

Excerpt from report, ***PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST***



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Dr. Vanna Gonzales
Chair, Political Science Department
Co-Chair Student Success Committee
Contra Costa College

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STRENGTHENING CAREER SERVICES

With the average student at Contra Costa College graduating with an average of 92 units, only 36 units less than what it takes to get a B.A. or B.S. at a four year college (Robinson-Cooper, October 21st), we are not doing a good enough job moving students “up and out” along a transfer and career pathway. It is also important to remember, however, that many students are not predominately transfer bound, nor do they feel they need a degree to work. For students negotiating complex family situations or committed to part-time employment, they may be less focused on ‘graduating’ or finding a career path than juggling family-life balance with young children or finding the right profile of specialty classes to take to work toward a significant career change when their depends leave the house or to start their online or local business, for example. Others who enroll in community college in order to qualify for social assistance via TANF/CalWORKS, may be more focused on surviving everyday life as a low income person in the bay area, than planning for the future. Alternatively, at a time when many people, young and old, have re-prioritized quality of life issues, they may be seeing community college as more of an opportunity for pursuing personal goals relating to enrichment or self-fulfillment rather than a pathway to either a four year degree or a professional goal. From these vantage points, the high number of units a student accrues at CCC could be indicative of persistence rather than failure.

This said, community colleges are still the primary means by which poor and low income people climb into the middle class. According to the director of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Doug Shapiro, “College is [still] the best chance you have to get into well-paying jobs in this economy. It is not the only path and its’ certainly not a guarantee, but it’s the best path we have right now. And so if more students are thrown off that path, their families and communities suffer” (Nadworny, 2021). If the mark of future mobility is not a

current pay check, but a degree indicating minimal qualifications and the accumulation of a set of skills that will lead students to be competitive in the twenty-first century labor market, we need to do better at fostering opportunities for students to balance personal enrichment, career exploration, and community engagement.

Career exploration and development

Currently, career development at CCC focuses heavily on helping students that need temporary jobs find work, often within the college itself, and servicing employers requests for referrals to build their workforce (Natasha Dealmeida, interview). As part of student services, separated from CTE, the Career and Transfer Center, a fairly new development at CCC as of 2017/2018, was run until this year by a single full time career development staff person, also its founding director. While the director collaborated with her counter parts on other campuses to organize a yearly job fair, with only one additional part time staff person, most of the career centers work at CCC focused on meeting the needs of individual students one-on-one, either on a drop in basis or upon referral from other programs on campus, who were in turn referred to other programs and services on campus to solve immediate needs. Additionally, the inadequacies of the SARS software, which presented onerous processes for employers to post jobs and limited access to designated career counselor, made it a cumbersome tool for employers and career counselors alike (interviews Dealmeida, Luna). Thus, the lack of job opportunities available to students, and their knowledge of them, was extremely limited, requiring a considerable amount of staff time to engage in search, and less time building student skills for longer term career development.

The adoption of Handshake throughout the district adds considerable additional capacity to connect needs generated from within the college to outward facing opportunities.

As a multifunctional software that has long been used throughout four year colleges, its adoption within 4 CD three years ago allows students to connect with a wide variety of opportunities generated from outside the campus, including but not limited to employment, apprenticeship, and internship opportunities, career and technical trainings, innovative educational opportunities and scholarships, and online workshops and career events. In Spring 2021, Los Medanos hosted its first virtual 4CD conference, therefore enabling a valuable opportunity for students that would have not been possible otherwise given the pandemic¹. However promising, currently, most of Handshakes functionality remains under-utilized, particularly at CCC. While LMC is utilizing the tool to build out connections on behalf of its students to the California Internship Network (CAIN), a leader of paid internships and over 1500 paid internships for students across the state prior to the pandemic (interview, Rachel Anicetti) and DVC is the first and only college to use Handshake to schedule appointments (interview, Rachel Luna), CCC has only begun to pilot the tool and it is widely unknown with the campus community.

Clearly, it is not enough to purchase a software and assume there will be pick up. The capability and utility for students has to be built. For instance, because internships come in so many shapes and sizes, and span a wide variety of professions and industries in the public, private and non-profit sector, students are often simultaneously overwhelmed by choice while underinformed about how internships are relevant to their educational or career trajectories.

¹ As a participant, I can attest to the incredible utility of the Spring, 2021 conference, which included a wide variety of external participants and faculty and staff led workshops and panels dedicated to student success. However, the participation of only twenty-two students across the three colleges (interview, Rachel Anicetti), speaks not only to the challenges of utilizing the tool in a pandemic environment, but also the need to develop functionality and better embed such opportunities within the life of the college campuses to make more stakeholders aware of it and its functionality and promote uptake among the student body of each campus.

Internships provide invaluable in depth experience on the job; however, most community college students can't afford to give up part-time jobs for an unpaid internship. They need to be paid a living wage and so expanding the range of opportunities beyond the key contacts that currently exist, predominately in the public sector, is a key job for the future. They also need to be better informed about how unpaid internships have become a pathway to employment in some organizations. While it is often assumed that faculty foster career connections to opportunities through their programs, which they do, they also have extremely limited bandwidth or capacity to prep students on how to apply, lack access to department websites for information sharing, and have limited reach with class-based announcements. Thus having a centralized resource hub or clearing house for student opportunities that was more visible and accessible to students through the career center, would go a long way in fostering more extensive connections between students and the community.

What is also needed is human capital that can effectively connect Handshake to students and make it an effective inward facing tool by also looking outward to make the case to a targeted group of employers as to why they should include Contra Costa students as among their potential contacts for new job and internship opportunities by actively outreaching, particularly among smaller employers, like the myriad of ethnic entrepreneurs or non-profits in West County that have flexible opportunities for students, but also among would-be employers that already have connections to programs across the college. In order for students to get access to employment opportunities or internships via Handshake, employers who generate ads have to intentionally select which institutions they want to receive them. Given lack of knowledge about this tool by many employers coupled by the reputational issues of the college more broadly, student opportunities are diminished by lack of effective deployment of Handshake. This is all the more salient given CCC's proximity to UC Berkeley and other larger colleges like

DVC that are well known. Lacking a strong outward facing presence with the public, private and non-profit sectors in the region, the flow of information and opportunities into the college is highly impeded, thus leading to low pick up of career services as student see little use for them given the lack of opportunities generated.

Given the magnitude of work needed to set students up for success, to have only one full time staff dedicated to career and professional development is to signal to students that the institution is not dedicated to their transfer or career success. It is even more baffling for a college that has a designated 'Career and Transfer Center', which should be getting workforce development funding. To be able to build a serious culture of college and career going, and thus professional development that generates positive externalities for community development, not least of which is broader reach in the community and thus the potentiality for greater enrollment, there needs to be at least two full time designated staff to career services, among them a fulltime coordinator whose administrative and outward facing work can complement the inward facing work of classified staff who interface with students.

A professional full time coordinator with twenty-first century technical skills is essential given the imperative for optimizing the functionality of Handshake, but also the need for strategic planning so as to optimize programming without duplicating effort, but also to generate metrics and integrating software that will produce the kinds of data, and student success narratives, that allow the career center to scale up its efforts into the future with additional grants. Moreover, marketing and communication skills are critical to be able to interface effectively with a wide variety of employers (nonprofit, public, private) across a wide variety of sectors and communities. Unlike four year institutions like UC Berkeley that have over a thousand established partnerships (Bass interview), CCC has to create them, which is made even more difficult, by reputational issues that beset the college. Thus, generating

'handbooks' for internship coordinators and employers that highlight the diversity of students and efforts of the center to prepare students, is critical to the outward facing work, as is the inter-personal skills and professionalism of someone who defacto becomes the outward facing representative of the college in many community forums.

We don't do our students any favors by failing to expand a knowledge base, arguably most directly relevant to *community* success. It is incredibly valuable to be able to relate to and identify with students, and this is the value 'high touch' services can provide for fellow students but there is considerable expertise needed to match skills to jobs effectively, and that comes from professionals with specialty credentials and training, for instance an advanced degree in career development and/or significant experience in industry are needed. Moreover, motivated, academic achieving students doing serious work in the classroom that are looking to improve their job and career prospects, can be disappointed by lack of professionalism in a space that is supposed to help prepare them for success in the twenty-first century workforce. Negative or unhelpful experiences can create reputational problems that lead to lack of uptake. This point is worth emphasizing given pressure many college campuses face to prioritize basic needs and services that serve as a gateway to classes rather than a pipeline to career advancement.

Leveraging funding to invest in external facing educational supports should not be considered in opposition to inward facing student services, but rather a multiplier to the goal of helping students succeed in their post transfer career pathways. Here, student hourly workers become a key source of support as 'peer advisors'. As currently happens at DVC, federal level student worker monies could be used to enhance the work of full time staff for example by assisting in creating workshops, soliciting information from and sharing it with internal stakeholders, and assisting in creating workshops and other events that scale up career

development opportunities for current and prospective students (interview, Rachel Luna). However, part time hourly student work cannot be a substitute for professionalism because when we undervalue career development we risk undermining students' opportunities for *professional advancement* by not developing programming and capacity that explicitly helps build skill sets expected by the most coveted employers in labor markets saturated with well qualified candidates, for instance networking and promotion, resume writing and interviewing. Thus, while some may view the expenditure of funds for professional expertise in this area as contrary to equity goals, that is largely if you see equity from the lens of basic needs rather than student and community success. The professionalization of transfer *and* career services advances equity because it is almost always students in low income communities that are the ones deprived of this expertise, thus perpetuating, if not exacerbating existing inequalities for individual families but for whole communities as well.

Obviously a robust Career Center can only do so much outward facing work without cultivating strong synergistic relationships with counseling, workforce that in turn require strategic planning. While these components will be discussed in subsequent sections of the paper, what is critical in terms of capacity building for the longer term is initial investments in efforts to create data bases and websites that can be curated for individual use by students as well as deployed to advance internal and external partnerships that then can support students in their career journey. Yet to be useful, these websites and data bases need to be well planned, integrated and curated. Obviously, there are key limitations given California's failure to develop integrated systems across its public education system. For example, many states have longitudinal data systems that span high school and college, while California has never invested in such infrastructure. Just as this lack of integrated data basis creates problems for four year universities in improving public high school student access to their programs, it limits

Community College's ability to identify programs and practices that aid them in assisting students with career development. Institutionally, setting up workable data bases, most realistically district wide, would allow for a much broader range of student-centered programming and empower students to do more career planning on their own by giving them the tools to successfully navigate what is too often a vast and confusion web of data, resources, and information.

While access to better more integrated information, data bases, and websites should never be considered a substitute for in person counselor and career professional advice, it is a critical enhancement and necessary supplement in career search in the twenty-first century. Some students are willing and able to take a designated career class from the counseling department to figure out their pathway, but for many students their schedules do not permit them to take an entire class to get a particular subset of career information. Thus, the career center should be a place where more flexible, professional workshops and opportunities are provided consistently to students each semester, a place where career and transfer specialists share out important information such as free, and highly beneficial workshops or online forums like, "[College-to-Career, Post Pandemic](#)", a virtual forum looking at the ways the career path after graduation could continue to evolve after the pandemic. It should also be a place where students can find short video presentations and mini workshops tailored to them, as well as high touch help with specific issues, such as looking over resumes. Recognizing that there are too many students to be able to rely exclusively on one-on-one interactions that aren't exclusionary simply due to lack of availability, investing the time and resources in strategic planning around career planning would go a long way to help set students up for success over the long run, particularly given the critical inflection point in career development that community colleges intersect with in the course of people's lives.

Establish a strategic plan for campus-wide student centered professional development initiatives

Ultimately, creating synergies around educational and professional development that build student and community engagement needs to be a college-wide effort and therefore, whether exposing students to new experiences and community stakeholders, or helping them find their career pathways, it is critical not only to build synergies between Career, Counseling and Workforce but to join up these efforts with academic departments and student life.

Because most community college counselors are focused on onboarding new students, grade and enrollment issues, degree requirements, social and emotional well-being of students, the average counselor cannot be expected to be particularly attuned to the complexities of labor markets that await students beyond their AA and BA/BS degrees. This presents a degree of difficulty in relying exclusively on community college counselors to do career exploration, particularly for counselors that have a significant caseloads and a wide variety of student profiles and interests. Moreover, though some counselors in the community college setting have specialized competencies in career exploration or career development, most have generalist M.A. degrees in Counseling with backgrounds in social work or psychology and teach career exploration courses as four year transfer preparation courses. Counselors that focus on CTE programs may have more knowledge of labor market analysis and industry trends, but given the significant institutional pressure to guide students to programs already offered within the college, as well as time and resource pressures, students are rarely given the opportunity for deep or meaningful exploration of career pathways during counseling sessions (Kubischta interview). If most of the course offerings for 'career exploration' are offered by counselors whose own experience is limited and for whom career development is not an expertise, greater efforts have to be made in drawing on the expertise faculty beyond CTE as experts within their

fields familiar with educational expectations and career dynamics and opportunities within their field.

There are considerable gains to be made from harnessing faculty assets within the broader campus community to create a more professionalized culture that blends workforce and transfer goals. In many departments, faculty do their best to provide opportunities for students to gain exposure careers in their discipline. For example, in political science, I have organized and led student field trips to Hastings Law School, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, UC Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies, and UC Berkeley School of Law. I have also arranged panels of community activists, politicians, judges and lawyers to share with the campus community the work they do in their field and have arranged panels of former members of the political science student club I advise to share their college and career pathway post transfer.² Similarly, many science faculty, for example, working through the Center for Science Excellence, provide a variety of opportunities for professional advancement (interview, Dr. Setiati Sidharta. While one or two non-CTE faculty have external grants to bring in speakers or arrange for more immersive professional development experiences, for the most part, for most community college faculty in small colleges, particularly those in department with only one or two full time faculty members and limited budgets (i.e. most social science departments), there is limited bandwidth to generate consistent programming in this area.

Thus, a key way of enhancing capacity is by developing a framework for collaborating with faculty and students. Working with the Chair of the Counseling Department (as Pathways lead), the Chair of the Student Success Committee, and the Dean of Student Services, the head of Student Life, and the Marketing Director, three initiatives could serve as the basis of a two

² See the Democracy in action section below.

year strategic plan to strengthen the culture of student-centered professional development:
Careers on Campus; Project Internship; Envision Your Future.

Careers to Campus

Careers to Campus, would be a campus wide 'career day' (to supplement, rather than substitute for the 'jobs' fair) each spring. Organized on a two year planning cycle beginning the summer prior to the first 'career day', *Careers on Campus* would be an all-day event that would showcase careers in two designated pathways year one and two designated pathways in year two. Pathways for the first 'pilot' two year cycle would be determined by the President and organizing committee (Chair of Counseling/Pathways; Director of C&T; Chair of SSC; Dean of SS; Coordinator of SL), with input from the Council of Chairs. Seed funding for this event would come from a combination of employer sponsorship, foundation seed money, and workforce funding.

Once the pathways and departments were determined, the Director of Career & Transfer, who would chair the standing committee, would work with faculty and designated staff to designate a theme and organize and coordinate the specific events within the parameters established by the program. In addition to the designated calendar date and time frame, *Careers to Campus* would be based around four key 'event' types:

- ◇ A panel of external and internal professionals in the fields represented by the designated pathways;
- ◇ An targeted employment fair of invited employers and/or paid internship providers in the designed pathways fields
- ◇ A round table event in which students would have personal interactions with external professionals;
- ◇ A student led activity or event, organized by Student Life, ASU, and ICC (i.e. trivia game and raffle, an invitation to jazz band or theater to perform, or a special guest speaker invited as related to a Student Life/ASU/ICC theme, such as "Dream Jobs" as related to the disciplines included in the pathway clusters).

In addition to providing a great way for students to immerse themselves in career exploration, acquire new skills and resources, this would be an opportunity to get potential 'partner' employers to campus and to facilitate personal connections and relationships between the campus community and professionals in the field. A great example of initial work in developing this kind of model is the work of Rachel Anicetti, the Director of Career and Transfer Center at LMC, in spearheading 4CDs Spring 2021 career fair. Leveraging her previous connections at Sacramento State as well as the bringing together of staff and faculty under the Dean of Student Success to develop innovative and multifaceted opportunities for students, enables the development of a multi-layered event which includes not only employer 'recruitment', but unique value added elements for students in terms of internship and education advancement opportunities and practical advice related to key themes, like how to network using social media.

Project Internship

Project internship would be an ongoing program that would be the responsibility of the Chair of Student Success, working closely with the Director of Career Services, the Head of Student life, and the Scholarship Coordinator. It would be comprised of one in-person and two online student-focused seminars which would correspond to key due dates for internships offered in the spring and summer predominately, in the social, physical and life sciences. The first in-person seminar, strategically scheduled for the beginning of February, would consist of a round table of experts discussing the different types of internships, reasons to apply for them, how to research them, and what employers look for in candidates as related to their own public,

private, or non-profit experiences. This would be followed by two hands-on online workshops, one facilitated by the Chair of Student success on application preparation strategies, for instance, acquiring high quality letters of recommendations, and the second, would be organized by the Career and Transfer center on subjects like resume writing.

All three workshops would take place in February to prepare students to submit summer internship applications in March and would be linked to targeted recruit meant through four key venues: The Career Center, ASU, ICC (where most institutionalized affinity groups also have clubs); and the Council of Chairs, where department heads would be encouraged to recruit students from within their units and to forward internship opportunities to the Career center to contribute to a CCC specific data base.

Because internships available for the fall often have due dates posted over the summer prior to CCC's fall calendar start date), other online seminars could be students to students in the late fall and early spring. These professional development seminars would be focused on preparing students to research, apply for, and interview for paid internships, and could include off campus guest speakers as well as speakers from inside campus in rotation from year to year. Recognizing that many low income students of color lack knowledge of key (often competitive) opportunities in their own back yard, as well as 'just-in-time' skills needed to take advantage of them (i.e. producing a resume, reference and writing sample with a few days turn-around), project seminars would attempt to fill this gap and in the process help to connect students with one another across affinity groups and disciplines, thereby building social capital.

In this way, *Project internship* also constitutes an intentional way of harnessing the expertise and know-how across the campus by establishing an ad hoc committee comprised of faculty and staff from across several key affinity groups: Puentes, Umoja, Metas, and the SCE,

and two key student service positions, the Student Life Coordinator and the Scholarship Coordinator. Given that many of these programs are focused either on supporting students' academic success in the classroom or furthering their transfer goals, many of the faculty coordinators have knowledge of opportunities in the community for students as well as useful advice and/or resources, yet given limited time and capacity, they may not be able to provide high level support for students that seek to take advantage of the internship opportunities faculty coordinators receive and pass on to students. This structure enhances their efforts.

Additionally, *Project internship* would attempt to solve the issue of scale by essentially coordinating efforts around this important component of student success, whether defined in terms of either career or transfer. As the UC system has moved away from standardized testing, essays and extra-curricular activities and experiences have become important aspects of a successful transfer application, along with grades. Moreover, paid internships in many fields are essentially a pipeline into a full time employment, yet many community college students are unaware of the importance of these opportunities or how they may be a useful supplement to classes during the summer months or during the course of the semester for those students who do not have paid work. Finally, this program has the potential of creating synergies with folks looking to help students learn about and apply to scholarships and fellowships. Because CCC scholarships are due in early March, *Project Internship* presents an opportunity to collaborate with the Scholarship coordinator to increase the number of scholarship applications, particularly for external sources of funding. Similarly, it presents an opportunity to work with Berkeley Experience, a Student-initiated Program (SIP) at the University of California, Berkeley that recruits low income Community College Students to the UC System by helping them with the FAFSA and preparing their PIQs. As a pipeline project, it offers a Summer Fellowship program, "Acquiring Social Capital Theory in Action", which could serve as a basis for

recruitment of CCC students that are interested in transferring to UC Berkeley. There are undoubtedly other internship/fellowship programs connected to HBCU's that could offer similar opportunities for recruitment and guest appearances.

To enhance the quality of effort each yearly programming cycle, the project could be conceived in three stages, which maximize stakeholders ability to plan and helps in integrating the project with other career development and academic initiatives:

- ◇ Stage One: Outreach to faculty and staff to send well known internship opportunities to the Career and Transfer Center Director to put into their data base
- ◇ Stage Two: Recruit panelists, assembly material and establish marketing strategy to promote the program in collaboration with Student Life, the Marketing Director and the Career Center Director
- ◇ Stage Three: Solicit feedback and set up analytic tools to assess impact and enhance the utility

Envision Your Future

Envision Your Future is an initiative that, under the purview of the Career and Transfer Center, would infuse career exploration and professional development into CCC recruitment events, in particular CCC's first year experience.

Working with the Enrollment Outreach Coordinator, the SSC chair, and the Student Life Coordinator, the Transfer Coordinator and Career Services Coordinator would design a mini program that would integrate online career exploration tools with a self-paced 'career exploration' assessment that would produce automated results students could view as an email report sent to their insite in box. Set up as a brief 15 minute 'online training tool' via

Handshake, the assessment would spur students to connect their self-assessed academic pathways to longer term career aspirations. In so doing it would introduce students to jobs related to their self-identified pathway and the different degrees and certificate associated with career advancement in their self-administered assessment. It would also ask participants a battery of questions about their personality traits, lifestyle choices, and work-related preferences to produce a preliminary automated analysis that they would then be encouraged to discuss further with their assigned counselor as well as the Career and Transfer Center Staff. The key goal of this exercise would be to get students thinking more about the connection between their educational, personal and career goals and to offer them a clear enticement to utilize counseling and career services. It would also generate a resource list for students as well as a list of Career and Transfer events sponsored or co-sponsored by the center, including Careers to Campus and the Internship Project

Additionally, *Envision Your Future* is have a two hour in-person in person program (and conceivably on line) integrated into the first year experience program comprised of a key note speaker, followed by an immersive conference-like experience in which students would be able to choose to attend three of six workshops; two “blue: workshops on making the most out of your time in community college; two ‘red’ workshops on how to set yourself up for transferring to the college of your choice and two ‘white’ workshops and setting and pursuing career goals. Students would be asked to choose one red, one white, and one blue workshop to ensure that they were exposed to key topics in each area of education and professional development. The workshops would be 25 minutes in length with a five minute period in between to walk to each classroom. Each student would be given a color coded punch card at the outset of the event along with a goodie bag with pen and paper to take notes at each workshop they attend. Students who attended three workshops and filled out an event feedback card would be eligible

to enter a raffle to win one of three classes of prizes (i.e. free parking passes, free meals at AquaTerra, and computers) funded by the CCC Foundation.

One potential enhancement to the program, which could offer synergies with *Project Internship*, would be to partner with '[Career Launch](#)' an innovative social enterprise incubated at Santa Clara University, founded by former DVC student Sean O'Keefe. Purchasing Career Launches' publication, *Launch Your Career: How ANY Student Can Create Relationships with Professionals and Land the Jobs and Internships They Want* for first year experience students would provide them a valuable asset as they start their journey at CCC and would enable the college to incorporate some of the books' best practices related to career and professional development in our workshops. Also, since the organization is based in the South Bay, the college could leverage this partnership to procure dynamic keynote speakers for 'Envision Your Future' as well as cross pollinate additional professional connections and community partners for both Careers to Campus and Project Internship.