Academic Senate Report to Board of Trustees
August 9 2014

As you know, the Academic Senate has not been meeting as a body over the summer, so we have no activity to report.

But we’d like to take this opportunity to share with you some of what we’re thinking as we head into this new academic year.

So I have a bucket, and I’m going to fill it with water.

Our task is to make sure that it is at least as full of water a year from now as it is right now. If we fail to do this, our ability to survive will be in serious jeopardy. The bucket has to remain at least this full.

And there’s a problem: no matter how careful we are with this bucket, we’re going to lose some water to evaporation. There’s nothing we can do to prevent this. It’s just the way it is.

But there’s good news: we have sources of water that we can tap into to replace the water we lose. So as the water evaporates, we’ll pour new water in and maintain the level.

But there’s also bad news: the sources of replacement water are hard to find, and they are limited. Sometimes we’ll fail to find new sources and sometimes the sources we’ve found will dry up, and then we’ll have to scramble to find a new source of replacement water…..because we’re always losing water.

And there’s another problem, a real problem: this bucket has lots and lots of holes that allow water to seep out constantly. Some of
the holes are big and easy to see; some are small and will take some effort to find. These holes are draining our bucket rapidly.

So the challenge we face is clear: with evaporation and the holes in our bucket, we'll lose more than 50% of the water if we do nothing. Half the water we started with will be gone. And remember, our survival depends on this bucket being as least as full at the end of the year as it is now.

Clearly, we have a decision to make: how are we going to spend our limited time and energy to make sure the bucket stays full?

One idea is to search constantly for new sources of replacement water. But remember: these are hard to find, and they are limited. So it will take a lot of effort to find replacement water, and we'll never know if we're going to find enough replacement water to keep the bucket full. We'll always have a very clear idea about how much replacement water we need, but we can only hope that our efforts to find replacement water will be successful.

Here's another idea: we can try to find the holes in the bucket and plug them so we retain some of the water we already have but are rapidly losing. We might not be able to find all the holes that are leaking water, but finding and plugging some of the holes will significantly help stop the leaking.

So again, we have a decision to make: how much time do we spend searching for replacement water, and how much time do we spend plugging the holes that are draining our bucket?

It doesn't take a very skilled problem-solver to realize that we've got to plug as many holes in our bucket as we can. I mean, we've got the water we need right here. It's in our bucket, and if we allow it to simply drain away when we know our survival depends on
preserving it, we’re not behaving wisely. What a waste of our time and resources to run around looking for replacement water all the time when we could plug some holes, keep more of the water we already have, and then spend less time and energy searching for replacement water.

The analogy here isn’t perfect, but it is helpful: CR is a kind of bucket and our students are the water.

We have to have at least as many students a year from now as we have now. Our survival depends on it.

And just like we know we’ll lose some water to evaporation, we know we’re always going to lose students for reasons we cannot control. There is and will always be circumstances beyond our control—even beyond our students’ control—that cause them to leave CR forever.

Fortunately, there are sources we can tap to replace some of the students we lose:

- we can wage creative marketing campaigns and draw new students to campus,
- we can offer courses at our high schools,
- we can offer courses online and draw students we might not otherwise get to come to campus for classes.

But like the sources of replacement water, these sources of replacement students are hard to find, and they are limited.

And making our challenge greater, CR, like the bucket, has holes. We’re not just losing students because of circumstances beyond
anyone’s control; we’re losing students for reasons within our control. We’re leaking students at the same rate the bucket is leaking water: CR loses by the end of any given year more than half of the students we began the year with. Half. Half of the people who come to us at the beginning of year with a desire to learn don’t come back to us. They do not persist in their effort to achieve their educational goals. This is what we are referring to when we talk about our “persistence rates.”

How many students persist year to year in their education at CR?

The answer is less than 50%.

To continue the bucket analogy here, our persistence rate is an indicator of just how leaky our bucket is, and it indicates how successfully we’re helping students be successful, and it indicates how successfully we are meeting the challenge of keeping the bucket full.

We have to keep the bucket full; our survival depends on it.

And it’s clear that with our persistence rates, we’ve got to act smartly to make sure we keep our bucket full.

Now, again, it doesn’t take a sophisticated thinker to realize that we cannot try to replace the students who don’t persist with just new students. There are only so many people in the regions our college serves, and there aren’t enough potential new students to recruit to make up for the students we lose.

So we have a decision to make: do we rely primarily on our efforts to replace the students we lose? Or do we try to plug the holes in our bucket?
The Senate believes we should focus intensely this year on plugging the holes.

We need to begin next year with the same number of students we have at the beginning of this year and ALL those students we need are already here at CR.

They are all here. Right now.

Every student we need to survive into the future is right here right now. They are our water in the bucket. But if we don’t do something, we’re going to lose them and have to find replacements.

We’ve got to plug the leaks, and we believe your faculty are critical in helping to identify where the holes are and how best to plug them.

So where are some of the holes and what are we doing to help plug them?

**Online Learning Management System**

An online learning management system (what is commonly referred to as an “LMS”) is a software platform that serves as the virtual classroom for students taking online classes and as an adjunct to the on-site classroom for students taking classes on campus.

Students take exams and quizzes through the LMS, they have discussions with classmates and instructors in through the LMS, they access course materials through the LMS….in short, the LMS is a critical component in the educational experience of many CR students.

In summer 2009, CR switched its LMS from Blackboard to Sakai—what is now commonly called “MyCR,” and the switch has not been good for students.
Surveys over the years indicate that not only do students and faculty not like Sakai but that they identify it as an obstacle to educational success.

Think about that.

The online classroom we provide for learning is being identified as an obstacle to learning.

That’s a hole in the bucket.

But we’ve taken steps to plug this hole. The LMS taskforce in spring 2014 surveyed students about their online learning needs, reviewed a number of LMS’s, and initiated a pilot project with 25 faculty for fall 2014 using the Canvas LMS.

Canvas is the highest rated LMS by students for ease of use and intuitiveness. The Distance Education Committee will assess the pilot project and make a recommendation to the District.

If the pilot project reveals that Canvas helps students persist in achieving their education goals and the District switches from Sakai to Canvas, then we will have plugged a hole in our bucket.

**ADT’s & Transfer**

Let me tell you about another hole in the bucket.

In 2012-13, 180 CR students transferred to HSU and 30 transferred to CSU’s other than HSU. Compare those numbers: 180 to HSU; 30 to not-HSU.

So the logical question one would ask is this: What pathways have we created to ensure that our students have the easiest, clearest, most efficient route to the transfer institution they go to most?
What are we doing to make sure we don't have transfer leak in our bucket?

The answer is the Associate Degree for Transfer—what we call the ADT. What is an ADT? ADT’s provide the primary pathway to transfer for our students by allowing them to earn an Associate of Arts or Science degree in a number of traditional fields—like biology, English, math.

But an ADT is so much more: it is a degree with a guarantee.

The guarantee for a CR student is this: a student who has earned a CR ADT is guaranteed admission to a CSU that accepts that ADT.

And which CSU do most CR students transfer to? HSU. By a 5 to 1 margin.

The Senate would like to continue to work with the administration to take a careful inventory of the ADT’s we currently offer and have plans to develop to make sure that we offer as many ADT’s as we can that HSU accepts, and that we have good reasons for committing our limited resources to ADT’s HSU does not accept.

The reason? Our students are more likely to persist in their coursework at CR if they know they have a clear path to transfer, and the vast majority of our students transfer to HSU. Furthermore, we have to assure students that CR will actually offer all the courses required for all our ADT’s, and this will require us to develop and implement a transparent, rational process for deciding how to prioritize our limited fiscal resources and critical course offerings so that we can assure students that they can be successful at CR and will have the opportunity to take the courses required for the ADT’s they seek.
If CR overextends its offerings and cannot offer students courses required for ADT’s, those students will not stay at CR—they won’t persist, and they will not complete their programs, and we won’t receive funding for them.

If students don’t see an easy, viable way from CR to HSU, we aren’t likely to retain them; and that’s a hole in our bucket.

**Changes to Funding Model**

Here’s another potential hole in our bucket: Changes by the state effective fall 2014 to the funding model CR and every other California community college depend on for operations.

As you know, CR will no longer receive funds based only on FTES; our funding will depend also on

- how many students complete orientation,
- how many students complete SEP’s (student educational plans),
- and how many students have declared a specific academic goal.

In short, our success as an institution depends now not just on how many students we have but also on how we support them and help them be successful.

This funding model that relies not just on the number of FTES but also on students’ engagement with support services is going to make it more important than ever that CR students have access to the counseling and advising services that are critical to their success and our funding.
It is our counselors and advisors who help students navigate their way through the maze of degree, certificate, and transfer requirements. Without their help, students may end up taking unnecessary courses, may end up not taking necessary courses, and may end up frustrated and demoralized when they can’t figure out on their own how to achieve their educational goals.

In short, without access to counselors and advisors, students are less likely to intelligently complete their student education plans and are less likely to successfully complete their degree, certificate, and transfer requirements—and, consequently, we are less likely to receive funding for the students we serve.

That’s a potential hole in our bucket.

**Counseling and Advising**

Right now, we have one grant-funded counselor, two categorical-program counselors who counsel only students associated with the EOPS and DSPS programs, and two general academic counselors, one of whom is reassigned from a portion of his counseling duties to perform articulation work.

What this means for students is that according to the Student Success Scorecard, CR has a student to counselor ratio of 427:1.

If students cannot easily access the help they need to figure out how to complete their degree, certificate, and transfer requirements, they will not persist at CR—we will not retain them.

That’s a hole in our bucket.
Conclusion
These are some of the potential holes we see in our bucket; there probably many more.

We’re determined to find them, and we welcome the opportunity to continue working with the best president CR has ever had and her administrative team to find effective ways to plug these holes and keep CR viable.

We look forward to reporting to you at future meetings the impact of the actions we’re taken to keep our bucket full.

Thank you.