LETTERS FROM LEADERSHIP

DR. ERIK COOPER, BOARD PRESIDENT, THE RP GROUP

Stepping into the role of President for the RP Group Board, I have been reflecting on the words of Rob Johnstone who, more than a decade ago, said, “There has never been a better or scarier time to be a research and planning professional in the California Community Colleges.” While our system and our students are facing multiple challenges, those challenges... continued on p. 2

DATA CRITICAL IN HELPING IRVINE VALLEY COLLEGE SECURE $10M IN ANNUAL EARMARKED FUNDING TO SUPPORT VETERANS

OLIVIA HENRIKSEN, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS, THE RP GROUP

Nathan* is a community college student and veteran who has been deployed eight times in his 10-year service for... continued on p. 3

RIO HONDO COLLEGE AND THE ABC'S OF RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN A CRISIS AND BEYOND

RP GROUP STAFF

If you’re looking for a way to understand and support students during the pandemic and beyond, a model of collaboration that brings together a wide cross-section of educators; and effective... continued on p. 4

LOOKING FOR CCC LEGISLATION AND CCCCCO ADVOCACY?

View federal here or state here.

OUR WORK IN THE WORLD

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...also represent opportunities. If we consider the roots of the word “crisis,” we’ll see it was once defined as a “turning point in a disease.” The aptness of that definition is so perfect for this moment, especially if we realize this moment as a turning point for the function of data and our role as researchers.

When I entered into institutional research at Yuba College in 2009 I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I had never been in IR (let alone P or E). My brief experience dabbling in program evaluation at a four-year university did not prepare me for the politics, disbelief, and lack of resources at a community college. It did not prepare me for when I attended my first Basic Skills Committee meeting and a “colleague” suggested that they take the researcher out to the fountain to see if I could walk on water. It was rough. It was also clear, very quickly, that most people were not sure what IR could do for them and many were afraid data would get used against them.

Fortunately though, there were enough kind, curious people that I was able to start telling an evidence-based story of what was happening to the students who came to our college. In partnership with those faculty, and alongside landmark statewide research, crucial changes occurred to Yuba’s math, English, and ESL sequences that began to make a difference for students.

Fast forward to 2014 at Sierra College, where I worked with our Student Equity Advisory Committee. Even though the college’s IRP department and a core group of faculty had long focused on social justice, few outside of that group were aware of the equity and success gaps our students experienced. Most meetings began by reviewing data, but for most in the room, it was information that called into question the shared narrative of who we were as a college. Leadership responded and called together a taskforce to address the issue of student success (in this case the lack thereof) head on. This work is not finished, but every year is better. (Yes, even this year.)

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AB 705 Implementation Findings and Guidance

With the shift towards AB 705 compliance, the MMAP research team is working with the Community College Chancellor’s Office to provide support, research, and recommendations on maximizing students’ likelihood of completing a transfer-level math or English course in one year, or an ESL course in three years.

As I’m sure most of you have seen on the RP Listserv, there is a tremendous passion amongst our colleagues to help address the inequities in our colleges and face the limiting beliefs within ourselves. Most of us have access to tools that make data literacy and democratization possible. Traditionally, our roles have been to dispassionately present information, but that luxury has passed. Communicating effectively with our fellow educators about the realities apparent in the data is now paramount. When we talk about data, we are really talking about the lives and experiences of our students; our neighbors and their children; and ultimately the communities in which we live. If we remember that truth, then we must tell their stories and advocate for what will help them succeed.

It is incumbent upon us to help foster a culture on our campuses that can break down barriers in order to allow for collaboration, transparency, and a student-first mindset, all for the purpose of laying a strong foundation for action.

In step with California’s community colleges, the RP Group has been holding and facilitating internal conversations on equity, diversity, and inclusion so that we can better define each of these concepts; understand the ways we unknowingly dismantle them, and push the boundaries on our level of responsibility in order to turn these ideas into a reality for our students.
Dr. Darla Cooper and I will be continuing this work, specifically with the RP Group Board and staff and members from the IRPE field this year to improve our ability to lead difficult conversations — particularly about race and racism. We will be providing both formal and informal professional development to help support you, so you are better prepared to lead these conversations at your colleges and districts. Our professional development projects, such as the Summer Institute, already include modules on the topic. We are going to do more. At the same time, we are working on a Code of Ethics to help guide us and help make our values and standards more transparent to others.

Neither the RP Group nor researchers can do this work alone. Division is the antithesis to progress. As a Board, we are trying to build stronger partnerships with the Chancellor’s Office and representative groups such as the statewide Academic Senate, and the professional organizations for CEOs, CIOs and CSSOs.

Change is neither fast nor easy, but if we are in the room, ready to listen, and prepared to lead, we can help keep our students, and all of those who support them, on the road to success.

Truly,
Erik (RP Group Board President)

Division is the antithesis to progress.

DATA CRITICAL IN HELPING IRVINE VALLEY COLLEGE SECURE $10M IN ANNUAL EARMARKED FUNDING TO SUPPORT VETERANS continued from front page

...the Marines. He suffers from hearing loss, extreme posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other conditions that make his personal journey to obtaining a degree highly challenging.

He’s far from alone.

In a 2018 statewide survey of California Community College (CCC) veterans, more than a quarter of respondents said they suffer from PTSD and almost 40% from depression. When it comes to physical injury or illness, the numbers skyrocket to 70%. Among female student vets specifically, nearly two-thirds (64%) reveal that they experienced military sexual trauma and 43% report having considered suicide.

Compounding these heartbreaking numbers is the fact that, depending on the health issue, the wait for a veteran to see a physician for some conditions can be up to a year.

“They are getting poor services and (they face) a lack of access, primarily a lack of mental and medical support, critical to these students,” says Nancy Montgomery, RN, MSN at Irvine Valley College (IVC).

It is hundreds of stories like Nathan’s that drive Montgomery, whose role at IVC is to lead care for veteran students, to advocate for funding to support the veterans at her own college, along with the 90,000 veterans enrolled at California Community Colleges across the state.

To help her in this quest, and to acquire more targeted and updated information and research on the situation, Montgomery has helped lead multiple rounds of research.
with the RP Group including a statewide survey focused on Veteran Resource Centers and veterans in the CCC system; a system-wide survey on VRC operations and spending; and most recently, a **statewide survey focused specifically on the unique needs of female veterans.**

To date, with the help of hundreds of veterans, legislators, and data, Montgomery and her team at IVC have secured a total of $10 million of annual, earmarked funding split over two years for the purpose of providing needed support to veterans and to learn more about how to help them.

“Even given the numerous places funding has been cut because of the crisis,” says Montgomery, “the $10 million is safe.”

The first year she approached lawmakers for funding, though, she was not successful.

“In the second year, we stormed the capitol. Tents were set up and hundreds of veteran (students) from all over California spoke to their officials with data booklets in hand. That’s when we got the first $5 million.”

“Data is huge.” She says, “They want to know, where is the research, the evidence?”

Here’s a glimpse into more of what was discovered:

- A stark disconnect between the proportion of CCC veterans reporting being injured in combat (70%), and the proportion requiring/receiving accommodations for a disability (21%)
- A glaring lack of mental health services available paired with a high prevalence of mental health challenges among vets
- The need for increased capacity to support veteran students’ educational planning and benefits
- For CCC female veterans specifically, 45% face at least one form of food insecurity, while more than half face housing insecurity
- Funding has allowed VRCs to achieve compliance with many of the standards associated with high-functioning Veterans Resource Centers

Ultimately, her team’s goal is to secure $25 million annually so that each campus could have at least $250,000 dedicated to outfitting their individual Veteran Resource

Students “Perform” RP Group-led Focus Group Findings in Convocation Performance

Watch as Grossmont’s student Forensic Poetry Team gives a powerful poetry performance of focus group questions and findings to faculty and staff at a past convocation. Student voices from focus groups, along with college data, resulted in a change to the college’s financial aid disbursement timeline — from census to a week before the beginning of the semester.

Centers with critical supports similar to the ones she has helped put in place for IVC’s resource center such as:
- Veteran counselors
- Academic counselors and tutors
- Financial aid counselors
- Programs that aid in providing medical, emotional, and peer support and access

Though these centers provide community, critical resources, and a dedicated safe space for veterans that are not readily available elsewhere, there’s only a handful of them across the state that are fully equipped — and none that are operational now due to the crisis.

“The pandemic just compounds issues like access to health services and feelings of isolation and nobody is talking about it at all. This is such a vulnerable population and these young men and women — quite a few of them live by themselves,” she says. “That’s huge when you look at pre-existing mental health issues. We need to keep the conversation going.”

*Name changed to protect the student’s privacy.

RIO HONDO COLLEGE AND THE ABC’S OF RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN A CRISIS AND BEYOND continued from front page

...Guided Pathways efforts, Rio Hondo College’s COVID-19 response project accomplishes all three.
Using the **Six Success Factors** and guidance from Dr. Al Solano, a few of Rio Hondo’s **Leading from the Middle** cohorts created a strategic cross-campus **Student Success team** responsible for many student-centered efforts including their recent survey and intervention program aimed at helping students during the pandemic.

**IN THE FIRST 24 HOURS, WE HAD 65 RESPONSES,** says Mecom.

Scores of community colleges have been collecting feedback from students during the pandemic to assess their needs, but Rio Hondo took additional steps. They assembled a cross-functional rapid response team and created a plan to provide students with support around three basic needs: Academic, Basic, and Community (ABC).

When students logged into their classes on Canvas they immediately saw this message: “Do you need help? We care. Please let us know how you’re doing.” The message was then linked to a survey.

“Within the first minute of the survey going live, responses started flowing in. In the first 24 hours, we had 65 responses,” says Mecom.

While the types of responses varied significantly, some things became clear.

“We were getting a ton of messages about anxiety, fear, stress. Desperation almost. And a lot of technology needs.”

Armed with the ABCs, a campus resource guide, and 22 recruited classified professionals, the team began sorting responses into the appropriate categories and then responding to students sometimes even in the wee hours of the night.

**WHEN STUDENTS LOGGED INTO THEIR CLASSES ON CANVAS THEY IMMEDIATELY SAW THIS MESSAGE: “DO YOU NEED HELP? WE CARE. PLEASE LET US KNOW HOW YOU’RE DOING.”**

Now, three months later, the biggest takeaways for Mecom may be as powerful as they are simple.

“I’m a dean, so I’m supposed to know exactly what to do and how to direct these students and I’m not quite sure. I can’t just give [a student] a generic email or tell her to try out this link and see if it actually meets her needs. I need to know,” she says.

“We need to understand our own colleagues and resources better and really get to know each other. We all need to walk the path of a student.”

**HIGHLIGHTS OF ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS GAINED**

- Direct, simple, nurturing language is effective in communicating with students
- Students can’t always find resources on their own
- Students respond at higher rates when invited to contact versus “cold calling”
- Students are easier to reach in the evening
- A warm hand-off to another educator on campus is pivotal in supporting students, but is not easy to do in many situations
- Classified professionals are crucial in GP efforts

**HIGHLIGHTS OF LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS**

- Improve communication channels among all college employees and with students
- Assign to each team member either A, B, or C students to allow response team members to specialize in a particular area to provide more thorough assistance to students
- Ensure critical messages are set to high priority in Canvas so they remain visible for students

**-watch the Rio Hondo webinar**
• Streamline how the college connects students with personnel, providing the names of staff rather just offices or emails
• Aim to normalize and advance practice among the team facilitating outreach and follow-up calls with students

INSIGHTS APPLIED AND WORKING
Taking bits of what she learned from the response project, Mecom was also able to increase student use of the college’s once underutilized online tutoring services. By softening the messaging in Canvas, pairing it with visual storytelling, and working with other departments to remove some registration access barriers, Mecom and her team report an increase of 30% of online tutoring sign-ups compared to the year prior during the same time period.

WHAT’S ON THE HORIZON?
In fall 2020, Rio Hondo is planning to restructure the student success teams based on area of interest so that each team will consist of classified professionals, embedded counselors, and deans. Next, they hope to establish a data coaching program and build a student data dashboard that will allow instructional faculty and success teams the ability to see some student information that will enable all to be more proactive in outreach.

OUR WORK IN THE WORLD
Explore places where the RP Group has been cited, quoted, or published.

THE HECHINGER REPORT
This national publication publishes an emotional essay from a student on her journey through higher education that includes mentions of RP Group work. Read the article here.

THE HECHINGER REPORT
This article features findings from the recent Through The Gate transfer study report as well as other transfer research. Read it here.

Daily Pilot
This LA Times blog post brings to light the critical role college veteran resource centers serve and cites RP Group research on veterans as evidence. Read it here.

To see more examples of how colleges have utilized our research and college-focused services, go here.

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