

Santiago Canyon College
Student Services
Student Learning Outcomes Annual Report 2008-2009

1. Program Name:

Transfer Center

2. Program-Department Mission Statement:

Santiago Canyon College Transfer Center provides resources, services, trained specialists and counselors to assist students who are preparing to transfer to a four-year college or university.

3. Student Learning Outcome(s)

As a result of participating in a UC Essay workshop, students will be able to follow UC essay guidelines in order to draft a personal statement for the UC application.

4. Methods

The UC application process requires two personal statement essays which total 1,000 words. The combined total should not exceed 1,030 words, but also should not be significantly below 1,000 (no specific minimum number is given by the UC). The two essays should also be reasonably balanced in length. Students are given specific questions to answer, and must be sure to address these questions directly and completely, while maintaining good grammar and spelling. The combination of the specific format and the personal nature of these essays makes writing them a unique exercise which is outside the experience of most students.

In Fall of 2008, the SCC Transfer Center offered one-hour UC Essay workshops on four different dates, generating a total attendance of forty-six students. The workshops included information on the required essay formatting and suggestions for the content and structure of a successful personal statement. This content comes from UC system guidelines, individual UC campus recommendations, and SCC faculty and staff experiential knowledge. Students were asked to share drafts of their essays with a counselor and/or with Transfer Center specialists. These faculty and staff members then provided feedback to the students for revisions.

5. Implementation of Assessment Process:

Implementation was performed in partnership by Transfer Specialists and the Transfer Center Coordinator. In most cases, staff members each worked exclusively with specific students, though some students met with more than one staff member. Assessment was performed during the fall semester of 2008 utilizing a new essay feedback form designed to track key criteria for success as emphasized in the workshops. A total of seven such forms were completed by the Transfer Center staff for this study. Students also completed their own evaluation forms to give their impressions of the workshop. The students' input was then combined with the SLO assessment to gauge the quality of the workshops so that the content or format could be adjusted as needed.

6. Results

Through participation in the workshop, most students were able to successfully complete essays that met the basic UC guidelines. The most common revisions included improving the focus of the essays to better reflect the specific questions asked, making corrections to meet the specific format requirements, and making corrections in grammar and spelling.

Utilizing the essay feedback forms as a grading tool, participants scored an overall average of 4.04 out of 5.0 points possible. Specific criteria included:

Word Count: 62.5% were within acceptable length range on their first draft. This is an area in which many students expressed a desire for help in editing.

Directly answered questions: The average score was 3.2 out of 5. This is an area of ongoing emphasis for counselors and Transfer Center staff.

Statements supported with details: Students did well here, scoring 4.6 of 5 possible.

Content not repeated from application: Students were excellent at using the essay to complete the application rather than repeating content, scoring 4.7 of 5 possible.

Grammar & spelling: Despite computer spell check features and feedback from multiple reviewers, many students continue to struggle in this area, scoring only 3.7 out of 5.

Minimal use of slang/colloquialisms: Most students proved able to use appropriate language with few examples of inappropriate language, scoring 4.4 of 5.

Conciseness: This is the area in which students struggle the most in their first drafts. Participants scored only 2.9 of 5 possible, marking this as an area in need of future attention.

Originality: Students did an excellent job of telling their own stories in their own words; scoring 4.9 out of 5.

In addition, student surveys confirmed that students felt better able to complete the personal statement after attending the workshop, returning an overall workshop rating of 3.7 of 4.0 points possible. When asked to rate their confidence in writing the essay *prior* to the workshop, only 24% rated it as “excellent” or “good,” with 57% rating their confidence level as “average,” and 19% admitting to below average confidence. The confidence ratings jumped dramatically following the workshop, with 90% rating themselves in the “excellent” or “good” range, 10% claiming “average,” and none lower. This increase in confidence exactly corresponded to the responses to the question “How well did the workshop meet your needs?” 90% rated it as “excellent” or “good,” with 10% in the “average” range and none lower.

In write-in comments many students commented on the high degree of knowledge exhibited by the Transfer Center staff who presented the workshops. In the previous year,

a question was raised as to possible differences in presentation style or content among faculty and staff presenters, and how such differences may have influenced the effectiveness of the workshops. Efforts were then made to standardize the workshop content regardless of the presenter. This year's quantitative evaluation of both the students' success rates and their evaluations of the workshops allowed for analysis of such trends, but none were found, showing that the workshops were similarly effective regardless of whether the presenter was a counselor or Transfer Center staff member.

A logical question when evaluating admission essay success is to consider a correlation between successful essays and success in university admission. Unfortunately the many variables in transfer preparation and the admissions process – particularly in times of budget-driven admission decisions such as these – make such correlation impossible.

7. Decisions and Recommendations

In this second year of UC Essay SLO assessment, clear progress was made in the methodology and implementation of the workshops. A collaborative review of the previous year's study involving the Transfer Center coordinator and staff yielded numerous improvements in the presentation of the workshop, the evaluations of student essays, and the feedback process. The workshop presentations were made more consistent through use of a common PowerPoint presentation and handouts. It was concluded that the previous year's assessment method was too subjective, so the process was revised, including development of a new assessment rubric, to allow for a quantitative evaluation. Participation in the SLO increased from the previous year, but was still lower than desired, with too few staff utilizing the required assessment tools.

Recommendations for future workshops and assessment include:

- 1) The Transfer Center Coordinator will emphasize consistent use of the essay feedback form by all staff in order to improve the sample size studied
- 2) Workshop presenters should place further emphasis on the common flaws seen in first drafts, particularly the need to generate direct and concise responses to the UC's prompts and reduce word count.
- 3) Poor spelling and grammar are ongoing problems. Counselors and Transfer Center staff are not in a position to teach writing skills, but the workshop can be revised to add emphasis on utilizing all available resources, including faculty or tutors and electronic spell checking tools, to minimize these errors.

This student learning outcome study has been conducted for two years in a row, but given the overall levels of satisfaction and success with the workshop, and with the evaluation and feedback processes, this SLO study will likely be discontinued for the 2009-10 year to focus on other areas. The Transfer Center coordinator and staff will continue to utilize student feedback to refine the workshop and feedback process.