



Mt. San Antonio College
Institutional Advancement Office
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High School Student Perception Survey

What are area high school students' perceptions of college and Mt. San Antonio College?

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Student Perceptions

Why they are important for marketing Mt. SAC

The Institutional Marketing Committee (IMC), in spring 2002, wanted to know how high school students perceived Mt. San Antonio College. The purpose for the study was to analyze the perceptions of the students and then use the data to determine whether the College's marketing strategies should be changed.

"Perception" means to become aware of something using external clues. The clues may not represent reality but the person uses them to create a feeling. Often the perception becomes reality in the person's mind. It is important to be knowledgeable about student perceptions to determine if they are correct or incorrect. If they are incorrect, changes can be made by the college to attempt to correct the misperception.

A survey was created which measured perceptions of high school students. High school students who attend Mt. SAC generally enroll full time and persist through the institution. They are an important component of FTE generation which brings financial resources to the College.

The survey contained questions related to:

- Perceived ideal college characteristics
- Validation of some of the perceptions the College had about itself
- How knowledgeable students are about area colleges
- Concerns students had about attending college
- How students received information about Mt. SAC
- Basic demographic questions (i.e. gender, ethnicity)

The survey was reviewed by IMC and a few Mt. SAC students prior to distribution. The High School Outreach Coordinator hand delivered packets containing the survey and a letter explaining the purpose of the survey, to various liaisons assigned by the high schools to Mt. SAC. They were instructed to distribute 100 surveys to high school seniors.

Some 1,729 surveys were returned from 26 high schools including continuation and private high schools. The College serves 40 high school in its service area. Due to the size of the data pool, the error rate is +/- 2 which is valid.

Slightly more females (59%) than males completed the survey (48%). The data pool contained responses from students who had visited the campus at some time and some who had not. About 56% of the students indicated they had visited Mt. SAC to attend sporting/cultural events or Senior Day. Senior Day brings high school students to campus to learn more about Mt. SAC.

More Hispanic/Latino students (46%) completed the survey than White (21%) or Asian (12%). Mt. SAC's current ethnic enrollment is Hispanic/Latino (41%), White (24%) and Asian (26%).

About 72% of the students said after graduating from high school, they planned to attend a community college (36%) or a university (36%). About 61% said they would (18%), or were not certain (42%) they would, attend Mt. SAC after graduating from high school.

What characteristics students look for in a college?

- Students were given a list of 22 characteristics of a college including such characteristics as “affordability,” “computers available,” “student clubs.” Students were asked to select the top three characteristics of the college they would like to attend. The three top characteristics were:

1. Affordable 60%
2. Can get classes 50%
3. Quality programs 27%

“Good reputation,” was listed fourth followed by “Finish programs in 2-4 years.”

IMPLICATIONS FOR MT. SAC:

Stamats, a research/consulting firm that works with colleges and universities conducted research nationwide on the Most Important College Characteristics and found that quality programs that were available to students to be among the most frequently mentioned characteristics. Mt. SAC frequently uses “affordability” as an element in its publication copy. Availability of classes and the quality of programs should be another focal point. Nationwide, students were also interested in the ability to get great jobs after completing their programs. Testimonials of successful students will reinforce this message.

When students were asked to choose three colleges/universities from a list of 11 public and private colleges and universities in the valley, they selected these three:

1. Mt. SAC 66%
2. Cal Poly Pomona 55%
3. CSU Fullerton 46%

Implications for Mt. SAC:

Local students perceive they know more about Mt. SAC than area universities.

How do students perceive Mt. SAC?

The Institutional Marketing Committee members theorized that a number of misperceptions were present in the community related to Mt. SAC and its programs and services. From a list of 14 perceptions, which were all listed as positive perceptions, students were asked to rate their level of agreement from “Totally Agree,” to “Totally Disagree.” It is not surprising that for most of the questions, students marked “Neither Agree or Disagree” since many may not have been familiar with the programs and services Mt. SAC provides.

Students perceived these services/programs in a positive light by marking “Totally Agree,” or “Agree,”

1. Can attend day, evening and weekend classes.	72%
2. Classes will transfer to another college/university.	71%
3. Students can participate in lots of activities.	53%
4. Students are able to get the classes they need.	49%
5. Students can finish a certificate/degree in two years.	48%
6. Counseling is available.	46%
7. Students can get tutoring if they need it.	44%
8. Students at Mt. SAC feel comfortable around each other.	44%
9. It's easy to register for classes at Mt. SAC.	41%
10. It's easy to get financial aid.	35%
11. Faculty/staff on campus are helpful.	34%
12. Faculty/staff on campus are friendly.	32%
13. It's easy to find parking on campus.	19%

Implications for Mt. SAC

Students seem to understand the availability of day, weekend and evening Mt. SAC courses. They perceive their classes will transfer to a university and that they can complete their program in two years. About half of them perceive there are activities on campus in which they can participate and that counseling and tutoring are available. Just under half perceive that students at Mt. SAC feel comfortable. They perceive that parking is a problem on campus.

What influences students' decisions to attend college?

Students were asked about their concerns about attending college. The IMC Committee listed 10 barriers that they thought students might have concerns about and add an "other" prompt. Students were asked to mark three of their top concerns from the list that might influence their ability to attend college. The top concerns were:

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| 1. Cost | 65% |
| 2. Need to work | 52% |
| 3. Classes too hard | 39% |
| 4. Might not pass | 38% |

Disaggregating the data shows some interesting patterns.

- **TRANSPORTATION** – For students attending Walnut, San Dimas, and La Puente High Schools, the response related to transportation issues getting to campus was higher than the average.
- **NEED TO WORK** – For students attending La Puente, Nogales, and Bonita, the responses related to needing to work were higher than average.
- **COST** – For students attending, West Covina, North View, and Nogales, the responses related to cost were higher than the average.
- **CLASSES TOO HARD** – For students attending Walnut, Nogales, and Baldwin Park, the responses related to classes too hard were higher than average.
- **MIGHT NOT PASS** – For students attending Walnut, Nogales, and Baldwin Park, the responses related to might not pass were higher than average.

The issues that students marked as least likely to influence their desire to attend college were:

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| "Need Child Care" | 3% |
| "I may not make friends" | 8% |
| "It takes too much time to go to college" | 8% |
| "Lack of family support: | 9% |

Implications for Mt. SAC

Although often potential students comment that community college programs are “easy,” this research indicates that students are concerned about being able to compete and succeed in college programs. Transportation should seem irrelevant for students living in Walnut since the College is located in the city. San Dimas is north of the college by 9 miles and La Puente is west of the college by 7 miles. The three high schools listing “need to work” as a strong influence are schools from lower socioeconomic communities and two of the schools have lower API scores for 2002. Achievement scores and community wealth have routinely shown a correlation. The ability to be successful in college was an issue for three schools including Walnut which has a very high API score (792/800). Only 9% of the respondents stated that a barrier was parental support to attend college.

MT. SAC Marketing Efforts

The survey listed the various ways Mt. SAC markets its programs and services to the public as well as areas in which the IMC Committee perceives students hear about the College (i.e. friend, counselor). The survey revealed that the three places students hear about Mt. SAC the most are: (1) friends (62%), (2) high school counselors (47%) and (3) family members (45%). Students checked least these ways they receive information about Mt. SAC is from:

- HS Outreach Wire (2%)
- Movie Theater Ad (2%)
- Newspaper (4%)
- Internet/Mt. SAC website (4%)
- TV Commercial (5%)

Implications for Mt. SAC

Students receive their information about Mt. SAC from their friends, high school counselors, and family members. The College does not market to friends and family members but does communicate with high school counselors through an annual breakfast. Stamats asked the same question to 800 college-bound high school juniors and seniors and found that (1) parents, (2) other relatives (3) friends and (4) counselors exerted the greatest influence on a student’s decision to choose a college. Parent to parent contact might be a valuable marketing tool. Surprisingly, the internet was not one of the ways the respondents received or searched for information about Mt. SAC. This fact is opposite to the current marketing trend.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

There is no way to determine whether the survey sample was random. The survey could have been administered to high school students who have self-declared they will attend Mt. SAC. For questions related specifically about Mt. SAC, its programs and services, a

high percentage of the respondents checked they did not have an answer for the question. The benefit for the researchers in listing benefits for which students may not be familiar is that it brings to their attention these services.

SUMMARY

Overall, high school students seem to perceive Mt. SAC in a positive light. They mention the College first above any others in the region and they have information on many services the College offers such as tutoring, financial aid, student activities, and flexible class offerings. They perceive that registration is easy but parking a problem. They perceive people feel comfortable on campus. They often visit the campus before enrollment. It is speculated that many have attended the Mt. SAC Relays and other athletic competitions. Parents support their decision to attend college and also influence their decision as to which college they will attend. Friends and high school counselors also influence their college choices. They do not seem to respond to the College's traditional forms of marketing (newspaper, movie theater ads, brochures, outreach to the high school, or internet).

SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP

IMC could benefit from reviewing the data and determining which perceptions about the College they would like to continue to promote and which they would like to change. Some current marketing techniques appear not to be influential to high school students and other ways to reach these students through parents, friends, and high school counselors may be a better use of marketing dollars. An interesting follow up study would be to measure these same perceptions of Mt. SAC freshmen after completing their first semester at Mt. SAC to see if any perceptions changed.

REPORT INFORMATION

This narrative report was prepared by Dr. Patricia A. Rasmussen, Vice President of Institutional Advancement with appreciation to the following people who assisted with the report and data collection and analysis:

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