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**This Issue's  
Gram of Gratitude goes to:  
Information Technology**  
**Thank you IT for  
the data warehouse and  
your technical support!**

# RESEARCH AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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## Your Research Department

*Barbara McNeice-Stallard*

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Research and Institutional Effectiveness department. We are pleased to offer the Mt. SAC community a semi-annual newsletter outlining who we are, what projects we are undertaking, and what directions we are taking for the future. We hope you will find the newsletter informative and valuable.

### Background

During the first four decades of the college, research was handled part-time by various administrators. Full-time commitment to research took place in 1985 through the establishment of The Office of Institutional Research, which was later named the Office of Research, Planning and Development in 1993. The Research and Institutional Effectiveness (RIE) department, as it is named today, was made official in 2001, concurrent with the hiring of the current director, a research assistant, and a research analyst. The department leads the campus in the collection, analysis, interpretation, reporting, and dissemination of data that support the college. RIE's mission is aligned with the college's mission and reflects a need to offer accurate and timely data for planning, reporting, and decision-making.

### What we do

Historically, the RIE department's efforts primarily focused on enrollment data and student, graduate, and employer satisfaction. In 2004, the department further expanded its range of activities for the purpose of building a research culture within the college. With the expansion of its staff and its set of mandates, the department now performs almost 100 percent of its tasks for accreditation purposes with an overarching role of measuring institutional effectiveness including Student Learning Outcomes (SLO), Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUO) and General Education Outcomes (GEO). Under the leadership of Dr. John Nixon and Dr. Virginia Burley, combined with the curiosity and attitude of excellence among Mt. SAC employees, the RIE department has helped to build a prestigious history in planning, researching, and evaluating Mt. SAC's programs and services. The department has a comprehensive research agenda based on the needs of the programs, the college, as well as institutional growth and development directions.

While RIE is expanding into other areas of the campus in a more in-depth perspective (see the story on the Basic Skills Research Team, p. 3), the department continues to conduct **program-specific** labor market studies, enrollment management projects, tracking students within and outside of Mt. SAC, analyses of the student assessment tests (e.g., English, mathematics, etc.), and satisfaction studies – to mention a few areas of concentration. Approximately 75 percent of the department's time is spent on these program-specific projects. However, any employee on campus can ask for our assistance in researching an issue. (*continued on page 6*)

## Research Projects: An Update

Project priorities are assigned based on planning conditions as dictated by regulatory requirements, administrative needs, and the needs of the originator of the project. In addition, the assignment of projects may be based on the RIE team members' area of expertise.

In order to satisfy accreditation, there are several forms of data which need to be gathered for data-driven decision making (i.e., evidence). Most projects conducted by the research department can be used in the accreditation self-study. From an accreditation and college-improvement direction, an important point to remember with all research projects is that the information must be used for something (i.e., decision-making, policy change/creation, re-working the request, etc.). Some of our past and present projects are provided below.

Basic Skills: The research department is providing extra support to Mt. SAC projects that are funded under the Basic Skills Initiative (BSI). There are 55 projects currently funded through the BSI. Some 78 percent have completed the Project Evaluation and Outcome (PEO) forms. Of those 55 projects, 24 are funded for over \$20,000 and should be working with special assistance from the Basic Skills Research Team to review their assessment measures. The Team is here to offer research support in whatever is needed by the project.

Student Learning Outcomes: The research office works closely with SLO/AUO and GEO coordinators to provide research support and input. Research is the navigator, while the SLO/AUO faculty and employees are the drivers.

Planning for Institutional Effectiveness: The department works closely with the Institutional Effectiveness Committee (IEC) in all aspects of *Planning for Institutional Effectiveness* (PIE—our program review process). Typically, the research department completes projects each year for different areas across the campus for program-level assessment. The research department also offers PIE training.

Cal-PASS: The research department works closely with the California Partnership for Achieving Student Success (Cal-PASS) to put together an English and Mathematics Professional Learning Council (PLC). The kick-off meeting of the learning councils was held in early December of 2007. The meeting brought together over 50 faculty members and administrators from K-12 and community colleges to discuss curriculum alignment issues across the different educational segments. The groups had their first planning meeting in January.

Assessment (placement): The research office is working closely with Jim Ocampo in Assessment and Matriculation to review the disproportionate impact issues of assessment tests. Disproportionate impact occurs when 80 percent of the placement rate of the dominant group (e.g., males—as set by the State) is not achieved by other groups. The college intends to formalize a plan for addressing disproportionate impact.

## Project in Focus: WIN Tutoring Program for Athletes

The research team is assessing whether the hiring of more subject-specific tutors in the WIN program improves student learning. Additionally, we are examining whether having an increase in the number of tutors at the WIN program is related to an increase in the number of students served in the tutoring area. The goal is to see if increasing the number of tutors in the WIN area will draw more students to the WIN learning center.

In addition, we are examining student learning indirectly by assessing the grades of tutored students in the subject-specific areas covered by the WIN tutors. There is a need to assess whether subject-specific tutoring in math and science topics will lead to improved student success at Mt. SAC. Finally, the WIN program has updated its tutoring tools, such as new textbooks, to provide stronger support for learning. We will measure the effectiveness of these changes by assessing the tutors' opinions of the effectiveness of the textbooks.

## RESEARCH AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

**Basic Skills Research: Why at Mt. SAC?**

California's community colleges are addressing the critical need for higher success rates among academically under-prepared students through a new initiative funded by the California Community College System's Office. More than \$33 million of the higher education budget has been earmarked for the improvement of basic skills at the state's 109 community colleges. Mt. SAC has received \$1.3 million in funding for the 2006-2007 academic year and \$1.1 million for the 2007-2008 academic year for basic skills projects.

The Basic Skills Initiative offers the funding and thus support for California community colleges like Mt. SAC to research, develop, implement, and cultivate effective educational practices that will improve learning outcomes for students under-prepared for college-level work. Research has shown that many students arrive at community colleges lacking the basic skills needed to be successful. Approximately 70 to 80 percent of Mt. SAC students devote some of their academic efforts towards developmental learning in mathematics, reading, writing, and/or study skills. Given the large number of students receiving these services, Mt. SAC intends to utilize basic skills funds to improve the delivery and outcome of these services.

The Basic Skills Initiative has been met with enthusiasm by many on campus. Several faculty groups are using the funds to develop innovative courses, examine effective practices, evaluate connections between courses, and even fund faculty training for effective pedagogy. However, faculty are not the only ones busy utilizing these new funds. The college has hired more tutors and other service personnel to serve the needs of students. Additionally, many professional development opportunities are now available for employees of Mt. SAC thanks to this initiative. There is also a significant amount of research being conducted on campus to determine the effectiveness of a variety of basic skills services. Most of this research is being conducted by the Basic Skills Research Team (Lisa DiDonato, Jennifer Tucker and Cathy Stute), also a direct result of this funding. Much of this research utilizes a rich supply of data from a data warehouse designed by the Information Technology department.

To the right are members of RIE—including the Basic Skills Research Team: back row from the left is Odette Richardson, Barbara McNeice-Stallard, Jennifer Tucker and Chiou Yueh (Maria) Tsai. Looking from the left on the front row is Cathy Stute, Lisa DiDonato and Priyadarshini (Priya) Chaplot.



## RESEARCH AND INSTITUTIONAL

## TEAM MEMBER BIOS

**Barbara McNeice-Stallard**

Barbara joined the team in 2001. She has her Master of Science degree in health behavior and a Bachelors in kinesiology. She has over 12 years experience in institutional research in the community college sector and 10 years in the university sector. She is the author of peer reviewed publications on topics such as distance education for nurses, as well as hostility and facial expressions. She presents at local, state, and national conferences on accreditation, student learning outcomes, and other topics. She is a member of accreditation teams that evaluate other California community colleges. Her interests include institutional effectiveness, research, planning, data warehousing, and public policy. Genealogy is one of her hobbies. So far, no family secrets have been uncovered.

**Odette Richardson**

Odette loves and has been a part of Mt. SAC for over 30 years, first, as a proud graduate of the college and soon afterwards, as a dedicated classified professional and part-time faculty. She holds both a B.S. in Business & Management and M.A. in Management from the University of Redlands where she was inducted into the university's Whitehead Leadership Society. Amongst her many talents in the research department, she especially enjoys strategic planning, project management and survey development. As a result of her vast knowledge of the college, she is often considered the resident historian, having co-authored *Mt. San Antonio College: The First Fifty Years*.

**Chiou Yueh (Maria) Tsai**

Chiou Yueh (Maria) Tsai joined the RIE Office in January 2006. She received her training in pedagogy, research and statistics application from Texas A&M University (M.Ed., Ph.D., Educational Curriculum & Instruction). Her research experience encompasses qualitative and quantitative research in teacher education, instructional evaluation, educational measurement, and student support programs. Prior to joining the RIE Office, she worked part-time in Student Services at Mt. SAC. Currently, her major responsibilities are coordinating several campus-wide surveys (Graduate Exit Survey, Alumni Survey), assisting in the placement test validation process, working cooperatively with IT in monitoring data integrity and usability of the data warehouse, and fulfilling ad hoc requests from the Mt. SAC campus community. Maria is greatly encouraged by seeing that the Mt. SAC community embraces research and assessment in the college's effort of maximizing student learning outcomes.

**Priyadarshini Chaplot**

Priya Chaplot graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology in 2002. During her undergraduate program, she performed qualitative and quantitative research for various studies regarding depression, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, and entitlement. Prior to joining the Mt. SAC family, she worked in academic recruiting and counseling. She offers research support for the assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and Administrative Unit Objectives (AUOs) and the integration of SLOs and AUOs in planning for campus-wide improvement. Priya will complete her MBA in 2008 from Cal Poly Pomona. When she is not daydreaming about numbers and figures, Priya enjoys exploring the architecture of downtown Los Angeles and learning odd phrases in different languages. Ich habe das brot in der tüte gekauft. Tschüß! (*I bought the bread in the bag. See you!*)

**Lisa DiDonato**

Lisa has nearly 20 years of experience working in education, a valuable asset for managing the Basic Skills Research Team. Her skills for conducting and understanding the demands and limitations of institutional research have been developed throughout her career both as a researcher at Richland Community College in Dallas and at Rowland Heights Unified School District. Having taught both primary-level and undergraduate students makes her especially sensitive to the needs and goals of students and faculty alike. Lisa received her M.A. in Sociology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and as a trained sociologist she always considers the ways in which society affects individuals. Lisa's desire to help others in achieving their educational goals is a good fit for both Mt. SAC and the Basic Skills Initiative.

**Jennifer Tucker**

Jennifer joins the research team having her M.A. degree in Experimental Psychology from Loma Linda University. This spring, Jennifer will complete her Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology with foci in health psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and neuropsychology. Her research history range from the study of physiological psychology to health psychology and the study of culture. In addition, she enthusiastically applies the principles of research methods and statistics to her work at Mt. SAC. She also brings experience with National Institutes of Health and National Institute of Mental Health grant-funded studies. She is excited to be a part of research planning in California community colleges to support basic skills students. Jennifer enjoys running, walking, and being outdoors when she is not affixed to the computer screen.

**Cathy Stute**

Cathy joined the RIE office in February of 2007 as a Project Coordinator for several basic skills grant projects. Prior to joining RIE, she worked at Mt. SAC for over 10 years as a classified professional working in Auxiliary Services, Public Safety, and Fiscal Services. Cathy is also a faculty member at Mt. SAC teaching Yoga. She received her B.S. in Business and Management from the University of Redlands, graduating Summa Cum Laude. Her undergraduate research was a study of the effects of yoga fitness on productivity. She currently attends a Master's in Business Administration program at the University of California, Davis. In February 2007 she had the opportunity to travel with UC Davis colleagues to meet "the Oracle of Omaha," Warren Buffett.

## RESEARCH AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

# Basic Skills Research at a Glance

## What We Do:

The development of the Basic Skills Research Team (BSRT) is a result of the California Community College Basic Skills Initiative funding. Our purpose is to address the research needs of all basic skills projects funded under this initiative. However, our primary focus is to conduct research to determine the effectiveness of all basic skills projects that have been funded for over \$20,000. We are here to advance the goals of the Basic Skills Initiative through research and dissemination of information.

## How We Can Help YOU:

Our team of researchers help basic skills-related projects through

- Research consultation (designing/assessing measurable outcomes)
- Data analysis (e.g., report writing)
- Future project development

## How We Help Mt. SAC:

The **mission** of the Basic Skills Research Team (BSRT) is to assist and enhance basic skills research in order to measure the effectiveness of the Basic Skills Initiatives at Mt. SAC. The goal is to use data as a method of demonstrating the value of these projects.

Beginning in October 2007, the BSRT began receiving the original project proposals for basic skills funding. Currently, there are over 50 basic skills projects. Of those, there are 24 projects with budgets of \$20,000 or greater. All projects with budgets of this size are required to submit a Project Evaluation and Outcomes (PEO) form to the research office for review. The PEO is similar to the Student Learning Outcomes five column model. There are five columns to help project managers set goals, design ways to measure these goals and identify areas for improvement in the future. The review of these forms by the research office is necessary to assure that each project has measurable outcomes which will, in turn, help Mt. SAC evaluate the effectiveness of these projects.

The project team is funded for 42 weeks of work so they will be disbanding between August to October, 2008. A new full-time Educational Research Assessment Analyst position will open in the fall. This position will focus on basic skills research projects including SLOs and AUOs.

## RESEARCH AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

(continued from page 1)

An additional way we contribute to Mt. SAC's comprehensive research needs is by the creation and evaluation of a standardized *Fact Book*. A *Fact Book* is a collection of mostly **institution-wide** information about the college from specific perspectives. For example, the *Fact Book* contains reports such as a profile of the community we serve, the number of students who stay enrolled in one semester, and the number of students who obtain degrees/certificates in any given year. The *Fact Book* has been created as a general communication tool to disseminate data in a standardized, college-wide manner. About five percent of our time is spent updating the *Fact Book*. We offer observations and recommendations to Academic Senate, the College President, Vice Presidents and President's Advisory Council based on the trends seen in this college-wide data. The *Fact Book* is updated every few years as the typical data trends do not vary much from year to year. As such, we've chosen to place the majority of our efforts on program-specific projects to help employees research their local questions, and thus, avail them of data-driven decision-making opportunities that improve overall program and institutional effectiveness. Our most up-to-date release of the *Fact Book* is due to appear online very soon.

Another way we help to measure institutional effectiveness is through institution-wide studies such as tracking, surveying, and conducting focus groups of students and employees. About 20 percent of our time is spent on these studies. The findings from these studies often give evidence of the current climate within the college as well as suggest further necessary actions. These types of studies encompass all areas of the college and serve to improve institutional effectiveness.

**Measurement of institutional effectiveness is the foundation of accountability.**

Measurement of institutional effectiveness is the foundation of accountability. In-depth studies are critical to informing the programs and the institution on necessary steps for institutional effectiveness (i.e., setting specific targets, having tasks to meet those targets, measuring the attainment of the targets, and evaluating the process and maybe doing it again). Data can inform staff, faculty and management of the quality of the educational experience from the students', graduates' and employers' perspectives. It is the college employees' questions and our assistance in finding them answers that makes the college a continually improving environment.

Our goal is to use innovative methods to conduct research and program evaluation. The RIE department serves as a source of support for members of the campus. We are a link between college programs and their collaborative research efforts. Overall, research is a team effort: from the inception of the project, to its bringing together many groups from across campus to assess the situation, to collecting data, and eventually recommending steps for action based upon the research the team conducts. All those who play a part in the research projects are striving for the same outcome: improved student success at Mt. SAC.

### **Contact Us**

Feel free to drop by and ask us for assistance with your research projects or email us at: [research@mtsac.edu](mailto:research@mtsac.edu). We provide a service offered to Mt. SAC employees who wish to continually ask questions, obtain answers and use that knowledge for improvement (i.e., institutional and program effectiveness). We are here to support you in what you do. Let us know how we may assist you in continuing to offer outstanding services and programs to students.