

AUGUST 28, 2024

## Welcome Back Luncheon Listening Report

Mt. SAC 2035

The Mt. SAC 2035 Coordinating Team met with students, faculty, and staff to introduce the Educational and Facility Comprehensive Plan on Friday, August 23. Through one-on-one and small group conversations, participants reflected on Dr. Garcia's commitment to center students throughout the planning process, their own knowledge and experiences, and they answered the following questions:

### How should we reach students? How do we center students throughout the planning process?

Participants included twenty-two (22) students, faculty, and staff; parents of students and former ones; faculty of credit and noncredit programs; staff supporting student equity, mental health, continuing education, students with disabilities, DHH students, and the various student centers; DHH and visually impaired faculty; Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and White people.

**Findings:** Mt. SAC 2035 must center marginalized student groups prioritized by the college's current programs and policy and those underrepresented in past processes. Faculty and staff have a deep understanding of what student-centered engagement looks like, suggesting there is a strong will to pursue it through the Mt. SAC 2035 process. At the same time, participants identified various threats like limited cross campus collaboration and information overload for staff, and weaknesses of past engagement processes like "not going out into the broader community," "ignoring student insights," "unilateral decision-making," and "performative engagement."

### THEMES ABOUT HOW TO REACH STUDENTS GROUPS

**Go to the local high schools** because "it's important to reach incoming students" from underrepresented families.

**Go out into the broader community** where "everybody is a former student, has family that are former students, or knows somebody."

**Go off campus** to reach "older adult students" and "adult students with disabilities."

**Be on campus** at resource-rich areas when "students are navigating the college" and are already seeking support.

**Coordinate with the wellness and student centers** "to partner on specific events."

**Partner with faculty** "who marginalized students seek out."

**Connect with noncredit programs** like the "vocational ones."

**Connect with coaches** so that "student athletes with packed schedules" can participate.



## THEMES ABOUT **HOW TO CENTER** STUDENTS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

### **Create a safe environment where students feel they belong and can express themselves freely.**

The engagement process must "provide students with a safe space to fail" and "make them feel secure," ensuring that students feel "supported on a personal level." Understand their experiences through "one-on-one conversations." It's crucial to recognize the difference between "fitting in and belonging," and to actively "reach out in ways so they participate," particularly for those with "a different voice," like deaf and hard of hearing students.

### **Adapt your methods for different student groups and use clear, accessible language.**

The engagement process must "communicate at students' level" and "avoid jargon and acronyms that students do not understand." Furthermore, "when you listen and communicate with students, you must be creative and think out-of-the-box" so that methods adapt to the unique needs of each group, regardless of their background or experiences. To reach "vocational students" and "students who do not attend full time, who are taking noncredit classes, working, supporting a family, and are single parents," create touch points at "untraditional times that work for them, like evenings and nights," with childcare. Allow for "flexibility" in how engagement is conducted to effectively support diverse student populations.

### **Build the engagement team's capacity to authentically listen and understand students' unique perspectives.**

It's essential to "train your team on how to listen—not just hearing but listening authentically to what students are telling you." Team members must "be curious and open-minded," striving to "genuinely connect to their experiences, not at the level of theory." It's crucial to "understand where they are at," "find the common ground," "understand what it means for students to not feel intimidated," and always "be nonjudgmental" to ensure that every student feels truly heard and understood.

### **Bring forth students' aspirational vision and demonstrate the impact of their participation.**

It's crucial to "let students know it's their opportunity to leave a legacy for generations to come" and "show them why their feedback matters." Engage them by "bringing them into the aspirational and showing them what's possible," and "expose students to aspirational ideas and possibilities" that resonate with their goals. Additionally, "share the offerings that working people and lower-income families care about," and highlight the strengths of Mt. Sac in a way that "becomes infectious," inspiring students to see the tangible impact they can have.

## FULL INSIGHTS FROM LISTENING TO STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF

"It's important to reach incoming students. Go to the local high schools. Go out into the community. Everybody is a former student, has family that are former students, or knows somebody. Actually, I attended Mt. SAC years ago. I am a [nontraditional student] who had one more class to be credentialed but never finished. But it worked well for my daughter. She transferred out to a university. She was successful. Athletics helped her do that."

—Maintenance staff

"I support continuing Ed, including older adult students and adult students with disabilities. You need to reach them off campus."

— School of Continuing Education faculty

"When you contact students, it's important that you explain the context. Let them know it's their opportunity to leave a legacy for generations to come. Show them why their feedback matters. Show them how it will influence the outcome. Combine your outreach with benefits. Be on campus on the days they are here. Provide a free meal. Provide gift cards. You must make it easy for them to be involved."

—Academic leadership

"When you meet students, be curious and open minded. I work in mental health, and I had to rework my approach to support our deaf and hard of hearing students. I had to work visually and speak less. I had to think critically about my framework, and I changed how I communicated. When you listen and communicate with students, you must be creative and think out-of-the-box."

—Mental health clinician

"I strongly recommend training your team on how to listen—not just hearing but listening authentically to what students are telling you. Many [practitioners] do not know how to listen, so the process runs in circles."

—Student

"Work with the student centers, and coordinate with them to partner on specific events. Find the faculty who marginalized students seek out and work with them."

—Student center staff

"When working with students, you must communicate at their level. Find the common ground. Having worked here so long, we too often use jargon and acronyms that students do not understand. Our nontraditional students may not know what to ask for, so bring them into the aspirational, and show them what's possible. It's critical that you understand where they are at. You must genuinely connect to their experiences, not at the level of theory."

—Student equity office staff



“When you engage with students, provide them with a safe space to fail. Make them feel secure. Be nonjudgmental. Go beyond what you are tasked with and give them a little extra. For example, when a student calls about a service outside of my role, I don't simply transfer them; instead, I tell them how to do it right there, I give them the number that I'm about to transfer them to in case they are disconnected, and only then do I transfer them. When you meet with students, you are not only there to learn; you are there to support them on a personal level. So, remember to give a little extra when you engage them.”

—**Student services staff**

“While the college has many great services, we struggle to have a holistic understanding of those offerings. As you begin the process, work to create cross campus collaboration, have conversations that integrate groups that are commonly siloed. Our workloads make it hard to build that holistic understanding. We are overloaded with emails. There is a unique opportunity here. Use it.”

—**Executive admin**

“The campus at Mt. SAC is intimidating. It's so big. It feels like a four-year institution. For these reasons it's important to connect with students when they are navigating the college. Really understand what it means for them to not feel intimidated, for it not to feel like they are constantly zigging and zagging and being ping ponged around.”

—**Executive admin**

“Consider the difference between fitting in and belonging. While deaf and hard of hearing students might feel included, that is not the same as them having a voice and feeling like they belong. They have different voices. Reach out in ways so they participate. Find ways to invite their participation. We must incorporate DHH students into the [process].”

—**DHH faculty**

“Student engagement often excludes student athletes because they are so busy with packed schedules. Reach student athletes. Connect with us coaches to [bring them into the process].”

—**Football coach**

“Mt. SAC 2035 must reach vocational students, like those who come to Mt. SAC to get an agricultural license and get out. Many of our students do not attend full-time. They are taking noncredit classes, working, supporting a family, and are single parents. Offer engagements at untraditional times that work for them, like evenings and nights. Provide childcare.”

—**CTE faculty**

“Attending classes and pursuing a noncredit program is difficult because I work part time to support my family. My [parent] has a disability, and I work in a restaurant the same days that my program is offered. I'm only able to participate when I'm not working, not in class or in my program. Understand what students are dealing with and adapt your outreach to suit their needs.”

—**Student**



"When working with students make sure to share highlights of Mt. SAC. There are a lot of positives, and when you connect to them, it becomes infectious. It's also important to expose students to aspirational ideas and possibilities."

**—Student**

"I recommend partnering with events at the Wellness Center. You must include outreach in Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic. We rely too heavily on our ESL office to support families who speak other languages. Find ways to connect to families when they are making decisions."

**—ESL faculty**

"Mt. SAC has strong noncredit programs. Our vocational ones are great. Tap into those as you reach students."

**—CTE faculty**

"Mt. SAC student and community engagement [needs work]. While Mt. SAC is good at reaching business leaders and the labor union, they must do better at going out into the community and sharing the offerings that the grassroots community cares about, including working people and lower income families. There is a history of secret committees where students are included only after the big decisions have been made. When students are included, there are too few of them to authentically represent the student voice. And even when the decisions are good ones, they don't have the same buy in because they were made unilaterally. Or they are made without saying the why. There is a history of not asking for student and community input. If you want this to be a successful process, then give students and community partners decision making power."

**—Board member**