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Dear Colleagues,

As faculty across the state review the recommendations of the California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force (SSTF), we are receiving many questions, hearing numerous concerns, and making note of the themes that are emerging. Many of the questions pertain to what faculty should be doing locally and what impact the vetting will have on the final recommendations. We have been encouraging all faculty to visit <http://studentsuccess.ideascale.com/> to provide feedback and to attend the SSTF presentations. While the majority of these presentations have not been open to the public because they were at events that required registration to attend, at least four have now been scheduled that will be open. For a complete list of all presentations, as well as other SSTF-related documents, please see <http://www.asccc.org/1143>. These presentations provide an opportunity for SSTF members and/or Chancellor's Office staff to respond to your questions and hear any concerns you may have. The Chancellor's Office has been emphatic regarding the full consideration of the feedback provided. However, some of the communications regarding input appear to have been misleading, suggesting that the final date for consideration of feedback by the SSTF would be November 9, 2011. At the most recent meeting of the Consultation Council, a Vice Chancellor rejected the concerns about the timeline for input that were shared and stated that the SSTF would add additional meetings, should they not have sufficient time to review the feedback.

The concerns emerging as faculty read the recommendations are many. Due to the number of recommendations, the length of the document, and the interaction of the "chapters," developing a complete understanding of the vision of the SSTF is complicated. Some components are easy to support in concept but harder to envision in practice. This is why your input, as practitioners in the field, is so critical. For example, recommendation 2.2 proposes that we "Require students to participate in diagnostic assessment, orientation, and the development of an educational plan," and 3.3 would have the colleges "Require students to begin addressing Basic Skills deficiencies in their first year." No one would suggest that these are not laudable goals. Presently, we are required to provide the services delineated in 2.2 "*if funding is provided for that purpose*" (emphasis added, page 23 of the SSTF recommendations). And shifting course offerings to provide more basic skills instruction is a necessary component of the implementation of any new prerequisites under the recently revised regulations, a process that many colleges have been considering as they seek to increase student success through the use of appropriate prerequisites. Achieving the goals stated by the SSTF will likely require more complex consideration and strategies than is acknowledged in the recommendations.

In general, the recommendations appear to be based on presumptions about our student population that are not consistent with our experiences of who our students are and what they need. While the vision of the SSTF may be that technology will enable some students to bypass matriculation services or complete such services online, the proposed recommendations fail to demonstrate how such an approach would yield positive outcomes and enable the provision of more services: indeed, some recommendations seem to directly belie the utility of this vision. Recommendation 3.3 would require financial aid staff to spend time demonstrating the value of being full-time to all students and 2.5 proposes "interventions" should a student fail to declare a program of study in the allotted time.

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Other details of the recommendations, from the use of “priority registration” as a means of rationing courses to the cessation of state funding for non-CDCP (career development or college preparatory) noncredit classes and courses outside of a student’s educational plan, raise many additional issues in the minds of faculty. Can linking course offerings to student educational plans result in a better alignment of college offerings and student needs when the two activities are temporally incongruous? What impact would modifying the criteria for receiving a Board of Governors (BOG) waiver have on our students? Does working more like a system require a stronger Chancellor’s Office, and how does that facilitate student success? These are just a few of the questions we have heard from faculty.

In order to give the reader an idea of what we are hearing across the state, in addition to the points already made, I offer you the enclosed “themes” and questions. The themes (reactions, emerging issues, and concerns) reflect what we are hearing. The questions are for the Chancellor’s Office and the SSTF, noting problematic elements of the recommendations absent judgment of the draft recommendations. The enclosed list is by no means exhaustive. Hopefully you will see many of your concerns captured here – or find yourself compelled to learn more after learning of the views of your colleagues.

I look forward to exploring these topics with you fully at our upcoming Fall Plenary and appreciate your help in formulating a thoughtful, effective response to the SSTF recommendations.

Regards,



Michelle Pilati, Ph.D.
President

MP

Enclosure

SSTF Recommendations – Reactions, Emerging Issues, and Concerns

1. The recommendations give the impression that community colleges are completely broken and failing. We know this is incorrect, and at the same time we know we can make improvements.
2. The recommendations are focused on a hypothetical student that is not our typical CCC student. The “traditional” CCC student is a “nontraditional” student.
3. The presumption that technology can free up counseling faculty for the students that really need them is flawed – and the recommendations increase the burden placed on counseling and student services more generally without an accompanying recommendation to also increase the number of counselors at the colleges.
4. Certain terms appear to lack clear definition, and these same terms are used almost interchangeably – i.e., program of study and educational plan.
5. The matriculation requirements, which have been in place for 20 years, align with the SSTF recommendations of today. Yet no additional funding for these tasks is identified (while funding for matriculation has been slashed) and more mandates and requirements in matriculation appear to be the solution to many of the challenges to student success.
6. The need for more full time instructional and counseling faculty is not addressed in the recommendations. There are documented benefits of having full-time faculty and it is full-time faculty who would be responsible for implementing the proposed “alternatives to basic skills curriculum”. And the proposed increased demand on matriculation services would necessitate the hiring of more counseling faculty.
7. A system priority for some time has been the need to close the achievement gap, yet the recommendations do not address this issue specifically.
8. The system office “reform” imbedded in the student success recommendations is misplaced. What is the relationship between the Chancellor’s Office and student success?
9. Career technical education (CTE), as part of the mission, is largely absent in the recommendations.
10. The recommendations presume that every course that a student takes is a required course; they ignore the additional units that are commonly needed as electives for degree completion. How do these factor into the educational plan as the means of guiding all offerings?

Questions for the Chancellor’s Office and the SSTF

1. How can educational plans be used to drive schedules when the timing of educational plans and the development of schedules are not aligned?
2. Why have categorical programs that receive matching federal dollars been included in the categoricals to be consolidate? This suggests an intent to cease those categorical programs – an intent that should be explicitly stated and justified.
3. How is it cost-effective to implement an interim assessment before a diagnostic one is developed? Wouldn’t a more logical approach be to wait and implement the more desirable diagnostic option? Is the intent really to have a diagnostic assessment or just to have any required statewide assessment?
4. As written, CTE is largely ignored in the recommendations. The CCC, for example, does not appear to be viewed as a place for job retraining. Would a student needing one or two courses for career advancement not be able to do this on state support? Or would such a student be required to go through all matriculation services and tax the college’s resources just to be able to take one or two courses on the state’s dollar?
5. Chapters 5 and 8 propose different uses for basic skills funds. If these dollars are to be redirected, how will they be used?
6. While recommendation 8.4 indicates that outcome-based funding is not to be a recommendation, 7.3 is suggestive of a first step in establishing such a system. Will the Chancellor’s Office oppose legislative efforts to implement outcome-based funding, should such efforts materialize?
7. Like many aspects of the recommendations, Chapter 6 delineates the inappropriate intrusion of the Chancellor’s Office and Board of Governors into matters that are clearly within the purview of faculty. Given the down-sizing of the Chancellor’s Office and the broad array of compliance monitoring activities that it is charged with offering, how can the Chancellor’s Office take on the new roles delineated for it in the recommendations? In its totality, the recommendations increase the roles and responsibilities of the Chancellor’s Office – and not clearly in a manner that would support student success.
8. Recommendation 8.3 proposes an alternative funding mechanism that appears to require consistency across the system in the leveling of basic skills curriculum in order to be implemented. Is there a presumption that basic skills curriculum will be aligned across our 112 colleges and a plan to avoid the declaration of this as an unfunded mandate by not mandating it, but rather tying new dollars to it? Given that this strategy is proposed in 8.2 (access to the proposed “student support initiative” is contingent upon local implementation of recommendations 2.1 and 7.2), is the plan to obscure unfunded mandates by creating options that colleges will be compelled to select due to fiscal awards?