next three years.

Although each unit receives a standardized set of information for the self-assessment, departments take a variety of approaches to using the data. Program review and the required planning activity give the units an opportunity to review, define and refine their missions and develop an appropriate approach to planning for the future. The resultant focus differs for each department and college unit. Program review and planning provides faculty with

an opportunity to address a series of critical issues facing their department including staffing, equipment, facilities upgrades, and program expansion or contraction.

### **Research**

Research projects support our objective of providing feedback to the regular college and individual departments. At the institutional level, we provide regular reporting to faculty, staff, administrators, and students on the status of our students who transfer to four-year colleges and universities. The report includes the number of CCSF students who are admitted each fall to the university systems in California, as well as how many of those students actually enroll. The report also gives an account of how CCSF compares to other community colleges in California in transferring Hispanic/Latino and African-American students to the University of California and California State University systems.

Recent college-wide research focuses on our matriculation process, assessing the impact of specific matriculation components upon students' progress through the college. We also conduct research projects in collaboration with college departments such as researching retention and persistence of students in some of our "gateway" departments—mathematics, English, and ESL, programs required for transfer to four-year institutions.

### **Information**

Our office provides college faculty, staff, and administration with two types of information. The first comes from extensive surveys conducted by programs, departments, and administrative units to assess student satisfaction with instructional and student support services, and user—that is, faculty, staff, administrator, and student—ratings of other college administrative services.

The second type of information is derived from data in our college mainframe, including enrollments, staffing, student grades, and progress through a curriculum sequence. Information of this type is compiled annually and distributed to the faculty, staff, and administrators in the form of an atlas that contains information and data on nineteen different indicators of institutional effectiveness required by the state. We also include "local indicators" in the atlas that are of particular relevance to our college, such as faculty adoption of technology and the campus climate.

The institutional effectiveness categories assess students' access to the college, their success while in the college, their satisfaction with the college's services, staffing, and fiscal data about the college. The atlas gives the entire college community a framework through which annual updates can be posted to compare with prior years.

One important aspect of the atlas is the regular reporting on the college's transfer function. We publicize the total number of students transferring to the California State University and the University of California, and we also report our transfer rate as calculated by the UCLA Higher Education Center. Thus far, transfer information contained in the atlas has been incorporated into several of the college-wide planning initiatives. We intend to add an additional section in the atlas that reports on student transfers to private colleges within the state as well as transfers to out-of-state schools.

The atlas also integrates information and data from college departments and units undergoing program review and evaluation. Student satisfaction ratings and other measures of user satisfaction are published in the atlas for all college units—instructional, student service, and administrative.

We also provide information to support college-wide planning efforts. Since the planning and research functions are combined into one office, we can usually anticipate what planning data will be needed. Two such planning efforts that relate to transfer include a Student Equity Plan and the creation of a Transfer Task Force that is currently developing a plan. In both instances, a researcher participates in the meetings and also provides the necessary information to develop a plan.

The Student Equity Plan is a report focusing on improving the following performance indicators established by the state for community colleges: access, course completion, campus climate, degree and certificate completion, ESL and basic skills completion, and transfer rates. During the development of the plan, our office provided data on the performance indicators, and helped interpret the data to the Student Equity committee. The researcher from our office who served on the committee brought knowledge of state-wide student equity efforts through her contact with other institutional research offices, thus providing valuable assistance in creating action plans to improve the performance of all indicators. Currently, the atlas provides an annual report of how well the college is doing on the student equity performance indicators so that the committee can make adjustments to the action plans accordingly.

## **The Transfer Task Force Plan: An Example of Feedback and Self-Reflection**

A Transfer Task Force was convened in the Fall 1995 term to improve transfer numbers at CCSF. Although our transfer numbers are high, we found that the numbers of African American and Hispanic/Latino students who transfer, particularly to the University of California system, is low. These numbers are published annually in the atlas and were also highlighted in a transfer report produced by our office. In response to the publication of these numbers, the college created a task force with a mission to produce a plan within a year.

The Transfer Task Force is currently developing a plan that will help create a college culture that supports transfer and increases the number of students who transfer to four-year institutions, especially for students from underrepresented groups. A researcher from the office is a member of the committee and furnishes additional transfer data as needed. The researcher also provides the committee with a link between the transfer plan and other planning efforts at the college so that efforts that improve the transfer function are not duplicated across planning initiatives. The research is able to steer the committee towards proposed research activities that are feasible for the office to complete, and also updates the committee on transfer projects and studies conducted by institutional research offices in the state.

The plan is divided into four sections: campus administration, academic programs, retention and student support services, and access and outreach. Each section identifies issues that hinder the transfer goal and outlines objectives and action plan activities to address these issues. The plan is currently in a final draft stage, and we should begin implementing the action plans as early as the upcoming fall term.

### **What We Have Found and Where We Are Headed**

After three years of aggressive pursuit of our objectives of providing feedback to all parts of the college community and enhancing institutional self-reflection among faculty, staff, administrators, and students, we believe we have made progress, but there remains the major constraint of the size and complexity of the college. The reform and restructuring of the college into one integrated unit has been a good first step, but we are now confronted with the task of establishing both a centralized and a local set of research and planning functions if we expect to achieve our goals. Our office currently

functions with a director, three researchers, one and one-half staff members dedicated to grant coordination, one office support staff member, and two student assistants. In a college our size, this number of staff members is not sufficient to accomplish the job we want done, and we are always looking for ways to increase our capacity.

We have yet to solve the problem of establishing effective channels through which the 2,500 faculty and staff can access basic information and regular reports. We need to provide information and reports that are understandable and useful to the rank and file faculty member and staff person. Once this is accomplished, our office staff will be able to shift from responding to basic information requests such as current enrollments, and size of staff and budget to work on more complex research and reports that will support the college's efforts to improve its transfer function.

To enlarge the capacity of our research and planning office, we are taking a new approach to encouraging feedback and self-reflection through a grant-funded project that we call the Decision Support System. We intend to build a grassroots network of information and research centers throughout the college in each of the seven instructional schools, as well as in the student services division. These centers will provide a permanent linkage between the college's main database system and faculty, staff, and administrators. Each center will have specially trained faculty and staff who will be able to access a variety of online reports on such topics as student demographics, budget and financial information, staffing and student outcomes (i.e., job placement), completion an graduate rates, and transfer success.

In this way we hope that more department chairs, other faculty, and administrators will become comfortable using information to do their own research. We suspect that once there is sufficient information available, many misconceptions will be cleared up, and faculty will generate interesting research questions. Once faculty understand, for instance, that many students are failing a particular course, and that pattern recurs semester to semester, they will want to find out why it is happening and what we can do to change it.

The college's efforts to strengthen its transfer function will also receive a boost. The research and planning staff will dedicate more time to studies and research projects related to our transfer programs, and faculty will have more frequent reports on the status of students seeking to transfer to four-year institutions.

We hope to see the Decision Support System phased into the college operations beginning in the 1996-97 academic year with a completion date in the year 2000. In an institution as large and diverse as City College of San Francisco, we must work towards providing accurate information, in-depth reflection, and effective planning. While we have not yet solved our problem of increasing transfer rates to the University of California for African-American and Hispanic/Latino students, we are working together to make changes.

We have seen the power of accurate information at work. We have learned that the Office of Institutional Research and Planning can have a great positive influence on the entire college. We have demonstrated to faculty, staff, administrators, and students how asking and answering questions through research will support their endeavors. While many more questions will be posed and answered, in the long run we believe our efforts will lead to increased student success—including our current desire to improve transfer rates.