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IMPROVING STUDENT SUCCESS AT CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Participatory Research Guiding Action and Innovation

 By Ted Younglove, Director of Institutional Research and Planning, and Sharon A. Lowry, Vice President, Academic Affairs Antelope Valley College

In the spring of 2011, California Community Colleges find themselves facing accreditation and accountability pressure to raise student success and completion, and increasing numbers of students enrolling with skills below college level. The key to increas-

ing student success in this environment is to use data and analysis as drivers of campus-wide assessment and innovation. Innovation is necessary for both efficiency and creating new solutions to help students succeed.

Honest and vigorous assessment is needed to improve programs, student learning, and operations within the college. Fact-based decision making is at the core of making a sustainable rubric for campus operation focused on continuous improvement of student success. Existing data can be maximized, and where necessary, new research and data col-

> lection can be used to fill gaps in knowledge with a focus on driving student success.

At Antelope Valley College we have developed a research office that is described as team driven and participatory. The research office staff and/or the director serve on all major committees, with particular focus on student success and equity, basic skills, matriculation, assessment, and student learning outcomes, which are the key campus entities tasked with improving student success. Much like guides on a river raft, the researchers are helping to steer the rafts through rapids, dealing with problems as they occur with oars in hand paddling along

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

VIDEO: VISION 2020: COLLEGE COMPLETION AND THE AMERICAN FUTURE

Moderated by the host of NBC's Meet the Press David Gregory, this panel addressed solutions to help transform American education and meet President Obama's ambitious education goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. Panelists included: The President of the University of Maryland Baltimore County Freeman Hrabowski; the Chancellor of District of Columbia Public Schools Michelle Rhee; and College Board President Gaston Caperton. Click here to watch the video.

with the rest of the team.

The downside of this model is that it takes time - time to spend on the committees, time to understand the problems the committee is trying to solve, and time to improve results and guide the committee from proficiency to sustainability. The benefits however go both ways, as researchers gain a better understanding of issues, operations, and campus structures and the campus gains a better understanding of research. The information flows in both directions, and because researchers are integrated into the team, campus processes rapidly become highly data driven and assessment and documentation become institutionalized in college planning for student success.

One successful project that came directly from this model of campus integration of research was a project to improve success of basic skills students. Research for the Basic Skills Committee had identified basic skills students as one of the campus groups most in danger of not being successful. Previous research efforts had produced interesting results, but little organizational change.

While working with the Basic Skills Committee and the Matriculation Committee, the director of research, through active participation in committee brainstorming, developed an idea to use historical data to help students select courses to be taken simultaneously with the basic skills courses that were appropriate for the placement level of the student. Working with the committees, the research office pro-

duced 'probability sheets', one-page lists of courses and the probability of passing the courses. For the results to be used, the team had found that it had to be easy to select statistics for the level of proficiency of the students, and for the results to be in a format easily discussed with students. The project received an award from the Research and Planning Group of California and is being adopted by other colleges statewide.

Participatory research can improve student success directly through innovative programs that deliver help to students who need it, and indirectly through improvements in the campus use of data, assessment, and continuous evaluation and documentation. The time invested in committee participation promotes better understanding of research by the campus community, and in better research through improved understanding of needs and operations by the researchers.

Research continues to be driven by data requests, necessary reports, and deliverables to outside agencies, but the integrated approach improves general understanding of those results as well as generating new research ideas and programs. Innovative programs are developed and tested, assessed and improved in a continuous cycle. Having the research team grab "paddles" and hop into the "rafts" can help guide the team through rough waters, and will let the campus speed along in smoother times.



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AWARD WINNING RESEARCH

STUDENTS WHO TRANSFER TO FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES VS. STUDENTS WHO TRANSFER TO NONPROFIT COLLEGES

Dr. Alice van Ommeren recently received the 2011 Mertes Award for Excellence in Community College Research at the annual ACCCA Conference in Long Beach. The prestigious award recognized van Ommeren's dissertation "New Transfer Partners: California Community Colleges and Private For-profit Four-year Institutions" completed at the University of the Pacific.

Intrigued by the growing number of for-profit colleges and the increasing conversation on their role in higher education, van Ommeren sought to compare the demographic characteristics, academic experiences and socioeconomic factors of those community college students who transfer to for-profit institutions to those that transfer to public and nonprofit institutions. This topic is especially important because transfer remains one of the critical functions of community colleges and the for-profit four-year sector provides an additional choice for community college students at a time when public choices are increasingly limited.

Most transfer research focuses on students transitioning from community colleges to four-year institutions, without differentiation between sectors. Dr. Caroline Sheldon (2009) conducted the most relevant research related to community college transfers to for-profit, four-year institutions. This

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 3)

current study expands on her work by using a more recent timeframe and uses different variables related to academic experiences.

Rather than focus on institutional-level characteristics, it builds on existing community college research that uses socioeconomic variables from census-level data to determine student characteristics. The study applied descriptive and logistic regression to a dataset of students identified through the Management Information System of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) who transferred in 2007-08. Transfer destination was determined by a student data match with the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC).

"One of the theoretical approaches for interpreting the complex factors associated with college choice processes uses societal models, which included the influence of sociological and environmental factors and social background characteristics," said Ommeren. "These theories do not adequately explain the increasing number of older, ethnically diverse, and working students, as well as the growth of the for-profit sector as a four-year destination but a model influenced by social factors was the most appropriate for examining our demographically and academically diverse student population."

The descriptive analysis concluded that approximately 12% of transfer students continued their education at a for-profit four-year institution in 2007-08, a proportion that has doubled over the past decade. Logistic regression analysis allows for simultaneous testing and modeling of the demographic characteristics, academic experiences, and socioeconomic factors of students who transfer to for-profit four-year institutions and compares them to students who transfer to other institutions.

Of these three broad categories, academic experiences have the most influence. Although students with lower GPAs were more likely to transfer to for-profits, part-time attendance at the community college was found to be the most predictive among the academic experiences. If academic experiences were held constant or equal, demographic characteristics still influenced transfer to for-profit institutions. This is especially true for students who are African American, over the age of 25, and female.

"The socioeconomic factors overall were found to provide some influence on a student's decision to transfer to a for-profit institution, with the most notable difference being students who receive financial aid," said Ommemren. "Students seeking a baccalaureate at for-profit institutions also tended to come from lower average incomes and educational levels, and from neighborhoods with slightly higher unemployment and poverty rates.

Community colleges have a variety of roles within higher education, including serving as a pathway towards obtaining a bachelor degree, especially for underrepresented minority, first-generation, and low-income students. For this reason, it is important that practitioners understand

the overall impact and consequences of the growth of forprofit institutions on the transfer choice of community college students. This study provides a foundation for this discussion.

The results indicate that there are differences between community college students who transferred to for-profit four-year institutions versus those who transferred to public or nonprofit four-year institutions. If these students are choosing for-profits, we have expanded our education sector. If the students are displaced from the public or non-profit sector, there is a responsibility for us to learn more about the reason this is occurring. What is more important, if we are creating a new pathway for students who might remain academically unprepared, knowing about the short-and long-term outcomes is critical.

CAREER LADDERS PROJECT: RESEARCH FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges adopted a major policy statement calling for a comprehensive, statewide Career Ladders Initiative (CLP). The nonprofit organization aims to improve post-secondary career pathway access and completion for underserved populations. The CLP pursues policy initiatives and makes research-based recommendations regarding career ladder programs in California community colleges.



The CLP also provides strategic advice and technical assistance to community colleges and their workforce partners in building regional career pathway and bridge programs. Recent projects include work on the career pathway in process technologies for the energy, petrochemical, and water treatment employers in Contra Costa County, and the regional biotechnology career pathway system in the greater Bay Area. With the sponsorship of the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, the CLP is currently developing Gateway programs offering bridges to college and careers for disadvantaged youth and young adults.

Linda Collins, CLP Executive Director of the Career Ladders Project, has created several research-based presentations regarding California Community College students and how they can be successful. She gave a presentation on April 9, 2011 at Fullerton College called A 2020 Vision for Student Success.

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FIVE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES MAKE COUNTRY'S TOP 120 LIST











Coastline Community College, Santa Barbara City College, Allan Hancock College, San Joaquin Delta College and Mt. San Antonio College were recently honored by the nonprofit Aspen Institute. Each was selected from 1,200 institutions nationwide as one of the top 120 community colleges in the United States. The top college and two or three runners-up will be selected in December and will split a \$1 million award.

"Community colleges have been remarkable points of access for many students...and that's something to really celebrate," said Josh Wyner, executive director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. "But in the last couple of years we have been realizing that access isn't enough, and that many of these students don't complete a degree or transfer. So the question is, what is it going to take for us to improve the graduation rates for students?"

"The Coastline faculty and staff were surprised, but

extremely delighted, to learn that our college has been selected as one of only five CA community colleges eligible to compete for the prestigious Aspen Institute Award," Loretta P. Adrian, Ph.D., President of Coastline Community College. "We are proud to be recognized for high completion rates towards degrees, especially among our military men and women and their spouses, and the adult population that we serve."

"Our faculty and staff, who are deeply committed to student success and who work closely with our students in person and on-line deserve all the credit for exemplary teaching and student services practices. We look forward to submitting our application for the next stage of the competition. This validation comes at a critical time, as we are in the process of completing our educational master plan and deepening our commitment to student retention, persistence, completion, and transfer."











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ACCCA MENTEE CLASS: NAVIGATING THE STORM

By Charity Bowles, Ericka Paddock, and Manuel Perez
 Edited by Kim Harrell and Deborah Mann

While traveling to our spring retreat, the ACCCA Mentee Class of 2011-2012 was reminded that journeying during uncertain weather is particularly challenging and that success is all a matter of perspective. As we approached our three-day retreat center in the foothills of Northern California, one thing was clear - we were traveling through the storm, literally, amidst the haze and gloom of torrential downpours. Despite the blustery weather, our spirit and energy could not be dampened. The mentees were determined to weather the storm ahead for the opportunity to learn new ways to lead our colleges through the changing landscape of the California Community College system.

One of the more resounding themes throughout the retreat was that in every storm, there are distinct possibilities for cre-

ating new partnerships and strengthening relationships. When we encourage the heart, evoking why we chose this profession and why we LOVE our jobs, we become active agents of growth and change for our students, ourselves, our colleagues, our institutions and our system. We MUST sincerely SAY THANK YOU and recognize the contribution of all the daily rock stars on our campuses working the front lines. We MUST lift our gazes from total deficits to our STRENGTHS by honoring the gifts we all bring to the table to improve students' futures. We MUST TAKE CARE of ourselves, our colleagues, and our students-we are MORE than the sum of all our parts. Appreciation and passion are fundamental. We MUST REMEMBER that LOVE has everything to do with surviving rough storms.

We must also appreciate the importance of communication. Although often overlooked, communication is critical to the success and effectiveness of college administrators. Those who have mastered the art of expression demonstrate the following survival skills:

- Listen more and talk less. Most people are either talking or getting ready to talk. The key to carrying out the thoughts and vision of an organization is to LISTEN MORE and TALK LESS. This fosters a sense of trust and creates opportunities for meaningful dialogue in tough times.
- Honor "the ghosts." Every position at every college has a history that goes back for years and maybe even decades.



Since administrative jobs are people-centered and sometimes people hold on to the past, it's in your best interest to do your research on the "ghosts" living in your organization. Once you understand who they are and how they impact your day to day operations, you're in a better position to adapt your communication style to the situations.

• Delivery is often more important than content. Communication experts say only 10% of our communication is what we say, 30% is represented by our sounds, and 60% is derived from our body language. As a leader, it is your responsibility to ensure that your actions communicate honesty and integrity at all times.

The clouds parted just long enough for us to share and learn from each other's experiences. As the retreat quickly wound down, dark storm clouds rolled in and gusts of wind rattled the landscape. Uncertain weather are the trend these days, not unlike those we face in our colleges today. However, this is a time to brave the challenges ahead, envision the same scenarios in a different light, and once again turn towards the wind to find the most effective way to enact change. Our retreat began and concluded with the worst storms in Northern California this season. However, the mentee class was reminded that if you hunker down long enough in the spirit of learning from and working with one another, you will see light again and brave the storm successfully.

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LEADERSHIP MATTERS: NURTURING A CULTURE OF EVIDENCE

- By Patti Ross, Educational Consultant

Over the past decade, most leaders in the California Community Colleges have started to build a culture of evidence across their campuses as the best path to improving learning and making effective decisions. One early clarion call for routinely adding student learning outcomes and assessment practices as part of the norm at each community college was the updated accreditation standards presented in 2002 by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. In 2006, the commission report A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education added to the conversation, championing the use of evidence in decision making and the transparency of data as methods to be used to heighten accountability.

The ultimate goal of the increased use of research is to provide appropriate data that can be used effectively to make the best decisions in all areas of operation. Completing the full research-improvement cycle is the challenge. Seybert (2002) offers this explanation: "If assessment results are not used for improvement, the time, effort, and resources used to implement the assessment process and obtain assessment results are wasted" (in Bers & Calhoun, p. 61). To address this challenge, most colleges and/or districts throughout the California Community Colleges have hired researchers to help collect, analyze and share the data that will help improve student learning and enhance effective decision making.

Institutional Researchers

As these research professionals started working on campuses, they were tackling numerous projects, many that had been waiting for attention for years. As colleges work to build a culture of evidence data are the key. The researchers put their time and energy into such tasks as correcting and reporting state data, generating student profiles for such projects as the basic skills initiative, and providing in-house data on enrollment trends to help administrators build an effective and responsive class schedule. Other projects would include but are not limited to setting up campus/district data mining efforts, preparing standardized reports, validating assessment (placement) instruments, serving on crucial campus committees, and designing specialized projects that more and more require trend analysis and disaggregation of data to best understand and try to help target populations.

When I worked at Bakersfield College in the Kern Community College District, a campus research office and a district research office were both available. The professionals in those offices were informed and responsive, but they were also busy and backlogged. Research projects needed to be placed on an official to-do list, if the data needed were going to be addressed. I doubt if BC and KCCD were alone in having more research that needed to be done than researchers to do it.

For most community colleges, as the culture of evidence is embraced, more and more research opportunities come to mind. But ongoing budget constraints dictate that more and more dollars cannot simply be allocated to permanent research efforts. Other pathways to building the culture of evidence need to be followed.

Faculty Driven Classroom Assessments Techniques

Fortunately, not all research needs the immediate input of the institutional researcher, especially some of the research that would have the most direct impact on improving student learning. Hunter Boylan, Director of the National Center for Developmental Education and Professor of Higher Education at Appalachian State University, visited the Bakersfield College campus in 2006 to oversee a campuswide basic skills review as the first step in improving service to basic skills students across campus. During my conversations with him at that time, we often talked about what staff development activity would best help faculty improve student learning in their classrooms. For Hunter, if funding were tight and the campus was limited to one workshop, the best suggestion was introducing faculty to CATs (Classroom Assessment Techniques). These techniques help the faculty intervene in the students' learning process and immediately use the data to improve the next day's lessons.

CATs are fully explained in the book of the same name by Thomas Angelo and Pat Cross: Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers. The interventions are numerous and deceptively simple. Each intervention takes just a few minutes for the students to complete, and a few minutes for the faculty member to review. The key to the success of these interventions is the quick faculty feedback that allows for immediate changes, if needed, and initiates an ongoing classroom dialog about learning. The numerous examples in the book work across all disciplines and are presented by faculty practitioners. These interventions have been around for years, but they are not yet fully embraced on every campus.

One example of a CAT is the "One-Minute Paper." Students at the end of a class period are asked to anonymously write for one minute addressing some specific topic, such as "What were the top three concepts introduced or mastered

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today?" If a faculty member thinks the top concepts were A, B, and C, but the students unanimously discuss concept Z, there is a problem! More realistically, students will identify only two of the three concepts, also identifying a learning problem. The next class can start with a needed review in response to the students' feedback about their learning. If the students "got it" and all (or most) identified concepts A, B. and C, then the teacher can say, "Terrific job! You really learned what we were dealing with yesterday. Today we will move on to applying those concepts."

Either way, the dialog is there. The students see that the teacher cares if they learn and the teacher can be confident the learning is taking place. This is the sort of classroom research that can immediately improve student learning, even though it does not tabulate data and does not require support of the official research team. It may be an example of what Einstein had in mind when he said, "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." Although not tabulated per se, these CATs are still powerful interventions that provide data that can immediately be used to improve learning—which is the ultimate goal.

Other Research Projects

As the culture of evidence grows, the perceived need for research will likely expand beyond the capabilities of the research office. For one thing, these extra research projects often surface on short notice and need to be addressed immediately. The research professionals can only do so much with their time, energy and budget. Similarly, these extra projects—while not often huge—are not simply based in one classroom and thereby controlled by one faculty member. When I worked at Bakersfield College, these extra projects often could be addressed with a well-crafted survey. Given I had developed my survey-design skills while working on my dissertation which included an extensive self-designed campus climate survey, I would often volunteer to help create whatever survey was needed.

As a dean, I was able to help oversee the appropriateness of each project to make certain students or staff were not misused in the process; that research protocols requiring anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were honored; and that the survey questions provided the answers needed in a way that could be effectively analyzed. I used SurveyMonkey.com, but there are many services available that provide help in creating, housing and analyzing surveys. Two others are Zoomerang.com and freeonlinesurveys.com. I knew SurveyMonkey from my dissertation work and appreciated its ease of use, wide range of design options, data storage and analysis capabilities, and confidentiality that could be heightened by additional encryption features. Initially, I used my personal account to produce the surveys, but—as more requests came forward—conversations started about which office would eventually purchase an institutional account.

The surveys covered a range of topics: The Bakersfield College Survey: Mission and Overall Effectiveness collected

campus feedback that helped complete an accreditation self study report. The California Community College CDC: A General Survey collected statewide information about staffing and wages in the centers for use in a district program review. "The College Council Survey" collected campus feedback from 165 respondents that helped the Council make decisions about campus goals. A group of student services professionals wanted to improve the services being made available to students on probation, but they realized they first needed to know if the current promotional activities were working. Thus, they created a pair of surveys—one for employees and one for students—to see what services were known to be available for students on probation and how those services were rated. The need for all of these surveys surfaced on short notice, and each specific survey (design, collection, and analysis) was fully completed within a couple weeks.

Of course, not every customized survey produces useful results, but even that feedback can be helpful. For example, a small group of faculty wanted to initiate a service learning project on campus. They created a survey, expecting many colleagues to sign on as participants. Instead, they only heard back from 17 colleagues and most of them said, "What's service learning?" Although disappointed, the survey was not really a failure; the results helped the original team realize they needed to provide some informational sessions and be more specific on the project parameters before colleagues would join them in their endeavor. It certainly was better to have completed the survey than to have just started the project. Although it was prudent for my office to help with this survey, it would not have been the best use of the researcher's time.

One student success project made extensive use of customized surveys. The project idea surfaced in early May 2008, when a group of faculty (full-time and adjunct) attended a state basic skills training session and decided on a student success project that they wanted to implement at the start of fall 2008. Basically, they would develop 10-15 supplemental workshops to offer for students outside of class that would help students develop and review necessary academic skills. Two adjuncts were developing the materials for the cornerstone workshop that would introduce students to the demands of the academic culture. To confirm what content should be included in the workshop, they surveyed colleagues to confirm expectations and to solicit feedback and ideas.

By early August the full range of workshops were developed utilizing active learning strategies. A delivery calendar had been prepared, with each workshop being offered several times; often those presenting the workshops were different than those who developed them. Part of the development process was devoted to how to collect feedback on the workshops to assess them for effectiveness, so improvements could be made the next semester. One survey asked

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students to rate each workshop and to make suggestions for improvement; rather than the feedback staying only with the original presenter, all feedback from all workshops were collated through the online survey process. The data could be sorted by workshop title or reviewed as a complete package. Presenters were also asked to complete a survey each time they offered the session, capturing the subtle distinctions evident between the various groups of students.

The data from both surveys were reviewed along with the attendance records in order to make changes in the workshops offered, the materials used, and the scheduling options made available each semester. Then new surveys were created for the next semester, so the improvement cycle could continue. Some of the surprising feedback came from the students who asked for such specifics as longer workshops on punctuation as well as new workshops on topics the faculty had never even considered. The first semester, close to 500 students were served, but that number grew to nearly 1000 by the next semester. One additional feedback loop sought feedback from those who referred their students to the workshops to gather reports on how and why they announced the workshops to the students and whether student behavior was perceived to have changed once the students attended. Versions of these original workshops are still being offered today.

Keep Research Momentum Going

As the culture of evidence builds on each campus, more and more research requests will surface. If the research office does not exist or does not have the resources (human or fiscal) to meet all the demands, then other avenues need to be explored to keep the momentum going. If faculty and staff see the need for evidence to determine the best way to improve student learning, effective leaders do not want to have to say, "Sorry, we cannot help you complete that research." The goal is to keep alive and active on campus the "intellectual curiosity about what and how our students learn" (Maki, 2004, p. 2).

Empowering faculty to control individualized classroom research is one avenue to pursue. Another is to make available customized surveys that can be designed and implemented with a quick turnaround time. There are many other avenues as well, and each campus will find its own pathways. The goal is to keep the momentum going, so the culture of evidence truly becomes the norm on campus, even if the research office is continually overwhelmed with projects.

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ACCCA BOOSTS STAFF TO SERVE GROWING MEMBERSHIP

After relocating to a larger suite of offices earlier this year, ACCCA recently welcomed two new staff members - Greg Pruden and Christel Mikami.

Pruden, ACCCA's new membership coordinator, is responsible for the development and execution of continuous member recruitment activities and the maintenance of member data and statistics. Mikami, ACCCA's new administrative assistant, manages all administrative and accounting responsibilities and assists with membership and events.

"We are thrilled to have both Greg and Christel," said Susan Bray, ACCCA Executive Director. "Their talents and energy will be needed, as we serve a growing membership with outstanding professional development programs, legislative advocacy and a wide array of benefits designed for college administrators."



BACK ROW, LTOR: SUSAN BRAY, WILL CURTIS FRONT, LTOR: KEEGAN JEFFRIES, GREG PRUDEN, CHRISTEL MIKAMI

Pruden and Mikami join Keegan Jeffries, ACCCA Events Coordinator, Will Curtis, ACCCA Communications Coordinator, as part of Bray's A-Team.

Pruden previously managed political campaigns for local school board and city council races and developed strategic plans for voter contact activities for city council, mayoral and state assembly campaigns. He also served in a constituent relations capacity at the mayoral and congressional level and has held an internship with the California Conservation Corps.

Mikami brings a wealth of expreience as an office manager, administrative assistant and accounting administrator. Over the years, she has gained practical knowledge and fine tuned her skills in several areas of administration. "I love working for ACCCA not only because I work with a great group of people," said Mikami. "but also because we help administrators advance their careers."

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ACCCA SALARY SURVEY RESULTS COMING MAY 23

Results of the 2011 ACCCA Administrative Salary Survey will be available May 23! The survey, which is currently being conducted, will provide information on 18 administrative positions at virtually all community college districts in California.

Data will include information on salaries, benefits, allowances and stipends, longevity pay, and span of control for positions ranging from CEO to deans.

Community college administrators have long relied on this survey to determine equity among positions and to establish baseline salary levels that attract the best and the brightest administrators to our colleges. ACCCA sincerely appreciates the staff members and administrators at each district who completed the survey and helped to make this survey such an important tool for districts as they consider compensation issues.

The survey results will be available to all ACCCA members on the ACCCA website, and to all district HR offices who participated.

UPCOMING ACCCA EVENTS

May 16-18 - ACBO Spring Conference

May 17 - ACBO Board Meeting

May 19 - Consultation Council Meeting

May 20 - Board Election Online Voting

May 20 - CFLA Conference Call

May 27 - COC Annual Planning Conference Call

May 31 - Member Survey Deadline

June 3 – ACBO Board Meeting

June 3 - Executive/Finance Committee Conference Call

June 10 - Editorial Board Conference Call

June 15 - ACCCA Board Annual Planning Meeting

June 16 - Consultation Council Meeting

June 17 - CEOCCC Classified Senate Institute

June 25 – CCC Classified Senate Institute



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