

# InquiRIE

*“A newsletter stimulating meaningful inquiry and dialogue.”*

Odette Richardson, Editor

## RIE Members

**Barbara McNeice-Stallard, MSc**  
 Director of Research &  
 Institutional Effectiveness  
 Extension 4109  
 research@mtsac.edu

**Priyadarshini Chaplot, M.B.A.**  
 Educational Research Assessment  
 Analyst  
 Extension 5505  
 pchaplot@mtsac.edu

**Lisa DiDonato, M.A.**  
 Project Manager, Basic Skills Projects  
 Extension 6385  
 ldidonato@mtsac.edu

**Odette Richardson, M.A.**  
 Research Assistant  
 Extension 5408  
 orichardson@mtsac.edu

**Maria Tsai, Ph.D.**  
 Research Analyst  
 Extension 5551  
 mtsai@mtsac.edu

**Jennifer Tucker, Ph.D.**  
 Educational Research Assessment  
 Analyst  
 Extension 4708  
 jtucker@mtsac.edu

## The Writing Center: Learning from Research

By David Charbonneau  
 Director, Writing Center

The Writing Center has found the Research & Institutional Effectiveness (RIE) Office very helpful in monitoring our growth and shaping our programs to best benefit the students we serve. We have worked with the research team to assess the impact of our tutoring, computer lab services, workshops, and the pilot Early Alert Program under the Title V grant.

The Writing Center began offering tutoring and workshops on a more-than-pilot basis upon its relocation to its new space in Building 26B in Spring 2008. RIE gave us data on the impact of these services in Summer 2008, establishing an increase in student success for pre-collegiate English courses of over 20 percent and showing similar results for college-level English courses as well. This data supported several working



The Writing Center's logo highlights its main charge — to help students “write better.”

hypotheses of the Writing Center's supervisory staff.

*(continued on page 2)*

## The Impact of Our Services: A Continuous Cycle of Assessment

By Priyadarshini Chaplot and  
 Jennifer Tucker

In order to gain an understanding about the use and impact of the information provided through our research services, we, in the Research and Institutional Effectiveness (RIE) Office, examined our interactions with areas, departments, units/offices, and other campus entities occurring

through requests made in the past two years. Other entities included campus programs, councils, and committees. As a team, we planned, discussed, and developed a shared matrix as our method of assessment to capture how much of the campus had received our services. We used Microsoft Excel to create a spreadsheet which included a comprehensive list of

areas, departments, and units on campus with a column designated to each RIE member to mark whether or not the Office had provided research services to that campus entity.

Next, we compiled our data from our shared matrix to create a summary of results. We did this activity over two years to see if

*(continued on page 2)*

### Inside this issue:

- The Writing Center: Learning from Research **1**
- The Impact of Our Services: A Continuous Cycle of Assessment **1**
- College Facts Q&As **4**
- RIE Interns' Perspectives **4**

## The Writing Center

*(continued from page 1)*

First, that peer tutoring would have a significant impact on student success at the pre-collegiate level. Second, and more surprisingly perhaps, that properly screened and trained peer tutors at a community college could successfully tutor students in courses involving collegiate-level critical thinking and significant research expectations.

The Writing Center is also currently working with RIE to assess the impact of multiple visits to tutoring on student success and to determine what percentage of first-time visitors return for subsequent visits. This will give us valuable information as to how well we are doing with students during our crucial “first contact.” We would also like to assess student impact not just in terms of success or failure, but in terms of impact on GPA and long-term benefits of frequent use of the Writing Center. This would be particularly valuable information for assessing the work of students who visit the Center for disciplines besides English and help in understanding the Center’s impact on completion and transfer rates.

---

**Margie Whalen from the Writing Center recently said that the researcher, Lisa DiDonato, “...helps us to identify issues that we should consider in research programs as well as refining our questions and figuring out the best ways to gather data, helping us to design effective paper and online surveys, and setting up focus groups, including the design of questions and conducting the groups. It has been an eye-opening experience for me to see all that a good researcher can do.”**

---

The Writing Center also worked with RIE to assess the impact of the summer and fall pilots of the Early Alert Program, designed to help faculty refer at-risk students to needed tutoring in the Writing Center and the Learning Assistance Center. These results were very strong in the summer, but mixed in the winter session, leading to a re-evaluation of the design of the program.

Finally, through the collaborative efforts of RIE, we were able to assess the value of the hourly workshops covering a variety of writing topics offered to students on a sign-up or drop-in basis. These results have confirmed the value of the workshops for the students using pre-and post-survey instruments as well as giving us feedback that led to a staggered scheduling to make more workshops available to more students. An assessment of the impact of workshop attendance on success in English courses yielded results parallel to the positive influence tutoring had on rates of student success. Going forward, we hope to work with the research office on a pre- and post-test for some of the grammar specific workshops to give objective results of the content benefits of the workshop. We also would like to look more closely at the impact of multiple workshops and the impact of the usage of multiple services in the Writing Center (tutoring, workshops, and lab) on student success.

## The Impact of Our Services: A Continuous Cycle of Assessment

*(continued from page 1)*

there were any trends in our service provision over time. Our data for the 2008-09 academic year revealed that of the 156 departments/units/offices (excluding other campus entities), we had provided research services to 88 (56.4%) units. As shown in Table 1 on page 3, the total number of RIE service users in 2008-09 represented an increase in 8.3% of our total RIE service users from the previous academic year, in which we had provided services to 75 (48%) units. Interestingly, there were a number of changes between the 2007-08 and 2008-09 academic years; for example, while the percentage of our services within the Administrative Services area decreased (by 33.3%), we provided more support for the Instructional Services area (+15.7%). Most notably, our additional RIE service users within units like councils and committees in the 2008-09 academic year increased from 11 to 23 entities!

## The Impact of Our Services: A Continuous Cycle of Assessment

(continued from page 2)

Table 1. Matrix of RIE Services Users

AREA	TOTAL UNITS	2007-08		2008-09		% CHANGE
		UNITS CONTACTED	%	UNITS CONTACTED	%	
Administrative Services	21	11	52.4%	4	19.1%	-33.3%
Human Resources	3	2	66.7%	2	66.8%	0.0%
Instructional Services	115	48	41.7%	66	57.4%	+15.7%
President's Office	2	2	100.0%	2	100.0%	0.0%
Student Services	15	12	80.0%	14	93.3%	+13.3%
<b>Total Areas</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>48.1%</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>56.4%</b>	<b>+8.3%</b>
Additional Entities	37	11	29.7%	23	62.2%	32.5%

Our office has used the results through engaging in dialogues about which units were our most frequent service users, which areas were more represented than others, and how we might want to improve the scope of our services. Taken together, our team dialogue prompted a better understanding of our campus exposure. Our conclusion was that our shared matrix gave us information about our annual service-related coverage.

By building the matrix, we became aware of the breadth of our services on campus. However, this study did not inform us of the depth or effectiveness of our services. For example, we did not know the plethora of initial expectations held by our research requesters and, further, whether or not they had all been met. Certainly their original request on paper was met, but what else was needed? Most importantly, we were not always aware of how our research requesters had used the information that was provided to them (i.e., data-driven decision-making).

This dialogue formed our motivation to continue the assessment cycle. As a result of these realizations, our office developed another study to interview a set of individuals who were receiving or had received research services. The aim of these one-on-one interviews was to better understand the expectations, experiences, perceptions, uses and the overall effectiveness of the research services best shared by those who have used them. The coordination and administration of this project rested with our two volunteer RIE interns, Jamaika Fowler and Aida Cuenza. We believe that by having an external party of individuals who conduct the interviews, the data will be more honest and telling. Based on the summary of findings from these interviews, our Office hopes to re-evaluate our existing process and services to better serve the needs of the campus. We look forward to utilizing what our users thought of the information we provided, the manner in which they received it, and what they did or planned to do with the findings. Additionally, future student learning outcomes and administrative unit objectives on how to enhance our service provision could be developed to focus on findings from this study.

You can learn more about RIE's interns, Aida and Jamaika, by reading "RIE Interns' Perspectives" on page 4.

## College Facts Q&As

By Maria Tsai and Barbara McNeice-Stallard

The Research & Institutional Effectiveness Office maintains some key current and historical statistical information about the College in a central place called the **FACT BOOK**. The Mt. SAC FACT BOOK offers an overview of our service communities, our students and employees with summative data such as profiles of Mt. SAC service communities, enrollment trend, student demographics, academic achievements (retention and success rates, degree/certificate awards, UC/CSU transfer) and reports of college-wide surveys on first-time students (CIRP), student engagement (CCSSE), graduating students (Graduate Survey), and graduate employment outcome (Alumni Survey). The Mt. SAC FACT BOOK is available online through the research website located at:

<http://www.mtsac.edu/administration/research/factbook.html>

- How well do you think you know our college?
- Do you know what a typical Mt. SAC student is like?
- Do you have answers to the following questions?

**Q1** What is the ethnic makeup of our student population?

**Q2** What is the percentage of our enrolled students living outside of Mt. SAC district?

**Q3** Which educational goal is the most claimed by our enrolled credit students?

**Q4** What is the overall course retention rate and success rate at Mt. SAC?

**Q5** Which UC/CSU universities did most Mt. SAC students transfer to? Can you name a few?

Now, are you ready to quiz yourself? Check your answers to the above five questions on page 6.

## RIE Interns' Perspectives

By Odette Richardson, Aida Cuenza, and Jaimaka Fowler

During Spring 2009 two Mt. SAC classified professionals inquired and were accepted to become volunteer interns of the Research & Institutional Effectiveness (RIE) Office. Both employees work in the Student Services Division and were taking a Counseling Fieldwork course through the California State University, Long Beach, in pursuit of their Master of Science in Counseling degree with an emphasis on Student Development in Higher Education.

Aida Cuenza is the High School Outreach Coordinator and coordinates outreach activities to district high schools, including on-campus event planning (i.e., Seniors' Day, High School Counselors' Luncheon, and Connect 4). Jamaika Fowler is an Educational Advisor, Articulation Services, and works with the articulation officer in managing and monitoring the articulation process on campus in addition to advising students in the preparation of their academic programs by interpreting policies and procedures to promote students' achievement of their educational and career goals.

When asked why they chose to conduct their fieldwork internship with the RIE Office, Jamaika remarked that she wanted to incorporate a variety of learning objectives, one of which included an increased understanding for information of the research department. She said that she has often visited the research website looking for

*(Continued on page 5)*

## RIE Interns' Perspectives

*(continued from page 4)*

information regarding Mt. SAC students and programs and wanted to gain an increased understanding of research activities, but learned in the process how essential the research department is in supporting the mission and goals of the college. Similarly, Aida said she had a personal interest in the research inquiry process. Given accountability expectations, she believed an internship with RIE would enable her to expand her practical knowledge and reinforce her understanding of measuring effectiveness.

A couple of additional questions were posed to the duo:

### **Q1** What have you learned from this mentoring experience?

■ **Aida:** What I learned was threefold:

1. The research process requires an investment of energy from both the RIE [Office] and the requesting program, where specificity in language is critical (i.e., clarity of goals/objectives or defining expectations).
2. Developing a research culture requires lasting patience and endurance. RIE must view themselves as both supporter and educator through this process.
3. RIE relies upon the talent and expertise of its members, who have honed skills in statistical methodology/analysis, data validity/integrity, communication, and relationship-building.

■ **Jamaika:** Through my fieldwork experience, I've discovered the value added by a culture of evidence. In the short time I spent with the research department, it has become evident that the services provided by the research team are increasing in demand. The campus community wants to know how their classes, programs, and services are impacting student success. In order to create an environment that supports inquiry, collaboration among researchers, faculty, staff and administrators is essential. Although the initial focus during a research study is the discovering of an answer to a research question, the use of research results becomes equally if not more important. The information provided by research increases in meaning and value when it results in informed decision making and becomes the springboard for action.

### **Q2** What impact do you feel this experience will have on your regular responsibilities at Mt. SAC or your future endeavor?

■ **Jamaika:** Through my experience with the research department, I am more aware of the research opportunities available to the campus. As I look to the future, I know that I will collaborate with the research department as I investigate programs that support student development success. At this time, I am exploring a possible thesis project. My experience with the research department has provided insight into the importance of defining your research plan and project. Currently, my research interests include basic skills, career counseling, and learning communities.

■ **Aida:** In my regular responsibilities, my experience with RIE provides me with an additional lens or perspective from which to organize my thoughts as I engage in the research inquiry process. I will essentially ask myself what concerns the analyst might have concerning an element of the proposed project or endeavor and how would this project be meaningful to my practice—the “So what?” factor (i.e., inspire change).

The wonderful news is that Aida Cuenza graduated from CSU, Long Beach, on May 28, 2009 with her M.S. in Counseling. Jamaika continues to work toward her M.S. in Counseling degree, which she expects to earn in Spring 2010. Congratulations to both the RIE interns for their current and future successes. It is through their time at the RIE department that they learned about the research team and the team learned about them. The RIE team looks forward to using the results of the research project the interns did to evaluate the RIE services (see p. 2-3).

## College Facts Q&As

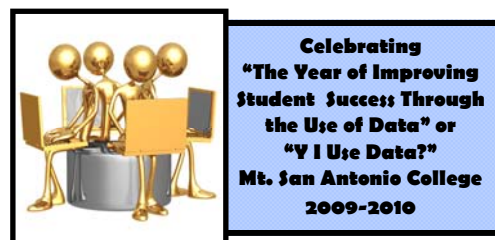
(continued from page 4)

- A1** In year 2007-2008, Mt. SAC credit student population consisted of 43.1 percent Hispanic, 21.1 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 17.8 percent Caucasian, 5.8 percent Filipino, 5.7 percent African American, 0.4 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 6.1 percent Other/Unknown.
- A2** About 42 percent of our Fall 2008 enrolled students came from areas outside of the Mt. SAC district.
- A3** Transferring to a four-year institution (with or without an Associate degree) is the most avowed educational goal by our credit students.
- A4** The overall college-wide retention and success rates are 83 percent and 66 percent, respectively, in Fall 2008.
- A5** Top 10 UC/CSU universities that most Mt. SAC students transferred to, in the academic year 2007-2008, were: Cal Poly Pomona, Cal State Fullerton, Cal State LA, UCLA, Cal State Long Beach, Cal State San Bernardino, UC Irvine, UC Berkeley, UC Riverside, and UC San Diego.

***Were your answers correct?*** Here is the description of a typical Mt. SAC student – she is more likely to be Hispanic, under the age of 25, placed in some pre-collegiate level basic skills courses, and has an educational goal of transferring to a 4-year institution. Check out the Mt. SAC Fact Book to learn more about our college (<http://www.mtsac.edu/administration/research/factbook.html>).

## Farewell Priya....

RIE is losing one very valuable Educational Research Assessment Analyst, Priya Chaplot. She will be leaving Mt. SAC to work with the Research and Planning Group of California Community Colleges as its Project Coordinator for a grant that aims to support institutional researchers as well as to strengthen the use of information and data to effect change and improvement and build cultures of evidence at community colleges across California. She expresses her thanks of the inspirational individuals at Mt. SAC for a priceless experience. Her last day on campus will be October 13. Although RIE is extremely happy and proud for her advancement, her absence will be heart-felt.



Mt. San Antonio College  
Research & Institutional Effectiveness  
1100 N. Grand Avenue  
Walnut, CA 91789

Building 40, Room 140  
Phone: 909-594-5611  
FAX: 909-468-4126  
E-mail: [research@mtsac.edu](mailto:research@mtsac.edu)

### RIE MISSION STATEMENT

The Research and Institutional Effectiveness Office will support the mission of the college by providing accurate, timely, and reliable information to respond to the research needs of the various institutional constituencies. It will engage in and support processes for determining and documenting the effectiveness of programs and services and the institution as a whole in order to foster continuous quality improvement.



**We're on the Web!**  
<http://research.mtsac.edu>