SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE

JOURNEY TO COMPLETION

Category:
Instructional Programs & Services

BCC BELLWETHER
COLLEGE CONSORTIUM

About San Diego Mesa

San Diego Mesa College is a fully accredited, comprehensive community college committed to access, success, and equity. We honor those commitments as a diverse community of students, faculty, professional staff, and administrators who collaborate to foster scholarship, leadership, innovation, and excellence in an inclusive learning environment. By promoting student learning and achievement that leads to degrees and certificates, transfer, workforce training, and lifelong learning, we empower our students to reach their educational goals and shape their future. Among the largest community colleges in California, Mesa College serves over 30,000 students per year, 25% of whom are full-time. Mesa offers nearly 200 associate degree and certificate programs and is one of 15 California community colleges offering a four-year baccalaureate degree. Mesa ranks as San Diego's top transfer institution, is a proud Hispanic-Serving Institution, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution, and a Military Friendly School, serving nearly 3,000 veterans and their families.

1964 Founded

31,893 Students enrolled 2020/2021

1,983 Academic Degrees & Certificates Awarded 2020/2021

$46 Cost per Unit, CA Resident

ETHNICITY
Latinx 39% • White 30%
Asian/PI 11% • Other/Multi 8%
African American 6% • Filipino 4%
Unreported 2% • Native American <1%

~3,000 MILITARY Active Military, Veteran, Spouse/Dependent

SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE
The Leading College of Equity and Excellence

MESA • HSI • SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE VETERANS • DREAMERS WELCOME • The Stand San Diego Mesa College • BLACK LIVES MATTER

Overview - *Our Why*

Why do we focus on student completion?

We know that the attainment of an academic award assists in the upward social mobility of all our students, and particularly our impacted groups. However, our data overall indicates that students took several extra years to graduate, earned excessive units, and that there were racial equity gaps in graduation rates. At San Diego Mesa College, we are driven to break down barriers and walk with students side by side in their success.

To respond to this call to action, we embarked on a highly collaborative process of inquiry and growth. Utilizing funding from the Regional Strong Workforce Program for Career Technical Education, the first-of-its-kind, cross-divisional team was assembled. The team developed an action-research project to identify students who had completed or were close to completing their award requirements and then worked with these students to get them to the finish line.

The most significant award and transfer program on campus, Business and Economics, was selected for this project. We hypothesized that focusing on the largest program would allow us to help the greatest number of students and would give us the largest dataset to identify possible insights on completion barriers for a more sustainable and systemic change.

We know students are not completing

We want to reduce the equity gap

4.2 Average number of years to earn an Associate's degree at Mesa *

97 Average total number of units earned at the time of receiving an Associate's degree at Mesa *

The largest student group on campus, **Latinx**, has the largest equity gap in percentage of awards ** **-1.8%**

While smaller in headcount, **African American** students have the second largest equity gap in percentage of awards ** **-1.2%**

* From 2013-14 to 2018-19. Source: www.sdmesa.edu/about-mesa/institutional-effectiveness/institutional-research/data-warehouse/AwardsDash.shtml

** From 2015-16 to 2018-19. There are various methods to calculate equity gap. In this case, equity gap is the difference between the percent of awards for a group and the campus representation (in percentage) for the same group. For example, the percentage of Latinx who received the award was 34.8%; the percent of Latinx on campus was 36.8%. Thus, the equity gap was -1.8%. Please see the link above for further information.

Planning Process

The dynamic team brought individual expertise to develop the initial comprehensive project process. The team included:

- Student Services Counselors
- Instructional Deans
- Institutional Researchers
- Evaluations & Career Classified Professionals
- Instructional Faculty
- Program Supervisors
- Student Workers
- Student Services Dean

Bi-weekly meetings kept the project moving forward as we discussed methods of inquiry, particularly given our system's data limitations. The team agreed on the overall goal to bring students to completion. However, the development of each plan of action relied upon outcomes analysis of prior steps in implementation. The uncertainty of each step was not met with hesitation but with curiosity and excitement to help students. The team was inspired by the capability and authority to challenge the norms.

We focused on Business because it is the largest program on campus. We also included Economics because they are similar in curriculum. In fact, **1,834** associate degrees were awarded in Business and Economics between 2014 to 2019 (**23.9%** of the total number of associate degrees awarded by the college in the same period).

Overall Project Steps

1. Identify the program with the largest number of awards annually (*everyone*)
2. Determine data queries parameters to identify potential graduates (*everyone*)
3. Run queries based on the parameters to get the list of potential graduates (*researchers*)
4. Manually evaluate individual student records and annotate findings (*counselors*)
5. Analyze findings, identify themes, discuss implications and actions (*everyone*)
6. Perform interventions depending on needs of different groups (*student services staff*)
7. Identify systemic barriers and come up with sustainable solutions (*everyone*)

*Focusing on the Biggest program
allows us to make the Biggest impact*
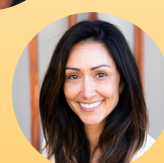
Data Gathering & Initial Analysis

After examining the degree requirements and student's course-taking behaviors, we came up with four parameters* to identify the Business and Economics graduates who were close to completing an associate degree:

1. *Had not earned an associate degree*
2. *Completion of the basic skills general education requirement (one course in each of the 4 areas)*
3. *Completion of >= 7 major requirement courses*
4. *Completion of >= 45 units*

Due to various technical issues and the complex nature of student's course-taking behaviors, this was not an *absolute indicator* but only an *index* of the course-taking behaviors.

Data do not have to be perfect in order to be actionable

From this process, researchers identified **633** students who could have potentially earned a Business or Economics degree from 2014 to 2019. **These students are referred to as the *Potential group*, and are the focus of this project** (Figure 2)**.**

Data revealed that among the 633 potential Business and Economics graduates, **the largest group was Latinx (33.6%)** (Figure 2). In contrast, among the 1,834 Business and Economics graduates from the same period, the largest group was White (37.5%) (Figure 1). Moreover, with the exception of African American, the representation of the non-White ethnicities were consistently lower in the *Potential* group compared to the *Awarded* group.
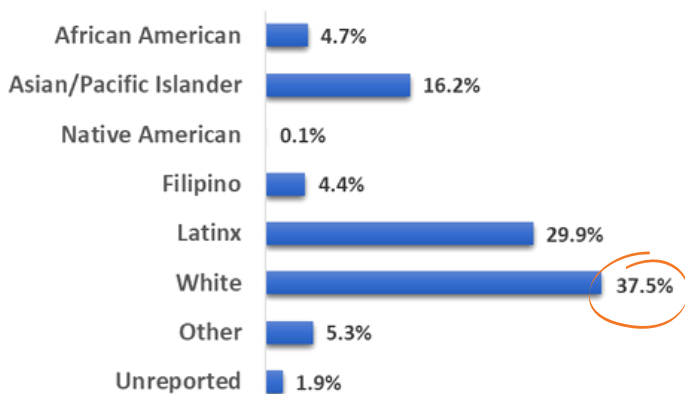

Figure 1. Awarded Group
Ethnicities of Business and Economics graduates from 2014-15 to 2018-19. N=1834
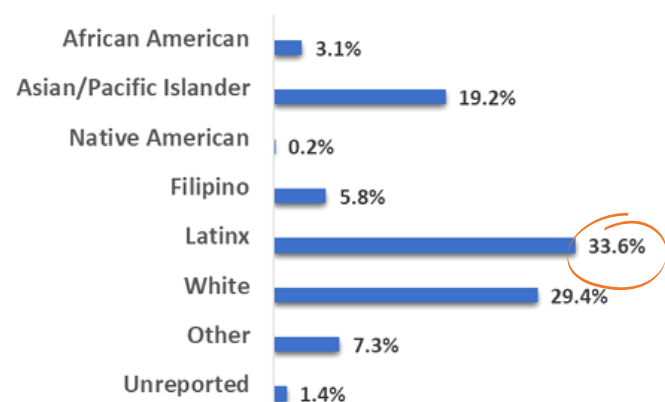

Figure 2. Potential/Non-awarded Group
Ethnicities of potential Business and Economics graduates from 2014-15 to 2018-19. N=633

* Note. These parameters will vary greatly by programs and by institutions.

Implementation

Different groups have different needs that require different interventions

Counselors reviewed records of all 633 students to confirm enrollment status and to specify any missing requirement toward earning a degree. Three patterns emerged from this review:

Group 1A (24.9%)
Completed - Petition

158 students completed all requirements (but did not get the degrees)

Intervention: 158 students were invited to attend a workshop to learn about how to petition to graduate

Implication: we did not anticipate to see such a large number of students in this group. Perhaps they forgot, did not know that they already completed, or they just did not want to get the degrees. Each potential reason will require a different action from us.

Group 1B (8.7%)
Completed - Reapply

58 students completed all requirements, but were not considered "active" due to the district systemwide transition to a new student information system.

Intervention: 58 students were invited to attend a workshop to learn about reapplying to the college and petitioning to graduate

Implication: it was also unexpected that the software system transition caused some students to be "out of the system." We should be mindful of any system change that we are doing to minimize any unintended side effects.

Group 2 (65.8%)
Missing Requirements

417 students missed documents and/or course requirement.

Intervention: 417 students were invited to meet 1-on-1 with the counselors to discuss education plans

Implication: as expected, the most common pattern was missing requirements. This highlights the essential roles of counseling, monitoring students' progress, and providing clear information on program requirements.
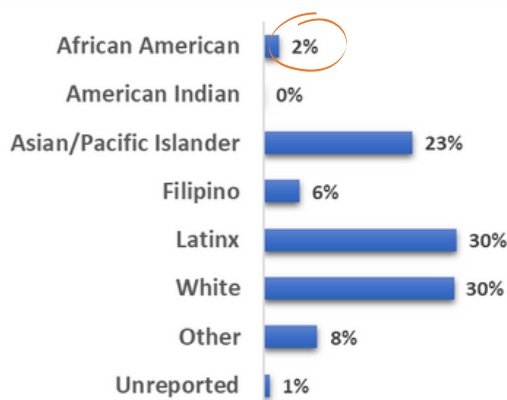
	Figure 3	Figure 4
African American	2%	4%
American Indian	0%	0.003%
Asian/Pacific Islander	23%	17%
Filipino	6%	6%
Latinx	30%	35%
White	30%	29%
Other	8%	7%
Unreported	1%	1%

Representation of African American in the Missing Requirement group was 2x the representation in the Completed group.

The largest representation was Latinx. This helps explain the biggest equity gap in annual award for Latinx (see page 3)

Figure 3.
Group 1A+1B (Completed)
N=158+58=216
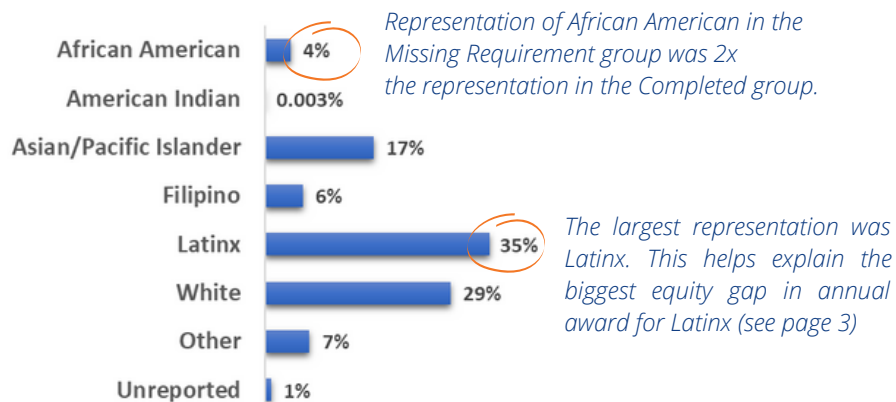
Figure 4.
Group 2 (Missing Requirement)
N=417

Student Outcomes

We don't know what we don't know, so we learn by doing

Over the course of several months, all 633 students were invited to their respective interventions (workshops and personal appointments) through customized emails and phone calls. Once this process was completed, **210** students applied for graduation, representing **33.2%** of the research cohort. Among these, 82 students were from Group 1 (*Completed*) and 128 were from Group 2 (*Missing requirements*); Latinx had the largest representation in both groups. In addition, the representation of African American in Group 1 who applied for graduation was **6%**, which was **3 times** the representation of African American in the original Group 1 (Figure 5 and Figure 3). In short, **the interventions benefitted the traditionally impacted groups the most**.
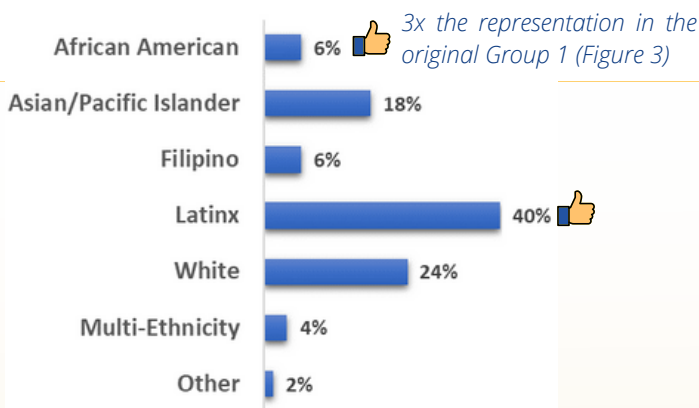

3x the representation in the original Group 1 (Figure 3)

Figure 5. Students in Group 1 (Completed) who applied for graduation. N=82
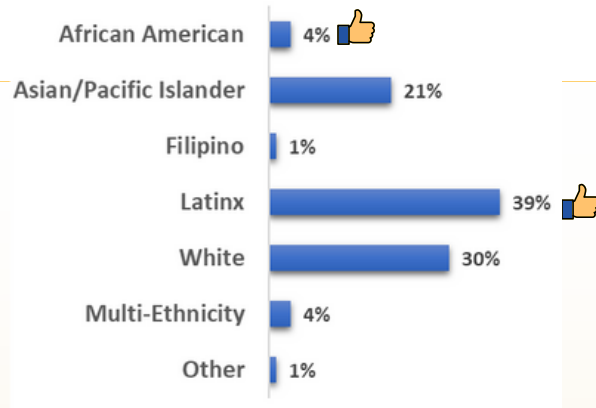

Figure 6. Students in Group 2 (Missing Requirement) who applied for graduation. N=128

Throughout the student intervention process, we sought to understand why students had not completed their graduation requirements, why they did not choose to finalize their degree, and reasons for wanting to obtain an education.

> ❝ I was so close to giving up before being invited to this event. ❞

"I was unaware of the process of applying for graduation."

"I did not see the value in an Associates Degree."

"My why is my daughter. I am a young Hispanic mom which comes with a stigma where people think your career is ruined and your life comes to a stop. Rather than giving up on school, I went back after only one month of giving birth. I love being a mom and I love being someone that my daughter can look up to. She is my why."

Some students assumed that degree award was an automatic process → *Implication about process communication & system change*

Some students had already obtained their Bachelors and Masters Degrees, and some were transfer students → *Implication for degree value*

Education and its potential life changing impact → *Implication for the importance of this project*

Results

Creating a systemic change may be costly at first but more beneficial in the long run

Overall, there are 4 main outcomes from this project.

1. Students - **210** additional students earned their award. Because many students are unaware of the benefits of earning an associate degree or certification, it is incumbent upon us to emphasize its importance to our students.

2. Funding - The California Community College Student Success funding formula monetizes the number of awards colleges grant every year. The college turned a **$50,000** grant into a possible **$350,000** of state funding.

3. Systems - Identifying our systemic barriers:
- *Archaic policies and processes*: canceling students' graduation petitions without the reasons and notifications.
- *Communication with students*: students listen and value the information and guidance that their faculty share, beyond the discipline content. By providing the proper resources, we can empower faculty to facilitate communication on graduation requirements and processes.
- *Leverage existing initiatives*: continually grown by leveraging existing initiative, such as Guided Pathways model and its wraparound services, to improve completion.

4. Collaboration - The glue that holds it all together leading to the current results. In a large organization, interdepartmental collaboration can be challenging due to politics, culture, and even physical distance. However, collaboration is essential in high-impact projects because each department has its own unique knowledge and institutional power. In fact, when values, leadership, and a common goal align, there is a place for everyone at the table with the desire for change. After 1,500 hours invested from across the campus, we directly impacted the lives of 210 students and are likely to impact many more lives with systemic changes.

Agents of Change

Systems
- Discontinuing barrier practices
- Developing processes through the student lens
- Improving existing initiative (Guided Pathways models)

Culture
- Engaging the campus in the results of the research to create change
- Call-To-Action for classroom faculty, that completion is everyone's responsibility
- Raising student awareness of the value of an award

Sample of a new communication campaign to educate the value of a degree and how to obtain it. Marketing tools will be developed to help the faculty promote this in the classroom.

Phase II (in-progress)

A mark of a good action-research project is its replicability at scale. We started to expand this action-research to other programs to identify more completers and determine if our findings and recommendations were consistent and generalizable. We had the fortune to implement Phase II of our Completion Project when receiving follow-up funding to the initial grant.

Understanding variation in the data and responding to it are key to scaling

Phase II focused on Career Technical Education programs that are non-cohort-based and smaller in enrollment size. Following the same process as Phase I (see Overall Project Steps in page 4), we developed data queries for **10 programs** and identified **495** potential graduates. Similar to Phase I, these students were divided into 2 groups: those who satisfied all requirements but did not follow through to receive an official degree (*Group 1 - Completed*) and those who missed documents and/or course requirements (*Group 2 - Missing Requirements*).

Initial analysis in Phase II showed that only **8%** of the potential graduates actually completed all requirements but did not attain the degrees (compared to 25% in Phase I - see page 6), which suggested that most students who completed actually received the degrees. Perhaps one reason for this data pattern is the relationships that faculty are able to build with their students in these smaller programs, which in turn keep students on track to graduate. If so, this highlights the important role of faculty, which in many cases is the only contact point between the college and the student. Not only are faculty instrumental for providing *instructional* support, but they can also provide *student-centered* support beyond course content. We plan to continue our action research through faculty engagement and program data discussions to identify best practices from their teaching styles and their interactions with the students.

Phase II Programs	Group 1 Completed	Group 2 Missing Requirements	Total
1. Accounting	1	27	28
2. Architecture	5	84	89
3. Computer Information Science	2	32	34
4. Culinary Arts & Culinary Management	1	20	21
5. Fashion	9	109	118
6. Geographic Information Systems	4	53	57
7. Hospitality	0	6	6
8. Interior Design	0	9	9
9. Multimedia	11	60	71
10. Web Development	3	45	48
TOTAL	**36**	**445**	**481**
(Phase I) Business and Economics	216	417	633

Lessons Learned

Relying on constant outcomes analyses to drive direction and implementation has proven to be a powerful method for success for this project. Throughout this process, we have learned important lessons for sustainability and continuous improvement.

Be student-centered throughout the whole process, especially if there are conflicting ideas about next steps

Be problem-specific and user-specific: different groups will have different needs that require different interventions

Be purposeful about making evidence-based decisions

Data are just numbers without appropriate contexts and intentional equity-driven discussion of implications

"Good enough" data are often enough to prompt actionable changes

Consult the experts in their respective areas

Act early - while it may feel uncomfortable, we don't need to have all the answers before we can start to intervene

Invest to tackle an underlying systemic cause - it is more beneficial in the long run than a Band-Aid on the surface

"building the boat while we are paddling through the water"

Appendix

Timeline

PHASE 0: APPLICATION (FALL 2019)

Regional grant available to apply
Administration meeting: decision to focus on completion and equity gap
Applied and received the regional grant
Brought together relevant stakeholders across campus

PHASE I-A: PLANNING & DATA GATHERING

Team meeting: planning details, decision to focus Business and Economics
Team meeting: develop parameters for the project and initial steps
Institutional Research: data query
Team meeting: discussion of data results, decision to bring in counselors
Counselors reviewed each student profile and recorded notes on completion
Team meeting: discussion of findings and intervention for 3 groups of students

PHASE I-B: ACTION

Intervention: reaching out to different groups and provided the needed information about their completion status and next steps
Intervention: student events (Graduate Party workshops, counselor sessions)
Team meeting: update on intervention efforts
Intervention: student events (Graduate Party workshops, counselor sessions)
Team meeting: update on intervention efforts and outcomes
Project leads reviewed, discussed, synthesized the final data
Presentations to campus, region, and state

PHASE II-A: APPLICATION, PLANNING, & DATA GATHERING

Second regional grant available to continue the project
Team meeting: decision to expand to 10 additional programs
Applied and received the regional grant
Team meeting: planning details
Institutional Research: data query
System change: discussion with the district on process revision for graduation
Intervention: ongoing follow-up with students in Phase I
Team meeting: discussion of data results and actions
Team meeting: developed marketing outreach campaign for faculty and students on degree completion

PHASE II-B: ACTION (SPRING 2022)

Implement of action plans identified in Phase II-A
Implement of marketing and outreach effort identified in Phase I
Develop how to change system process with the district

Project Team

Dr. Ailene Crakes, Dean – Student Development

Alicia Lopez, Senior Student Services Assistant – Career Center

Amara Tang, Student Services Technician – Extended Opportunities Programs and Services

Anda McComb, Administrative Technician – Institutional Effectiveness

Anne Hedekin, Counselor

Dr. Bridget Herrin, Dean – Institutional Effectiveness

Chris Kalck, Counselor

Claudia Estrada-Howell, Associate Dean – Strong Workforce Programs

Dr. Cynthia Rico, Counselor

Dr. Danene Brown, Chair Regional Consortia

Deborah Salazar, Senior Student Services Assistant – Evaluations

Fred Kasule, Research Assistant – Institutional Effectiveness

Guillermo Marrujo, Counselor

Hai Hoang, Acting Associate Dean – Institutional Effectiveness

Jezyle Diez, Project Assistant – Completion Grant

Kari Parker, Counselor

Kristian Carson, Counselor

Leroy Johnson, Counselor

Dr. Mariette Rattner, Marketing Professor

Monica Romero, Dean - Business and Technology

Olivia Picolla, Career Guidance and Transfer Center Supervisor

Ramiro Hernandez, Counselor

Raquel Sojourner, Counselor

Student Intervention Activities (1)

Email to Group 1A (Completed Requirements, need to re-apply to the college and petition to graduate)

A 2-minute video was created to guide students through the application for graduation process. This video was embedded in the emails to students in Group 1A and 1B.

Student Intervention Activities (2)

Email to Group 1B (Completed Requirements, need to petition to graduate)

A 2-minute video was created to guide students through the application for graduation process. This video was embedded in the emails to students in Group 1A and 1B.

Student Intervention Activities (3)

Email to Group 2 (Missing award or document requirements, need to meet with a counselor)

Hello ,

Did you know you are close to earning your degree?
Discuss your options by attending a **FREE** Counseling zoom session on **November 6th** and or **November 13th** from **11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.** – **please register here!**

For your convenience, we have included your **Student ID #**

Recent research suggests that higher education attainment leads to higher employment opportunities and also higher wages. In fact, the lifetime earnings for associate degree holders is $180,000 more, or 12% higher than those without a degree.

*According to Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2013

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Questions? Comments? Concerns? **We are here to help!**
Contact Jezyle Diez @ jdiez@sdccd.edu or 619-431-1088. We will respond within three business days.
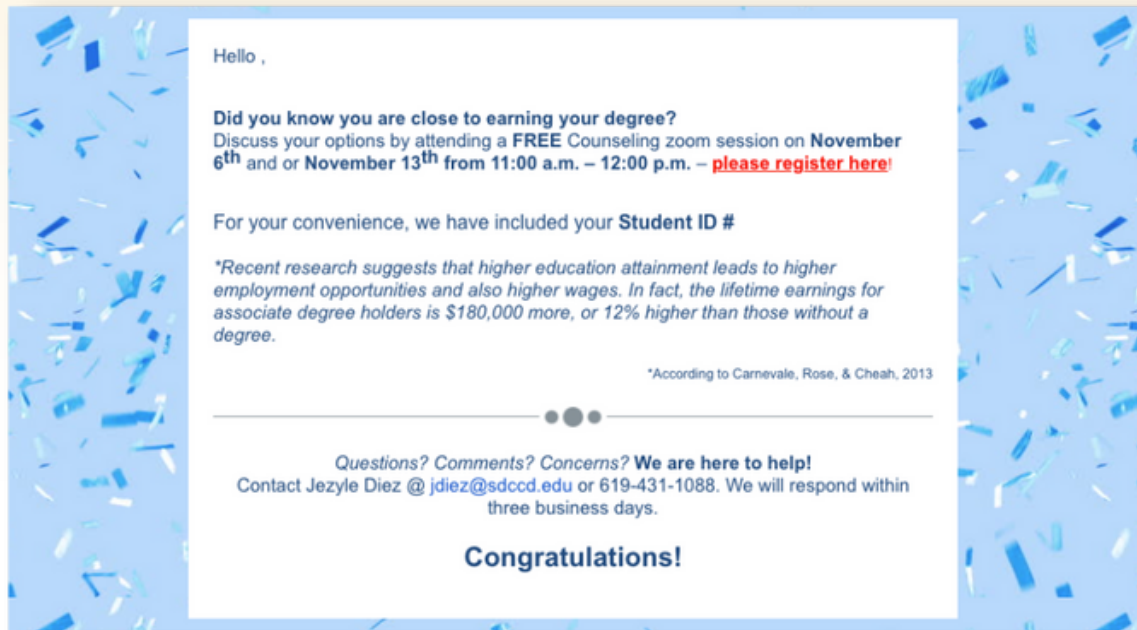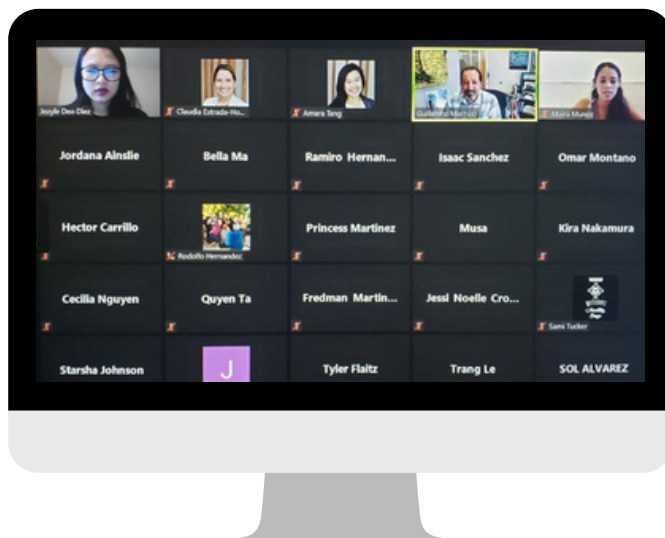
Congratulations!

Components of the Counseling Zoom Sessions

1. Virtual Waiting Room
2. Process of applying for graduation
3. One-on-one Breakout Room with the counselors
4. Collect student sentiments and follow-up

Scope of Work (Page 1)

San Diego Mesa College's response to the Request for Applications

EXHIBIT A
SCOPE OF WORK
Contract #PA1704-2663-R8/10

Regional SWP Request for Applications
College-Based Internal Marketing Project

Context and Purpose of the RFA

The gap between job openings and the availability of qualified applicants is expected to increase – with employers unable to find qualified applicants for more than one million jobs statewide by 2025. With current enrollment and retention trends, the current number of students training in CE programs in the region and statewide is not expected to fill this gap. Strong Workforce Program local funds will provide additional CE training opportunities, but students must be able to access programs and successfully complete these programs. This project will support the colleges in San Diego/Imperial in their student retention marketing strategies.

Internal Marketing Project

The purpose of this funding is to support college-based internal marketing initiatives that increase the retention and success of career education students. These projects must support the region in improving Strong Workforce outcome metrics including:

- Students with a noncredit workforce skills gain
- Students who completed 9+ CTE units
- Students who earned a noncredit certificate over 48 contact hours, a CCCCO approved CTE credit certificate, associate degree, ADT, CCC bachelor's degree or apprenticeship journey status
- Students who reported that their job is closely or very closely related to their field of study
- Median annual earnings for non-transfer exiting students, in the first year after exit
- Students who exited but did not transfer who attained the living wage for a single adult in the county where the college's district office is located

Examples of aligned initiatives might include email retention campaigns that target specific students who:
- Need one more class to complete a certificate or degree
- Have applied to the college but have not enrolled in any courses
- Have taken classes in previous semesters, but are not currently enrolled

Other examples might include:
- Creating awareness of on-campus academic support services such as tutoring and writing centers
- Creating awareness of career education programs
- Developing a marketing strategy utilizing Google Analytics data

Scope of Work (Page 2)

EXHIBIT A
SCOPE OF WORK
Contract #PA1704-2663-R8/10

- Other student support resources that will facilitate student retention, success and completion

Promising Practices

Promising practices from the regional CE marketing campaign include:
- Ensuring clear, measurable media KPIs (ex. Landing Page Visits) that tie to the desired outcomes (ex. Increased retention) that will allow for the campaign to deliver actionable learnings in the immediate and long term;
- Auditing the online environment for ease of user flow and ability to measure & track to ensure that the campaign is set up for success prior to launch;
- Using attention-grabbing, vibrant, engaging creative assets that will help boost the performance of the campaign.

These funds cannot be used to supplant activities or free up expenses in already budgeted activities. These funds must be used for internal college-based marketing strategies related to student retention and success. <u>These funds are not available for any external marketing campaigns.</u>

Funding Details
Up to $50,000 per college is available. Funding must be spent by December 31, 2020.
The region will ask for preliminary budget report on September 30, 2020 to assess investment progress. If progress is not being made, funds will reallocated to other colleges.

Project Outcome
This regional investment is designed to increase student retention, success and completions at the colleges, with the long-term impact of reducing the middle-skills jobs gap in San Diego and Imperial Counties.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE SECTIONS BELOW

Description of proposed project:
Describe the project or activity you plan to implement. How does this project increase student retention and success?

Students' completion of certificates and degrees face a number of challenges. The college can improve completion through:
- Individualized communication with students who have completed an award but have not petitioned to graduate with said award.

Scope of Work (Page 3)

EXHIBIT A
SCOPE OF WORK
Contract #PA1704-2663-R8/10

- Individualized communication and course plans for students who are only a few classes away from completing an award.

Working with students on an individual basis to clarify the last step or classes needed to obtain an award has many benefits. It will not only increase the number of awards conferred, and enrollments to complete them, also equip students with the education and training for improved employment outcomes.

The Office of Institutional Research will utilize the necessary query parameters to provide student data to the Evaluations Office. The Evaluations and Counseling Offices will work directly with students who have not graduated to complete the process and with counseling faculty to provide students with the course(s) necessary for award completion.

The student data set will be tracked to determine process outcomes and areas for improvement.

This process will additionally assist as an enrollment management tool through the identification of the remaining courses that CTE students need for award completion.

Equipment will be required to provide a workstation for the hired staff.

The target populations are students who:
- Completed a CTE certificate but have not applied for graduation
- Are one or two classes away from completing a CTE certificate.
- Completed a CTE degree but have not applied for graduation.
- Are one or two courses (within the major or GE) from completed a CTE degree.

The outcomes and leading indicators:
- Number of students who apply for graduation.
- Number of students who update their educational plans.
- Number of phone calls, meetings and emails with students regarding program completion.

Start date: June 1, 2020

End date: December 31, 2020

Scope of Work (Page 4)

EXHIBIT A
SCOPE OF WORK
Contract #PA1704-2663-R8/10

Budget:
Please provide a detailed budget.

Detailed Budget (Funding must be expended by December 31, 2020): *Please detail the budget items under by object code.*

Object	Classification	Itemized List of Budgeted Expenses	Total	
1000	Instructional Salaries	Adjunct Counselor (15 hours a week for 20 weeks)	$	14,500
2000	Non-instructional Salaries	Hourly Staffing (20 hours a week for 20 weeks x 3)	$	24,500
3000	Employee Benefits	Benefits	$	9,000
4000	Supplies and materials	Printing and mailing of educational plans.	$	1,000
5000	Other Operating Expenses and Services	Workstation	$	500
6000	Equipment	Computer or LapTop	$	500
Total Program Costs			$	**50,000**

Indirect is not permitted on this project.

Please include an email chain with approvals from the CE Dean, CIO and President with your application.

Presenters

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San Diego Mesa College - Leadership

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Ashanti Hands, Ed.D., **Vice President, Student Services**
Lorenze Legaspi, **Vice President, Administrative Services**
Isabel O'Connor, Ph.D., **Vice President, Instruction**

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SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE

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