Summary of Focus Group Responses
May 2011

Communication

Adult Basic Education
Communication is mostly informal, through conversations and discussions with staff and teachers. Students feel they are informed and are able to give suggestions about the ABE program. Students appreciate the Twitter updates and desire email updates as well. For those who do not have access to a smart phone or computer at home, bulletin boards in the hallways and flyers are a primary source of information. These need to be updated regularly to be of use. Also, mail home is suggested. Students appreciated the opportunity to give formal feedback through the student survey and focus group. There is a desire for formal feedback options to continue.

Adult Diploma
Adult Diploma students receive information through instructor announcements, at meetings with counselors, from hallway bulletin boards, at the high school program office, through the Internet, and from peers. Students desire an on-line communication tool, such as the Mt. SAC student portal, as an alternative communication source. Although students know they can make suggestions about the Adult Diploma program at the main office, no students have done this. Counselors and administrators are available to meet with students. The primary concern expressed at these meetings is completion of mandatory course hours and issues with balancing credits. Not all students were aware that hours required for course completion are mandated by the Education Code and would have liked this specific information. Students would also like to have a list of contact names in the program for reference if they did choose to share a concern or idea.

Health Careers *(Data gathered through an online survey)*
Students came to the Health Careers program to learn skills for employment opportunities in the healthcare field. Mt. SAC was chosen by students because of the community perception of program excellence. Students received initial information about Health Careers from a variety of sources including the Mt. SAC website, the Penny Saver adds, the Mt. SAC schedule of classes, and friends. Informal communication with classmates, colleagues, and friends is also utilized. Some students noted that it would be helpful to receive information about the program through newsletters or advertisements. Nearly all students cited a desire for email contact as a primary communication tool for news and information. Some students share suggestions or ideas directly with instructors, but others have not had the opportunity to give feedback. Students would like the opportunity to share their voice through a formal survey (like this one) or by email.

High School Referral
Most students heard about the High School Referral program during an individual credit check by their home high school counselor, although a few students were aware of the program through family members who had been enrolled in the past. Most feeder school counselors provided students with a flyer about the program. Once in the program students receive information about hours completed through their teacher and HSR counselor. Other program announcements are made by their teacher, as needed. Students have little need to give feedback about the program but appreciated completing the WASC survey. No suggestions were made for alternative communication modes.

Language Learning Center (LLC) *(Data gathered through an online survey)*
Students primarily learn about the LLC from their language or ESL instructors. Students share their positive experiences with the LLC through conversations with friends and language course classmates. Once enrolled at the LLC, they receive news and information from the on-line LLC website or through the LLC staff. Students feel that the LLC website is very informative. They would like to receive additional information through personal email. Sixty-five percent of students (65%) state they have a chance to share their ideas or to make suggestions about the LLC by speaking directly with LLC instructors and staff. They suggest future opportunities for input also include an on-line blog on the website, occasional

surveys, email, or a suggestion box.   The majority of students (69%) attended an orientation which provided instruction in the use of LLC computers and software. This orientation was extremely beneficial to students and contributed to student success in developing language skills.

Noncredit Vocational *(Data gathered through an online survey)*
Students enrolled in noncredit vocational courses for personal growth and because space was available in a highly desirable course. Students learned about the noncredit option through family, the Mt. SAC website schedule of classes, and through Student Services. Students suggestions for continuing communication included email, the Internet, and delivery of the schedule of classes home. An emailed survey is the desired format for students to give feedback about the program. Only one student recalled attending a student orientation, but did not believe that noncredit course information was provided at that time.

Older Adult Program
The greatest source of communication for students in Older Adult Program classes is networking with others in an informal setting.   Additionally, traditional communication through flyers and the schedule of classes books provided through the community and senior centers is appreciated. Many older adult students use technology as a primary source of communication and desire an ability to receive information through email contact, such as a list serve. Although there is a current OAP list serve, only two participants were aware of this. Although there is sometimes a language barrier with communication, students expressed that they help one another to overcome this and make sure that all can express their ideas. A suggestion for a generic email box or drop box for comments was raised as a way to communicate confidentially. Instructors provide an important point of contact for program updates. Students appreciate the instructors' approachability and feel they are able to give suggestions about the OAP program and class needs. The OAP program Coordinator, Mary Lange, is also available for student suggestions and is extremely well respected. There is a strong consensus that the Mt. SAC Older Adult Program is a critical educational resource in the community. Classes help seniors to learn critical 20th century technology skills, maintain mental fitness, support good health, and create opportunities for supplemental income in retirement. Beyond the curriculum, students benefit from social engagement and participation in the community. Students had a strong desire to "give back" to Mt. SAC through participation in the OAP Advisory Group. They hope that sharing their experiences and ideas will benefit the program as a whole and contribute to its continuance through these difficult economic times.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

ESL - morning
Most students initially discovered Mt. SAC ESL through a network of family and friends in the community. Peers in the classroom continue to be a primary source of ESL information. Formal communication through teachers, the ESL website, and bulletin boards have also been helpful resources. Students would like to use email and Facebook as additional communication tools for information and updates about ESL. Students acknowledge that although they have the opportunity to share ideas through the teacher, they do not take the initiative to do this. Students desire a formal, confidential method for sharing their feedback, such as an opportunity to write suggestions that the teacher submits to the office or a "suggestions" email address.

ESL - evening
Most students initially discovered Mt. SAC ESL through a network of family and friends in the community. A few students used the Internet or front desk to learn about the ESL program and registration. The front desk, classmates, and bulletin boards are all utilized as communication resources. The bulletin boards (both upstairs and downstairs) are perceived as important sources of information, especially for those students too shy to ask questions. It was noted that the second floor bulletin boards have more information than those on the 1st floor near lower level classes. Students would like to receive program updates and event information through email.   Students expressed a feeling of "missing out" on information regarding which campus resources are available (or not) for noncredit student use (ex. Health

services, the gym, etc.).   Many stated that other departments on campus don't know how to help ESL students and direct them back to building 66 without providing answers to questions. On-line information was also found to be confusing. Students express ideas and suggestions during the ESL data entry process and in conversations with counselors. Feedback regarding teacher quality is shared among classmates, but not often directly with the teacher.

<u>Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL)</u>

VESL - morning
Formal communication about the program occurs through announcements by teachers. Students also rely on informal communication such as conversations with peers. Overall, students felt informed about important program news and information. Although students are aware of formal structures for sharing comments and ideas, there is a culture of not being disrespectful by saying "bad things". Student focus for ideas and feedback centered on improvement of teacher quality. There was a consensus that teacher evaluations conducted at the end of class were not a useful tool for suggestions or improvement. There was little confidence that student comments lead to change.   Students desire a formal, confidential process (other than teacher evaluation forms) for expressing suggestions and ideas.

VESL - evening
The instructor is the primary source of information for VESL evening students.   Many of these students work during the day, come directly to class, and go straight home. This schedule offers little opportunity for students to use the ESL front desk to get information such as the student "newspaper" or event flyers. The front desk is used only for registration. Students appreciate when information about the ESL program is brought directly to class and prefer this as the primary mode of communication. Some students expressed a desire for more information on-line, however others shared that they do not have access to a computer.   Students appreciated the opportunity to share their comments about VESL through the focus group. They are aware that Dana, Heidi, and Michael are available if they choose to give comments or ideas about the program. However, students expressed that they do not give ideas because they, "just follow the program". Students believed that the WASC focus group was intended as the vehicle for sharing their thoughts and had been looking forward to the opportunity to communicate needs.

Support Services

<u>Adult Basic Education</u>
Although not all students recalled attending an official orientation, there was consensus that the ABE faculty and staff explained the expectations of class and the information essential to being a part of the program. Not all students were aware of counselor/advisor availability. Most learned about the counselors through visits of Susan Wright to class, which was extremely helpful in building job readiness skills. Additionally, the classroom visits prompted students to take advantage of one-on-one counseling. Students who had met with a counselor were pleased with the support.

<u>Adult Diploma</u>
All students attended an orientation prior to beginning the Adult Diploma program. Although a few students did not find orientation helpful in understanding the nature of independent study, there was consensus that it established program expectations, explained graduation requirements, and provided information on concurrent credit enrollment. For many students orientation was conducted one-on-one with a counselor. It was through this initial contact that many students became aware of counseling/advising services. Other students found out about advising through their teacher. Students who met with a counselor expressed that it was extremely helpful. Adult Diploma counselors have provided students support with registration, helping to meet course completion hours, and matriculating into credit classes. Instructors also provide advice in making good choices about course enrollment. Students were all aware of the availability of tutoring in class. Tutors are used for test review and assistance with projects/assignments. Tutoring support is in high demand in the morning classes, with waiting lists each day, and not enough tutors to fulfill the needs. Although tutoring time limits are set for maximum use of tutor time, students perceive the individual time limits to be short and restrictive.   Tutoring demand in the afternoon class session is less, with assistance adequate to meet student need.

<u>Health Careers</u> *(Data gathered through an online survey)*
Most Health Career students recall receiving information about noncredit courses during student orientation (77%). 68% are aware of counseling and advising, with many finding out about this support through orientation. Other students found out about counseling from the schedule of classes. While only a few students have used Mt. SAC counseling/advising services, their experience was helpful in establishing a course of study. Instructors and the Health Careers program coordinators have also been important resources for making good choices about classes, exploring career options, and providing professional networking. A small number of students (33%) have used tutoring services to assist them with school assignments and test preparation.

<u>High School Referral</u>
All students attended and orientation that clearly explained the requirements for completing credits, the hours of attendance, the flexibility of attending during each afternoon session, and the nature of the independent work. Although students understood the requirements, they were unprepared for the volume of work to complete a course. All students have met one-on-one with a HSR counselor. Counselors are visible in the classroom and make appointments with students to discuss assignments and hours completed. There is a consensus that HSR counselors are nice, supportive, and motivate students to finish their courses. Counselors are critical in helping students plan the completion of their assignments and projects by the end of the spring term. Teachers and tutors are important resources for guidance with projects, test reviews, assignments and essays. Students find there is adequate access to tutors and teachers for help.

<u>Language Learning Center (LLC)</u> *(Data gathered through an online survey)*
The majority of students (69%) attended an orientation which provided instruction in the use of LLC computers and software. This orientation was extremely beneficial to students and contributed to student success in developing language skills.   Many students (62%) shared that beyond orientation they have attended the LLC with their class. Approximately one-third of students in the LLC have used a tutor to assist them with classwork. Tutoring has helped students to go beyond what is taught in class and have a greater understanding of the language they are studying.

<u>Noncredit Vocational</u> *(Data gathered through an online survey)*
Only one student recalled attending a student orientation, but did not believe that noncredit course information was provided at that time. Students were aware of the availability of noncredit counseling/advising. They became aware of counseling/advising when they registered for noncredit classes, but no students have used the services.   Faculty have been utilized by students to assist them in making good choices about courses. Tutoring has not been used as a resource.

<u>Older Adult Program</u>
All students were given an orientation upon entrance to an Older Adult class. The orientation included information about the syllabus, calendar for the term, and attendance. Classes are full and many have wait lists. There is a culture of commitment to attendance. Students stressed that the classroom environment is very accommodating, with "late starters" provided with extra help and one-on-one assistance if needed. Many students were not aware of the benefits of student ID's, discounts, and campus services that are available to them. A suggestion was made to create a flyer with this information. Although students were not specifically familiar with the availability of counselors/advisors, there was general knowledge that, as a college, Mt. SAC provides this service. None of the students have felt a need to use a counselor or advisor. Instructors are the main point of contact for class recommendations, with peers and the schedule of classes also used as resources. Students are most comfortable taking classes at locations in the community and cite concerns about Mt. SAC parking as a main deterrent for not taking courses on campus. Some students expressed the desire to take more advanced computer classes. Although OAP students are aware that these advanced classes are offered through credit, they are intimidated by the younger student culture. The greatest challenge to class registration is communication of registration dates. First time students find it difficult to get accurate information about the "registration windows". However, once in the class, instructors make certain to announce important registration

information and dates. It would be helpful to have folks at the community and senior centers be more knowledgeable about OAP registration dates and deadlines.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

ESL - morning
Students found the orientation process to be extremely helpful in satisfying their immediate needs regarding the student ID, parking permits, and library use. Half of the students continue to use the student handbook as a resource for information. All students were aware of the availability of counselors and advisors. Counselor and advisor support was discovered from a variety of sources. Most students have not yet taken advantage of support services. Students who had used a counselor shared that the meetings focused mainly on level placement and testing policies, with one student noting they had received advisement regarding transition to credit. Students also benefit from support provided by teachers, classmates, and the Internet as they make class registration decisions. There is not an awareness of tutors/TAs in the ESL program; however, students cite that peer assistance is commonly utilized in class.

ESL - evening
ESL orientation helped students to understand the ESL program and processes. Most students were aware of counselor and advisor availability and learned about this support service through friends, the front desk, and the schedule of classes. Only a few students had met with a counselor/advisor. Several students shared that making a counseling appointment was difficult. Repeated attempts to use the front desk "sign-up sheet" were not effective. However, students who had emailed a direct request to the counselor received quick responses. One student sought counseling assistance in Building 9 as an alternative. Teachers and peers are used as additional resources for making choices about classes. Students suggested training teachers about AMLA and other programs, so that students can rely on teachers for more information in these areas.

Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL)

VESL - morning
The orientation process was extremely helpful in satisfying students' immediate needs regarding registration, ID, and parking. The amount of information shared at orientation was overwhelming for some students, resulting in confusion. Many students expressed a need for a "second orientation" or several additional smaller orientations focused on topics such as the ESL program, transfer to credit, etc. All students were aware of counseling/advising services. Teachers, advisors (Michael), and counselors (John) were all cited as approachable, extremely helpful resources for academic support. Some students shared that obtaining a counseling appointment through sign up papers at the front desk was not effective, with several not receiving responses (calls) after multiple attempts to obtain an appointment. A need to change the formal appointment process was expressed.

VESL - evening
VESL open house was cited as the main orientation into the VESL program. Students recall hearing about VESL though information presented in class, but their experience in talking directly to other VESL students was the most beneficial in understanding what to expect from the program. All students were aware of counseling/advising services. Although many students entered in levels 2 or 3, the consensus was that students didn't become aware of the counselors/advisors until they reached level 4 and a counselor visit occurred in the classroom. In the earlier levels students follow the advice of the instructors when registering for classes. Counselors were all cited as the primary resources for determining next steps in transition to credit and AMLA. A few students shared that it took a month to obtain a counseling appointment through sign up papers at the front desk. While others stated that they had access more quickly. Direct access to John and Michael in the classroom to make appointments was more effective than signing up for appointments at the front desk.

Learning Resources

Adult Basic Education
All students confirmed that they use computers in ABE daily during classroom instruction. The consensus is that computers and software are current and more than adequate. Email was noted as an important resource to access, especially for students without computers at home. Students expressed a strong appreciation for the free software training provided by quality instructors.

Adult Diploma
All students use the computers to complete course projects. Technology training is available through tutors in the Adult Diploma classroom, but all students entered the program with adequate technology knowledge to meet learning needs. Students expressed that course projects are very time intensive, require computer use for extended periods of time, and result in lack of computer access for waiting students. Class restrictions on use of cell phones and personal laptops have eliminated alternative Internet research options for students. As a result, students often have to skip projects or delay their completion due to the lack of computer availability. There is a desire for easier access to Wi-Fi for research needs. Some students requested that websites with inappropriate content be "blocked" for efficiency. On-line resources such as Answers.com, Spark notes, YouTube, and the BBC have all been found to be effective learning tools.

Health Careers *(Data gathered through an online survey)*
Technology tools such as computers, LCD projectors, and medical equipment are utilized in Health Career classes. The computer lab is an important resource for students and is accessible. 61 % of students use on-line resources referred by Mt. SAC, such as the Mt. SAC website, libraries, Medical Dictionary, and resume software. 65% of students reported completion of their Health Career program, with the remaining students still enrolled. Five students who completed their planned program reported finding employment as a result. Four Health Care Interpreting (HCI) certificate completers reported that although they have had an improvement in interpreting skills, they have not been able to secure employment. Many students who are enrolled in a noncredit Health Career program have career plans with short-term focus on employability and long-term focus on advancement in the medical field.

High School Referral
Students use technology in all classes except for math. Computers are used for completion of class projects. Microsoft Office programs and research on the Internet are the primary on-line resources utilized. Students are not aware of Mt. SAC library resources, nor do they access the HSR website. Students shared the HSR website would be of value if orientation materials, current grades, and hours completed were available on-line.   Technology is adequate to meet student needs. One student mentioned that it would be helpful to have access to an electronic translator in math class. Students shared that second language learners struggle with the curriculum.

Language Learning Center (LLC) *(Data gathered through an online survey)*
All students utilize computers and language software in the LLC. Students practice grammar exercises, watch video clips to strengthen listening skills, create projects with Microsoft Office and PowerPoint, and develop audio recordings. Other software used includes Rosetta Stone, Linguanaut, Muzzy, and SANAKO. Students have been trained to use the various software and technology tools by LLC staff, instructors, and classmates. The majority of students feel confident in the use of LLC media tools. A few would like additional assistance in the use of Microsoft Office and software use through one-on-one tutoring. Students appreciate the variety of software available for use. Additional software suggestions include a larger number of music samples, and more Chinese word learning software. Most students use online learning resources provided through Mt. SAC such as the portal, Blackboard, and Library Databases. These have been instrumental in helping students to be more effective in studying, learning vocabulary, and completing assignments.

Noncredit Vocational *(Data gathered through an online survey)*

Computers, software, and vocational tools are used by students regularly in class. Instructors sometimes model the use of technology in the classroom and then ask students to work independently on it at home. The Mt. SAC portal is an important on-line resource which has given students access to course information and resources at any location which has Internet access. One student shared that enrollment in their noncredit course led to more frequent use of the web for research purposes.

Older Adult Program
Students in vocational and computer classes use technology as part of their daily course of study. Training in the use of the technology and software is a focus of instruction. Few students were knowledgeable about the OAP website and its resources. Those who have accessed the website find it user-friendly. It was suggested that the website URL be provided to all students in a flyer format at the beginning of the term.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

ESL - morning
Most students cite the use a variety of learning tools such as the computer, LCD projector, computer lab and electronic translator. Students find the ESL Lab and software to be more than adequate. Training for the use of software is available as needed. Instructors assign projects and homework that require the use of this technology. Students desire more projects and presentations because these provide opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills in a practical, "real world", setting. Some of the students have used online resources such as the Mt. SAC website and library link to study at home. Although all students are aware of the LLC as a learning resource, they cite crowded parking and distance from the ESL building as a deterrent to its use. The ESL Lab is viewed as more convenient, however, students would appreciate more "open lab" time to take advantage of the software available.

ESL - evening
Technology is regularly used by students for improvement of listening/speaking skills, access to the Internet, and development/presentation of classroom projects. Technology tools include computers, LCD projectors, and the ESL computer lab. Students find the technology available more than adequate to meet their learning needs. Tutors, teachers, classmates, and the LLC have all provided students with technology and software training. Students use on-line resources such as the ESL website, LLC website, on-line newspapers, and other instructor directed websites to practice reading and vocabulary development. Students are aware of the LLC as a "good" learning resource but do not use it. Several students noted that they access the LLC on-line instead of going there in person.

Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL)

VESL - morning
Students use technology regularly in class and through the ESL Computer Lab. The primary use of technology is for student projects. Training in technology is varied with many students having technology skills prior to entering ESL and others receiving training through class instruction. There is a consensus that technology is more than adequate to meet learning needs. Students expressed the helpfulness of online learning resources, with some teachers providing class information through websites. A desire for a Blackboard learning environment, type (similar to credit), was expressed. The use of the LLC varied, with many students attending as part of a class. Knowledge of LLC online, "at-home" resources was varied, with a strong sentiment that online use was desirable and more information on this feature (though class) would be beneficial.

VESL - evening
Students use technology regularly in class for presentations such as PowerPoint. Additionally, many students use the ESL Computer Lab with their class. Training in technology typically occurs through class instruction. There is a consensus that technology is more than adequate to meet learning needs. Eureka, AAA, and Randall were all cited as on-line resources used regularly by students. The use of the LLC varied, with all students aware of the LLC as a resource, but

few having time to take advantage of it. Most students know that LLC access is available on-line, but few have used it. Those who have used the LLC found it helpful to have the extra practice and to build stronger listening skills.