VCCCD LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

TEAM PROJECT REPORT

Increasing Financial Aid Uptake:
A Student-Centered Equity Initiative that Strengthens Institutional Bottom Line

Guadalupe Bedolla

Tamarra Coleman

Holly Correa

Keller Magenaua

Matthew Moore

Preston Pipal

Kim Hoffmans (Resource Mentor)

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Executive Summary

This project exemplifies our philosophy of *impact innovation,* that is, it sits at the nexus of doing good for students and doing well for the institution. We propose developing locally-produced, culturally and linguistically targeted digital content that will increase the number of our students who receive Pell Grants and other financial aid. Research has shown that as many as twenty percent of California college students who are eligible for Pell Grants and other financial aid are not receiving it (Wheelhouse). One of the greatest barriers appears to be student misconceptions about financial aid. It is well demonstrated that when students have adequate aid for the total cost of attendance, they are significantly more likely to complete their educational programs.

Additionally, under the 'new funding formula' for California Community Colleges, the institution stands to benefit both from improved student outcomes and from increased numbers of students receiving Pell Grants. Traditionally, California's community college funding has been based, solely, on student contact hours (i.e. FTES or full-time equivalent students). This model was changed by the state's 2018-2019 budget plan. Under the new system, funding for community college districts will be based on three factors: student access (60%), student equity (20%), and student success (20%). One outcome of the new model is that revenues will be partially based on the district's unduplicated headcounts of Pell, AB19, and California College Promise Grant recipients. The district will also receive additional allocations for Pell students who complete specific metrics (e.g. earning a certificate or associates degree for transfer).

Our project focuses on increasing the number of students in the district who apply for and complete their financial aid applications. Reducing economic barriers is a proven method to increase student success for community college students.   While increasing this success, we are also, potentially, enhancing revenues for the district by increasing the number of Pell, AB19, and California College Promise Grant recipients. To accomplish this goal, we propose an awareness campaign by creating videos that debunk common financial aid myths and assist in the rollout of the financial Aid software called CampusLogic. Our intention is to develop culturally relevant videos targeted to students who find barriers in completing their financial aid applications.

Introduction

Mission
Our mission is to increase the awareness and usage of financial aid resources on all three campuses. Reducing economic barriers is a proven method to increase student success for community college students. We intend to provide culturally relevant content that reflects the needs of our student body.

Objectives

1. Promote access to educational opportunities for students by providing culturally relevant information about the financial aid process.

2. Support student success at the Colleges by increasing the number of students who apply for and complete their financial aid packages.

3. Maintain the fiscal stability of the Colleges and the District Administrative Center by maximizing revenue allocations under the new California Community College funding model.

Committees/Work Groups
District Technical Review Workgroup–Student Services (DTRW-SS)
Institutional Research Advisory Committee (IRAC)
Instructional Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC)

Project Philosophy
Our philosophy for this project is that IMPACT INNOVATION will help the Ventura County Community College District realize its mission. We borrow this concept from the growing trend of ''impact investing," which identifies areas where financial returns can also generate social and environmental impact. In this project, we use data to identify an area where small investments to increase the number of students who complete financial aid applications can have a positive impact on both students and the fiscal stability of our institutions.

<u>Belief Statements</u>

We believe that access to information should not be a barrier to students applying for financial aid.

We believe that financial aid can help close equity gaps by improving access to higher education.

We believe that equity in education is not only possible but also our responsibility as faculty, staff, and administrators.

We believe that being student-centered is in the best interest of our students and our institution.

Background

While the California community college system offers some of the lowest tuition and many students receive tuition waivers, tuition costs account for only about 10% of the total cost of attendance. It is increasingly clear that, for many community college students, financial obstacles persist. Increasingly, students are facing housing and food insecurity. Covering basic educational costs like textbooks is an additional burden. A 2016 study by The Institute for College Access and Success found that many California community college students take fewer units than they would like to because they are balancing work and family responsibilities with their course load. Housing accounts for as much as 43% of their costs, and homelessness among community college students is on the rise. Students are working longer hours just to feed themselves or to purchase textbooks. Many students are struggling or are unable to meet these basic needs.

According to the research, students working long hours to cover basic needs are less likely to achieve their educational goals. Students who need to prioritize work over school tend to take fewer units. The research shows, however, that students are as much as three times more likely to complete their programs if they are attending full-time. Furthermore, students who have sufficient aid to cover the cost of attendance, are more likely to complete their programs of study.

Unfortunately, many students are not receiving the aid for which they are eligible. This is, mostly, due to the complexity of the application process. There are separate policies and procedures at the federal and state level, notwithstanding, the policies and procedures students have to navigate at the college level. Students are expected to move from one process to the other, but the systems are not well coordinated and connected. Studies have demonstrated that many find applying for financial aid to be so daunting and confusing, they may not apply at all. In 2016, The Campaign for College Opportunity published their one-year survey of graduating California high school students. They found that over $340 million of available aid went unused by eligible students who did not complete the FAFSA.

According to a study conducted by the Wheelhouse Center for Community College Leadership and Research at the UC Davis School of Education, completing the FAFSA is often the first of many hurdles. In their study, they examined receipt of Pell Grant aid among California community college students who had already completed the FAFSA. They found that more than twenty percent of California community college students who demonstrate eligibility for Pell Grants do not complete the often-required next steps in the financial aid process, so they never receive these or other grants. For the Pell Grants alone, this equates to a single semester loss of roughly $130 million in grant aid for California community college students. This is money that students could use to meet their basic living and educational expenses that are not covered by tuition/fee waivers.

If adequate aid is a determiner for student success, then working to increase the number of students who submit the FAFSA and who go on to complete the financial aid process is an investment worth making. The Wheelhouse study identified three major areas that community college leaders could target to improve Pell Grant uptake rates:

1. Establish campus policies and provide resources to help students navigate and complete the financial aid verification process.
2. Ensure that students are informed and understand their eligibility for financial aid.
3. Address the possibility that students may try to "save" their financial aid for their transfer to a four-year university.

Improving our communication with students about financial aid is a critical component in meeting our students' needs, thus improving their chances of success.

Project Overview

In order to increase motivation and communication with students, we are recommending short instructional or advertising video, 1-2 minutes in length. We are proposing a four-stage process for creating these instructional videos.

Stage 1: *Storyboarding and Scripting*.   The value of a well scripted storyboard that contains scenes, prop needs, locations, and dialogue that meet the educational goals needed cannot be underestimated. After its creation by local experts, it will need approval from various constituents such as financial aid officers and other relevant administrators (i.e. Deans and Vice Presidents with related supervision and responsibilities). An approval team should be created to evaluate the script and give feedback.

Time/Work Commitment: *2 Hours Creation for each storyboard*
Calendar Time: *give a week for people to approval*

Stage 2: *Directing and Filming*. Selecting the right representatives to fill the roles in the script is vital to the process and reaching the target audience. Key local students, administrators, faculty, and staff are preferred. There will also be a need for scheduling out these filming sessions or scenes. The above approved script will help guide the director and filming team so that the scenes of the film can be created and filmed independently.

Time/Work Commitment: *8 Hours of video directing and Filming*
Calendar Time: *scheduling these specific hours might need 2/3 weeks of meeting*

Stage 3: *Editing, Voice Overs, Flow of Video, Educational Goals.* During the process of editing, the editor/director will have the flexibility to create the video as per the above script. They will have access to the extremely organized and labeled files There might be a need to add educational goals, screen shots, stills with voiceovers, music, etc. to create a motivational product for the targeted audience.

Time/Work Commitment: *8 hours of video editing*

Calendar: *Two days but needs reviewed by team before release*

Stage 4: *Marketing, Playing, Hosting, the Video*. Once the final approved video is ready for distribution, marketing, playing, and hosting the video needs to occur. It can be hosted on the website, tweeted via official accounts, played at athletic events, and distributed in creative ways. A team of marketing experts can help distribute the video to educate the public in our various campus events, classes, and other venues.

Implementation Plan

<u>Stakeholders</u>

Key stakeholders such as financial aid officers, enrollment management, students, marketing, counselors and faculty are necessary in the development of the videos.

<u>Timeline</u>

Phase 1: Initiation 1-2 months
- Present data to stakeholder
- Authorize Project
- Meet with all colleges

Phase 2: Planning 2-4 months
- Recruit staff and students for videos
- Identify possible IT issues
- Allocate necessary funds
- Develop marketing and roll out campaign for videos and CampusLogic

Phase 3: Production 2-4 months
- Produce financial aid videos
- CampusLogic training for Financial Aid Staff

Phase 4: Test 2-3 months
- Marketing and roll out campaign
- IT issues

Phase 5: Go Live
- Roll out financial aid videos
- Roll out CampusLogic

Financial Plan and Budget

Upon review of FATV individual college budgets, and an initial meeting with the VCCCD district marketing division, the following two options for production are as follows:

Option I

- Ventura pays $18,500 annually as part of a 3 year contract. They have about 60 custom video credits left.
- Moorpark pays $18,500 annually as part of a 3 year contract. They have about 27 custom video credits left.
- Oxnard pays $14,000 annually as part of 3 year contract. They have no custom video credits.

As a company, FATV is phasing out customized videos, however Ventura and Moorpark have some grandfathered into their contract.

Option II

- Work with VCCCD District Marketing Team to roll-out a financial aid video series. The total cost for 3 (1-2) minute videos is $1,500.00 total.

Communication Plan

Because the literature shows that personal contact and one-on-one support positively impacts student completion of financial aid process, we recommend placing strong emphasis on educating all members of the community. Follow the district communications plan for information distribution to faculty, administration, classified personnel, students and k-12 partners. In addition, we will notify local and district relevant avenues of communication such as the following.

Faculty: Academic Senate Announcements and Professional Development Announcements Advisory meetings to share the roll-out and to provide for feedback

Administration: Emails, Dean Meetings, Cabinet Meetings

Classified Staff: Classified Senate Announcements and Professional Development Meetings

Student Body: Announcements in Canvas, on the web site, via student emails, and portal announcements as well as advertising at major events.

Recommendation: Participate in the district website revision process to best leverage this marketing resources.

Data Overview and Analysis

As we noted above, an estimated twenty percent of California Community college students who demonstrate eligibility for Pell Grants are not receiving that aid because they do not complete the financial aid process. Not only are our students leaving financial aid on the table, but under the new California community college funding model, institutions will be losing money, as well.

Under the new funding model, 20% of total systemwide revenue to districts will be based on their unduplicated headcounts of Pell, AB540, and Promise Grant 25 years and older+ students. These groups represent the disadvantaged populations whom the California Community College System strives to serve. Each community college district is predicted to receive $1,526 in funding for each Pell/AB540 student they serve. Pell/AB540 students who are age 25 or older and eligible for the Promise Grant program will generate an additional $1,526 per student in funding from the state.

The new funding model also stipulates that 20% of total systemwide revenue to districts will be based on their performance in various outcome metrics. Metrics are weighted with different point values (e.g. an associate degree for transfer is worth 4 points while an 18+ unit certificate is worth 2 point). All outcomes are funded at $876 per point with Pell students generating an additional $660 per point. To better understand this aspect of the new funding model, let's consider two hypothetical students. Student A does not receive financial aid and completes an associate degree for transfer. This student would generate $3,504 in revenue (4 points x $876/point). Student B is a Pell recipient who completes an associate degree for transfer. Based on the outcome metrics and the student's status, the district would receive $6,144 in funding ([4 points x $876/point] + [4 points x $660/point]). Because the new funding model places increased emphasis on the success of Pell/AB540 students, it is in the VCCCD's interest to ensure that all eligible students complete their FAFSA and Pell Grant applications.

For this project, we used the 20% incompletion rate provided by the Wheelhouse study to estimate the number of VCCCD students who do not complete their FAFSA / Pell Grant

application (Fig 1.). Our preliminary data suggests that up to 2,068 students in our district may be eligible for Pell Grants but did not receive one for the 2015-2016 academic year. Under the new funding model, these potential Pell recipients could generate up to $3.16 million in new revenue per year simply by completing the federal aid application process and receive a Pell Grant (Fig 2). This total does not include additional money generated through the outcome metrics portion of the new funding model (See Appendix for breakdown per college).
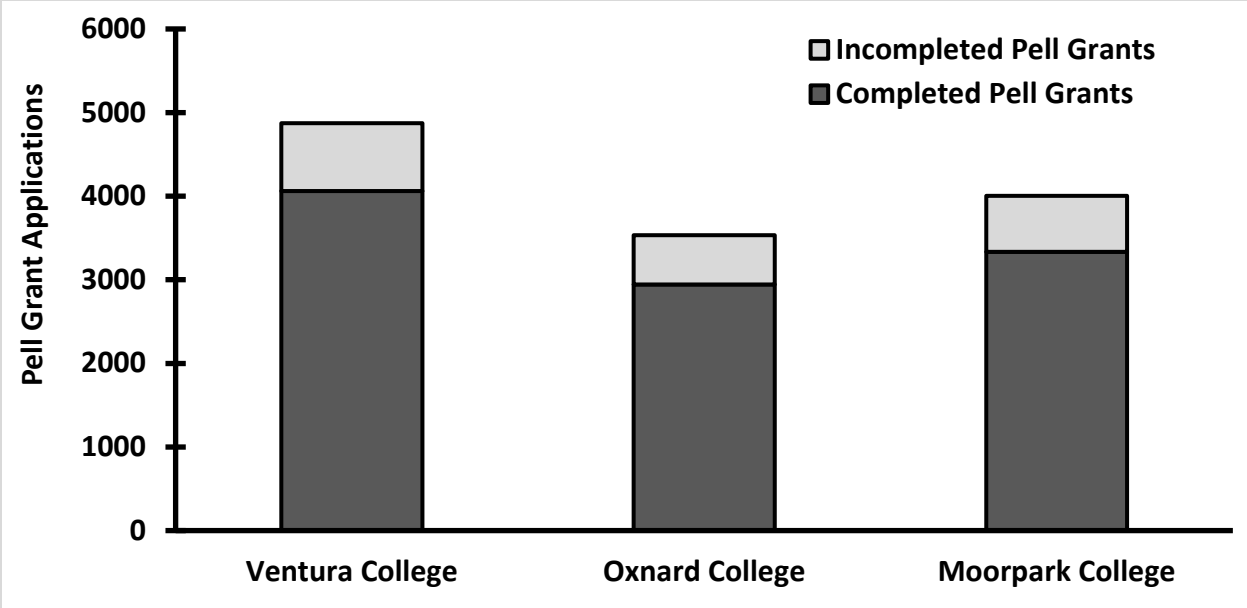
Figure 1. Estimated Pell Grant applications by campus for academic year 2015-2016. The number of completed Pell Grants at each college was estimated by multiplying the total number of students enrolled for Fall 2015 by the percentage of students who were awarded Pell Grants. The average incompletion rate for California community college students (20%) was used to estimate the number of students on each campus who were eligible for but did not complete the aid application process to receive a Pell Grant application. We estimate that up to 2,068 VCCCD students were eligible for but did not receive the Pell because they did not complete the aid application process.
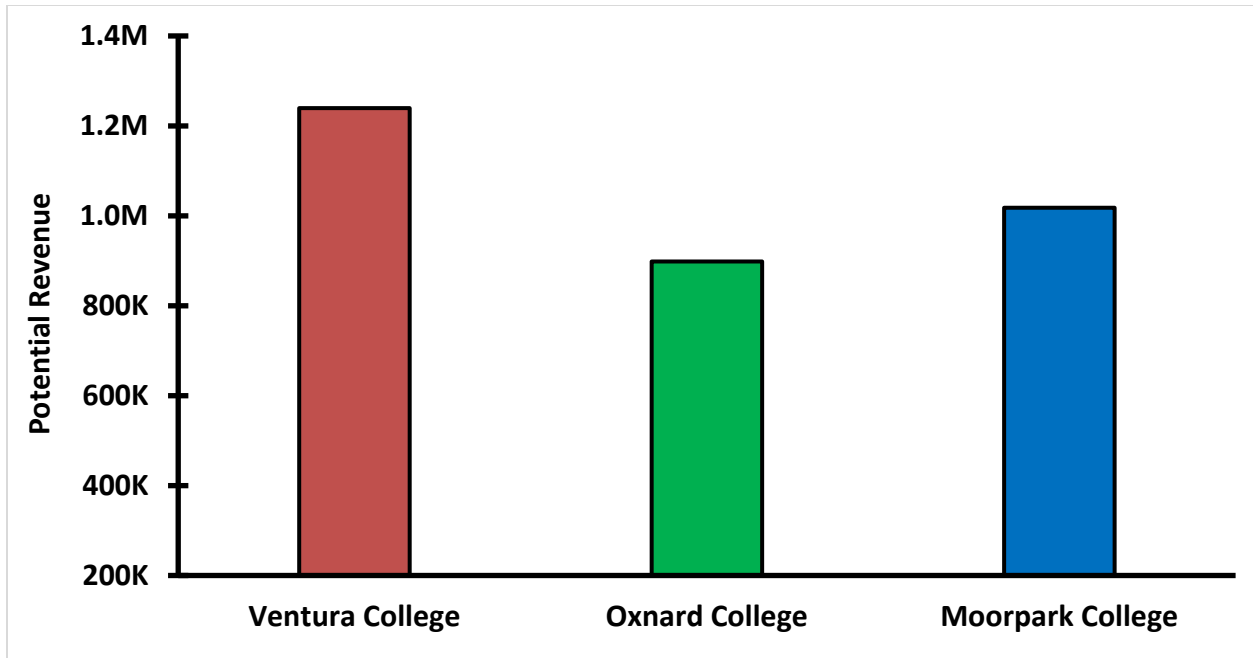
Figure 2. Potential revenue available under the new funding model for increasing the number of Pell Grant recipients. Under the new California Community College funding model, each Pell Grant student will be funded at the rate of $1,526. Potential revenues were calculated by multiplying the estimated number of incomplete Pell Grant applications for 2015-2016 by $1,526. These estimates do not include additional revenues generated by Pell Grant students who complete certain outcome metrics (e.g. completing a certificate or Associate's Degree program). We estimate that up to $3,155,787 in new revenue could be generated by increasing the completion rate for Pell Grant applications.

Risk/Benefit Analysis

Benefits

Students: more students receiving aid and receiving increased aid to help cover total cost of attendance is expected to increase completion and decrease time to degree

Institution: fiscal benefit of increasing number of Pell Grant recipients and of improving completion rates. Supports institution wide mission, vision, and values.

Risks

Institution: Data may overestimate the increase of students who would receive Pell Grants through increases in application completions. As with the Wheelhouse study, students who appear eligible might not be eligible for Pell Grant aid.

Outcomes

List planned outcomes. For each outcome, measure(s) that will confirm success or that the outcomes have been met.

Outcome #1

Increase the number of students accessing information on the process of completing their financial aid application.

Measure: track the number of students/families who watch the videos.

Outcome #2

Increase the overall number of students who complete the financial aid process and maximize their financial awards.

Measure: overall data to determine that students are completing the process and accessing all available aid.

Outcome #3

Increase the number of target student populations who complete the financial aid process and maximize their financial awards.

Measure: disaggregate data and determine if targeting populations are completing the process and accessing all available aid.

Appendix A

Table 1. Estimated Pell Grant applications by campus for academic year 2015-2016. The number of completed Pell Grants at each college was estimated by multiplying the total number of students enrolled for Fall 2015 by the percentage of students who were awarded Pell Grants. The average incompletion rate for California community college students (20%) was used to estimate the number of students on each campus who were eligible for but did not complete a Pell Grant application. We estimate that up to 2,068 students were eligible for but did not complete the Pell Grant application.

	Enrollment	% of Students Receiving Pell Grant	Estimated # of Pell Grants Awarded
Ventura College	12,996	25%	3249
Oxnard College	7,136	33%	2355
Moorpark College	14,043	19%	2668

Table 2. Estimated potential revenue from increasing Pell Grant completion rates for academic year 2015-2016. The average incompletion rate for California community college students (20%) was used to estimate the number of students on each campus who were eligible for but did not complete a Pell Grant application. To calculate the potential revenue, the estimated number of incomplete Pell Grants was multiplied by $1,526.

	Estimated # of Pell Grants Available	Estimated # of Incomplete Pell Grants	Potential Revenue
Ventura College	4,061	812	$1,239,494
Oxnard College	2,944	589	$898,387
Moorpark College	3,335	667	$1,017,907