CSM STUDENTS ENROLLING IN MORE THAN 19 UNITS

INTRODUCTION

This Research Brief analyzes the coursework success of students approved to enroll in more than 19 units, Fall 2000 – Spring 2002 [4 semesters]. A total of 170 students were approved to enroll in 1,238 courses. The academic outcome of these course enrollments is presented below.

A basic tenet of counseling students is one of developing realistic expectations regarding educational planning. Many community college students feel pressed to complete their course of study in the shortest period of time. In their haste to complete their program of study, some may attempt to enroll in an excessive number of units or courses incongruent with their skills, aptitudes, values, and competing time commitments associated with family and work.

Accordingly, CSM Student Services has a long-established policy limiting the total number of units that a student may enroll in any given term: 19 units.

The Office of Admissions and Records has installed a computer-generated “block” preventing students from exceeding this unit enrollment limit without prior written approval. Students wishing to enroll in more than 19 units must submit a petition to be reviewed by a Counselor/Advisor. If approved, the 19 unit “block” is lifted.

Student petitions submitted to a counselor or advisor are evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Number of hours employed per week during the semester;
- Prior Cumulative GPA;
- Participation in Intercollegiate Athletics;
- Student narrative statement regarding reasons for wishing to enroll in more than 19 units.

In addition, counselors consider numerous other factors—both tangible and intangible—in order to arrive at a holistic understanding of each individual
student petition. These factors include:
- Number of “W’s” from past coursework;
- High school academic record;
- Type of coursework being attempted (e.g., courses that meet 5 days per week, courses with lab component, etc.);
- Placement test scores in math and English;
- Recentness of math and English coursework;
- Prior educational achievement;
- “Intangibles” or “non-quantifiables” such as motivation, desire, and earnestness.

**FINDINGS**

Figure 1 displays distribution of unit loads approved:
- Nearly one-half (43.0%) attempted 21 units or more.
Figures 2 and 3 display the outcome (i.e., successful course completion and grade earned) of coursework attempted:
- Figure 2 shows that 26.5% of those approved earned a term GPA of 3.50 or higher. Another 25.3% earned a term GPA of 3.00 – 3.49.
- Figure 3 shows that, of the 1,238 courses attempted, 82.6% were successfully completed—i.e., grade of “A,” “B,” “C,” or “Cr.” 9.5% earned grades of “D,” “F,” or “NC.” Another 8.9% resulted in “W.”
- In comparison, students approved for unit loads greater than 19 units do significantly better than the typical CSM student. The Collegewide successful course completion rate is 70.5%.

**CONCLUSION**

The criteria currently employed by Counselors/Advisors works well—as measured by successful course completion—insofar as selecting for or approving petitions of students who are likely to succeed. Although we do not know how many petitions were not approved, the success rate of those who were approved strongly supports the existing evaluation criteria employed by counselors and advisors.