

How the External Environment Affects College of Marin

As part of developing College of Marin's 6-year Educational Master Plan, multiple groups reviewed the environmental scan report and discussed the following questions:

- Given COM's mission, what environmental factors are most likely to influence the college and in what ways?
- What challenges and opportunities does the external environment and Marin's culture present?

A synthesis of the results of these discussions is presented below. The most commonly stated areas of focus are highlighted and the narrative encapsulates the main points of the various discussions. Additional items that did not arise across multiple group discussions are noted under the header called Other Thoughts. This is the external context in which the College will develop its priorities and Educational Master Plan for the next six years.

Cost of Living/Lack of Affordable Housing

The high cost of living affects everything. It filters who can live in Marin and what they do, influences decisions. Childcare and transportation costs affect affordability in Marin, but most critical is the lack of affordable housing. Many young people who grew up in Marin can't afford to live here as adults. There's a lack of workers for entry-level positions. Employee recruitment and turnover is a problem for COM and other organizations and businesses in Marin. College affordability can be a problem even for some who live here and have relatively high incomes. Also, though Marin is seen as affluent, the high cost of living creates economic inequality in which many can't get basic needs met, including many of our students—which makes it difficult for them to focus on school.

There's ongoing community controversy and resistance to developing workforce housing in Marin. As more wealthy people move in, will they still be willing to support public education, education for all, as has been the cultural value in Marin or will they only support what benefits them?

Both employee and student housing are needed. What housing options can COM support? Would housing attract international students and other students who live outside Marin? Building affordable housing in Marin is extremely controversial and there are many obstacles.

Many middle school students' parents are struggling financially, worried about how they can send their children to college. As COL continues rising, some of these families move away from Marin for places that are more affordable. COM should reach these middle schoolers' parents; COM makes college viable for them.

Commuting Workforce

A large portion of people who work in Marin live outside of Marin and commute in; many for low-wage jobs.

Are they potential COM students? COM would need flexible class scheduling to accommodate their after work hours and opportunities to earn degrees through evening and weekend courses.

Large Older Adult Population in Marin

Marin's population is the oldest in the Bay Area and Marin's population will continue to age. The Marin population is also one of the most highly educated in the nation. People in Marin value education.

People are living longer and working longer, what education can COM offer to help this group in these pursuits? What offerings would interest older adult learners? What about internships for older adults who are changing careers? In what ways can COM better include older students and make sure they have a good experience with COM? Might not be just through lifelong learning. This is a characteristic of Marin that doesn't align well with the Chancellor's Office focus on pathways, transfer, degree-seeking students. We can't change this demographic-need to serve them. Also, how can this group help COM? Some are potential donors.

Marin County's Lack of Diversity and Racial/Ethnic & Economic Inequality

Marin's population is predominately White and the County has been cited as having the greatest racial/ethnic disparity in California. Lack of diversity doesn't benefit the health of the community. Racial/ethnic disparity may widen due to the cost of living in Marin. Income inequality creates more need for affordable community college options. Financial aid may be adversely affected by living in a high cost area for students with a mid-range Expected Family Contribution (EFC). Age differences in Marin create different priorities and needs. Undocumented students and residents are at risk in the current climate. Also, it's an equity issue when low wage people/students must come across a bridge to college.

Given its mission and diverse student population (far more diverse than the County), COM could take a strong role as convener in addressing these disparities in the county and supporting diversity/equity. How can we use diversity to strengthen courses/programs, offer new courses/programs, open up cultural awareness, appreciation and exchange? COM may need to increase scholarship opportunities. COM needs to provide education at both ends of the age spectrum given the broad age range of Marin residents participating in educational opportunities.

High School Students & Perception of Community College Versus its Value

In general, Marin high school students are high achieving and the culture is that parents send their children directly to 4-year colleges and universities; lower value is placed on community college education. 25% of Marin high school graduates attend a community college.

How to tell the stories of students who've gone to 4-year and returned to COM, or who came to COM directly from high school, and see the value? Well-qualified faculty, small class size with more interaction, low cost. Save 2 years of cost of university tuition by attending COM. TAG agreements and new honors program.

How to enroll a higher percentage of new Marin high school grads? Consider innovative ideas such as promoting a gap year at COM, potential study abroad, Honors pathway. Offer a Life 101 class to new high school graduates on how to budget, do taxes, pay rent, etc. Counter/enhance community college or COM image. Reach parents to message and contextualize course offerings and make students' stories of COM experience and value concrete and real so parents view it as a viable option for their children.

May increase dual enrollment, but this also results in challenges for faculty: students not showing up for class, timing of classes, scheduling conflicts with high school classes, transportation problems, may not be intellectually ready for college courses since they're less structured than high school courses.

May need to deepen career, CTE, focus since the large majority of high school graduates aren't attending community college. Focus on highly skilled trades, e.g., plumbers, electricians, construction, auto mechanic, even teachers. Trades professionals are difficult to find in Marin and highly paid. 2-year degree—they can earn good income after 2 years. Also for those who want more practical, professional, skill-based degree. Rebrand CTE not as vocational/technical but professional to overcome the undesirable perception of technical ed.

Continue nurturing K-12 partnerships.

Highly Educated Marin Population

Education is a strong cultural value in Marin, including lifelong learning. Marin's population is one of the most highly educated in the nation.

What courses are relevant and challenging to highly educated people? Could be to satisfy intellectual curiosity, retirement transition or retraining. How does COM market to them? How does the College serve them and give them easy access?

State/Chancellor's Office Priorities and Directives

Directives from the State/CO don't always align with Marin population and its educational needs and interests. Examples include: Repeatability limits on professionals who want to continue developing their skills and interests through the same credit-bearing class; Emphasis on degree-seeking and transfer students yet Marin high school graduates largely enroll directly in 4-year institutions and Marin's young adult population is declining; Marin's population is aging and a focus on pathways isn't relevant to most older adult students.

COM is part of the larger CA college system and must respond to its priorities and directives, which also provide funding to the college, but the college is also answerable to Marin taxpayers and their interests and needs (e.g., Novato invested in IVC expansion--Jonas Center, makerspace). If COM doesn't address State/CO priorities and metrics, COM will lose categorical funding. Implementing programs and services to meet those goals takes time and money. How do we prioritize directions, actions and resources?

How do we reconcile our mission to get students who are far below college level to college level in light of AB705? For CTE/workforce, how do we prioritize programs? Do we train for skills up (transfer) or focus on low wage available jobs? This is both an employer-driven and educational programs issue. What do employers need for which they will pay workers a higher wage?

Transportation

Commuting distances and high traffic makes it difficult to get to COM and affects course scheduling/class times. In commuter culture, better options are needed such as bus routes from East Bay and SF. Can add GG Transit options for students outside of Marin, or COM shuttle? Also from SR transit center across Wolfe Grade to COM and between IVC and KTD. Resident of Novato are more likely to drive north for college, reverse commute.

Increasing job opportunities for students on campus may help mitigate transportation issue because they can work and study in the same place.

Slow or No Marin County Population Growth

There are fewer young adults in Marin, the number of high school graduates is only slightly increasing and recent high school graduates are not increasing COM enrollment. Marin County's population is no or slow growth as well.

Should we still try to increase enrollment or is there another aspect of enrollment that should be addressed? Such as shifting markets, populations served, providing the best education and service, maximizing units taken by students already enrolled as apportionment colleges do? COM's current strategic plan and CO metrics call for students to increase their unit load.

Potential new markets: There's a large number of ESL students at COM. This is a potential market for transfer/CTE/degrees and certificates that is already here. Do more work on our pipeline and proactively encourage students to persist to the next level. Also, there's a substantial number of employees in Marin with only a high school education or some college but no degree. Is this a potential market? Should we look outside Marin County for potential students? How do we reach and message to these groups? Distance Education can reach a larger geographic area. Also, COM can continue focusing on dual high school-college enrollment.

Marin Employment

Marin is a work from home capitol; self-employment is high. Also, most businesses in Marin are small, employing fewer than 25 people. Many businesses have difficulty finding employees they need. 5 industry groups are expected to grow: biotech, tourism, healthcare, food and agriculture and education.

COM needs to focus on what business is like in Marin and what it needs. COM needs to identify specific CTE needs in the County and new career areas for people just entering the workforce. What education do people who are self-employed or running a home business need? Consider incorporating entrepreneurship and startup into the business curriculum. Potentially retrain people living in Marin who are under-employed to give them higher level skills maybe through continuing education. Provide training toward sustainable small businesses, e.g., what does it take to be a landscaper? What about professional certificates for adult caregivers? Offer courses for Marin industries and its workforce sectors. Collaborate with companies and industry to provide internships that can become full-time jobs in emerging and high-growth areas e.g., solar, energy grid, e-vehicles. COM does have internships.

SRJC and CCSF

If Marin high school students enroll at a community college but not COM, they're most likely to enroll at CCSF or SRJC. But, COM is offering programs in partnership with them, so they are collaborators too.

What makes SRJC or CCSF more desirable to some students than COM? What can we do about it? Marketing—how do we get COM message out? Consider closer collaboration with SRJC on timing of courses offered.

Other Thoughts

COM's image has improved in the community (bonds, etc.)

There is a perception that COM isn't as good as other local higher education options.

Increase outreach for potential job opportunities for COM students

Evaluating our effectiveness to help prioritize and make program decisions and to identify gaps and needs for racial/ethnicity, equity, and show what helps for setting priorities.

Need systematic approach to equip faculty to teach and feel support in making program changes.

International student enrollment is declining nationally.

Modify class schedules to make them student driven rather than faculty driven. More scheduling to take into account working students.

High median wage in Marin may affect funds we receive from CO though funds are needed to address inequities that exist in Marin but usually aren't seen in the image of Marin as affluent.

Need to keep up with technological advances

Marin values sustainability, part of its culture

There is a sense of entitlement in Marin and fragmentation (e.g., 19 separate school districts for relatively small population)

Marin has lost its middle class and people don't have time to volunteer and participate in the community anymore.