Students Speak

'spEk\ *v*:
1. to converse. **2.** to express thoughts,
opinions, or feelings orally. **3.** to
communicate….

"Students Speak"
Focus Group Initiative
Report of Findings

College of San Mateo
September 16, 2007

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STUDENTS SPEAK
FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE: REPORT OF FINDINGS
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PREFACE

Students Speak, a student focus group initiative, developed in Spring 2007 as a means to identify and analyze the practices at College of San Mateo which may contribute to its persistent student enrollment decline. In fact, since 1968, CSM's enrollment has declined 40%. *Students Speak's* goals as an initiative have also included: making recommendations to improve services or processes that may affect enrollment and building a capacity to conduct qualitative institutional research that measures organizational effectiveness.

Purpose:

This first phase of this institutional self-examination focused primarily on the "front end" of the student experience: for example, those factors that influence students' initial decisions to enroll, how (and what) they first learn about CSM, how they maneuver through application and enrollment processes, what ancillary or support services they use, and how they finally select courses, among other areas.

In more sweeping terms, its charge has been to measure how easy or difficult it is for students to "navigate" through CSM—from the perspective of students. Simply asked, what do students think about the ease of navigation through CSM?

Participants:

An internal team trained in focus group methodology and institutional research was assembled to execute the project and included a CSM faculty member, a dean, two staff members, and a professional researcher from University of California.

Presentations were made in 38 day and evening classes in 15 disciplines to recruit students. Eighty students indicated an initial interest in joining the project. Fifty-seven students finally participated in a total of 28 sessions: 15 one-on-one interviews and 13 focus groups. Interviews also included sessions dedicated solely to evaluating the functionality of CSM's website; 2 students who attended other institutions of higher education were included in the latter group.

In addition, several counselors, administrators, and faculty members were interviewed.

The team gathered a variety of demographic information about the students: students ranged in age from 17 to 60 years old; their ethnic identifications roughly mirrored that of the college as a whole; 53% were bilingual; as a group they spoke as many as 15 different languages; and 20 or more students were enrolled or had been enrolled in ESL classes.

Findings and Recommendations:

The findings reported here constitute a synthesis of more than a 100 pages of session transcripts. Recommendations are intended as suggestions and as starting points for further discussion and analysis in the respective program areas and among pertinent staff and subject-matter specialists.

Themes:

1) Every interaction matters.

Students have dozens of interactions at CSM with a large number of staff members and programs before they ever make it into an actual classroom. And many CSM students highly value and admire the often outstanding faculty, counselors, and staff who assist them; these students in turn view CSM as a reputable, highly-respected "academic" institution with opportunities for all. Those interactions include their experiences not only with individuals but navigating the website, using the class schedule, or simply calling an office at CSM to seek information. **_Each interaction is an "opportunity" for students to choose to attend and eventually enroll in classes or to reject CSM as a confusing and inhospitable place, seek another institution, or give up on higher education entirely._**

2) In several key program areas, CSM's processes are convoluted, cumbersome, sometimes illogical, and ultimately off-putting for many students.

In a well-intended effort to provide students with "all" the information students need in using programs or services, CSM frequently drowns them with dense text that is, for many, indecipherable. Overly complex "steps" and overly detailed text appear in a variety of media, both hard-copy and web-based. As CSM identifies critical enrollment management strategies, it needs to <u>streamline</u> key application, enrollment, matriculation, and course-selection processes; <u>eliminate</u> unnecessary steps in those processes; and <u>simplify</u> print- and web-based communications about those processes.

3) CSM needs to focus <u>strategically</u> its outreach, marketing, and recruitment efforts.

Findings identify multiple sub-populations of students. In identifying these subpopulations, CSM has several genuine opportunities to expand enrollment in purposeful, coherent, targeted ways, rather than through reactive, scatter-shot efforts that culminate with no measurable outcomes.

Next Steps for "Students Speak":

Beginning in Fall 2007, a new series of focus groups and interviews will specifically target evening students. In addition, focus groups and interviews will begin systematically with faculty and staff to probe at their analysis of enrollment management issues and recommendations for improvement.

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INTRODUCTION

Summary of Purpose

College of San Mateo's (CSM) *Students Speak* has been developed in the context of several internal and external imperatives, including a need to improve institutional effectiveness.

Students Speak is CSM's first attempt to conduct extensive interviews and focus groups with current students in order to capture students' perceptions of CSM's programs, services, and outreach. As a qualitative research initiative, it has been designed to probe especially at how easy or challenging it is for students to navigate CSM, both on campus and through its website. It has focused on gathering information about the "front-end" of the student experience—from how students initially learn of CSM to what support and ancillary services they use, to how they put together a class schedule.

Its goals include:

1) identifying the issues that contribute to a persistent decline in student enrollment;

2) interpreting a variety of qualitative and quantitative data that measures the quality of the student experience from the perspective of students;

3) making recommendations for improvement of services or processes; and

> 4) *building a new internal capacity to conduct qualitative institutional research in order to assess organizational effectiveness.*

Change in Leadership with New Imperatives

In January 2007, CSM experienced a considerable change in its executive leadership: a new president and vice president of student services were appointed and a search was launched for a new permanent vice president of instruction who has also been recently appointed. One of the first major tasks the new president and his cabinet have encountered was the imperative to develop new strategic short- and long-range goals for the institution, a process currently underway. These goals would need to address the fact that CSM now faces an enrollment decline of 40% since 1968—after more than a decade of a persistent decline. What's more, the college faces a budgetary shortfall of more than two million dollars for fiscal year 2007-2008.

Persistent Enrollment Decline & its Impact on the Budget

CSM's enrollment decline in part may reflect the same factors also affecting the overall enrollment decline in the District. Unlike Skyline and Cañada, however, CSM's enrollment is at an all-time low. Yet it is the largest of the three colleges with a long and unique history in the county. Because of a combination of external forces and the relatively new model for SMCCCD's internal budget allocation, the decline in enrollment, specifically FTES, has a major negative impact on CSM's already scarce resources. In simple terms, enrollment decline and budget cuts are becoming inextricably intertwined, the one leading to the other.

Limited Qualitative Data about the Enrollment Decline

Concern with enrollment has been voiced for many years at all levels of the institution as far back as far back as the early 1990's. The 1995 accreditation *Self-Study* and subsequent accrediation commission report specifically addressed CSM's shrinking enrollment and the need to implement a comprehensive enrollment management plan. For some time, CSM has had an enrollment management taskforce charged with developing strategies to stem the decline. Yet analysis of the causal agents has not included a <u>systematic</u> assessment of the student experience.

Environmental Scan & Survey Data:

A district-wide environmental scan that utilized focus groups with selected "community members" was commissioned in 1996. It yielded some valuable information about the community's perception of CSM—namely that the

college has a largely positive image among those who know it. But it also suggested that CSM did not have a prominent, consistently recognizable presence in the community as a whole. Neither the District nor CSM has conducted follow-up studies of this nature since that time.

More recently, in preparation for the 2007 accreditation *Self-Study*, CSM's Office of Articulation and Research has collected a variety of quantitative and qualitative survey data about students' experiences at CSM. Surveys can effectively identify trends, offering a breadth of understanding but they have inherent limitations: close-ended questions, by definition, have limited response choices and cannot go in detail for respondents. Even open-ended survey questions do not capture the qualitative elements of tone or context. This recent survey data has only hinted at student dissatisfaction at some services and the results have not yet suggested a roadmap to address the enrollment decline.

Capacity to Conduct Focus Groups:
The Office of Articulation and Research conducts a variety of extensive institutional research on an ongoing basis, including extensive data collection and analysis of student performance outcomes. It has conducted focus-groups that were program specific (e.g., a study of CSM's Middle College High School students) or random intercept interviews of students during the first two weeks of instruction. But it does not have the staff to conduct extensive ethnographic studies, especially with large populations.

Rationale for Project Objectives

Nature of the Problem?
For the past several years, college staff at all levels have heard anecdotal evidence that some students and other members of the community perceive CSM as "not welcoming" or "difficult to navigate." These anecdotes have suggested that CSM presents labyrinthine institutional processes that may discourage students from applying and subsequently enrolling in classes. Indeed, the perception of CSM being "not welcoming" may largely be due to our overly-complex and convoluted procedures for admission and registration.

A Method to Fit the Problem
Focus groups and one-one-one interviews are together a legitimate method of qualitative research for finding out what participants think and feel about atopic. They utilize participants' self-reports of their own behavior and

attitudes. The focus-group and interview setting allow the researcher to follow-up and to probe to clarify a response. These forms of studies are not intended necessarily to allow the researcher to generalize, but they provide a more complete, in-depth understanding of a topic (Kruger, 1998). For focus groups, the concept of "transferability" is more apt than "generalizability" (Guba and Lincoln, 1989); in transferability the receiver of the information decides on whether the findings and larger theoretical concepts can "transfer" to other situations.

Sources of Data:

In addition, this method does not rely on the random sampling, an element of quantitative research. Qualitative research uses the strategy of "purposeful" sampling in which the participants are selected because they possess special knowledge or experiences that are pertinent to the study. In this case, the population interviewed included not only students but also other key respondents, including administrative staff, counselors, and faculty. Moreover, *Students Speak* team members themselves reported first-hand observations or specific perceptions about the factors that may be contributing to CSM's enrollment decline.

Additional data used to inform this study included a collection of approximately 1,000 email inquiries sent to the "Contact Us" link on CSM's website for the period of January 2006 through June 2007. (The Office of Public Relations and Marketing collects and forwards these emails to other offices and programs for action.) The purpose of surveying these "Contact Us" emails was to discern whether prospective and current students reported consistent barriers as they attempted to "navigate" CSM.

Other Models:

To better understand its own enrollment trends and the quality of their services, Skyline College recently successfully conducted several student focus group projects, including the project "Fresh Look"; findings were used to improve their services. External research consultants have conducted many of these focus groups.

Desired Project Outcomes

Encouraged by the "Fresh Look" focus group model, CSM developed its own focus group initiative, *Students Speak,* in early Spring 2007, as one of President Claire's first major projects. It emerged as a cost-effective approach that would use existing CSM personnel and expertise.

It was designed to elicit concrete information about what it is like to be a student on campus and to use the college website, especially as a new student. What's more, by developing the internal expertise to conduct focus groups, CSM is building a new capacity to conduct ongoing assessment of its organizational effectiveness.

Outcomes:

1) *qualitative data about the practices and processes at CSM that shape students' enrollment choices;*

2) *recommendations for improving services and thereby addressing enrollment management; and*

3) *a new organizational capacity to use student focus-groups as one of multiple methods of assessing institutional effectiveness.*

Project Design & Procedures

As noted above, the purpose of focus groups in this context is to understand the experiences of students and communicate that understanding to key college decision-makers. The *Students Speak* team [referred to here as "we] adhered to widely accepted standards in qualitative research, also called "ethnographic" research. In particular we adapted the practices advocated by the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) and, among others, social scientist Richard A Krueger, who is well-known for the six-volume, *The Focus Group Kit* (1998).

Personnel

The *Students Speak* team is comprised of individuals with diverse backgrounds yet considerable collective experience with institutional research and assessment. This diversity helps ensure researcher neutrality and that the results would be presented from differing perspectives, capturing all participants' perspectives.

Students Speak has been coordinated by Milla McConnell-Tuite, a faculty member who has more than a decade of experience with external grants development, fundraising, and institutional research. Other members of the *Students Speak* team include: John Sewart, Dean of Articulation and Research; Beverley Madden, Acting Director of Public Relations and Marketing and Coordinator of CSM Connects; Sheldon Carroll, Coordinator of

Articulation; and Dennis Keane, a researcher at University of California, San Francisco, who has worked on several ad hoc research initiatives at CSM.

Extensive organization-wide focus group initiatives can be costly when they rely upon external consultants, but cost effectiveness has not been the sole rationale for assembling a largely internal team. This staff brings familiarity with CSM and its programs and processes—institutional knowledge which is especially useful in probing student participants. Members also have all been trained in focus group methodology. Most recently, three members participated in the Research and Planning Group's (RP Group) workshop, "How to Plan and Conduct Your own Focus Group," held in April 2007 at Skyline College. In addition, Dennis Keane brings expertise conducting interviews about the efficacy of computer applications—a skill-set that is particularly useful for assessing students' experiences with the college website.

Ellen Leach provided administrative assistant support in addition to a student assistant who aided with scheduling student participants.

Workplan

Planning began in March 2007 when team members began consultation with the president, vice presidents of instruction and student services, an enrollment management subgroup of President's Cabinet, counselors, and faculty. Key tasks and personnel included:

- **Preparatory interviews with key CSM personnel to identify key issues and processes for communicating *Students Speak* activities and findings** (March-May: Team)

- **Preparatory individual interviews with students to identify key issues for focus group sessions and pilot-test discussion guide questions** (April: 8 students, McConnell-Tuite)

- **Development of protocols, questions, and probes for focus groups** (April-May: Team)

- **Development of protocols, questions, and probes for website interviews and selection of the software application Adobe's "Captivate" for protocol analysis** (April-May: Team; Keane)

- **Class visits by team members to classes to recruit focus-group participants** (May: 38 class visits, 80 students identified themselves as prospective respondents, McConnell-Tuite and Madden)

- **Scheduling of students for focus groups and/or website interviews** (May: Milla McConnell-Tuite and Bev Madden)

- **Focus groups conducted** (May: 13 groups, 42 respondents: Moderators: McConnell-Tuite, Sewart, and Keane; co-moderators: Madden and Carroll)

- **Individual interviews with students navigating CSM's website and conducting various tasks online** (May: 8 students, Keane)

- **Transcription, recording, coding and analysis of focus-group sessions and interviews** (May-June: Team; McConnell-Tuite, lead writer)

- **Final report drafting and review** (June-September: Team; McConnell-Tuite, lead writer)

- **Dissemination of focus group findings to pertinent areas** (July-September: Team)

Focus Group Strategies

The research team established a systematic process for data collection, data handling, data management, and reporting.

Project Development:
Preparation for *Students Speaks* began in March when the research team was assembled and project goals were defined. Several administrators, counselors, and faculty active in enrollment management efforts identified issues for study and project strategies.

Development of Discussion Guides:
In early April 2007 McConnell-Tuite conducted interviews with 7 students in order to pilot test focus-group questions. Questions were modeled after several focus group questions used at Skyline College and other colleges.

The discussion guide for focus groups included 9 key questions with 4 follow-up questions if time permitted. The one-on-one website interviews included

10 key questions with follow-up prompts if time permitted. (See Appendices.)

Structure of Focus Groups:

Focus groups were led by a moderator and an assistant moderator who was responsible for capturing student comments on large-sheet butcher paper. Several students objected to electronic taping so tape recorders were not used except in the single case of an evening focus group that was conducted by Dennis Keane who recorded the session.

Moderators assured respondents of their anonymity in reporting and all participants agreed to discussion ground rules. Moderators also collected demographic information from the participants.

Moderators probed students for specificity, encouraging them to use examples or explain if the moderators did not understand their view.

Moderators did not rigidly adhere to the discussion guides if students contributed unanticipated and important remarks or analysis, were unable to respond, or did not understand the questions. In some, but not all sessions, word-association exercises were used to prompt discussion.

That there were a relatively large number of non-native speakers of English among the participants resulted in some limitations to the discussion topics.

All focus groups were held in a single conference room in Bldg. 19 and typically lasted one hour and 15 minutes though a few voluntarily lasted longer. (The availability of a single conference room for all focus groups was critical to managing scheduling logistics.) Beverages and snacks were served. At the end of each session students were given a $25 gift certificate to the SMCCCD's Bookstores for participation.

Participant Verification:
Sessions ended with the moderator or co-moderator summarizing student remarks for the respondents to ensure the accuracy of the recording and to ensure that key points were captured.

Debriefing:
After each focus group session, moderator and co-moderator conducted a debriefing to capture insights and contrast findings with other groups.

Reporting:
Focus groups data was transcribed from the butcher paper by the assistant moderators and by Ellen Leach. Each session was then summarized in writing by the lead moderator. Milla McConnell-Tuite coded the sessions and drafted the final report which integrated findings, interpreted data, and made recommendations for action. All team members reviewed and approved the final reports.

Website Interviews:
Interviews were conducted in Bldg. 1 by Dennis Keane with an Office of Articulation and Research computer and the software, "Captivate." This application captures user behavior, both verbal and navigational, which was then analyzed and summarized by Dennis Keane.

Analysis of Focus Groups and Website Interviews:
Those contributions which were specific and illustrated with examples were given more weight than those that are vague and impersonal. Team members also considered such issues as:

- Frequency: How often was it said?
- Extensiveness: How many people said it?
- Intensity: How strong was the opinion or point of view?

Final analysis of findings about the college website includes data collected from one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and researcher observation.

Student Respondents

Recruiting Respondents

During the first week of May, McConnell-Tuite and Madden contacted, via email and voicemail, more than 40 faculty members to arrange for 10-minute classroom visits to recruit participants for *Students Speak*. We were able to make arrangements with 22 faculty members: from May 1st to May 14th McConnell-Tuite and Madden visited 38 separate classes (see attachment, *Class Visits Schedule*.)

Our goal was to recruit a diverse population from a range of disciplines, both day and evening classes, and online courses. The disciplines included: accounting, anthropology, astronomy, biology, English, electronics, ESL (3 levels), film (two online sections), health science, mathematics, photography, political science, physics, Spanish, and speech

communications. We also recruited students from *CSM Connects* participants and Associated Students.

Scheduling:
Scheduling was a multi-step process conducted by McConnell-Tuite, Madden and a student aide.

After the class recruitment visits, a total of 80 students provided us with initial contact information (email addresses and phone numbers) and information about when they would be available.

We structured the focus groups around the times students indicated their availability, including morning, afternoon, evening, and Saturday sessions. Student participation was confirmed by email and phone.

Incentives:
Beverage and snacks were served at each focus group.

We also offered a $25 gift certificate to the SMCCCD's Bookstores as an incentive for students to participate in an activity.

However, the gift certificate was not the sole motivator for some students. The largest and one of the most lively focus group was conducted on a Saturday following the finals period for Spring 2007 when the highly-motivated participants were willing to make a special trip to campus in order to participate.

Participation Data:
A total of 57 students participated in a total of 28 interview and focus group sessions. (Six students participated in more than one activity.)

- 7 students were interviewed in one-on-one sessions (April)

- 13 focus groups were held with 42 participants (May 14-May 29)

- 6 CSM students participated in one-on-one <u>website</u> sessions (May 16-May 29)

- 2 college students at other institutions (one at CCSF and one at UC Berkeley) participated in one-on-one website sessions (May 19-May 29)

Introduction

Demographics

The moderators collected demographic information from the students at each session. We asked students to fill out a form voluntarily and indicate: gender, numbers of semesters at CSM, languages spoken, and ethnicity. (Students could choose to remain anonymous and many did.)

In general, the demographic characteristics of the participants closely approximated CSM's overall population. Thirty-two (56%) students were female and 25 (44%) students male.

Numbers of Semesters at CSM:
The majority of students (65%) had attended CSM for 3 or fewer semesters:

- 1 semester: 12 (21%)
- 2 semesters: 13 (23%)
- 3 semesters: 12 (21%)
- 4 semesters: 6 (11%)

- 5 semesters: 9 (16%)
- 6 semesters: 1 (1%)
- N/A: 4 (7%)

Ethnicity/Country of Origin:
The ethnic identifications of the participants approximated that of the student body at large:

- White: 26 (46%)
- Hispanic/Latino: 10 (18%)
- Asian: 10 (18%)
- Asian Indian: 4 (7%)

- Mid-Eastern/Arabic: 4 (7%)
- Pacific Islander: 1 (1%)
- Native American: 1 (1%)
- African American: 1 (1%)

Age:
The ages of participants were also diverse, ranging from teens to seniors. They included 2 students who were 17 years old, 2 in their fifties, and one who was 62 years. The age ranges roughly mirror the general population of our students.

- 17-19: 14 (26%)
- 20-24: 23 (40%)
- 25-29: 7 (12%)
- 30-39: 7 (12%)

- 40-49: 3 (5%)
- 50-59: 2 (4%)
- 60+: 1 (1%)

Languages Spoken:

There were several international students. Thirteen students specifically identified themselves as being currently enrolled in ESL classes while at least 20 students had been enrolled in an ESL class at CSM at one time. Thirty students (53%) identified themselves as bilingual and 8 (14%) students spoke 3 or more languages. Spanish was the language spoken most frequently next to English. In addition to English, the 15 languages include:

- Arabic
- Armenian
- Chinese (Mandarin & Cantonese)
- Farsi
- Fijian

- German
- Japanese
- Hindi
- Hungarian
- Italian

- Kurdish
- Nepalese
- Spanish
- Telugu
- Turkish

**SUMMARY OF
KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Why Students Attend CSM

Findings:

- *Students report attending for reasons typical of community colleges: to earn college credit while in high school; prepare for transfer; acquire fluency in English; complete an interrupted education or jumpstart a delayed one; retrain for a job because of injury of layoff; prepare for a new career post-retirement, and enjoy personal enrichment.*

Recommendations:

- *Enrollment management strategies need to address multiple and disparate issues. Including the diverse needs of CSM's students.*

- *For the purposes of developing enrollment management strategies, "diversity" needs to be defined broadly and include the many issues affecting students' lives.*

A Reputable "Real" College

Findings:

- *CSM is viewed by many as a reputable institution with high academic standards and long respected history of offering a variety of opportunities for students.*

- *CSM "looks" like what students expect of a college.*

- *Students value CSM's sweeping vistas, landscaping, and style of architecture.*

- *Students value the mild sunny weather and relatively easy access from major freeways.*

- *Students highly value CSM's high rate of transfer and numerous guaranteed transfer agreements with other institutions, including University of California, and pay attention to CSM's rankings.*

- *Some students will move a great distance because of highly rated programs at CSM.*

- *Many students value activities like learning communities; they see them as enhancing CSM's prestige regardless of whether or not they participate in them directly.*

- *Many students describe CSM's faculty as challenging and excellent.*

- *Students report valuing their own accomplishments (and CSM as an institution) when they earn good grades from demanding instructors who uphold high standards.*

- *Students, at the same time, value staff and faculty who are friendly and welcoming; students prefer faculty who are both serious about their work, but warm in their demeanor.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM should consider "branding" CSM as a high-ranking academic institution with high standards but also a place with opportunities for all.*

- *In "branding" itself as a highly-regarded academic institution, CSM should not characterize itself as exclusionary or elitist but as genuinely preparing a diverse student body to be successful students in the 21st Century.*

- *In its outreach and marketing efforts, CSM should consider promoting the physical beauty of the campus as well as those specific facilities that are renovated, well-maintained, or new.*

- *In its outreach and marketing efforts, CSM should broadly promote CSM's success as an institution (e.g. rate of transfer and guaranteed transfer agreements) as well as the diverse programs that contribute to a vibrant campus life.*

Image to Counter: CSM as "High School on the Hill"

Findings:

- *Students are aware of negative stereotypes about community college students and report that they are commonly held.*

- *Students are divided about attending CSM alongside their former high school peers: for some, it provides a sense of community; for others, it becomes a negative extension of high school.*

- *Younger students report the benefits of taking classes with "older" students.*

- *Students of all ages and demographics do not like to witness uncivil behavior tolerated on campus.*

- *Uncivil behavior by students reinforces negative stereotypes about community colleges as organizations which are "not serious institutions."*

Recommendations:

- *CSM might consider reinforcing its image as a reputable academic institution that offers life-changing opportunities for students of all ages by discouraging incivility throughout the campus and within the classroom.*

- *CSM might consider promoting high expectations about standards of student behavior as an antidote to the perception of CSM as "high school on the hill."*

- *CSM might consistently encourage faculty and staff to view appropriate "classroom management" as an aspect of "enrollment management."*

People Who Recommend CSM

Findings:

- Students of all ages report choosing CSM because an individual important to the student recommends or endorses it.

- Many students describe multi-generational connections to CSM which shape their decisions to attend.

- Several students report that counselors in local high schools do not consistently endorse CSM as a college option.

- Students report that counselors in local high schools typically endorse four-year institutions as the sole path for high-achieving high school graduates and, in some cases, may not be familiar with CSM's guaranteed transfer agreements.

- Students report that CSM's high school Outreach Counselor and EOPS staff members were instrumental in introducing them to CSM and helping them complete the initial enrollment process.

Recommendations:

- Marketing and outreach activities need to appeal to the diverse age cohorts who "influence" the decisions of others as well as attend themselves; these populations are multi-generational.

- Liaison with local high schools should educate high school counselors and faculty about CSM as a low-cost alternative with competitive transfer agreements.

- CSM should continue its efforts to secure adequate resources for outreach.

Choosing CSM over "X" Institution

Findings:

- At least half of the respondents report attending an institution of higher education prior to enrolling at CSM.

- Several students report experiences with baccalaureate institutions that were unsatisfactory; they see CSM as helping them to transfer eventually to a "better" baccalaureate institution.

- Several students report overcrowding, lack of available classes, disappointment in their major courses, a sense of personal isolation, and considerable expense as reasons for leaving a CSU and enrolling in CSM.

- Students who live in San Francisco will commute to CSM because of the "unfriendly" environment and overcrowding at CCSF and because CSM provides a more "welcoming" setting.

- Students who are UC eligible may consider CSM if they feel confident that as transfers they can secure a spot at highly desirable UC campuses in the schools of their choice.

Recommendations:

- *CSM should consider targeting outreach activities to high school seniors and others who are likely to have been accepted by a CSU or UC. (Cohorts may be identified through SAT reporting, for example.)*

- *CSM should consider a targeted recruitment of prospective math and science majors at Mills and Burlingame high schools for whom acceptance as freshmen by their first-choice UC in a first-choice major is remote. These students are significantly more likely to secure a spot in competitive departments and majors as transfers.*

- *CSM should consider outreach that specifically targets San Francisco residents.*

- *If CSM targets AP students, it might review processes which include the timely evaluation of AP courses/scores, efficient transition for students from a concurrently-enrolled status, the assignment of priority registration dates, and the use of discipline-specific advisors.*

Pre-college Paths to CSM

Findings:

- *Positive experiences as concurrently-enrolled high school students and as MCHS students do influence students' attitudes about CSM; they do not, however, ensure that students will continue college study at CSM.*

- *Enrolling in CSM coursework while a high school student can help ensure acceptance at a UC or a highly-rated baccalaureate institution.*

- *Positive experiences with College for Kids can influence a prospective college student's enrollment decisions even a decade after the childhood experience.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM should begin to cultivate MCHS students and concurrently-enrolled students early in their high school experience (especially those enrolled in AP courses).*

- *CSM should look upon College for Kids as a means to cultivate future students as well as cultivate the families of those children as those families become "key influencers" for prospective students.*

<u>Other Paths to CSM</u>

Finding:

- *Some students choose CSM solely because of job training, retraining, and career preparation opportunities*

ESL: A Path to Other Coursework and New Goals

Findings:

- *Anecdotes reported by students suggest that San Mateo Adult School does not actively or consistently promote CSM's ESL program.*

- *ESL students who had previously attended an adult school report difficulty with the transition to CSM and with navigating the college.*

- *ESL students frequently report a general lack of familiarity with CSM's programs and services.*

- *The ESL program is an "enrollment management" opportunity—a path for some students to enroll in other additional courses.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM might consider offering activities that would bring San Mateo Adult School faculty to the CSM campus.*

- *CSM might consider developing a "bridge" course designed as, in part, an orientation for the adult school graduate.*

CSM Website as Recruitment Tool

Finding:

- *CSM's website is a critical source of information about CSM for prospective students investigating the college.*

Recommendations:

- *Summary information about CSM (its history, programs, and students served) needs to be easily accessible from the homepage.*

- *CSM's success stories, including personal vignettes about students, data on academic rankings, and/or information about award-winning programs, needs to be highlighted on the homepage in an easy-to-read format.*

- *CSM should pursue a strategy to ensure that internet search engines and online web resources easily link to CSM's homepage. For example, they might also include:*

    √ *Sponsored links on Google and Yahoo Search, among others, associated with a variety of key word searches*

    √ *Robust Wikipedia entry that is dynamic and maintained; and*

    √ *Reciprocal link with College of Saint Mary (who owns "CSM.edu").*

Components of Matriculation
Applying to CSM

Findings:

- *Students report that the use of jargon and "insider" terminology is confusing for first-time student when used by staff or used in web-based and hard-copy materials.*

- *Students report the need for clearer signage that identifies building and facilities and large-format maps located throughout the campus at key locations, including parking lots.*

- *The class schedule is a critical and widely-used tool for virtually all students; few students, however, were familiar with the course catalog.*

- *Students report that the text on "New Students Steps" and "Welcome to CSM Online Application" pages is far too dense and confusing and the steps need to be simpler.*

- *Online information does not clearly delineate the steps new students should expect after completing CCCApply, including information about registration dates and how (or whether) to log on to WebSMART.*

- *CCCApply does not offer enrollment options for a given semester which are in sync with the availability of CSM's schedule online; no information is provided online that instructs students to apply on CCCApply for a "current" semester in these cases.*

- *One case study indicates that Admissions & Recordss email support is timely and courteous.*

Recommendations:

- *Materials which are likely to be used by a first-time student need to define key terms.*

- *CSM might encourage staff who are likely to work with first-time students to define and explain key terms repeatedly.*

- *CSM might consider a campus-wide effort to improve signage, posting large-scale maps at key locations.*

- *CSM might consider the prospect of renaming buildings to connote their function, e.g. planetarium, (rather than using building numbers that do not tell students about the primary purpose of the building).*

- *CSM should consider making the course catalog available to students at no charge, both as a service to students and as a marketing tool.*

- *Online PDF versions of the class schedule and the catolog need to be genuinely searchable.*

- *Both the text and the steps in the online application need to be simplified.*

- *Online information should inform students in simple straight-forward terms what to expect of CCCApply and the next steps in the enrollment process.*

- *Online information needs to direct prospective students how to use CCCApply if the next term is not yet an option for application.*

- *Information about Admissions & Records' email resource needs to be widely distributed.*

- *CSM might consider the option of a stream-lined application for students who are taking classes purely for "personal enrichment."*

Matriculation: What is It?

Findings:

- *Students are divided about the usefulness of the matriculation process.*

- *Some students view the matriculation steps as enrollment barriers.*

- *Few students reported being aware of matriculation exemptions or options for opting out of processes.*

- *Most students are not aware of orientation materials, unless they are associated with a special program.*

- *Students are divided about their experiences with using WebSMART: initially some find it challenging and need help learning it. Once they master it, they find it often "easy to use."*

- *Many students do not know that the WebSMART graphic on the homepage is a link to WebSMART and thus may have difficulty finding it for the first time.*

- *Students expect complete course descriptions to be available online.*

- *Some students report selecting courses only using WebSMART so those course descriptions are especially important.*

- *Some students report difficulty with their first default log on to WebSMART and are dissatisfied with having to go in person to Admissions & Records to have it reset.*

Recommendations:

- *Online instructions and other materials about the matriculation steps need to be simplified and the density of text reduced.*

- *Prospective students need to be offered matriculation exemptions as genuine options in a simplified, easy to understand formats.*

- *Matriculation processes can vary college-to-college since Title V is interpreted in a variety of ways. CSM might consider a broad discussion among a variety of college constituencies about who should be included in the matriculation net and develop policies that are widely understood.*

- *The new "CSM Welcome Team," who were introduced in Summer 2007 as mentors and guides through the matriculation process, may be a timely and effective intervention for some students and might be explored as an option to adopt broadly at CSM.*

- *Develop a brief interactive online orientation that is placed on the WebSMART homepage (not solely with "Orientation").*

- *Indicate that the WebSMART graphic on the homepage is a live link.*

- *Bring online all course descriptions for all courses listed in WebSMART's class schedules.*

- *CSM might consider developing a process for resetting a logon in WebSMART that a student can complete online.*

Placement Testing

Findings:

- Students generally report satisfaction with the placement test process.

- Many students, especially returning students, report anxiety about the placement testing; as a result they consistently need good "customer service" skills in this setting and sensitivity to their needs.

- Several respondents questioned why CSM does not recognize placement test results from other community colleges.

Recommendations:

- Good customer service be a high priority for this key unit, especially as it provides one of the first experiences and impressions of the college for prospective students

- Appropriate staff and faculty consider examining what constitutes an "acceptable" retake rate for math assessments and explore ways of improving that rate if needed.

- Appropriate staff and faculty explore the issue of accepting placement test results from other community colleges as a way of eliminating unnecessary steps in the matriculation process for new students.

Counseling

Findings:

- Students engage in numerous ways to obtain information for academic planning, including using resources from the CSM's website and consulting with informed classified staff and student aides.

- Students are divided about the quality of their experiences with counselors.

- Students describe counselors or advisors as "effective" when they teach students concrete skills, help them set goals, and "broaden their horizons."

- Students consistently report that some counselors appear disengaged during counseling sessions, providing either incorrect or "formulaic" guidance.

- Students frequently cite "academic advisors" as providing important discipline-specific knowledge, accurate information, and valued guidance.

Recommendations:

- Counseling program consider developing "enrollment management" strategies to ensure more consistent quality in its service delivery.

- Counseling program offer students a range of options in seeking academic planning information, including access to accurate online materials and the assistance of trained students and classified staff.

- *Counselors should not underestimate the importance of their roles as teachers—helping students learn how to use institutional and other resources effectively as well as define and meet their educational goals.*

- *Counseling program might consider making counseling processes more transparent for students. The counseling program could define standards of service—explicitly articulating, for example, what students should expect from Drop-in Counseling or during a "typical" session with a counselor or advisor; those standards should be clearly communicated to students.*

- *Counseling program continue to offer students the services of discipline-specific academic advisors.*

"Work-arounds" the Matriculation Processes
Case Studies

Findings:

- *Because of perceived inefficiencies or barriers in the matriculation process, some programs have created "work-arounds."*

- *Their strategies include simple, straight forwarded instructions about how to apply to CSM displayed on the respective program website.*

- *In one case, the program provides information explicitly about "how to avoid matriculation " for its population of largely working adults.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM might examine these programs' strategies as possibly symptomatic of systemic problems.*

- *CSM might consider adopting similar styles of communication as it instructs students on the application and matriculation processes.*

- *CSM might consider providing similar explicit instructions in a variety of venues about exemptions for non-matriculating students.*

Special Programs and Matriculation Processes

Finding:

- *Students who are associated with special programs generally describe high levels of satisfaction with the matriculation process, including initial enrollment, placement testing, counseling, and academic planning. Programs include EOPS, International Students, Middle College High School, PEP, and Intercollegiate Athletics.*

EOPS

Findings:

- *Respondents who identified themselves as EOPS students report high levels of satisfaction with the support and guidance they receive from program staff.*

- *Respondents included EOPS students who described successful high school outreach.*

International Students

Finding:

- *Respondents who identified themselves as international students report high levels of satisfaction with the support and guidance they receive from program staff.*

Recommendation:

- *Given the high levels of student satisfaction with the program, CSM might consider targeting this population for enrollment growth that also would produce considerable revenue.*

Middle College High School

Findings:

- *MCHS students report being insulated from many of the "hassles" of the matriculation process.*

- *MCHS students report successfully learning a variety of student success strategies as a result of the program.*

Priority Enrollment Program (PEP)

Findings:

- *PEP students are generally very satisfied with assistance in the enrollment and matriculation processes.*

- *Students value priority registration, especially students who have clearly-defined transfer goals.*

- *Students who already possess clearly-defined transfer goals and majors report needing accurate, discipline-specific counseling from the very beginning.*

Recommendation:

- *PEP outreach, orientation, and counseling activities be adapted, where appropriate, to target the recruitment of high-achieving high school students who enroll at CSM because of its guaranteed transfer arrangements.*

Issues About the Physical Environment
Facilities Problems

Findings:

- *Both the consistency and quality of facility maintenance affect students' perceptions of the college as a whole and campus safety in particular.*

- *Deficits in facilities maintenance—ranging from broken desks and chairs to graffiti in restroom stalls—convey the message that CSM can't control destructive behavior and, as an institution, is not concerned with students' well-being.*

- *Students find few "welcoming" locations on campus where they can congregate.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM maintain classroom furniture in the older classroom buildings 14, 16, and 18 and ensure that classrooms and lab are well-lit at all times of the day and evening.*

- *CSM aggressively address graffiti on a consistent basis.*

- *CSM ensure that restrooms are sanitary, amenable, and genuinely safe for students.*

- *CSM explore low-cost temporary options for making Bldg. 5 more amenable for students to congregate.*

Campus Safety

Findings:

- *Many students describe CSM as a "safe" environment—a reason to attend.*

- *Many students also report concerns with the safety of remote, poorly lit parking lots and poorly lit campus grounds and stated they were, therefore, deterred from enrolling in evening classes,*

- *Students report as "troubling" the absence of emergency phones and pay phones.*

- *Several students report being aware of security officers only when they are issuing parking tickets, rather than as a presence on the campus grounds.*

- *Anecdotes reported suggest there may be "customer service" problems with some of the security personnel.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM should consider addressing concerns about lighting and emergency phones and pay phones as an "enrollment management" issue.*

- *CSM should consider that security officers have a more prominent and visible presence on campus, a version of the neighborhood uniformed "cop on a beat."*

- *CSM should consider a comparative study of evening and day enrollment patterns to examine whether women are, in fact, consistently less likely to enroll in evening courses than men.*

Student Support Services
Key "Frontline Points of Contact

Findings:

- *Students highly value good "customer service" from frontline staff in key areas: information booth, Admissions & Records, Security, Placement Center, Cashier's Office, and Counseling Center.*

- *Some students report frustration with long lines, untrained staff, and limited hours of operation for many key frontline services.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM revisit the issue of how to foster good "customer service" skills among key frontline staff.*

- *CSM should ensure that key frontline staff possess accurate knowledge about basic college functions and are familiar with appropriate protocols for referring students to other offices, functions, or programs.*

- *CSM ensure that key frontline services are genuinely available to day and evening students alike.*

- *CSM continue to explore ways web-based alternatives for typical and customary transactions.*

- *CSM continue to explore ways to improve phone services and to ensure the availability of "live" staff to answers phones.*

Financial Aide

Findings:

- *Students consistently value an opportunity to receive financial assistance while attending college and value accurate information about securing such aide.*

- *Students were consistently divided about the quality of their experiences with Financial Aide.*

- *Students were highly satisfied with the quality of their experience at the Scholarship Office.*

- *Students reported the need for more explicit coordination between Financial Aide office and the Scholarship office.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM explore ways to ensure consistency in the quality of services delivered by the Financial Aide office as an important resource for students.*

- *CSM encourage consistent coordination between Financial Aide and Scholarship services.*

DSPS

Finding:

- *Students generally report satisfaction with DSPS services.*

Student Life
Connections with other Students and Faculty

Findings:

- *The majority of students are too absorbed by demands from work, school, and family to become involved with extracurricular on-campus activities. Similarly, extracurricular activities are seen as irrelevant to their educational and occupational goals.*

- *A small minority of students actively participate in extracurricular activities and place high value on these activities.*

Recommendation:

- *Marketing and outreach materials, including web-based, should include information about a range of campus activities as a means of promoting the value of CSM—even to those students who are unable to participate.*

Finding:

- *Students highly value "knowing" at least one student in each class.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM encourage faculty to conduct discipline-appropriate classroom activities that allow students to develop "study buddy" relationships with their peers.*

Findings:

- *Students value web access to current contact information for their faculty.*

- *Students report the importance of email and voicemail as ways to communicate with faculty and expect faculty to respond in a timely way to messages.*

- *Students report being frustrated, dismayed, or put-off by faculty members who don't use email and/or voicemail; in some cases, they perceive those faculty members as possessing weak technology skills.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM consider developing processes for ensuring that faculty provide students with current contact information, including voicemail and email addresses.*

- *CSM should consider establishing standards for use of email and voicemail by faculty and provide appropriate training (or continue to provide training via the CTL).*

Academic Support
Labs & Library

Findings:

- *Students report high levels of satisfaction with the library.*

- *Students report needing better access to general-use computers where they can work and print school work.*

- *Several users of the foreign language lab report problems with computer maintenance and the limited availability of instructional assistance.*

Tutoring

Findings:

- *Students report the need for tutors in a variety of disciplines.*

- *Students generally value the assistance they receive in the Writing Center and Math Lab.*

Recommendation:

- *CSM needs to address both the near-future and long-term need for a student learning center which provides a variety of tutoring support for students.*

Selecting Classes
Scheduling and Program Availability

Findings:

- *Most students reported that courses are scheduled at times convenient for them.*

- *Several students reported an interest in enrolling in afternoon classes and would even prefer them to evening courses.*

- *There is no comprehensive repository of information about career preparation and job training maintained on the college website.*

- *Several students reported that generally beginning foreign language classes were offered in the evenings and not mornings when they would enroll.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM explore the viability of offering a comprehensive afternoon educational program.*

- *CSM develop the "Career Programs" website to become a comprehensive source of information about career preparation and job training offerings with links to pertinent programs.*

- *Comparable hard-copy information about CSM's career and job training programs should be widely-available for marketing and outreach.*

Choosing Faculty

Findings:

- *When students select classes, one of the most important considerations is the reputation of faculty assigned to courses.*

- *Students seek a variety of information about faculty from many types of sources, including other students, faculty, and counselors.*

- *Students frequently avoid enrolling in classes which are listed as "staff" in class schedules.*

- *A large number of students report using RateMyProfessor.com or similar faculty evaluation review sites when considering courses to take.*

Recommendations:

- *Whenever possible CSM should try to staff sections so that the names of individual faculty members are included in the hard-copy or online class schedules.*

- *As an enrollment management strategy, CSM should consider the impact of assigning key faculty to core "gatekeeper" or "gateway" courses within individual programs.*

College Website

Summary of Findings:

- *Many students find the home page "boring, "really bad, with the text "too dense" and confusing, and the graphics irrelevant; they expect, instead, images of students of all ages.*

- *They report disliking "linking pages" that contain links that loop back to the page.*

- *Students consistently find all the pages "too dense" with too much text, and too many links and directions on a given page that have no relevance to that particular page.*

- *90% of the time, the search function failed.*

- *The website does not replace the catalog and schedule for students; they are frequent users of the hard-copy schedule which they thumb through as they use WebSMART.*

- *Many students reported using the website almost solely for WebSMART tasks, enrolling in classes, seeking contact information about their faculty, or finding where and when a service is available.*

Recommendations:

- *As CSM develops policies that govern both the style and content of the website, it should involve all constituencies in that development.*

- *CSM should consider that Captivate might serve as a tool in any efforts to further evaluate the college website as it develops*

- *CSM should consider exploring ways to improve the quality of the website immediately and to begin planning and resource identification.*

- *CSM should explore using Google as a search engine within the site itself.*

STUDENTS SPEAK
FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE: REPORT OF FINDINGS
September 2007

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Why Students Attend CSM

Findings:

- *Students report attending for reasons typical of community colleges: to earn college credit while in high school; prepare for transfer; acquire fluency in English; complete an interrupted education or jumpstart a delayed one; retrain for a job because of injury or layoff; prepare for a new career post-retirement; and enjoy personal enrichment.*

Recommendations:

- *Enrollment management strategies need to address multiple and disparate issues, including the diverse needs of our students.*

- *In the context of developing enrollment management strategies for CSM, diversity needs to be defined by not only traditional demographic measures of age, gender, and ethnicity, but also such factors as:*

  - *levels of academic preparedness;*
  - *previous experiences in higher education;*
  - *language competencies;*
  - *work and other economic imperatives;*
  - *religious affiliations;*
  - *family responsibilities;*
  - *proximity to the campus;*
  - *access to transportation.*

Summary:

Some members of the college community advocate that CSM should primarily develop enrollment management activities exclusively targeting transfer-bound students who enroll immediately upon graduation from high school. In fact, CSM's population is quite complex. All ages bring with them diverse experiences in the educational system and seek the myriad range of goals typical in many community colleges.

Almost all students reported considering and being influenced by <u>several</u> factors when deciding to come to CSM. (It was only the rare student who stated one sole reason.)

The fact that these influences are so multi-dimensional suggests that enrollment management strategies—even those targeting very specific populations—need simultaneously to address seemingly disparate issues. The diversity of CSM's student body needs to be understood as encompassing a great number of social, economic, and academic issues.

A Reputable "Real" College

Finding:

- **CSM is viewed by many as a reputable institution with high academic standards and a long respected history of offering a variety of opportunities for students.**

Recommendations:

- **CSM should consider "branding" CSM as a high-ranking academic institution with high standards but also a place with opportunities for all.**

- **In "branding" itself as a highly-regarded academic institution, CSM should not characterize itself as exclusionary or elitist but as genuinely preparing a diverse student body to be successful students in the 21st century.**

Students of all ages consistently cite a sense that CSM offers a variety of opportunities for "serious" academic preparation, career training, and competitive options for transfer to highly-desirable baccalaureate institutions.

Students express their view of CSM as a reputable and even "prestigious" institution through their descriptions of: 1) the physical campus itself; 2) specific programs; and 3) faculty and staff. *Taken together, these three elements project an image of a serious-minded academic institution with a long respected history.*

Campus Image as "Character":

Findings:

- *CSM "looks" like what students expect of a college.*

- *Students value CSM's sweeping vistas, landscaping, and style of architecture.*

- *Students value the mild sunny weather and relatively easy access from major freeways.*

Recommendations:

- *In its outreach and marketing efforts, CSM should consider promoting the physical beauty of the campus as well as those specific facilities that are renovated, well-maintained, or new.*

- *CSM should continue efforts to enhance its facilities and grounds and adapt them to the needs of the 21st century learner.*

When asked about the factors that influenced students' choices to attend CSM, students report that the design of the campus makes a difference. For many, the landscape is "beautiful." They report that CSM looks like what they imagine is a "real" college campus, a place for "serious study." The campus architecture presents a seriousness of purpose that appeal to students but they also see it as "welcoming," "inviting," and "peaceful."

The style of architecture, the reflecting pools, "pretty" abundant trees, "big open spaces," and the spectacular views, including those from the library, combine to give the campus a specific attitude and to project that it is a place for "serious study." One student specifically describes the architecture as "medieval" to show that it looked academic and had served many generations.

Sun and Access:
For many students, the physical appearance is coupled with the warm, mostly "sunny," weather and "if you have a car…easy access" from major freeway arteries.

Specific Facilities:
Bldgs. 16, 18, and 36 were cited as having "good" and "wonderful" facilities. The library, too, was described by several students as possessing "amazing" views—an "excellent" facility.

Minority View:
While several students described CSM as "not too big," a few stated that the campus required "too much walking" and "too spread-out." The relative distance of the parking lots was also cited as a negative issue for some students. (See section, "Issues about the Physical Environment, Parking Lots.")

High Ratings for its Programs:

Findings:

- **Students highly value CSM's high rate of transfer and numerous guaranteed transfer agreements with other institutions, including University of California, and pay attention to CSM's rankings.**

- **Some students will move a great distance because of highly rated programs at CSM.**

- **Many students value activities like learning communities; they see them as enhancing CSM's prestige regardless of whether or not they participate in them directly.**

Recommendations:

- **In its outreach and marketing efforts, CSM should <u>broadly</u> promote CSM's success as an institution (e.g. rate of transfer and guaranteed transfer agreements) as well as the diverse programs that contribute to a vibrant campus life.**

Students describe a variety of issues when discussing what makes CSM a "first rate" and "academic" institution.

Transfer:
Many students were familiar with CSM's transfer record and the fact that it's an "affordable option" for lower-division transfer coursework. Students cite its "high rate of transfer…one of the best in the state," its "numerous guaranteed transfer agreements, and that it's a "good place if you want to transfer to a UC."

"Lots of Opportunities and Choices":
Students also describe the programs as "flexible," "challenging," "academic," and a great place to "quickly achieve your goals." One student remarked that it "doesn't feel like high school even with the younger students."

Students do enroll in CSM because of its rankings in particular areas: one student came for its fire science program, "the best in the state," and another moved some distance because of its football program. Others described the art and music programs as "first rate."

Campus Life that Elevates CSM:
Several students (of all ages) reported being considerably engaged by the "richness" of CSM programs and activities. One student, for example, described a student life more typical of a student in a small private liberal arts college: he/she said that over the past week he/she had participated in Tragedy of the Commons, given blood to an on-campus blood drive, performed at an electronic music concert, and attended a lecture from the President's Lecture Series.

While it is only a small number of students who participate in extra-curricular on-campus activities, they do not have to participate in them to value them. Several students cited a variety of programs that give CSM extra "prestige." They include learning communities, CSM Connects, athletics, and the honors program.

Honors:
Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) and Alpha Gamma Sigma (AGS Honor Society) were mentioned by several students interested in the honors program. A couple of students, however, report some difficulty in getting information about both the honors program and the student honors clubs/societies. (Voicemail messages and emails inquiries were not replied.) They suggest that the student clubs be more tightly linked to the honors program of study and information be widely distributed to those eligible.

5

Reputable, Highly-regarded Faculty and Staff:

Findings:

- *Many students describe CSM's faculty as challenging and excellent.*

- *Students report valuing their own accomplishments (and CSM as an institution) when they earn good grades from demanding instructors who uphold high standards.*

- *Students, at the same time, value staff and faculty who are friendly, welcoming, and flexible; students prefer faculty who are both serious about their work, but warm in their demeanor.*

Recommendations:

- *In its outreach and marketing efforts, CSM should <u>broadly</u> promote the genuine accomplishments of its faculty and staff.*

- *CSM should foster an academic environment in which the notion of high standards is not confused with rigidity and inflexibility.*

As expected, the faculty and staff contribute to the image of CSM as a reputable institution. Several students described the faculty as "excellent," "challenging," and "friendly" and described counselors as "very good" and as "helpful."

(Students do raise, however, concerns about the quality of some interactions with faculty, counselors, and staff and those are reported throughout this report.)

One student reported that her very first experience on campus was an encounter with the student activities staff whom she described as "warm" and "welcoming" in sharp contract to a previous experience she had at City College of San Francisco. She says the CSM encounter made her decide to enroll.

Demanding Faculty Earn High Marks:
Many students expect CSM faculty to be the most rigorous in the college district and value them for the standards they uphold. Students generally

distinguish between faculty who are inflexible, rigid, or otherwise harsh and those who clearly define reasonable but high expectations of their students.

As an example, several students mentioned one member of the English faculty, in particular, whose classes are known to be particularly intellectually stimulating, demanding, and, at times, difficult. Students describe this professor as demanding "respectful" behavior from students with no tolerance for tardiness. They describe the feeling of accomplishment and pride having earned good grades from this professor and cite this faculty member as illustrative of what makes CSM attractive to them.

Image to Counter: CSM as "High School on the Hill"

Findings:

- *Students are aware of negative stereotypes about community college students and report that they are commonly held.*

- *Students are divided about attending CSM alongside their former high school peers: for some, it provides a sense of community; for others, it becomes a negative extension of high school.*

- *Younger students report the benefits of taking classes with "older" students.*

- *Students of all ages and demographics do not like to witness uncivil behavior tolerated in the classroom and elsewhere on campus.*

- *Uncivil behavior by students reinforces negative stereotypes about community colleges as organizations that are "not serious institutions."*

Recommendations:

- *CSM might consider reinforcing its image as a reputable, academic institution that offers life-changing opportunities for students of all ages by discouraging incivility throughout the campus and within the classroom.*

- ***CSM might consider promoting high expectations about standards of student behavior as an antidote to the perception of CSM as "high school on the hill."***

- ***CSM might consistently encourage faculty and staff to view appropriate "classroom management" as an aspect of "enrollment management."***

- ***CSM might consider assisting faculty and staff in developing strategies that teach students how to be effective participants in the 21st century classroom, regardless of the discipline.***

- ***New faculty orientation might include workshops that focus on strategies for managing and developing appropriate student behavior.***

When asked why prospective students may not enroll at CSM, respondents were very aware of the stereotypes of community colleges as academically soft, "not serious" institutions.

The "Baby" College Paradox:
When students were asked why prospective local students don't enroll at CSM, respondents describe a paradox:

Students who live in San Mateo frequently come to CSM because their high school friends also plan to attend and they are pleased to have the continued sense of a social community. These students frequently stay in the area because of complex economic, family, or employment ties or because they do not have clearly defined goals.

For some students, however, that is a reason not to enroll at CSM; they feel compelled to get away from their previous circles of friends and all associations with high school.

Students who have many high school friends also at CSM are frequently most likely to describe CSM as being "too much like high school," or "a high school hangout" with "too many cliques, " and a "place where everybody is into everybody's business."

Effect of Older Students on Younger Students:
Students who have taken both day and evening courses report perceiving the evening population of students as different from the day population—not only as older with fulltime jobs, but also more "serious" about their

education. Several students (under 20 years old) said that they liked attending classes with "older" students and that older students enhanced their learning experience.

Civility Matters! How Stereotypes about Community Colleges are Inadvertently Confirmed:

Many students report disliking other students who are "not serious" and display behavior that shows little respect for the classroom or for the campus at large.

Students dislike seeing students who habitually don't attend classes and then show up for the final, particularly irksome in classes in high demand. One respondent described the students who hang out on the quad as "rude" when they make comments about the people who walk by. "Rude" behavior was also reported in labs and the library where students do not turn off (or down) their audio devices, even when asked.

Some students mentioned the notable presence of individuals on campus who appear to be mentally unstable. As one student put it, "when I come to college, I don't expect to find the kind of people that I see down on Market Street in San Francisco late in the night." (See section "Safety.")

For many students, disrespectful behavior in the classroom includes talking or sleeping in classes, leaving early, and walking in late. Both students and several faculty members report that some classes don't begin until 20 minutes after the hour—because "the students tend to straggle in."

A few students cite other "disrespectful behavior" by some students who sometimes congregate in the main plaza area near Bldg. 16. They describe students making hostile or otherwise "rude" comments to other students walking by. Several also report seeing (and smelling) drugs being use visibly in outside spaces on campus.

Uncivil behavior is not the sole purview of students: A few students, for example, mentioned a faculty member who, in their opinion, appears to be visibly "stoned" much of the time and exhibits noticeably "weird" behavior on campus.

The People Who Recommend CSM

Findings:

- *Students of all ages report choosing CSM because an individual important to the student recommends or endorses it.*

- *Many students describe multi-generational connections to CSM which shape their decisions to attend.*

- *Several students report that counselors in local high schools do not consistently endorse CSM as a college option.*

- *Students report that counselors in local high schools typically endorse four-year institutions as the sole path for high-achieving high school graduates and, in some cases, may not be familiar with CSM's guaranteed transfer agreements.*

- *Students report that CSM's high school Outreach Counselor and EOPS staff members were instrumental in introducing them to CSM and helping them complete the initial enrollment process.*

Recommendations:

- *Marketing and outreach activities need to appeal to the diverse age cohorts who "influence" the decisions of others as well as attend themselves; these populations are multi-generational.*

- *Liaison with local high schools should educate high school counselors and faculty about CSM as a low-cost alternative with competitive transfer agreements.*

- *CSM should continue its efforts to secure adequate resources for outreach.*

Summary:

Students of all ages and diverse backgrounds report that they came to CSM initially because of the influence of someone close to them or someone whom they admired. The key "influencer" may be a relative or an individual whom they viewed as an authority in a school or community setting. This was as true of students who went to local high schools as well as students new to San Mateo, the Bay Area, or the state. Even most international

students reported coming to San Mateo (and then to CSM) because they have a family member or other personal connection in the area.

Family and Close Friends:
One of the most common reasons that students of all ages and demographics cite for choosing CSM is that they have a family member (parent, sibling, aunt, uncle, cousin); spouse or partner; or close friend who attended or who encouraged them to attend.

These are frequently multi-generational connections and they affect students of all ages. For some, these connections remain strong even when, for example, an alumnus went on to earn higher degrees at prestigious universities. One student, for example, was urged to attend by his/her father, a professor at San Jose State University; another by his/her "professional" father who holds "three advanced degrees."

One student who briefly attended CSU Monterey described a San Mateo family business that was founded by his/her grandfather in the 1920's and the fact that both parents attended CSM, as did several other members of the family. Several students reported having more than one parent attend CSM at some point. One former Middle College High School (MCHS) student had a sibling who also attended CSM's MCHS; another had an uncle who went through the program.

Other Affinity-Group Influences:
Students cite a variety of other connections. They include:
- Peer high school students (word of mouth)
- Co-workers
- Lifelong pediatrician
- Church in Burlingame (for an international student)
- ESL faculty and counselors at CCSF
- San Francisco adult school
- San Mateo adult school (inconsistent for ESL students)
- Adult career training agencies (2 students)

The Role of Local High School Counselors and Faculty:
Typically counselors at local high schools are not a sole or predictable source of information about CSM. The students who attended CSM as concurrently enrolled students in San Mateo County or upon graduation from high school did not consistently report that their high school counselors or teachers encouraged them to enroll in CSM. Students report that many counselors seem to share the notion that CSM is only "high school on the hill."

For example, two Mills High School AP students who began CSM as concurrently enrolled students said their counselors push students only to attend four-year institutions; a community college is simply not presented as a low-cost option for lower division work. These particular students found information about CSM and its guaranteed transfer admissions only at Mills' Career center who has staff familiar with CSM. These students also reported thinking that the counselors did or did not promote CSM for concurrent enrollment because of a potential loss of ADA.

Counselors Who Promote CSM:
The exceptions reported by students were Ms. Hom at Lincoln High School in San Francisco who promoted CSM (without mentioning Skyline and CCSF as alternatives) and counselors at Half Moon Bay High School.

CSM's High School Outreach:
Respondents included a number of students who attended San Mateo high schools. Virtually all of them had attended a workshop or presentation by CSM's Outreach Counselor who introduced them to the benefits of attending CSM, helped them complete applications, or facilitated concurrent enrollment. Students had consistent praise for this counselor and his work appears almost single-handedly responsible for the transition many students make from local high schools to CSM. Several remarked that they never could have handled the "paperwork" on their own.

In addition to the high school Outreach Counselor, two students who identified themselves as EOPS students also described how contact with an EOPS counselor who convinced them to attend CSM rather than another college in the area.

Limited Resources:
CSM's high school Outreach Counselor describes limited support for web resources. Until "Students Speak" was launched, for example, the moderators were unaware that this counselor maintained a website especially targeting the enrollment needs of concurrently enrolled high school students or graduating seniors.

> ✔ *Resolution*: A "High School Students" link to that site is now posted on the homepage.

He has also described a persistent and serious problem with the availability of class schedules. As he reports: "It's the most important tool I carry."

✔ *Resolution/In Progress*: The Office of Public Relations and Marketing has made available more schedules to this counselor and are revamping its distribution processes to ensure broader on-campus and off-campus distribution.

CSM's high school Outreach Counselor also describes being given very limited resources in terms of printed recruiting materials about the college. He has written and copied (on a copy machine) all his information materials himself. He describes, for example, how DeAnza and Foothill College widely distribute to high school students full-color College View and Career brochures. He asks: "How can we compete with that?"

✔ *Resolution/In Progress: The Office of Public Relations and Marketing is currently developing a variety of new print materials about CSM.*

Finally, he reports contact with several thousand students a year, at times working more than 60 hours a week to cover his territory. Even with the addition of a relatively new dedicated student recruiter and thus new personnel resources, his workload is considerable.

Choosing CSM over "X" Institution

Findings:

- **At least half of the respondents reported attending an institution of higher education prior to enrolling at CSM.**

- **Several students reported experiences with baccalaureate institutions that were unsatisfactory; they see CSM as helping them to transfer eventually to a "better" baccalaureate institution.**

- **Several students reported overcrowding, lack of available classes, disappointment in their major courses, a sense of personal isolation, and considerable expense as reasons for leaving a CSU and enrolling in CSM.**

- **Students who live in San Francisco will commute to CSM because of the "unfriendly" environment and overcrowding at CCSF and because CSM provides a more "welcoming" setting.**

- *Students who are UC eligible may consider CSM if they feel confident that as transfers they can secure a spot at a highly desirable UC campus in the schools of their choice.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM should consider targeting outreach activities to high school seniors and others who are likely to have been accepted by a CSU or UC. (Cohorts may be identified through SAT reporting, for example.)*

- *CSM should consider targeting students who have had unsuccessful experiences with a CSU or UC institution.*

- *CSM should consider a targeted recruitment of prospective math and science majors at Mills and Burlingame high schools for whom acceptance as freshmen by their first-choice UC in a first-choice major is remote. These students are significantly more likely to secure a spot in competitive departments and majors as transfers.*

- *CSM should consider outreach that specifically targets San Francisco residents.*

- *If CSM specifically targets AP students, it might review processes that include the timely evaluation of AP courses/scores, efficient transition for students from a concurrently-enrolled status, the assignment of priority registration dates, and the use of discipline-specific advisors.*

Where Students Come From:

At least half of the student respondents reported attending some institution of higher education before enrolling at CSM. Several international students reported attending a college or university in their home countries. Several other students attended out-of-state institutions, such as Florida International University and University of Alaska, Anchorage. Students also reported attending several CSU campuses, specifically San Francisco State University (SFSU), California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB), and California State University, East Bay (CSUEB), among others.

In addition, student respondents included students who had attended all community colleges along the Highway 92 corridor: Skyline, Cañada, Foothill, and DeAnza Colleges. They also reported attending community

colleges in the East Bay and throughout the State, such Pasadena and Glendale Community College.

Foothill College:
One student describes having to convince his/her parents that attending CSM was a better choice than Foothill College. According to this student, his/her parents view Foothill as having a better record of transfer for its graduates and more "prestige" than CSM. This student reports this perception as one shared by a number of his/her parents' friends.

A Comparative View of Cañada and Skyline:
Several students reported that Cañada's and Skyline's Learning Centers were "real pluses" since tutoring in a variety of disciplines and computers are easily accessible and centralized. CSM does not have anything comparable and several students reported the limited availability of tutoring and general-use computers at CSM.

More Accessible than its Sister Colleges:
Students report that CSM is easy to reach by car as it sits so close to major highway arteries, 101, 92, and 280, and that it is generally more accessible than the other two colleges.

They also report that public transportation is better at CSM than at the other two campuses, with buses usually running every half hour. Several students live far enough south that they take both a train and a bus and are pleased with the frequency of the connections. However, there were complaints that the bus to Belmont was too infrequent in the evenings, a problem for residents taking night courses.

City College of San Francisco:
The several students who reported attending CCSF describe similar experiences with considerable overcrowding in the classes or feeling "not invited" by faculty, staff, or students. One student, who lives in San Mateo, reported "being forced" to take a political science class at CCSF one semester because a class at CSM was cancelled at the last minute and being very unhappy about the experience. A few students reported regularly commuting from San Francisco.

As students describe CCSF:

"I felt ignored."   "Cold place, cold people."
"Classes so full you can't sit down."   "Impossible parking."
 "There were few open classes."

First Experiences with CSU's and other Baccalaureate Institutions:
Several students reported completing a year or more at baccalaureate institutions and not being pleased with the experience. They report enrolling in CSM so that they can earn enough units to transfer to a "better" institution and eventually earn a degree. These are individuals of diverse ages who have some sort of family connection in San Mateo County.

Among the issues reported by these students was one of expense. As one student reports: "first I suddenly had tuition…then it didn't make sense to commute from home to SFSU and pay over $100 a month just for parking alone!"

They also describe being disappointed with the major they selected and, in the case of CSU's, finding it "near to impossible" to get into "crowded classes" along with "feeling lonely and isolated."

Two students, who had been enrolled at a CSU, said that they found they didn't want the experience of "being away at college" and wanted to live at home—for them CSM is more welcoming.

"Why come to CSM, if you can go to UC Berkeley?" Or
"Why go to UC Berkeley, when you can come to CSM?"
One graduate of Mills High School reported completing several semesters as a concurrently-enrolled student at CSM before applying and being accepted as a science major into UC Irvine and UC Davis. However, he/she was not accepted by the school of engineering at UC Berkeley. So this student's parents decided he/she would have a better shot at UC Berkeley's school of engineering as a junior transferring from CSM.

This student reported that his/her family made the "big family decision" for him to attend CSM, rather than a UC because, in part, of the lower-cost. But the primary issue was whether the odds would be greater for UC Berkeley to accept him/her into the school of engineering as a transfer student. He also reported that other AP students from Mills High School are taking this path.

This student described how he/she is one of many AP-placed Asian students at Mills and Burlingame high schools who are science and math majors and

whose families would consider CSM as a low-cost alternative for lower-division coursework since that would help secure a path to the desired UC campus and school of study.

For this student to meet the UC goal, however, he/she also "really needs the right courses at the right time."

While this student described being highly satisfied with his courses, he/she also described a host of registration and counseling problems:

- Student reports taking AP exams, but scores did not arrive at CSM until July, too late for fall "priority" scheduling choices; then student had to meet with "math dean" in order to be cleared for higher level math in the absence of AP results even though student had transcripts "clearly" showing math coursework completed.

- Student reports that the "counseling department" and Admissions & Records have no record of AP scores.

- Student learns about "priority registration dates" from friends, not from college staff, and found this "really stressful" because of the lock-step nature of prerequisites he/she needed to be completed before transfer.

- As PEP student, he/she met with a counselor who wasn't familiar with the "proper chemistry sequence" and the advice "wasn't correct." Eventually the student was connected with the subject-matter advisor for engineering.

- Student is treated as a concurrently-enrolled student his first semester as CSM college student and thus did not receive "priority registration"; father intervened and contacted the president's office who forwarded the problem to the Vice President of Student Services who secured a "priority registration date" for him/her.

- As a second-semester college student, he/she also did not get a "priority enrollment" date and went twice to Admissions & Records where he/she reported being told by staff: "I will talk to my supervisor." Father also again intervened and contacted the Dean of Admissions & Records directly to secure a "priority registration date."

Pre-college Paths to CSM

Findings:

- *Positive experiences as concurrently-enrolled high school students and as MCHS students do influence students' attitudes about CSM; they do not, however, ensure that students will continue college study at CSM.*

- *Enrolling in CSM coursework while a high school student can help ensure acceptance at a UC or a highly-rated baccalaureate institution.*

- *Positive experiences with College for Kids can influence a prospective college student's enrollment decisions even a decade after the childhood experience.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM should begin to cultivate MCHS students and concurrently-enrolled students early in their high school experience (especially those enrolled in AP courses).*

- *CSM should look upon College for Kids as a means to cultivate both future students and the families of those children as those families become "key influencers" for prospective students.*

Concurrent Enrollment and Middle College High School (MCHS):
Moderators interviewed several students who were currently or had been concurrently-enrolled students. All these students described being very pleased with the quality of their learning experiences at CSM. One student, for example, "loved" CSM and participated in a variety of extracurricular activities including the honors program. The student began her/his career at CSM as a home-schooled 14-year-old and has stayed because of the guaranteed transfer path to a particularly desirable UC campus.

Moderators also interviewed several former and current MCHS students who reported being extremely satisfied with their MCHS experience and pleased they had earned college credits as teens. As noted above, one student interviewed had a sibling who also graduated from MCHS; another had an uncle who was a former MCHS student.

However, high-achieving high school students from both programs stated that a positive experience at CSM didn't necessarily make them want to enroll as college students. These pre-college experiences helped them earn confidence and skills as college students. These experiences also encouraged them to be ambitious about their college goals—which may include, as one student remarked "wanting more than just CSM." These students use concurrent enrollment or MCHS as a jumping stone to University of California or other prestigious baccalaureate institutions.

College for Kids:
One student in her late twenties reported that her positive association with CSM began more than a decade earlier when she enrolled in College for Kids. She reported that her experience was not uncommon: other CSM students also first learned of CSM through College for Kids.

Other Paths to CSM

Finding:

- ***Some students choose CSM solely because of job training, retraining, and career preparation opportunities.***

Two respondents reported being referred to CSM by "local job training agencies." They both described CSM as a "low-cost alternative" for career preparation and/or retraining. Discussion did not elicit more detail about the nature of these referrals, except that students report how CSM does not provide comprehensive, underline easily accessible, centralized information about its career programs. (See section "Selecting Classes: Career Courses.)

ESL: A Path to Other Coursework and New Goals

Findings:

- ***Anecdotes reported by students suggest that San Mateo Adult School does not actively or consistently promote CSM's ESL program.***

- ***ESL students who had previously attended an adult school reported difficulty with the transition to CSM and with navigating the college.***

- ***ESL students frequently reported a general lack of familiarity with CSM's programs and services.***

- ***The ESL program is an "enrollment management" opportunity— a path for some students to enroll in other additional courses.***

Recommendations:

- ***CSM might consider offering activities that would bring San Mateo Adult School faculty to the CSM campus.***

- ***CSM might consider developing a "bridge" course designed as, in part, an orientation for the adult school graduate.***

Students enrolled in ESL courses were well-represented in the focus groups. Thirteen focus group participants identified themselves as currently enrolled in 3 levels of ESL courses; additionally, 8 or more students had been enrolled in an ESL class previously at CSM.

These students consistently describe difficulty in figuring out how to apply to CSM and in completing an application for admission; in several cases reported, the teenage or grown children helped their parent/CSM student apply.

Several students stated that San Mateo Adult School "did not promote" CSM's ESL program and that the transition from it was "difficult" and "not smooth." But one student, however, also reported being "successfully" referred by San Mateo Adult School. Two students who attended ESL classes at CCSF reported hearing about CSM from either an instructor or counselor at CCSF.

The students who identified themselves as recent immigrants (arriving within the last two years) appeared to be the least familiar with CSM support programs unless they were international students on F-1 visas.

Students also reported that while the ESL program was an initial attraction, they discovered additional programs and started to attend other classes.

CSM'S Website as Recruitment Tool

Finding:

- *CSM's website is a critical source of information about CSM for prospective students investigating the college.*

Recommendations:

- *Summary information about CSM (its history, programs, and students served) needs to be easily accessible from the homepage.*

- *CSM's success stories, including personal vignettes about students, data on academic rankings, and/or information about award-winning programs, needs to be highlighted on the homepage in an easy-to-read format.*

- *CSM should pursue a strategy to ensure that internet search engines and online web resources easily link to CSM's homepage. For example, they might also include:*

  √ *Sponsored links on Google and Yahoo Search, among others, associated with a variety of key word searches;*

  √ *Robust Wikipedia entry that is dynamic and maintained; and*

  √ *Reciprocal link with College of Saint Mary (who owns "CSM.edu").*

How Students Use it:

The website is critical for those students who are unfamiliar with the Bay Area and moving from a distance, out of state, or out of the country. Students who were not native to the area generally reported enrolling at CSM because a partner, family member, or close friend lives in the area or intends to move to the area. These students do their homework and gather information about CSM from the website.

For these students, information about public transportation was very important along with local maps. One student describes doing Google map

searches so he/she could understand the local geography, become oriented, and figure out how to get around.

Three out-of-state students specifically described browsing information about various academic programs and found the information about rates of transfer "very important." These were the students who wanted to see "student success stories" prominent on the website.

"About CSM" Link:
As reported, the CSM website does not present summary or overview information about CSM in an easily digestible form—especially important for students new to CSM. The "About CSM" link brings one to a subpage that gives links to the various mission statements for CSM, but no summary description of CSM, its purpose, history, the nature of its programs, and the students it serves. Such information is either not posted or placed throughout the site.

CSM.EDU:
When asked to find CSM's homepage, one student interviewed notes that College of San Mateo shows up on the first page of thee Google search of the key word "CSM." The student's first inclination was to type in "CSM.edu". However, "CSM.edu" takes one directly to College of Saint Mary in Nebraska. He/she suggested that CSM might ask College of Saint Mary to consider posting a link on its website saying: "Looking for College of San Mateo? Click here." We could do the reciprocal.

Google:
One student described discovering CSM because he typed "community college" during a Google search. When we tired to replicate this, we found more than 276,000,000 references to "community colleges" in Google and didn't discover a link to CSM (This doesn't mean, however, that the student didn't find one!).

CSM's Competition:
When we used key words "San Francisco Bay Area community college," there were 1,970,000 links with Heald College as the first link and Foothill College as the second. None of the first 5 pages examined include a link to SMCCCD and we did not search further.

Moderators found that Foothill has placed a "sponsored link" on subsequent pages with the following text:

<u>Foothill College</u>
Online. Transfer. Career Programs. Upgrade. Advance.
www.foothill.edu
San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose

CSM's homepage is the first link, of course, to key words "College of San Mateo" and the second link after SMCCCD's for "San Mateo community college."

Yahoo Search:

In Yahoo Search, key word search for "community colleges in the Bay Area" brought up 20 links to community colleges; CSM was 13th on the list and an excerpt from CSM's mission statement was used to identify the link: "Open-access, student-focused, teaching and learning institution which serves the diverse educational, economic, social, and cultural needs of the community."

Wikipedia as a Recruitment Tool:
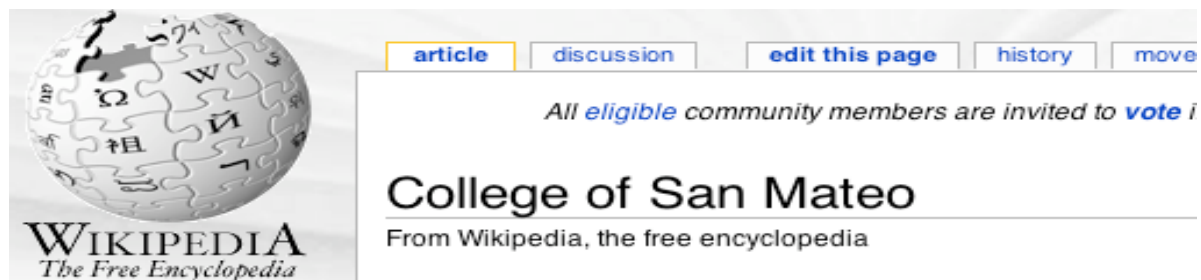
What helps ensure better ranking in Google and other search engines is one's presence on Wikipedia, the free open-source encyclopedia. It is fast becoming one of the most frequently used sources of information—"for just about everything," as one student reported. While it is not considered a scholarly standard academic source, the fact that users can continuously modify and edit entries has a self-correcting effect and many find it remarkably accurate.

One student reported the 400-word entry for CSM. The entry also includes links to CSM's homepage and to CSM's historical collection of photographs assembled online by William Rundberg.
(http://smcweb.smccd.net/accounts/csmarchives/vewebsite/index.htm)

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Moderators were not previously aware of the *Wikipedia* entry nor was staff from Public Relations and Marketing.

The entry for CSM has no images and is poorly developed if one compares it to entries for CCSF, Foothill College, and DeAnza College which each are several thousand words in length and display pertinent logos and a variety of photographs. Considerable care has gone into the development of these entries by the colleges that are, in effect, competition to CSM.

Components of Matriculation

Applying to CSM

Summary:
Students describe a range of experiences when enrolling at CSM for the first time and are divided about the ease of their experience. Some of these differences lie in the fact that one has multiple options for registering for the first time and the different processes require different steps: one can use CCCApply and apply online, one can print a PDF of the application from the website and mail it in or drop it off, and one can use the application in the class schedule.

As described below, if a student is a member of a particular cohort that is served by a dedicated program (EOPS, PEP, MCHS, athletics, etc.), the student is likely to describe the application and enrollment process in positive terms. (See section, "Special Programs and Matriculation Processes.")

However, students consistently reported a host of problems with the online application process. One of the "Students Speak" moderators who applied to CSM for the Summer 2007 term faced many of the difficulties reported upon by students.

Jargon and Code Language as Barriers:

Findings:

- *Students report that the use of jargon and "insider" terminology is confusing for first-time students when used by staff or used in web-based and hard-copy materials.*

- *Students report the need for clearer signage that identifies building and facilities and large-format maps located throughout the campus at key locations, including parking lots.*

- *The class schedule is a critical and widely-used tool for virtually all students; few students, however, were familiar with the course catalog.*

Recommendations:

- *Materials which are likely to be used by a first-time student need to define key terms.*

- *CSM should consider making the course catalog available to students at no charge, both as a service to students and as a marketing tool.*

- *Online PDF versions of the class schedule and the catolog need to be genuinely searchable.*

- *CSM might encourage staff who are likely to work with first-time students to define and explain key terms repeatedly.*

- *CSM might consider a campus-wide effort to improve signage, by posting large-scale maps at key locations and identifying key areas where a student may seek help.*

- *CSM might consider the prospect of renaming buildings to connote their function, e.g. planetarium, (rather than using building numbers that do not tell students about the primary purpose of the building).*

Students consistently describe how staff members from all areas of the college refer to the terms "WebSMART" and "CCCApply" and assume new students understand what these tools constitute. Some students, for example, said it took quite awhile for them to understand that WebSMART worked like a software application within CSM's website. On the college homepage as noted below, students don't recognize that the WebSMART graphic is a link or something that new students need to learn about. On the WebSMART site it is referred to as a "resource." For some students, that's just not enough explanation.

Others describe being launched into CCCApply and being uncertain about whether they were completing an application to CSM itself.

Several students describe being confused about the meaning of a "G" number upon hearing about it for the first time.

No student could define the term "matriculation" when asked by moderators. When moderators described the core steps in the matriculation process (e.g. admissions, placement testing, counseling, etc.) some students, however, then recognized familiar steps.

Course Schedule and Catalog:
Virtually all students reported using the hard-copy class schedule; however, students typically use the terms "schedule" and "catalog" interchangeably.

This confusion becomes an issue when it's clear that most students don't know what a catalog is and thus don't take advantage of a valuable resource, especially the inventory of complete course descriptions. The catalog can be used as an excellent marketing tool because of its complete program and course descriptions.

In addition, several students mentioned the cost of the catalog. CSM might examine why it charges students for a course catalog that is such a vital resource for students and contains information critical to their academic success.

Signage, Maps, and Building Names:
In the context of discussions about jargon and "insiders' speak," several students raised the issue of poor signage, lack of large-print current maps in key locations (including parking lots), and the effect of naming buildings by only numbers. Students report consistently that signage is "very poor almost everywhere."

In addition, the fact that buildings are identified solely by numbers mystifies some students. As one student says, "How can I figure out what Building One means? It tells me nothing about what goes on in the building—it's just one more thing that makes me confused."

Applying Online—Step One:

Findings:

- _Students report that the text on "New Students Steps" and "Welcome to CSM Online Application" pages is far too dense and confusing and the steps need to be simpler._

- _Online information does not clearly delineate the steps new students should expect after completing CCCApply, including information about registration dates and how (or whether) to log on to WebSMART._

- _CCCApply does not offer enrollment options for a given semester which are in sync with the availability of CSM's schedule online; no information is provided online that instructs students to apply on CCCApply for a "current" semester in these cases._

- _One case study indicated that Admissions & Records' email support is timely and courteous._

Recommendations:

- _Both the text and the steps in the online application need to be simplified._

- _Online information should inform students in simple straightforward terms what to expect of CCCApply and the next steps in the enrollment process._

- _Online information needs to direct prospective students how to use CCCApply if the next term is not yet an option for application._

- _Information about Admissions & Records' email resource needs to be widely distributed._

- _CSM might consider the option of a streamlined application for students who are taking classes purely for "personal enrichment."_

Students who were interviewed one-on-one while navigating the college website were given the following scenario as a task to conduct on the CSM website:

> **"You want to help a friend who is coming to enroll at CSM for the first time. What would you show this person to help him/her with registering as a student for the first time."**

Students began with the following first step:

May-Home Page Link for New Students:
During May, the interviewees did not attempt any of the actual steps to applying online. While only one of the interviewees had applied online in this manner, each found the "New Students" menu on the homepage quickly. → → → → →
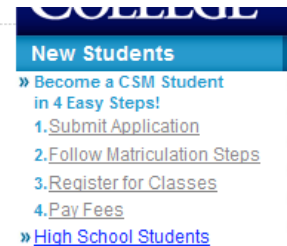
July-Home Page Link for New Students:
During July, as moderators reviewed findings, we found a revision to the homepage that is confusing. What follows the "4 Easy Steps!" are links that are not the steps, as one would customarily expect. → → → → →
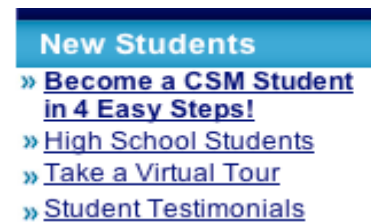
As a next step, interviewed students easily found "New Student Steps" page:

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Submit Application	**Follow Matriculation Steps**	**Register for Classes**	**Pay Fees**
You must submit an application prior to	Matriculation is the process which brings the College and a student who	Now you're ready to choose your classes and register!	Don't forget at the time

However, students report these "4" steps are far from being "4 Easy Steps!"

Students commented upon denseness of the material the page. Interviewees wanted less information and simpler directions. Several suggested that the material on the page be distributed among several pages to make the material less dense and easier to determine what to do next. All found the "Apply online now" link and assumed this would be the next step.

Before You Get to CCCApply:

Students also reported that the next step which takes one to the "Welcome" page (below) is also far too dense and needs to be simplified:

College of San Mateo

2007-2008 APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION

Welcome to the College of San Mateo Online Application

If you have already submitted your application to College of San Mateo, you can access Special Links and Opportunities and your Application Confirmation by going to the <u>Application Manager</u>.

In addition, it doesn't tell students that they will be launched into the "CCCApply" application process.

CCCApply—Now What's Next?:

One of the most consistent inquiries made via email to the "Contact Us" email address were questions about what the students should do next <u>after</u> completing the CCCApply application.

They are not sent an email immediately, for example, CSM that provides them with information about the next steps for scheduling classes and the dates when they can register. No clear description of next steps is available on the website. In essence, they are left hanging.

Case Study of the Lost Enrollee:

One moderator actually applied online for the first time in March 2007 for the Summer 2007 and met with many of the problems described by students above. The end result, unfortunately, was that she never received any confirmation by mail of her application with a registration date.

Her application steps included the following:

- While a Summer 2007 schedule was available as a PDF online, in mid-March she found that CCCApply did not provide an option to apply for the summer session. It provided only the Spring 2007 semester as an option. What was the applicant to do?

- She then sent an email to CSMadmissions@smccd.edu inquiring about the next step and received a polite reply from a staff member in Admissions & Records within a day who wrote that the application for Spring 2007 would allow her to register for summer classes and that she should check her registration date via WebSMART. Also included was the information that "applicants with college degrees are exempt from matriculation."

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- She did not find information online that explained how to get a "student number" to log in for the first time at WebSMART or any information that defines a "G" number. When she inquired again via email about how she would learn the registration date and acquire a student number, she received an immediate email reply from Admissions & Records that provided instructions about using the SS# and birthdate to log in to WebSMART.

- When the moderator tried to log in to WebSMART, however, these numbers did not work and the option provided by WebSMART were instructions to go <u>in person to Admissions & Records with a photo ID</u> to reset the user ID or pin. The moderator did and Admissions & Records Staff Member #2 immediately reset the password. This staff member was courteous and helpful.

- *Finally, she never received any information in the mail that provided her with a registration date for Summer 2007. And this process absorbed several hours from start to finish.*

CCCApply & the Student Enrolling for Enrichment:
Students who enroll for personal enrichment find the CCCApply application "unduly long and irrelevant," "tedious," and "overly time-consuming." As one student pointed out, he/she could not recall the last 5 or 6 college enrollments, identified by months and years required by CCCSApply. This was especially irksome for a student who had skipped a semester at CSM and had to apply again, but had earned previous degrees several decades ago.

Matriculation: What is It?

Findings:

- **Students are divided about the usefulness of the matriculation process.**

- **Some students view the matriculation steps as enrollment barriers.**

- **Few students reported being aware of matriculation exemptions or options for opting out of processes.**

Recommendations:

- *Online instructions and other materials about the matriculation steps need to be simplified and the density of text reduced.*

- *Prospective students need to be offered matriculation exemptions as genuine options in simplified, easy to understand formats.*

- *Matriculation processes can vary from college to college since Title V can be interpreted by institutions in a variety of ways. CSM might consider a broad discussion among various college constituencies about who should be included in the matriculation "net" and develop policies that are widely understood by faculty, counselors, staff, and administrators.*

- *The new "CSM Welcome Team," who was introduced in Summer 2007 as mentors and guides through the matriculation process, may be a timely and effective intervention for some students and might be explored as an option to adopt broadly at CSM.*

As noted above, "matriculation" is a term few students can define.

When shown a hard copy of the "matriculation ticket," by moderators, less than half the students recognized it.

Students were clearly divided about the process of matriculation itself. Their degree of satisfaction seemed most tied to whether they were satisfied with the counseling they had undergone and with the placement test process.

Students interviewed all found the "Follow Matriculation Steps" confusing as it constitutes much more than a single "Step 2." In fact, students reported nothing "easy" about the steps outlined for the application process. → → → → →

> **Step 2**
> **Follow Matriculation Steps**
>
> Matriculation is the process which brings the College and a student who enrolls for credit into an agreement for the purpose of developing and realizing the student's educational objective. Students who are taking classes for personal enrichment/no credit (aka non-matriculating students) can proceed to Step #3.
>
> » See more about steps:
> 1. Fill out Matriculation Ticket*
> 2. Admissions
> 3. Assessment/ Placement Testing
> 4. Orientation
>   a. On-line Orientation Program
>   Print your individual Orientation Guide
>   b. Workbook—An essential document for ALL students!
> 5. Counseling
> 6. Follow-up
>
> More info

Matriculation Exemptions—Not a Genuine Option?

Few students reported being aware that they could possibly be "exempt" from the matriculation process. *Prospective students are not provided with options online to allow someone to "opt out" of matriculation and simplify the path for non-exempt students.*

In fact, information about exemption is inconsistent. In the online "New Students Steps" (above), for example, an exempt student is defined as one who is taking a class for "personal enrichment or no credit." This is incomplete and limits the options for students applying solely online. In addition, CCCApply uses another set of terms for several educational goals which ultimately determine students' exemption status.

A variety of anecdotal information suggests that the matriculation steps are themselves barriers to enrollment for some students. Most students don't know that the "educational goal" they check on an application will determine their matriculation status. When told, it then becomes a challenge for the student to figure out the appropriate educational goal to check on the

application to ensure exemption. And students are frequently not certain what "educational development" or even "personal enrichment" mean to begin with.

Exempt Students are Frequently "Key Influencers":
Exempt students include "older" students who are most likely to be taking courses for enrichment or job training or perhaps to begin a first step in an interrupted education. The student who might be exempt also is frequently a person who may be a "key influencer" of a friend or family member enrolled at CSM as a matriculated student. These, for example, may be the spouses, parents, and grandparents of matriculated students in the 18-22 years age range.

Some of these individuals describe being "put off" by the many steps, especially placement testing, even when the prospective student only wants to "simply to take a class or two." As a result they may view CSM as "difficult to navigate."

One counselor stated to a moderator: "It's up to us to determine if a student is exempt; it's not up to the student to decide." What ends up constituting the "matriculation net" is mystifying for many students. Some resent that they have no choices in deciding what services they use or participate in.

Orientation:

Finding:

- **Most students are not aware of orientation materials, unless they are associated with a special program.**

Recommendation:

- **CSM might consider the development of an online orientation that is dynamic and genuinely prepares students to navigate CSM with ease.**

Only one student reported actually completing the online orientation or even knowing that it was available online. This student reported it as "helpful" and "well- done."

The only other students who reporting participating in any type of "orientation" were several PEP students who liked the on-campus orientation, especially the tour of the campus.

WebSMART:

Findings:

- *Students are divided about their experiences with using WebSMART: initially some find it challenging and need help learning it. Once they master it, they find it often "easy to use."*

- *Many students do not know that the WebSMART graphic on the homepage is a link to WebSMART and thus may have difficulty finding it for the first time.*

- *Students expect complete course descriptions to be available online.*

- *Some students report selecting courses only using WebSMART so those course descriptions are especially important.*

- *Some students report difficulty with their first "default" logon to WebSMART and are dissatisfied with having to go in person to Admissions & Records to have it reset.*

Recommendations:

- *Develop a brief interactive online orientation that is placed on the WebSMART homepage (not solely with "Orientation").*

- *Indicate that the WebSMART graphic on the homepage is a live link.*

- *Bring online all course descriptions for all courses listed in WebSMART's class schedules.*

- *CSM might consider developing a process for resetting a logon on WebSMART that a student can complete solely online.*

As noted above, several students remarked that the website does not define the function of WebSMART and that college staff members readily use the term assuming that students understand what it is.

Students are divided about the experience of using it for the first time. Many students reported needing assistance for the first and second semesters, especially students who identified themselves as EOPS students or recent

immigrants who were in their 30's and 40's. They received assistance from family members, counselors, and Admissions & Records staff (at the computers in front of the second-floor counters).

Once they master it, however, they find it easy to navigate and appreciate that it provides 24 hour access and that they can add, drop, and pay fees online. Many think it is "intuitive" and "user-friendly."

Concerns Reported about WebSMART:

Finding WebSMART
Some students new to WebSMART report difficulty finding it for the first time. It's not listed as a Quick Link on CSM's website.

Where's WebSMART on CSM's homepage?

←Students don't know this is a link.

"G" Numbers
Several students also reported problems with their "G" numbers. Their birthdates and social security numbers do not act as the default when they try to log on for the first time. They are then displeased with having to go in person to Admissions & Records for help. This presents an obvious difficulty for some working students.

As one student asked: "if my bank can figure out how to keep my logon information secure, then why can't CSM?"

One faculty advisor reported that about 10% of the time, first-time users are forced to switch their pin numbers for no apparent reason. This reportedly creates confusion for some students.

Course Descriptions: Incomplete Inventory
The WebSMART class schedule does not include course descriptions for all courses. This creates a disadvantage for students who are forced to toggle from WebSMART to a downloaded PDF of the class schedule or who don't have access to a printed schedule (often the class for students out of the local area).

As so many current and prospective students increasingly use web-based tools for registration and enrollment, students report expecting easy access to course descriptions.

Concerns Addressed/Previously Reported about WebSMART:

Access only for Registered Students
In Spring 2007, one had access to WebSMART class schedules only as a registered student.

That left no genuinely "searchable" option for prospective students browsing for classes online. A PDF of the class schedule (posted online) is not a searchable tool for most users.

> ✔ _Resolution_: WebSMART class schedules now accessible to all, Sp'07

Course Descriptions: CRN Links
In early Spring 2007, users didn't know that the CRN numbers in WebSMART are linked, in many cases, to a course description. Many students did not know many course descriptions were available as a result.

> ✔ _Resolution_: CRN # is now underlined in "link blue" and explanatory text has been added to pages: "Further details about each course are available by clicking the CRN link." Sp'07

Waitlists
One of the most consistent complaints voiced by students was that one cannot be waitlisted on WebSMART. However, this was a new feature added for the Fall 2007 semester.

> ✔ _Resolution_: wait listing added for Fall 2007

Placement Testing

Findings:

- **Students generally report satisfaction with the placement test process.**

- **Many students, especially returning students, report anxiety about placement testing; as a result they consistently need good "customer service" skills in this setting and sensitivity to their needs.**

- *Several respondents questioned why CSM does not recognize placement test results from other community colleges.*

Recommendations:

- *Good customer service should be a high priority for this key unit, especially as it provides one of the first experiences and impressions of the college for prospective students.*

- *Appropriate staff and faculty might consider examining what constitutes an "acceptable" retake rate for math assessments and explore ways of improving that rate if needed.*

- *Appropriate staff and faculty should explore the issue of accepting placement test results from other community colleges as a way of eliminating needless, unnecessary steps in the matriculation process for new students.*

- *CSM should explore ways to "prepare" students to take placement tests, both to ensure students are assessed appropriately and to help mitigate students' anxiety about the process.*

Students generally reported being satisfied with the process of placement testing, including the results of assessments. Most, though not all, thought they were accurately placed. One student, who had been a student at CSM many years earlier, reported being pleased with the greater flexibility of the assessment scheduling process and that he/she didn't have to endure long waits or testing in large groups—"cattle-call testing." Students also generally reported being satisfied with the timeliness of the results reporting and their availability through WebSMART.

Many students also described experiencing a lot of anxiety about the testing process—particularly an issue for returning students who had not been tested in many years. As one returning student described: "It's the part I dreaded most." Those students who reported anxiety about the process were very appreciative when the Placement Center staff members were "helpful."

Customer Service:
Several students who were satisfied with the placement testing process described being helped by "cordial" and "helpful" staff in the placement center. Students reported that "helpful staff" assisted them with making

appointments with the counselors and figuring out the next steps in the matriculation process for that individual.

However, other anecdotes reported by an athletic coach, several students, and a parent focus on Placement Center staff member(s) who is/are frequently "rude" to students.

A parent of a prospective student described a "rude" exchange with two high school students in which a staff member reportedly said: "My goodness…you can't just walk in here and expect to take the test." Concerns about the manner which <u>new</u> students have been treated in the Placement Center have also led the athletic staff to make special placement testing arrangements for some athletes (administered by another staff member outside the unit).

Preparing Students for Tests:
In addition, one of the questions raised by participants was whether one can accurately determine one's math placement level based upon only 3 sample problems. The athletic coach reported that in his experience, students frequently do not know how to read the test results when they are instructed to retake a test.

One student also reported that practice examples available on the second floor of the Building 1 were incomplete.

"Accepting" other Colleges' Assessments:
Several students and faculty members also raised the issue of why CSM does <u>not</u> formally recognize placement tests administered by other community colleges in the state.

As one faculty member asked: "If the tests are all validated by the State Chancellor's Office, why can't we 'validate' them?" This faculty member pointed out that several other community colleges in the Bay Area accept the placement test results of other institutions in the system.

Counseling

Findings:

- *Students engage in numerous ways to obtain information for academic planning, including using resources from CSM's website and consulting with informed classified staff and student aides.*

- *Students are divided about the quality of their experiences with counselors.*

- *Students describe counselors or advisors as "effective" when they teach students concrete skills, help them set goals, and "broaden their horizons."*

- *Students consistently report that some counselors appear disengaged during counseling sessions, providing either incorrect or "formulaic" guidance.*

- *Students frequently cite "academic advisors" as providing important discipline-specific knowledge, accurate information, and valued guidance.*

Recommendations:

- *Counseling program might consider developing "enrollment management" strategies to ensure more consistent quality in its service delivery.*

- *Counselors should not underestimate the importance of their roles as teachers—helping students learn how to use institutional and other resources effectively as well as define and meet their educational goals.*

- *Counseling program might consider offering students a range of options in seeking academic planning information, including access to accurate online materials and the assistance of trained students and classified staff.*

- *Counseling program might consider making counseling processes more transparent for students. The counseling program could define standards of service—explicitly*

articulating, for example, what students should expect from Drop-in Counseling or during a "typical" session with a counselor or advisor; those standards should be clearly communicated to students.

• *Counseling program should continue to offer students the services of discipline-specific academic advisors.*

Summary:
In general, students are divided about the quality of their experiences with counselors. When students are linked with those whom they view as "good" conscientious counselors, the students describe very positive experiences that result in effective goal-setting and genuine help in making important life-planning and life-changing decisions. Conversely, the poor experience with the careless counselor results in students making decisions based on faulty knowledge or feeling derailed from their goals.

Counselors/Advisors as Teachers and Guides:
When students described an "effective" counseling session, they highly valued being given "accurate" information by the counselor or advisor. In addition, they valued sessions in which they were taught concrete skills, such as how to use Assist.org or WebSMART for the first time. (They also describe student assistants as effectively teaching them these skills in "Drop-in Counseling.")

One student was very impressed that a counselor showed him/her information about a particular program posted on Foothill College's website because it contained more accurate information than CSM's site. Very few focus group students were familiar with the course catalog and most said they had never seen one when moderators asked them to identify it during the focus groups. Yet those who were familiar with it credited their counselors for showing them that the catalog was a useful tool and expressed appreciation.

Students also valued counselors or advisors who pushed them to set goals, such as choosing a major while acknowledging that students could change their major at any time. Students valued counselors or advisors who spent time developing the student's educational plan through exploring the student's interests and hobbies. (However, at least half the students did not recall completing a formal educational plan with a counselor.)

In addition, students valued being introduced to programs that "broadened horizons" such as learning communities, the President's Speaker's Series,

and CSM Connects. Several students stated their counselors had an important impact on their lives.

"Getting Help Where You Can"
Students consistently report as "helpful" the "counseling staff" they initially encounter in Bldg. 5; they describe them as "staff" and "student staff." Students do not consistently make distinctions among CSM's employment categories of "counselors," "advisors," "classified staff, and "student assistants." But many are aware of distinctions between "faculty advisors" and "counselors."

In general students report many ways to obtain accurate information and frequently use classified staff from a variety of programs for every aspect of program planning and success strategies.

"Better Off on Your Own"
Students are mixed about the extent to which counselors were helpful specifically in with the processes of registering or selecting classes. In fact, several reported that the website was "helpful enough" and that "self-counseling" was better than those "not helpful counselors." These students "figure out a viable option on [their] own" and several found the IGETC and CSU GE requirements (and matrices) easy to work from without assistance.

One former MCHS student now enrolled at CSM reported: "I can do it myself…I know more about what I need to transfer than most counselors" and "I always carry the catalog with me."

Scheduling System Issues:
Some students reported the counselors are "often booked" and that there was a "long wait to be seen" and an "inefficient system" of scheduling appointments. In one case, the student reported being told to wait until completing 60 units before making an appointment.

One faculty advisor reports a consistent problem with the assignment of students randomly to counselors and advisors by Drop-In Counseling staff. He/she describes how a nursing student, for example, was sent to him when it's quite clear that this is not his/her discipline. His/her concern is that staff in Drop-In Counseling were not taking enough time with students to identify their specific needs and thus the appropriate referrals to counselors and advisors.

Not Connected to Students:

A consistent theme about some counselors was that they were not interested in their work and did not take the time to analyze the needs and aspirations of the individual student.

Descriptors and phrases used by students included:

"Disinterested"

"Distracted during…session"

"Operates on remote control"

"Did not consider [my] workload"

"Should be open to more options"

"Doesn't see alternatives"

"Responses were formulaic and repetitive"

"Recommended what I wasn't interested in"

Inconsistent Quality of Information:

Several students complain that they were given incorrect information concerning prerequisites, general education, and major requirements that had serious consequences for them. Some of those consequences included delayed graduation and transfer because the student unexpectedly needed additional coursework.

Several students described being given information by one counselor and then being told subsequently by another counselor that information was incorrect. One student reported using his professor, who is also an "advisor," "just in case" to verify information in addition to using counselors assigned through Drop-in Counseling. Another described using both a counselor and an athletic coach to advise him/her "just to make sure."

Transcript Evaluation Problems:

Some students report a lack of clearly-defined procedures for evaluating transcripts of courses students have completed at other institutions, including high schools, as well as barriers for efficiently approving prerequisite work.

Three students described experiences with counselors in which the counselors did not know how to evaluate the transcripts of previous coursework from other institutions. These students brought transcripts to the counseling session and yet the counselors didn't seem to know the next steps for these students to get their previous course work evaluated. One student described bringing the course catalog from his previous college and, even though it demonstrated that he had successfully completed a prerequisite math course, the counselor still refused to allow him to enroll in

a math class. This student went to the "dean" to appeal successfully but was "very frustrated" that the counselor did not make an initial decision.

The issue about evaluation of transcripts from other colleges also emerged in relation to the Admissions & Records staff. There appears a disconnect between the role of counseling staff and Admissions & Records when it comes to some transcript evaluation that involves coursework the student completed at another institution. For example, several weeks before the focus groups two students were told by staff that someone would get back to them with results of transcript evaluations (of college coursework completed elsewhere), but the students were still waiting.

Selecting a Counselor—"Luck of the Draw":
Students consistently report that the quality of counseling is random and "depends on the person and the day scheduled." A typical scenario reported is of a student who has seen 4 or 5 counselors while at CSM for several semesters. Most of the counselors he/she sees are "understanding" that the student doesn't begin college with clear goals. The student reports: "You come to CSM because you didn't know what you wanted to do." But typically that student also meets one or more counselors along the way who are explicitly "rude." As one student described: "The counselor really got mad at me" and said "you have to choose a major!"

Reports of Unsatisfactory Experiences:
Students reported a variety of less than satisfactory experiences with a few counselors.

Several students reported unsatisfactory sessions with a counselor, for example, who in one case told a student to return to adult school even though the student had "completed" the adult school ESL coursework. In another case, a student reported that this counselor did not return repeated calls or respond to a student's follow-up email despite a pressing issue that needed resolution. (This student also said the counselor "helpfully" clarified that one doesn't necessarily need a B.A. in the same major as one attempts a M.A.) Sessions with this counselor were described by another student as "every time a horrible experience" with "every time just small talk" even though "I love [this person] to death." Still another described having to wait while this person "rudely" remained on the phone.

One student described another counselor as "quite rude," making this student wait in the hall for more than 20 minutes while the counselor talked to another student without acknowledging this student's presence or the fact this student had an appointment. The episode seemed upsetting for this

student because he/she was returning to school after an absence of many years. Another student said this counselor was "not at all helpful" and referred to the student's previous experiences in college as a time when that student was "young and dumb." This student was not amused.

In another case, a student described a problem with WebSMART in which he/she was dropped in error from a speech class. He/she reported going to several counselors about this problem who were "no help."

Students Share Information about Counselors and Advisors:
In most cases, students did not describe long-term relationships with counselors or advisors, but there were some exceptions: Two students, for example, stated that they continued to see a particular counselor because the information he/she provided was so "accurate and reliable"—even though that counselor no longer did "generalist" counseling but worked in a program dedicated to a specific population. When students are very serious about transfer, several described seeking out the academic advisors and giving one another tips about where to go for the "best" and most accurate advice.

Students consistently praised particular advisors and counselors who were "excellent" for advising in engineering, physics and other science majors, and business majors. One advisor for business was especially praised for encouraging students to consider learning communities and service learning opportunities. Accurate advice about transfer is critical for students and thus they consistently praised several counselors and advisors for being well-informed or particularly "good about transfer." (However, one "expert' in transfer also provided a referral to another advisor who was then on leave, a fact that "frustrated" the student.)

Highly-Rated Career Courses:
A few students reported enrolling in career planning courses, such as CRER 120, and consistently rated the experience as very helpful. As a result of the course(s), students developed educational plans and set long-range career and academic goals. Students in these courses also report being very familiar with a variety of support services on campus and being pleased that they are knowledgeable about those services and thus better able to use them.

"Work-arounds" the Matriculation Processes

Case Studies

Findings:

- *Because of perceived inefficiencies or barriers in the matriculation process, some programs have created "work-arounds."*

- *Their strategies include simple, straight forward instructions about how to apply to CSM displayed on the respective program website.*

- *In one case, the program provides information explicitly about "how to avoid matriculation " for its population of largely working adults.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM might examine these programs' strategies as possibly symptomatic of systemic problems.*

- *CSM might consider adopting similar styles of communication as it instructs students on the application and matriculation processes.*

- *CSM might consider providing similar explicit instructions in a variety of venues about exemptions for non-matriculating students.*

Two programs have created their own systems to "work-around" what the lead faculty views as bottlenecks, barriers, lack of clarity, or inefficiencies in the matriculation process.

Football Program:

The football coaches have created ways to streamline the application process for new students. The steps they outline for students on the program website, demonstrate these streamlined approaches.

Recruits
The step-by-step process to becoming part of the Bulldog Family.
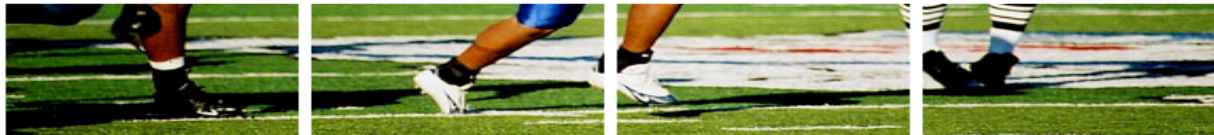
Step 1
Complete online recruit form. **Click Here >>**

Step 2
Fill out application for admission. **Click Here >>**

Step 3
Mail application along with game film to:

College of San Mateo Football
c/o Coach Bret Pollack
1700 West Hillsdale Blvd
San Mateo, CA 94402

Step 4
Take placement/skills assessment test. **Click Here for More Info and Plackment Test Dates >>**

Step 5
Schedule appointment with Coach Pollack to map out academic plan and enroll in classes (please bring placement test scores). **Click here to email Coach Pollack** or call 650.574.6467.

Step 6
Additional Resources:
Financial Aid Services - **Click Here >>**
Extended Opportunity Program & Services (EOPS) - **Click Here >>**

The coaches report being involved with essentially every aspect of the matriculation process because they want to be able to ensure that these "students don't slip through the cracks." They teach students how to use WebSMART, for example, serve as liaisons to Admissions & Records, and assist them with selecting courses.

Because of the repeated problems cited above with scheduling placement testing, they also make special test-taking accommodations for new students.

Accounting Program:

Serving a very different population, accounting faculty members have constructed a program for students to train as CPA's, tax preparers, and accounting assistants.

For several program faculty members, the matriculation process is a barrier for many returning, working students. However, the guidelines for "exemptions" have been murky for the faculty. One accounting faculty member reported that none of the three business advisors was clear about what constituted a non-matriculated student. They then sought clarification from the Dean of Counseling.

What resulted are very clear instructions on the accounting program website about how to apply to the college, including details about log on procedures for WebSMART. It defines the matriculation process. It also provides simple, factual information about how to "Apply and Avoid Matriculation."

One should note that the website page is simplified because not all details about every program facet are included—they are instead accessible through other links.

The following is an excerpt from the "Register for Classes" link on the <u>accounting homepage:</u>

To enroll in a class at College of San Mateo follow these steps:

1. Apply for admission.
Apply on-line at <u>websmart.smccd.edu</u>. Everyone is admitted and admission is free.

After you apply you will receive an e-mail with instructions on how to register for classes. The e-mail will include a logon ID and password, and should arrive in less than one hour.

Register
for
Classes

When you apply for admission you will be asked to state your major and your educational goal. Your answers will determine if you need to complete the matriculation process. The matriculation process includes:
1. Taking placement tests
2. Completing college orientation (on-line or on campus)
3. Meeting with a counselor or academic advisor

If you plan to earn a certificate or degree from CSM, or you plan to transfer, you must complete the three matriculation steps. Follow the directions below labeled **"Apply with Matriculation"**.

You can avoid the three matriculation steps by following the directions labeled **"Apply and Avoid Matriculation"**.

>>> Apply with Matriculation
If you plan to earn a certificate, degree or transfer, enter the major and educational goals listed below. You will be required to take placement tests, complete orientation and see a counselor or academic advisor before registering.
Major or Program of Study: Select best match from list of accounting programs
Educational Goal: Select best match from first five choices

>>> Apply and Avoid Matriculation
When you apply enter the major and educational goal listed below. You will NOT be required to take placement tests, complete orientation or see a counselor or academic advisor.
Major or Program of Study: Self Enrichment
Educational Goal: Advance in current job / career

Special Programs and Matriculation Processes

Finding:

- *Students who are associated with special programs generally describe high levels of satisfaction with the matriculation process, including initial enrollment, placement testing, counseling, and academic planning. Programs include EOPS, International Students, Middle College High School, PEP, and Intercollegiate Athletics.*

Summary:

Focus groups and interviews were <u>not</u> organized to focus solely on individual programs with student respondents specifically recruited from pre-selected individual programs. The findings here reflect the information reported by respondents who <u>choose to identify themselves as a program participant</u>s.

The respondents included several students who identified themselves as being a current or former MCHS student, international student, EOPS student, a participant in PEP, or an intercollegiate athlete. They generally describe high levels of satisfaction with their programs and with CSM in general as a result of the personal attention they receive.

Students associated with such single-program cohorts describe receiving help with virtually all steps of the matriculation process.

Many of these students could not even recall their initial experience enrolling at CSM as a counselor or other program staff member had completed some steps for them. Several students described how it was customary, for example, for their counselor to handle WebSMART activities for them for several semesters before the student "got the hang of it."

These students also report that program staff also helped them navigate throughout the college in a variety of other ways, including assisting them in seeking financial aid or scholarships.

EOPS

Findings:

- **Respondents who identified themselves as EOPS students report high levels of satisfaction with the support and guidance they receive from program staff.**

- **Respondents included EOPS students who described successful high school outreach.**

Several students identified themselves as EOPS students and report high levels of satisfaction with the program, availing themselves of a variety of assistance including special tutoring and financial aid.

Two students reported that their relationship with the program began via an EOPS program staff member who visited their local high schools and "convinced" them of benefits of CSM rather than another community college.

This was true of a Latino student, for example, who described being "heavily recruited" to attend Cañada and participate in its bi-lingual program. The student described how he/she initially attended a variety of events organized by EOPS staff members and students, including field trips. He/she described EOPS staff members as also assisting his/her extended family: the mother (currently a student at Skyline) and as well as a younger sibling who is going to attend next Fall. In addition, one outreach staff member was cited by several students as being very helpful in the initial enrollment process for high school graduating seniors.

Another student, who was a former international student, described how program staff had done "everything they could" to see if the student could qualify for financial assistance services. (He/she didn't qualify.)

In contrast to the experiences cited above, two students did report "poor" experiences with an EOPS Counselor, citing a counseling session scenario similar to one described earlier in the section, "Counseling." Both students identified the counselor as "rude." One student described being ignored by the counselor, then being made to wait for more than 20 minutes while the counselor met with another student. Then once the counseling session actually started, the counselor "rushed through all the educational plan stuff" leaving the student unhappy with the experience.

Financial Aid and EOPS:
Another staff member is cited especially as helping students through the financial aid labyrinth. Two students reported being rejected initially; with this particular counselor's assistance, they resubmitted revised FAFSA forms, then qualified for aid, and reported "relief" and appreciation.

International Students

Finding:

- **Respondents who identified themselves as international students report high levels of satisfaction with the support and guidance they receive from program staff.**

Recommendation:

- **Given the high levels of student satisfaction with the program and the potential for considerable and sustainable revenue to the college, CSM should consider increasing the numbers of students served.**

As noted above, respondents included a relatively large number of students who identified themselves as international students. These students consistently praised the two program staff members as being informed, attentive, and consistently helpful.

The considerable fees for non-residents are certainly an issue for some students.

Several students report being very integrated into the life of the campus, participating in student clubs, student government, events, service learning, and a variety of activities including on-campus employment.

Middle College High School

Findings:

- **MCHS students report being insulated from many of the "hassles" of the matriculation process.**

- **MCHS students report successfully learning a variety of student success strategies as a result of the program.**

Several current and former students describe enrollment and registration as processes that are conducted for them and from which they are "protected."

These students did describe, however, knowledge of "how to be students." They report developing study-skills and life-planning skills as a result of the required career courses and the intense involvement of their high school faculty, principal, and counselor in their program.

Priority Enrollment Program (PEP)

Findings:

- *PEP students are generally very satisfied with assistance in the enrollment and matriculation processes.*

- *Students value priority registration, especially students who have clearly-defined transfer goals.*

- *Students who already possess clearly defined transfer goals and majors report needing accurate, discipline-specific counseling from the very beginning.*

Recommendation:

- *PEP outreach, orientation, and counseling activities be adapted, where appropriate, to target the recruitment of high-achieving high school students who enroll at CSM because of its guaranteed transfer arrangements.*

PEP participants generally rate the program very highly. The majority report filling out an initial paper application with a counselor at their local high schools (most frequently CSM's high school outreach counselor) and are pleased with getting the assistance in completing the application. Few students report filling out applications online.

They find the campus tour and orientation helpful and the one-stop/one-day placement test, sessions with counselors, and introduction to other student services representatives convenient and an "eye-opener."

Priority registration is very important to them, especially students who have their sights on eventual transfer to a highly competitive UC campus.

Two students who had been concurrently enrolled at CSM, however, were extremely dissatisfied with the fact that their PEP counseling session was with a counselor who knew little about transfer requirements for the sciences and gave them incorrect advice about prerequisite courses for transferring to UC Berkeley. The result was that both students needed an additional semester to meet the correct prerequisites. This was especially upsetting for one of the students: as discussed earlier, he had turned down two offers from UC campuses (into two different science tracks) because he wanted to have a genuine chance to secure a slot in the school of engineering at UC Berkeley: transferring from CSM was the best path to an "almost" guaranteed acceptance.

These students strongly advocate that PEP students who had declared majors need to be counseled by subject-area specialists from the <u>very first</u> counseling session and not be left to the luck of the draw with counselor assignments.

Another AP student who participated in PEP reported frustration that the "PEP counselor" would not approve a higher unit load, even though this student had a 4.0 and had brought all his transcript information with him during the first counseling session to verify his strong academic background. He reported being highly dissatisfied with having to appeal to the dean of counseling the first time; in the subsequent two semesters, other counselors also wouldn't approve an increased load. He continues to appeal each time.

Issues About the Physical Environment

Facilities Problems

Findings:

- *Both the consistency and quality of facility maintenance affect students' perceptions of the college as a whole and campus safety in particular.*

- *Deficits in facilities maintenance—ranging from broken desks and chairs to graffiti in restroom stalls—convey the message that CSM can't control destructive behavior and, as an institution, is not concerned with students' well-being.*

- *Students find few "welcoming" locations on campus where they can congregate.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM maintain classroom furniture in the older classroom buildings 14, 16, and 18 and ensure that classrooms and labs are well lit at all times of the day and evening.*

- *CSM aggressively address graffiti on a consistent basis.*

- *CSM ensure that restrooms are sanitary, amenable, and genuinely safe for students.*

- *CSM explore low-cost temporary options for making Bldg. 5 more amenable for students to congregate.*

Restrooms Matter!

Female students were more passionate about the condition of restrooms than they were about labs and classrooms.

The restrooms in Bldgs. 16, 18, and 36 were cited as "wonderful." (In fact, two students described the superior quality of the toilet paper in Bldg. 36.) In contrast, several female students said the bathrooms in the Creative Arts complex and Bldg. 5 were "disgusting" with pools of water or urine on the floors that were "gross."

Students reported that no hooks on the interiors of restroom stalls required them to place their bags on the frequently wet floors—a problem in many buildings.

One female student (who also works on campus) said there is consistently "something wrong" with the plumbing in Bldgs. 14 and 16 because of the "smell."

Safety in Restrooms:

One female student described how she and her friends do not feel safe in the ground-level women's restrooms in those buildings when the windows are open because anyone can easily climb in.

Some students are aware of graffiti in the stalls and find it disturbing, increasing the sense that the restrooms are not safe. One student described it as "ghetto"; another said "I expect it on Bart but not here."

Graffiti conveys a negative image of an institution as one that cannot control anti-social and aggressive behavior or simply doesn't care about the well-being of students.

Condition of Labs:
The labs in Bldg.18 were described by several students as consistently "too dark."

Condition of Furniture:
While students remarked on the recent renovations and the new science building, several also complained about crowded classrooms in Bldgs. 14, 16, and 18 where there are also not enough chairs and where some of the desks and tables are broken. (Some students, as noted earlier, viewed these buildings in more positive terms.)

Student Center or "What Student Center?"
Students consistently cited Bldg. 5 as "not comfortable," "not inviting," "not a place I want to hang out" along with serving "bad food." (The new food service agent was not appointed during the period of these interviews.)

The comments voiced about Bldg. 5 also echoed a theme—CSM has few places for students to congregate in amenable, welcoming settings.

Food Services:
While two students remarked that they liked "Drip," the majority of students did not use the cafeteria; several did not even know about CSM's central food service.

Many students do not use the food services in part because they do not "hang out" at CSM (most often leaving for work). Food was also described as "too expensive" and "nasty" with no "veggie " options.

Vending Machines:
Vending machines were described by a few as "eating money" throughout campus. Students complained that there were no instructions about how to secure a refund.

Students also complained that the vending machines found outside of Bldg. 5 didn't give them the option of purchasing bottled water.

Campus Safety

Findings:

- *Many students describe CSM as a "safe" environment—a reason to attend.*

- *Many students also report concerns with the safety of remote, poorly lit parking lots and poorly lit campus grounds and stated they were, therefore, deterred from enrolling in evening classes,*

- *Students report as "troubling" the absence of emergency phones and pay phones.*

- *Several students report being aware of security officers only when they are issuing parking tickets, rather than as a presence on the campus grounds.*

- *Anecdotes reported suggest there may be "customer service" problems with some security personnel.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM should addressing student concerns about lighting. emergency phones, and pay phones as an "enrollment management" issue.*

- *CSM should consider that security officers have a more prominent and visible presence on campus, a version of the neighborhood uniformed "cop on a beat."*

- *CSM should consider a comparative study of evening and day enrollment patterns to examine whether women are, in fact, consistently less likely to enroll in evening courses than men. (Data may suggest a need for follow-up studies about students' perceptions of safety during evening hours and the impact of those perceptions on their enrollment choices.)*

Summary:
When asked: "Do you feel safe on campus?" most students said they felt safe. In fact, many students report that one of the reasons they enrolled in CSM was because they felt "safe" on campus. However, when probed about

whether they: 1) would (or do) take night classes; 2) drive to CSM and park in the lots, or 3) could describe factors that would discourage others from enrolling, students said "safety" is a primary issue. Clearly students are divided on this issue.

Parking Lots:
Many students described not being pleased with the distance of many parking lots from their classes and this was not simply an issue of being required to walk. Many report that parking lots were badly lit at night. One student reported that her night-class instructor encouraged students to walk in pairs to their cars, advice which had the inadvertent effect of making the student feel less safe and more worried about the lighting and relative isolation of the parking lots.

Another student cited an "upsetting" incident in which she and her friends were approached in a parking lot by a "crazy" lady who wanted someone to fix her computer. She said that they used an "emergency phone" to security and that there was no answer; the students then went to the security desk and no one was there.

Two students also reported being somewhat alarmed by the number of "crazy people on campus," including "the guy who walks around with a shopping bag." (See section on "Civility Matters.")

Evening Safety:
Safety is an issue for evening enrollment, particularly for women, though not exclusively. Several students stated they would not take classes in the evenings because of safety issues. As one student reports: the "campus feels different at night—feels abandoned."

Many students report that the campus is "too dark" in the evenings. They report that poor lighting is not only a problem in the parking lots but throughout the campus.

Activity = Safety:
One male student expressed concern about the ravines circling the campus and the remoteness of the facilities on the north/east end of campus. Several students remarked that they feel more confident when a "a lot of people are around."

Lack of Emergency & Pay Phones:
With one exception, the majority of students were not aware of any "emergency" phones in the buildings or parking lots and wouldn't know

where to call and to whom to call if they had an emergency or witnessed one. Students reported that the apparent absence of phones was troubling when moderators probed about this issue.

With the exception of two students, students were not aware of any pay phones on campus. (One student knew about the pay phone near the bus stop because he didn't have a cell phone and had to call for a tow truck.) Students also report that not everyone always has a cell phone handy despite what people normally think about college-aged students.

One student who used a hall phone said she didn't know that it could be used to call 911 and this information needs to be widely posted.

Security Officers & Parking Tickets:
Students were aware of security officers issuing parking tickets in the parking lots; in fact, most said that the parking lots are the places where they do see security officers. A few students complained that this was "not fair" during the first few days of a new semester when students don't know their way around. No student reported receiving a "warning" rather than a ticket during those first few days of the semester.

The issue about officers ticketing students became more prominent during focus groups as this was during a period right after the increase in parking fees was announced. Several students said that increasing fees to pay the salaries of security officers to hand out tickets to students was a "vicious cycle" and "didn't make a lot of sense."

A faculty member reported a "lack of logic" when a security officer had issued a parking ticket to a visitor to whom the faculty member had sent a "visitor's pass." The visitor had parked in the "Visitor's Lot" not the lot indicated on the pass. What was the logic of issuing a ticket to a <u>visitor</u> who parked in the <u>Visitor's</u> Lot?

Desire for a Security Presence:
Few students could describe seeing officers on the campus grounds (vs. parking lots). Two students described chronic and persistent "weed smoking" by some students on the main quad and found it "lame" that security officers ignored this or didn't have a visible presence. These students said they didn't have issues with drugs per se only that students should "do it somewhere else—not at school." For them the tolerance indicated "a lack of respect" for the educational mandate.

Other students said it was a "good idea" to have security officers strolling the campus. They "wouldn't have a problem with that."

Customer Service Issues—Anecdotes:

One female student described not being able to lock the doors of music practice rooms, a problem that made her feel unprotected. When she took this issue to Security she described being first "brushed off" and then told by a security officer that there were "limited resources" and nothing could be done. The student reported that eventually this issue was addressed by the Dean of Creative Arts who made special arrangements for her to practice in a room which could be locked. But for this student, this incident raised credibility issues about the helpfulness of campus security.

Another student described "a problem with security" when it came to opening a classroom building for a Math 811 class that was scheduled on Saturdays. On the first day of class after finding no access, the instructor called Security to request that the building be opened. The security officer said the class wasn't on the "facility list" so he wasn't going to open the building. The student described the officer as "yelling at the instructor." According to the student, the division dean eventually resolved the issue after several weeks of problems getting the building opened but she found the behavior of the security officer "bad" and "off-putting."

Student Support Services

Key "Frontline" Points of Contact

Findings:

- **Students both expect and highly value good "customer service" from frontline staff in key areas: information booth, Admissions & Records, Security, Placement Center, Cashier's Office, and Counseling Center.**

- **Some students report frustration with long lines, untrained staff, and limited hours of operation for many key frontline services.**

Recommendations:

- **CSM needs to revisit the issue of how to foster good "customer service" skills among key frontline staff.**

- ***CSM should ensure that key frontline staff possess accurate knowledge about basic college functions and are familiar with appropriate protocols for referring students to other offices, functions, or programs.***

- ***CSM needs to ensure that key frontline services are genuinely available to day and evening students alike.***

- ***CSM should continue to explore web-based alternatives for typical and customary transactions.***

- ***CSM should continue to explore ways to improve phone services and to ensure the availability of "live" staff to answers phones.***

Students typically describe several points of contact during their first visit or two to the campus. They include:

- **Information Booth, Bldg. 1**
- **Admission and Records Bldg. 1**
- **Security (for parking), Bldg. 1**
- **Placement Center, Bldg. 1**
- **Cashier's Office, Bldg. 1**
- **Counseling Center, Bldg. 5 (Counseling is addressed earlier.)**

Students report a range of experiences with these services. Many report coming in contact with very helpful and patient staff. Others describe staff members who ignore students while they chat with one another or are otherwise explicitly impolite. Most students report that "good customer service" from these frontline staff members is very important to them and does affect their perception of the institution. *Courtesy and accurate information are paramount.*

The problems students described as typical at the beginning of a term include:

Long Lines for Services:
Students describe having to wait for over a half an hour at Security for a parking permit and then having to go to the Cashier's Office to wait in another line. One student asked, "Why can't I pay all my fees, no matter what, online?"

Long Lines to Use Computers:
Some students report being quite annoyed at having to wait in line to use a computer in front of Admissions & Records to log on to WebSMART while at the same time there are "unused" computers in Bldg 5. or elsewhere on campus.

Limited Hours of Operation:
Some students report the "We-close-at-4:30" syndrome for these services. Several students stated that hours for key services need to be more flexible, especially for working adults. (Moderators did not verify hours of operation.)

Lack of Trained Staff in Key Areas:
As reported above, students frequently do not distinguish between a staff member and a student aide (and the differences frequently don't matter to them). One student described a "student angel" in Admissions & Records who taught her how to use WebSMART. A faculty member, on the other hand, reported that for some student aides, English is a second language, and thus they can't teach students effectively how to use WebSMART. Other students describe repeatedly being told by Admissions & Records staff that a staff member had to consult with a supervisor about an issue and would get back to the student, but didn't.

One former student, who is now a staff member, reported his/her chronic frustration with staff members in several key offices in Bldg. 1. He/she report that staff simply did not know where to send students for services— they were not informed enough about the functions of other departments.

Phone Services Issues:
Several students reported "voicemail hell" and the frustration in not reaching a live person as a pervasive problem at CSM. In addition, they report that some staff does not know how to transfer call and thus they get cut off.

Financial Aid

Findings:

- **Students consistently value an opportunity to receive financial assistance while attending college and value accurate information about securing such aid.**

- **Students were consistently divided about the quality of their experiences with Financial Aid.**

- *Students were highly satisfied with the quality of their experience at the Scholarship Office.*

- *Students reported the need for more explicit coordination between the Financial Aid office and the Scholarship office.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM explore ways to ensure consistency in the quality of services delivered by the Financial Aid office as an important resource for students.*

- *CSM encourage consistent coordination between Financial Aid and Scholarship services.*

Students report a variety of experiences with Financial Aid and are divided about their experiences. Several students reported that the staff was "helpful" and that working with staff was a "positive" experience. Students who were members of special programs like EOPS, as described above, greatly appreciate the benefits of having a specialist help them and serve as advocates for them.

However, there were a variety of concerns reported:

- One student, who has been awarded financial aid several times, said that the staff was "very helpful" "but that only happened when they get to know you."

- Several students reported that they "resented" the considerable time it took to fill out and complete all the forms and then be rejected. They reported that the "eligibility criteria presented by the staff was different from the reality."

  Students clearly understood that staff members themselves do not ultimately determine who received an award, but what they wanted from staff was a reasonable "rough" assessment of who was eligible or ineligible.

- One student who returned to the office several times reported a consistently poor experience with the staff whom he/she said frequently "didn't speak English clearly enough" and that every time he/she used the office "there was someone new" and he/she was told something different by the new staff.

- Another student reported that he/she always got a "run-around" and "never clear information." The student reported that he/she found out from an aunt that he/she actually would have been viewed as an independent adult by FAFSA and thus would have been eligible several years earlier before he/she finally was awarded financial aid. (He/she ended up doing FAFSA on her own completely.)

- Several students whose first language was Chinese described being "just given the forms" by staff who "wouldn't take the time to explain things." One of these students said he/she would attend a workshop on applying if he/she had been informed of one.

- One student described an experience that was not critical of the financial aid staff per se: He/she submitted sensitive information on a fraudulent financial aid website that the student found via Google. Later, the student safely linked to FAFSA through the college site.

Scholarships:
Several students reported being awarded scholarships and also reported being very satisfied with the "helpfulness" of the staff member who spent time with the students to provide them with a variety of options.

Several students report, however, that they found the scholarship office on their own: As one stated: "I just stumbled on it walking around." They had not received information from the Financial Aid office that scholarships were even an option. These students asked why the two "offices couldn't work together."

DSPS

Finding:

- *Students generally report satisfaction with DSPS services.*

Several students reported that they used the services of DSPS, specifically working with the staff that is housed in Bldg. 16. Several students referred to the staff as "helpful," "informative," and "excellent." One observed, however, that the "front desk" staff seemed harried and burdened with too much to do.

Student Life

Connections with other Students and Faculty

Extracurricular Activities:

Findings:

- *The majority of students are too absorbed by demands from work, school, and family to become involved with extracurricular on-campus activities. Similarly, extracurricular activities are seen as irrelevant to their educational and occupational goals.*

- *A small minority of students actively participate in extracurricular activities and place high value on these activities.*

- *Many students value being informed about extracurricular activities, even though they are unable to participate. (A rich campus life is a sign of a strong, "respectable" academic program for many students.)*

Recommendation:

- *Marketing and outreach materials, including web-based, should include information about a range of campus activities as a means of promoting the value of CSM—even to those students who are unable to participate.*

Most students report that they are too busy to become involved with extracurricular activities on campus and they use few ancillary services. Many are not particularly aware of various on campus-programs and activities for students (such as specific student club activities), but not necessarily through ignorance or lack of information. _They simply are too busy._

They are consumed with school and family obligations and almost all students report working at least part-time, many more than 30 hours a week. Several students report that they didn't know the location of the cafeteria, even that CSM had food services. As one student says: "I go straight from my car to classes."

Seeing Value in a Vibrant Campus Life:
As noted above, several students report that they liked being informed about activities on campus regardless of their own inability to participate. Knowledge of those activities also helped inclined them to recommend CSM to other prospective students.

Several students report being actively involved in campus life through Associated Students and students clubs, for example. These students were more likely to see most students' lack of engagement with campus activities as an enrollment deterrent. They bemoan the fact that most students are "commuters."

Importance of Relationships with Other Students in the Classroom:

Finding:

- **Students highly value "knowing" at least one student in each class.**

Recommendation:

- **CSM should encourage faculty to conduct discipline-appropriate classroom activities that allow students to develop "study buddy" relationships with their peers.**

Most students reported that they didn't seek relationships with students outside the setting of their classes. As one student stated: "I have my own life for that." But they consistently report valuing some kind of connection to students in their classes. In many cases, they reported being pleased with knowing at least one person in each class—someone to share notes with or help them catch-up on missed work. Many value some variation of a course-specific "study buddy."

Importance of Relationships with Faculty: Access, Access, Access:

Findings:

- *Students value web access to current contact information for their faculty.*

- *Students report the importance of email and voicemail as ways to communicate with faculty and expect faculty to respond in a timely way to messages.*

- *Students report being frustrated, dismayed, or put-off by faculty members who don't use email and/or voicemail; in some cases, they perceive those faculty members as possessing weak technology skills.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM consider developing processes for ensuring that faculty provide students with current contact information, including voicemail and email addresses.*

- *CSM should consider establishing standards for use of email and voicemail by faculty and provide appropriate training (or continue to provide training via the CTL).*

As noted above, students reported that they highly valued "friendly" and "warm" faculty. The focus group discussion guide did not elicit much discussion among students about the importance of their relationships with faculty outside the classroom except in one area—that of "access." They want to be able to contact their faculty and be assured that messages or calls will be returned.

Value of Email/Voicemail:
Students were consistently critical of faculty who do not post current office hours and office locations; do not use email or provide students with their current email addresses (if they don't use "smccd.edu" for example); and do not return phone messages left through voicemail.

Students generally expected that all current contact information be available on CSM's website (and as the website interviews demonstrated, current contact information is frequently not posted).

Several students also suggested that they were not sure that some of their instructors knew how to use email or the voicemail system. These faculty lacked credibility for those students.

Adjunct Office Hours:
One student was quite critical of the fact that adjunct faculty frequently do not keep office hours or, when they do, are on campus for only limited periods. He said he used one adjunct instructor's office hours so much "it annoyed him." (This student was not aware of contractual issues around office hours.)

Academic Support

Labs & Library

Findings:

- **Students report high levels of satisfaction with the library and its staff.**

- **Students consistently report inadequate access to general-use computers where they can work uninterrupted and print schoolwork.**

- **Several users of the foreign language lab report problems with computer maintenance and the limited availability of instructional assistance.**

Recommendations:

- **The library, with its considerable beauty and many resources for students, should be showcased for both prospective and current students as well as visitors to the campus.**

- **CSM needs to address the persistent need for a well-maintained, dual-platform open-access computer facility that serves day, evening, and Saturday students.**

- ***The foreign language department might consider conducting focus groups with student users in order to validate the problems reported here and, if persistent, assess how they impact student learning.[1]***

Library:
Students who use the library regularly value it for a place to study, to relax, to listen to music (via MP3 player), and to use computers. They frequently repot that it's a beautiful environment. They also report that its staff is "helpful."

Two concerns were consistently voiced: 1) That students frequently talk and make too much noise and 2) there are time constraints on the use of computers.

Availability of General Use Computers:
Students reported needing access to computers and printers on a regular basis. Many who own laptops do not bring them to campus. One student remarked that he/she didn't "understand this connecting thing" when referring to wireless access.

Many students were aware that computers were available in the library, and in Bldg. 14 and Bldg. 18, but several didn't like the limitations on access and remarked that other than the library, they had few places in which they could use computers and study.

Issue of Access to "Open Lab" Printers:
Several students reported that they knew there was a "rule" that one had to be a business student to use the computers in Bldg. 14. But they did so anyway because of the helpful instructional aide who let them "sneak" in when they needed to print.

Other students asked their instructors (in art and music especially) to print what they needed for classes. One student drove to Cañada if he/she needed to print documents for class.

Foreign Language Lab:
Those who reported using it were not happy with the facility. For example, two students enrolled in Italian classes noted that the only faculty member on duty spoke only Spanish so there could be no direct instructional assistance.

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[1] The Office of Articulation and Research can assist with conducting student focus groups.

Students report that the Mac computers were poorly maintained and that there were persistent problems with the software (iTunes and SFT Share (?)) that made it "difficult" to complete their work.

Tutoring

Findings:

- *Students consistently report the need for tutors in a variety of disciplines and describe the lack of tutorial assistance as a persistent problem.*

  (As noted earlier, several students reported that CSM's sister colleges had state-of-the-art student learning centers in sharp contrast to CSM.)

- *Students generally value the assistance they receive in the Writing Center and Math Lab.*

Recommendation:

- *CSM needs to address both the near-future and long-term need for a student learning center which provides a variety of tutoring support for students.*

Tutoring and other Academic Support:
While most of the current students interviewed were not aware that CSM at one time had a multi-discipline tutoring center, many students complained that there is no multi-discipline tutoring center. Among the issues for students were that they had no access to tutors for Italian and science courses and for help in the many non-English classes that require essays.

Students who had attended Skyline or Cañada reported that CSM had nothing to compare to the student learning centers at both campuses.

Several students report not knowing where to get academic help of any sort. Only one student cited the multi-discipline peer-tutoring program established by one of the Associated Students officers.

Writing Center:

The students who used the Writing Center praised it as extremely helpful but several students complained that appointments were not readily available, appointment times were limited to 20 minutes, and they could not use the Writing Center for papers not assigned in English classes.

Most of the students in ESL classes were not aware of the Writing Center and that help could be available to them.

Math Lab:

Most users were pleased with the availability of math tutoring. Two students, however, complained that the student tutors were not advanced enough and "knew less" than the students seeking assistance.

Selecting Classes

Scheduling and Program Availability

Findings:

- *Most students reported that courses are scheduled at times convenient for them.*

- *Several students reported an interest in enrolling in afternoon classes and would even prefer them to evening courses.*

- *There is no comprehensive repository of information about career preparation and job training maintained on the college website.*

- *Several students reported that generally beginning foreign language classes were offered in the evenings and not mornings when they would enroll.*

Recommendations:

- *CSM should explore the viability of offering a comprehensive afternoon educational program.*

- *CSM should develop the "Career Programs" website to become a comprehensive source of information about career*

preparation and job training offerings with links to pertinent programs.

- *Comparable hard-copy information about CSM's career and job training programs should be widely-available for marketing and outreach.*

Afternoon Classes:
When asked whether they were able to enroll in classes when they needed them, generally most students stated that they were able to.

Some students, however, observed that "there is not much activity during the afternoons" and that classroom and labs seemed under-used. Several students also said that the lack of afternoon classes forced them to attend classes in the early morning, leave campus for part-time jobs, and then return for evening classes. They reported that they could arrange their work schedules to accommodate afternoon classes and it would be a better use of their time if they made only one visit to the campus in a single day.

Career Courses:
As noted above, several students stated that they were referred from a "job training agency." One of these students stated that it was "somewhat difficult" to locate information about the variety of career-preparation programs at the college. The student pointed out that there is no single centralized web source of information.

Career Programs Link:
CSM does maintain a link on the homepage to "Career Programs." (This is prime website "real estate"!) The "Career Programs" page, however, does not comprehensively list all of CSM's training programs, with live links to the program specific website. The information is general and there are not links to programs which have websites. All the links are to email addresses and contact information for people only.

The accounting program, for example, is listed solely as "accounting assistant." Yet that program is one of the "jewels in the crown" when it comes to career preparation at CSM. It offers CPA and tax preparer training as well as a well-developed website as described earlier.

Foreign Language Classes:
Several students complained that few beginning foreign language classes were available in the mornings, only in the evenings.

Choosing Faculty

Findings:

- *When students select classes, one of the most important considerations is the reputation of faculty assigned to courses.*

- *Students seek a variety of information about faculty from many types of sources, including other students, faculty, and counselors.*

- *Students frequently avoid enrolling in classes which are listed as "staff" in class schedules.*

- *A large number of students report using RateMyProfessor.com or similar faculty evaluation review sites when considering courses to take.*

- *More than 300 CSM faculty members are "reviewed" by students on RateMyProfessor.com.*

Recommendations:

- *Whenever possible CSM should try to staff sections so that the names of individual faculty members are included in the hard-copy or online class schedules.*

- *As an enrollment management strategy, CSM should consider the impact of assigning key faculty to core "gatekeeper" or "gateway" courses within individual programs.*

Summary:

The majority of students report that when scheduling classes, they seek information about faculty scheduled to teach those courses. Students also reported that they disliked the fact that so many sections listed in class schedules only had "staff" indicated since they would not know what to expect from that particular class.

Students seek information about faculty first from other students and secondly from faculty, counselors, and other staff.

In addition, students frequently plan their course schedules together to ensure that they know someone in their classes.

RateMyProfessor.com:

When selecting courses, a large proportion of students of all ages report using RateMyProfessor.com or similar faculty review sites maintained by social networks like myspace.com. (More than 300 CSM faculty are currently evaluated on RateMyProfessor.com.)

Most students reported that they evaluated the validity of teacher ratings and at times discounted the rantings of what appeared to be disgruntled students. Most students thought that student evaluations appeared to be fairly accurate. They particularly valued teacher evaluations when a large number of reviews were posted by students. They especially searched for concrete information about faculty grading and assessment or testing practices in a course (e.g. how much homework is assigned).

College Website

Summary of Process:
Qualitative data about CSM's website was collected through the focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and the interviews described below. A report of the interviews using the software "Captivate" to record students' navigation through the website is attached as an appendix.

Each interview was structured around a set of tasks to be completed utilizing the website as a tool to complete each task. Interviews were conducted with a research office computer and software to capture user activity along with interviewer notes. Software such as Adobe's *Captivate* that captures user activity offers the possibility to closely analyze user behavior when the user visits the CSM website.

Summary of Findings:

- *Many students find the home page "boring, "really bad, "the text "too dense" and confusing, and the graphics irrelevant; they expect, instead images of students of all ages.*

- *They report disliking "linking pages" that contain links that loop back to the page.*

- *Students consistently find all the pages "too dense" with too much text, and too many links and directions on a given page that have no relevance to that particular page.*

- *90% of the time, the search function failed.*

- *The website does not replace the catalog and schedule for students; they are frequent users of the hard-copy schedule which they thumb through as they use WebSMART.*

- *Many students reported using the website almost solely for WebSMART tasks, enrolling in classes, seeking contact information about their faculty, or finding where and when a service is available.*

Recommendations:

- *As CSM develops policies that govern both the style and content of the website, it should involve all constituencies in that development.*

- *CSM should consider that Captivate might serve as a tool in any effort to further evaluate the college website as it develops*

- *CSM should consider exploring ways to improve the quality of the website immediately and to begin planning and resource identification.*

- *CSM should explore using Google as a search engine within the site itself.*

Session:_____

"Students Speak" Focus Group Discussion Guide

General Introduction

> Facilitator's ID, purpose and use of the focus groups, confidentiality agreement, logistics and process:

- Welcome participants and introduce yourself.

- Explain the general purpose of the discussion and why the participants were chosen.

- Discuss the purpose and process of focus groups

- Explain the presence and purpose of observer/recorder/equipment and introduce.

- Outline general ground rules and discussion guidelines including: importance of everyone speaking up, talking one at a time, and being prepared for the moderator to interrupt to assure that all the topics can be covered.

- Address the issue of confidentiality.

- Inform the group that information discussed is going to be analyzed as a whole and that participants' names will not be used in any analysis of the discussion.

- Ask them to fill out demographic form: explain the importance of this.

Participant Introduction:

Please tell us your first name, how many semesters you have attended CSM, what you are currently studying, what your educational goal is and if you have attended another college or institution.

Questions:

1. How did you first hear about CSM? [icebreaker]

2. Why did you decide to come here?
- as opposed to Skyline or Canada
- other community colleges
- a 4-year institutions

3. Think back to your first semester at CSM. Talk about the kind of support and information that you received **on registration** (PROBE)
- Where did you get most of your information**? [web, schedule, a person, counselor?]**
- How did you know what to do
- Who was most/least helpful?
- How accurate and helpful was the information? Ease of use?
- Did you do an "orientation"? How helpful?
- Did you do an "orientation"? How helpful?
- How did you learn about **Websmart**

4. Did you take a placement test? How did you learn that you had to take placements tests
- How did you know what placement tests to take (4 levels in math/ 2?() levels in ESL. Placements test are for math, English and ESL
- How did you get your results.

5. Have you gotten help from counselors? Talk about the help you got from counselors during your first semester/Subsequent semesters
- How much did they help you to select courses?
- Did they help you identify goals? (career/academic)
- Did you follow a **"matriculation plan."** Show them matriculation ticket/have they seen this?

5.B Have you been able to schedule the classes you needed when you wanted them scheduled? (Probe)
- Were the courses you needed for GE or major requirements offered the time/semester you needed them?

6. Talk about the kind of support and information that you received on student services such as admission and records, counseling, financial aid, the library and tutoring services on campus. (PROBE)
- Who was most/least helpful?
- How did you find out about these services?
- Where did you get most of your information?
- How accurate and helpful was the information?
- How difficult or easy were the services to use or access?

(optional)
7. Is having connections with other students important to you? With faculty?
- What activities, processes or information is available to help you connect to other students?
- To connect with faculty?
- To connect with student support services outside of the classroom?

IMPORTANT
8. What do you think keeps people from enrolling at CSM? (PROBE)
- Why would a friend or family member of your decide NOT to come to CSM?
- What makes it hardest to go to school here?

9. How well do you believe CSM faculty and staff are doing to ensure that you receive the kind of individual attention you need to be successful?

IF TIME PERMITS:
10. Use the piece of paper in front of you to write down words you would use to describe College of San Mateo to a friend/co-worker/family member. Someone who is perhaps interested in attending a college, but knows absolutely nothing about CSM.

- Share your responses and explain a little about why you selected the words you choose to describe CSM. (Record on flip chart and probe for explanation of images).

Miscellaneous (as time permits)
11. Do you feel safe on campus? (probe)
12. Find a phone if you need one and/or get help? (probe)

13. Can you find parking? Transportation problems a barrier?

CLOSING:
- Anything that you would like to add before we close?

- Summary of main themes and solicit suggestions for action.

- **Would they be willing to do one-on-one computer or other kind of follow interviews?**

Session:_____

"Students Speak" Website Questions Guide

General Introduction

Facilitator's ID, purpose and use of the focus groups, confidentiality agreement, logistics and process:

- Welcome participants and introduce yourself.

- Explain the general purpose of the discussion and why the participants were chosen.

- Discuss the purpose and process of focus-group interviews

- Explain the presence and purpose of observer/recorder/equipment and introduce.

- Address the issue of confidentiality**.**

- Ask them to fill out demographic form: explain the importance of this **(information is voluntary).**

(This is a brown sheet; Milla has copies)

- Inform participant that information discussed is going to be analyzed as a whole and that participants' names will not be used in any analysis of the discussion.

For more than one participant at once:

- Outline general ground rules and discussion guidelines including: importance of everyone speaking up, talking one at a time, and being prepared for the moderator to interrupt to assure that all the topics can be covered.

Participant Introduction:

Please tell us your <u>first name</u>, <u>how many semesters</u> you have attended CSM, what you are <u>currently studying</u>, what your <u>educational goal</u> is and if you have <u>attended another college</u> or institution.

Questions:

1. Ask student how and why he/she use the website.

[First ask participant which browser he/or she uses; have student find

website from a "neutral."

2. Ask participant to find the CSM homepage

3. Ask student to rate the homepage according to:
     --clarity; ease of reading and logic to its organization
     --visual attractiveness/inviting

RATE CLARITY: 1   2   3   4   5+

RATE attractiveness: 1   2   3   4   5+

4. Ask student if homepage tells student that this is a college (as opposed to a business, for example); or what is the "message" projected by the homepage.

[**Alternative:** have student write down three words that come to mind when looking at the homepage and then explain those associations.]

Scenarios:

1. You are about to figure out what classes to take for next Fall, what would you do starting at the homepage?

• Follow-up with tracking how the students finds WebSMART. Where is the link?

What does he/she have to do to get there?

[The link to WebSMART on the homepage is "disguised" as a graphic lower right hand corner; most students don't know it's a link.]

2. You want to help a friend who is coming to enroll at CSM for the first time. What would you show this person to help him/her with registering as a student for the first time?

• Is the process easy/difficult to figure out? [Probe]

3. You need to meet with a counselor to discuss what to take for next semester. You have never met with a counselor before even though you have taken classes. How would you find a counselor?

4. How would you find out if meeting with a counselor was something that CSM required?

5. You think you might want to transfer to San Francisco State University as a business major. You want to figure out if your classes are all transferable for the last semester, what would you do?

[Probe: explore with student how he/she learns about the transferability of a class; where does he/she get such information?]

6. You have decided to look into changing your major to English or maybe Art [or another discipline] .

[Probe] Where would you go for information about major requirements?

7. You have run out of money for school and lost your part-time job, would you use info on the website to help you? How?

[Probe: financial aide, scholarships, career center, part-time jobs…]

8. Find the office hours for all your faculty this semester?

9. Find their email addresses and whether they have websites [Students may already know this, but have him/her show you how to find this information. Ask student how he/she knew this info?]

10. You have missed 5 classes of a particular class and want to figure whether or not you need to "withdraw" or to "drop." What would you do?

[Probe: is there information that explains what to do in either case?]

CLOSING:
• Anything that you would like to add before we close?

• Summary of main themes and solicit suggestions for action.

• **Would they be willing to do one-on-one computer or other kind of follow interviews?**

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"Students Speak"
Focus Group and Interviews
Participation Data

Final Focus Group Schedule

</div>

Date	Time	Facilitators	Numbers attended
Monday, 5/14	9:15-10:30	John Sewart and Sheldon Carroll	3
Monday, 5/14	2:30-3:45	Milla McConnell-Tuite and Bev Madden	5
Tuesday. 5/15	9:15-10:30	John and Sheldon	2
Weds. 5/16	7:00-8:15pm	Dennis Keane	5
Thursday 5/17	2:30-3:45	Milla and Bev	4
Thursday 5/17	12:30-1:45	Milla and Bev	2
Friday 5/18	10:-11:15	Milla and Bev	3
Sat. 5/19	10:30-11:45	Milla and Bev	4
Monday 5/21	2:30-3:45	Milla and Bev	2
Tuesday 5/22	10:-11:15	Milla and Sheldon	1
Weds. 5/23	11:15-12:30	Milla and Sheldon	2
Friday 5/25	11:15-12:30	Milla and Bev	3
Sat. 5/25	10:30-12:00	Milla and Bev	6

Total: 13 Focus Groups/42 students

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Website Interviews: Dennis Keane

</div>

Weds. 5/16	3:30-4:15 5:15-6:30	Dennis	1 2 together
Sat. 5/19	1:00-2:15 2:30-3:45	Dennis	2: CSM st.+non-CSM student
Thurs. 5/24	3:30-4:15	Dennis	1
Tues.. 5/29	3:30-4:15 5:15-6:30	Dennis	2: CSM st. +non-CSM student

Total: 7 interviews/8 Students
(2 of whom/not CSM students; 1 at UC Berk. & 1 at CCSF)

Total: 7 interviews w/ 7 students (March and April)
One-on-One Interviews: Milla McConnell-Tuite

Total # of student interview/group contacts: 57
(Duplicated students-6)

"Students Speak" Class Visits
Student Recruiting: May 1-14 2007

Day	Arrival Time	Class Time	Class	Instructor	Location
Thursday, 5/1, Bev	8:10	8:10-9:00 Daily	English 828	Ruth Zucca	16-251
√**Friday, 5/5, Mmt**	8:10	8:10-9:00	Spch 100	Kate Motoyama	16-253
√Mmt	9:10	9:10-10:00	Spch 100	Kate Motoyama	16-253
√**Monday, 5/7 mmt**	8:10	8:10-9:00	Spch 100	Kate Motoyama	[follow-up for class]
√Mmt	9:10	9:10-10:00	Actg 100	Bruce Maule	14-220
√Mmt	9:45	9:10-10:00	Spanish 120	Rich Castillo	18-203
√Mmt	10:10	10:10-11:00	Actg 121	Bruce Maule	14-220
√BevM	10:10	10-11, MWF	English 110	Mitra Ganley	18-201
√BevM	11:00	11:00-12:30, MW	PLSC 210	Erin Scholnick	14-120
√Mmt	11:10	11:10-12:00 MWF	Actg 100	Bruce Maule	14-220
√BevM	10:10	11:00-12:30, MWF	English 838	Mitra Ganley	18-201
√Mmt	12:45	12:10-1:00	Spanish 111	Rich Castillo	18-203
√BevM	1:00pm		Photography	Lyle Gomes	4-263
√Mmt	1:10	1:10-2:00	Engl 100	Mad Murphy	18-108
√BevM	5:00pm	5:00-6:20, MW	Biol 250	Charlene Tonini	36-215
√BevM	6:00pm		Photography	Lyle Gomes	4-263
√**Tues,, 5/8** √**Mmt**	9:10	9:10-10:00, MWF	Actg 121	Rick Ambrose	14-216
√Mmt	9:45	9:45-11:00, TTH	Speech 120	Pat Paoli	18-307
√Mmt	10:10	10:10-11:00, daily	ESL 400	Diane Musgrave	16-252
√BevM	11:10	11:10-12:45	Actg 121	Bruce Maule	14-220
√BevM	12:10	12:10-1:25, TTH	Biol 145	Tania Beliz	36-200
√BevM	6:30pm	6:30-9:20, T	SPCH 120	Pat Paoli	16-251
√BevM	6:40pm	6:30-7:45,T	Engl 100	Peter Bruni	16-105
√BevM	7:00pm		ELEC 201	Roy Brixen	19-41
Weds., 5/9 MMT	8:10	810-9:00, daily	ESL 828	Lisa Melnick	16-256
BevM	8:10	8:10-9:00, MW	HSCI 100	Fern Lucero	36-207
Mmt	9:00	8:00-10:00, MWF	Phys 150	Mohsen Janatpour	36-114
Mmt	9: 45	9:10-10:00	Spanish 120	Rich Castillo	18-203

Revised-MMT: 10/1/2007

"Students Speak" Class Visits
Student Recruiting: May 1-14 2007

Mmt	10:10	10:10-11:00daily	Actg 131	Rick Ambrose	14-216
Mmt	11:10	11:10-12:35,MWF	Actg 131	Rick Ambrose	14-216
Weds., 5/9, Mmt	11:45	11:10-12:00,MWF	ESL 846	Lisa Melnick	18-303
BevM	11:10	11:10-12:00,MWF	Eng 100	Madeleine Murphy	18-108
Thurs. 5/10 BevM	10:50	10:10-11:10, Daily	Actg 131	Rick Ambrose	14-216
MMT	12:10	12:10-1:30	Astro 100	Darryl Stanford	Theater
BevM	1:10pm	1:10-2:35, TTH	Anthro 180	Michelle Titus	16-154
BevM	6:30pm	6:30-9:20, Th	Astro 100	Darryl Stanford	36-109
Friday. 5/11 mmt	1:10	1:10-2:35, MWF	ESL 400	Diane Musgrave	18-303
Sat. 5/12 BevM	12:50	Online courses finals	Film 100 (online 2 sections)	Dave Laderman	Chorale Room
Mon. 5/14mmt	9:10	9:10-10:00 daily	Math 120	Mike Burke	18-202
MMT	10:10	10:10-11:00daily	Math 222	Mike Burke	18-202

Methods:

Each interview was structured around a set of tasks to be completed utilizing the website as a tool to complete each task . Interviews were conducted with a research office computer and software to capture user activity along with interviewer notes. User activity capture software such as Adobe Captivate offers the possiblity to closely analyze user behavior when they visit the CSM website. Our trial efforts with this technology were only partially successful. The software tended to crash approximately 50% of the time but it is unclear if this was due to installation issues, software conflicts or hardware incompatibilities. We suggest that this software, with adequate IT support, be explored further as a tool in any efforts to further evaluate the college website.

Summary of Results:

Almost all of the CSM student interviewees were no more familiar with the CSM website than the two non-student participants. Most of the CSM students used the website almost solely to register for classes via Websmart. A few used the site to look up library hours. One or two students used class-specific webpages set up by their professor.

Many pages, including the college home page, were considered "too dense." There are too many directions/links/text on the page that are not necessarily relevant to what the student is doing but requires at least a cursory reading if the page is new to the student.

As an example, it was suggested that the college home page retain the headings for "New Student" and "All Students" but hide the options under each one so that viewers don't feel compelled to read material that is not relevant.

The website search function yielded no results for approx. 90% of attempted searches and irrelevant responses for others. For example, "transfer courses" yields unhelpful information, "course transfer" yields no responses, "major requirements" yields information about IGETC. Students seemed to be using the search function as though it is Google and assume the search function can make sense of multiple keywords.

The catalog/schedule is useful and used frequently by students. In selecting and enrolling in classes, several students utilized a hard-copy version of the

schedule with Websmart to enroll in classes. Almost all preferred the hard-copy version that they could navigate more easily than the online PDF version.

One much older respondent (approx. 60) relied on the printed version of the schedule and apparently referred to it before looking anywhere else for answers. She also was quicker to resort to "asking a counselor" as a means to answer questions.

Summary Responses by Question:

How and why do you use the website?

Almost solely for class registration.

Rate the homepage on clarity and attractiveness (1-5 scales):

Impressions of the homepage on both clarity and attractiveness varied widely. Generally, younger female users tended to find the homepage less appealing. Clarity ranged from 3-5, while attractiveness ranged from 1-5.

Suggestions for the homepage:
Do not use the existing grey text as it is bland and more easily overlooked
Use pictures that reflect CSM – images of students and campus
     Swimmers in the pool
     Art students at their easels outside
     Students in the courtyard

Put fewer items on the page to allow the fewer options to be larger/obvious and have more room for news and events.

Do not list all of the options under the larger headers of "New student", "All Students" – these links would go to new pages.
Quick links is too long

You are about to figure out what classes to take for next Fall, what would you do starting at the homepage.

Almost all participants went straight to Websmart without any problem. On further discussion it became clear that the schedule(preferably hard-copy) was also an important part of the class enrollment process. Most people preferred the hard-copy version of the schedule and a few did not even know it was available online as a PDF.

When interviewees who had gone directly to Websmart to enroll in classes were asked where they might go to gather information about classes before they register on Websmart, most said they would look in the Catalog or Schedule. Most students didn't know the Schedule is available on the CSM website and were asked to find it.

Locating the online versions of the Catalog and Schedule provided another example of web pages being overly dense. Typically interviewees first looked on the homepage for links that would guide them to the Schedule and Catalog. That some did not see the link on the homepage under the "All Students" heading reflects on the text style and layout of the homepage. From the Schedules and Catalog link on the home page or from the Quicklinks link, interviewees were directed to a page that lists Schedule and Catalog as a "title" and "Printed Schedule" is displayed prominently at the top of the page (http://collegeofsanmateo.edu/webpages/default.asp?WebPgID=172&CatID=5). This page offered interviewees two layers of menu options to the left of the page content – many of which have little or nothing to do with obtaining a schedule or catalog. Most students, in their effort to locate the schedule, paused and perused the various links for a minute before deciding that the appropriate links were located on the right side of the page.

You want to help a friend who is coming to enroll at CSM for the first time. What would you show this person to help him/her with registering as a student for the first time?

The interviewees did not attempt any of the actual steps to applying online. While only one of the interviewees had applied online in this manner, each found the "New Students" menu on the homepage quickly.
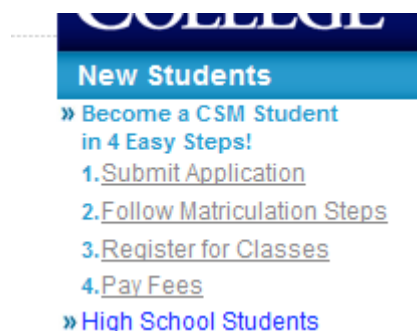
It should be noted that several of the interviewees tried a couple of the links within this "New Students" menu and commented that it seemed a confusing that all four of the links took the user to exactly the same location. (http://collegeofsanmateo.edu/webpages/quicklink.asp?WebPgID=368)

The denseness of the material on the linked page was commented on by several students. Interviewees wanted less information and simpler directions. It was suggested that the material on the page be distributed among several pages to make the material less dense and easier to determine what to do next. All found the "Apply online now" link and assumed this would be the next step.

You need to meet with a counselor to discuss what to take for next semester. You have never met with a counselor before even though you have taken classes. How would you find a counselor?

None of the interviewees had utilized the web to connect with a counselor. Most interviewees scanned the homepage to find an appropriate link. Most chose the Quicklinks menu to get to Counseling, a few went to the Student Services Online link and from that page connected to Counseling. All looked for 1) an option to make an appointment with a counselor and/or 2) a list of counselor names, numbers, and office hours.

All came to the decision to use the phone number listed on the Counseling webpages and call to make an appointment.

How would you find out if meeting with a counselor was something that CSM required?

No interviewees could answer this question. Most assumed that if they had completed the online application they would have been told if they had to make a counseling appointment. A few scanned the "New Students Page" (http://collegeofsanmateo.edu/webpages/quicklink.asp?WebPgID=368) for information about this. Two interviewees tried the Counseling link in Step 2 of this page but gave up when it was clear this did not offer the needed information.

You think you might want to transfer to San Francisco State University as a business major. You want to figure out if your classes are all transferable for the last semester, what would you do?

Most people were aware of the Assist.org site to help them determine the transferability of their courses (because a counselor had told them about the

site). Those that weren't aware of the Assist.org site tended to go to the Transfer Center page (http://www.collegeofsanmateo.edu/transfer/), although some also looked in instructional programs and majors pages for information about course transferability. Most of those who went to the Transfer Center page tended to click the "Transfer Checklist" link (http://www.collegeofsanmateo.edu/transfer/transferchecklist.html), and while fewer noticed the link to Assist.org on the left side of the page, some interviewees clicked multiple links on the Transfer Center page and a couple of students gave up if they never happened upon the Assist.org link.

You have decided to look into changing your major to English or maybe Art. Where would you go for information about major requirements.

One participant immediately offered that this information could be found in the catalog. Others spent a fair amount of time following links based on words like "major" or "program," that usually did not reveal information about fulfilling the major program.

Find the office hours for all your faculty this semester.

Only one interviewee did not find the "Faculty" link at the top of the homepage but when interviewees were directed to this page (http://www.collegeofsanmateo.edu/webpages/faculty_webpages.asp) they tended to immediately scroll down the list of names to find their professor. Every interviewee assumed this list was faculty for CSM as the link would have suggested. On hints from the interviewer, interviewees re-read the top of the page and noticed that they, in fact, needed to follow one of the other links at the top of the page to obtain a list of CSM faculty.