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# Academy of the Canyons Evaluation Brief Number 57

## **College of the Canyons**

Santa Clarita Community College District  
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Institutional Research, Planning, and  
Institutional Effectiveness

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*Image 1. Group of AOC Students*

## ***Introduction***

Academy of the Canyons (AOC), a middle college high school, just completed its 20th year of operation on the College of the Canyons campus in the Dr. Dianne G. Van Hook University Center. AOC opened its doors in August 2000. AOC is a collaboration between the William S. Hart Union High School District and College of the Canyons designed to provide a supportive, flexible, and academically enriched environment for students whose needs are not being met by the large comprehensive high schools. AOC was awarded a six-year accreditation through 2021 by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and was named a National Blue Ribbon School in 2015.

## ***Brief History of Middle College High Schools***

The first middle college high school was founded in 1974, by La Guardia Professor Janet Lieberman, on the campus of La Guardia Community College in New York City to help remove the barriers between high school and college and provide an alternative for students at risk of dropping out of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2003; La Guardia Community College, 2004). Today there are 50 middle college high schools across the nation (Middle College National Consortium, 2019). Currently, the California Community College system funds 14 middle college high schools which are serving almost 5,000 students (CBEDS, Middle College National Consortium, 2020). The two initial sites in California were Los Angeles Southwest and Contra Costa community colleges and were founded in 1988.

## ***AOC's Student Population***

Academy of the Canyons is open to high school students in grades 9-12 who "...are looking for a unique high school experience" that affords them the opportunity to complete high school requirements and take college courses at College of the Canyons' Valencia campus (AOC brochure). Prior to Fall 2009 AOC was open to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Beginning Fall 2009, AOC added grades 9 and 10. The goal for total student enrollment for the middle college high school is 400 students. As of Fall 2019, the goal remained surpassed with an enrollment of **404**, which is more than twice the enrollment of 191 in Fall 2005. Recruitment focuses on students who meet at least one of four criteria: students who are under-represented in the college environment, students who have high potential but are low performing, students of lower socio-

economic status, and first generation college students. AOC's student body in 2019-20 included 70 percent who were ethnic minority, excluding White not of Hispanic origin. AOC's diverse student population closely reflects the demographics of the greater Santa Clarita Valley. Specifically, about 30 percent of the student population identifies themselves as White; 20 percent identifies as Hispanic or Latino; about 42 percent identifies as Asian; one percent identifies as African-American; and seven percent identifies as multi-racial. Over the past five years the most significant change in the ethnic composition of the AOC student body has been an increase in the Asian population (19 percent - 2014 to 42 percent -2019), with a concurrent decline in the White population (42 percent in 2014 compared to 30 percent in 2019).

Providing students who are first generation college students, ethnic minority, low-income, and / or have lower academic performance this opportunity is a component of the early college high school initiative, as well as the mission of the middle college high school. The student body is smaller than traditional high schools, which allows students to get to know each other and their teachers better than they might at a traditional high school. All AOC students are enrolled in "Advisement," a college readiness class designed to "...support students academically and socially in the college setting" (AOC brochure). The faculty member for the class serves as the students' advisor throughout the school year. This class fosters interaction and communication between students and teachers since students are enrolled in Advisement with their teacher/advisor as one of their high school classes.

## ***AOC Students***

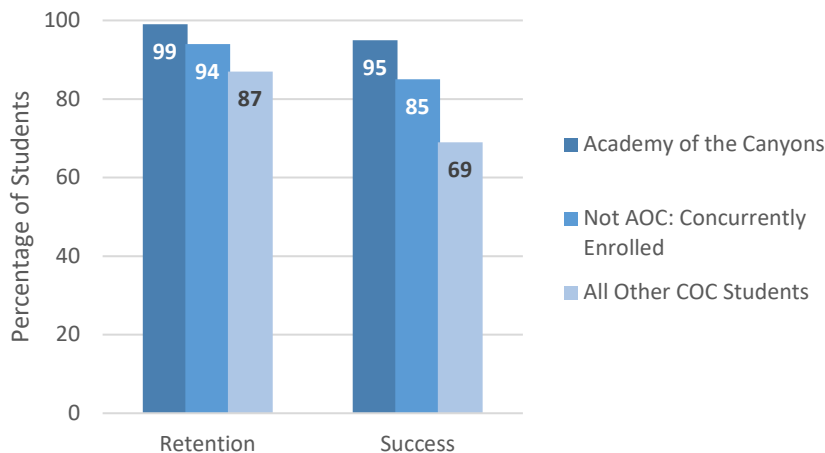
- Are selected based on a thorough application process, and may include an interview with prospective students and parents.
- Complete at least four high school courses and between 4 and 11 college units per semester depending on the grade level (the \$46/ unit college tuition is waived for all high school students).
- Earn dual credit for college courses, which is recorded on both their college and high school transcripts.
- Use college support services, such as the library, computer labs, tutors, counseling and career centers.
- Take regular high school classes in addition to the college classes.
- Complete College of the Canyons Counseling-111, which addresses topics such as "the responsible student, career interest, choosing a major, goal setting, learning styles, time management, utilizing college services, and educational planning." Students also complete Counseling-110, which helps students with career planning.

Typically, AOC students have shown potential to succeed. However, their academic success to date may indicate a need for a more focused and smaller learning environment. Many times the profiles of AOC students are those who:

- Show potential for succeeding in college.
- May have a discrepancy between their standardized scores and grades.
- Show adequate social adjustment within the high school, but may be disconnected from the high school environment.
- Are not tied to the home campus through participation in athletics.
- May be creative, artistic, and/or individualistic (Source: AOC Student Profile).

## Retention and Success Rates

Figure 1. Fall 2019 Retention and Success Rates for AOC Students Compared to Concurrently Enrolled Students (Not AOC) and Other COC Students



AOC experienced several challenges during the 2019/20 academic year including multiple school closures (two fires, school shooting in the district, and COVID-19) resulting in a significant loss of face-to-face instructional time. Additionally, these closures lead to a significant increase in the need for student and staff social/emotional support and therapeutic support. These closures lead to lower grades and anticipated achievement gaps within content and course completion.

Academy of the Canyons was evaluated using outcome measures that were based on students' success in college courses. Two measures used were students' retention (completing the college courses without withdrawing) and success (passing the college courses with a "C" or better). AOC students were compared to other (not AOC) concurrently enrolled students and all other (non-high school) COC students in the *same college classes*. As is evidenced by Figure 1, AOC students outperformed other COC students in the same classes. **In Fall 2019, the success rate for AOC students was 10 percentage points higher than other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and 26 percentage points higher than other COC students in the same classes, despite the significant challenges faces this semester!** Historically, success rates for AOC students have been higher than all other COC students enrolled in the same courses for the past 18 years.

High success rates of AOC students (see Figure 3) could be attributed to a number of factors including: the support services and resources available through the counseling and advisement services at AOC; a peer tutoring program implemented in 2012-13 at AOC; the majority of the students attending in 2013-14 and forward attended AOC for all four years of their high school career; accelerated math and English courses offered at COC; and availability of COC services such as the Tutoring/Learning/Computing Lab and Supplemental Learning workshops.

## Retention Rates

Figure 2. Retention Rates for AOC Students Compared to Concurrently Enrolled Students (Not AOC) and Other COC Students: Fall 2014, Fall 2015, Fall 2016, Fall 2017, Fall 2018, and Fall 2019

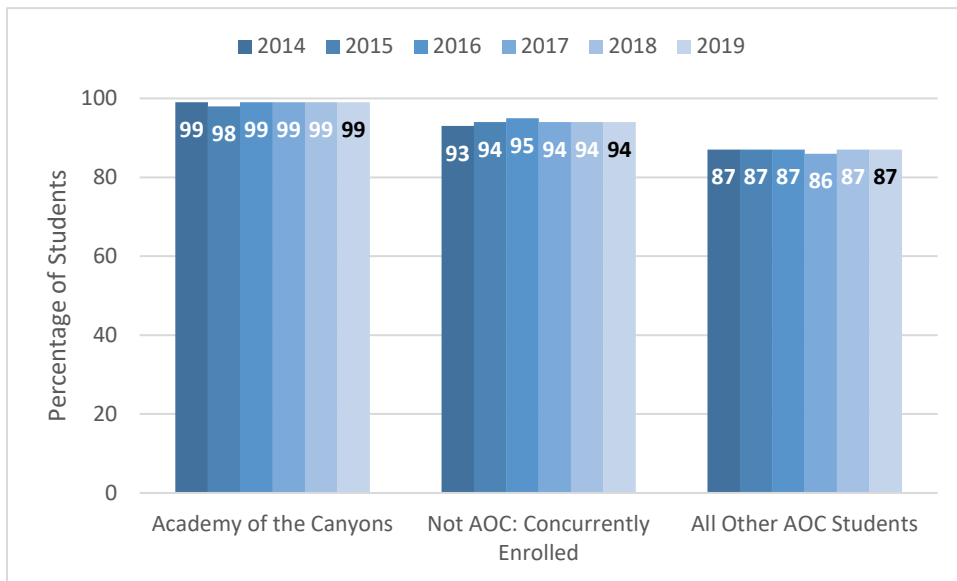


Figure 2 illustrates retention rates over time for AOC students compared to other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and other COC students in the same college classes. Overall, AOC retention rates were higher than other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC). AOC students also had higher retention rates than other COC students in the same classes (as high as 12 percentage points higher).

## Success Rates

Figure 3. Success Rates for AOC Students Compared to Concurrently Enrolled Students (Not AOC) and Other COC Students: Fall 2014, Fall 2015, Fall 2016, Fall 2017, Fall 2018, and 2019

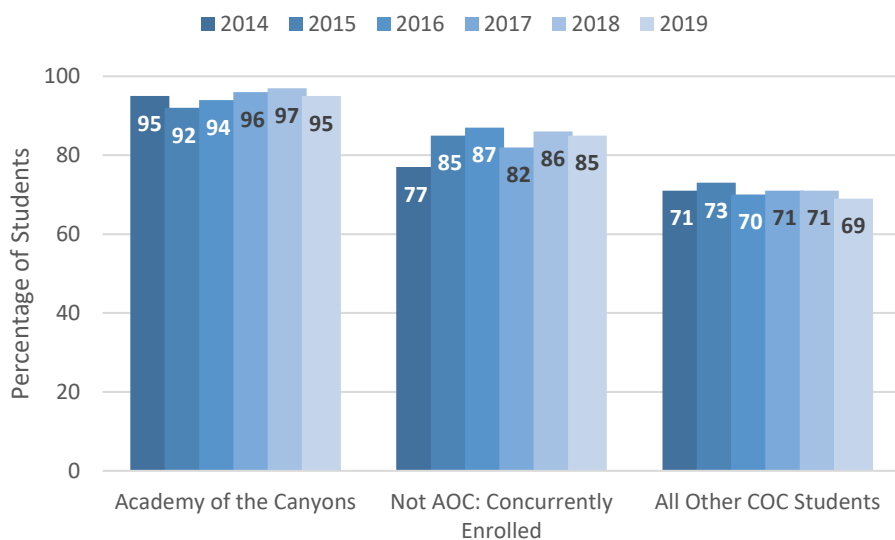


Figure 3 illustrates success rates over time for AOC students compared to other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and other COC students in the same college classes. Success rates for **AOC students** in Fall 2019 **remain high at 95 percent; however they decreased two percentage points from 2018. AOC student success rates have been consistently higher than other COC students by over 20 percentage points over the past six years!** Historically, AOC success rates have been higher than non-AOC, concurrently enrolled students. Additional analyses comparing AOC 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students with 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students showed that success rates were 99 and 94 percent, respectively in Fall 2019. The difference in success rates is likely due to the difference in courses taken by each group. For example, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students are permitted to enroll in a limited selection of classes. AOC 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students enroll in a wide variety of courses. Courses taken by AOC juniors and seniors at COC in Fall 2019 with the highest enrollments included Math-140 (Introductory Statistics), Math-212 (Calculus II), Spanish-101 (Introductory Spanish), Math-104 (Pre-Calculus), and Sign Lanuage-101 (American Sign Language I).

During the Fall 2019 semester, AOC students enrolled in courses from 38 different departments (see Figure 4), including 140 enrollments in Computer Applications and Web Technology, 66 enrollments in Pre-calculus, and 45 enrollments in Physical Education.

Table 1. AOC Enrollment at COC by Academic Department: Fall 2019

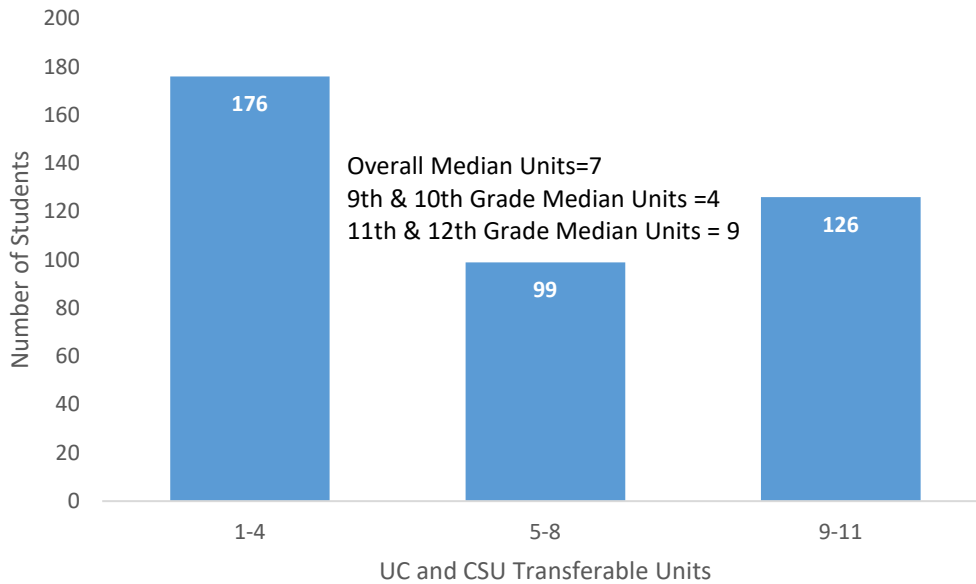
Department	Enrollments	Department	Enrollments	Department	Enrollments
Administration of Justice	5	Fire Technology	2	Ocean	1
Anthropology	16	French	11	Paralegal	2
Art	36	Geography	7	Philosophy	2
Astronomy	1	Geology	13	Photography	24
Biology	25	German	1	Physical Education	183
Business	7	Graphic and Multimedia Design	4	Physics	9
Chemistry	25	History	23	Physical Science	5
Chinese	5	Health Science	1	Psychology	34
Cinema	4	Italian	1	Sign Language	28
Communication Studies	24	Kinesiology	1	Sociology	16
Computer Applications and Web Technology	100	Math	181	Spanish	31
Dance	18	Media Entertainment Arts	19	Theatre	21
Environmental Studies	1	Music	22		

## UC and CSU Transferable Units Completed

### *UC/CSU Transferable Units Successfully Completed*

An analysis was done to determine the number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by AOC students during the Fall 2019 semester (Note: successfully completed is defined as passing UC / CSU transferable courses with a “C” or better). Overall, the median number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by all AOC students during the Fall 2019 semester was seven. The median number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by 11th and 12th grade AOC students during the Fall 2019 semester was nine. While there are restrictions on the range of college classes that AOC students in grades 9 and 10 can take, the median number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by 9th and 10th grade students during the Fall 2019 semester was four. Note: According to California State law, dually enrolled students are not permitted to enroll in more than 11 college units per semester.

Figure 4. UC and CSU Transferable Units Successfully Completed by AOC Students Present During the Fall 2019 Semester (Grades 9-12)



### ***Notable Highlights in 2019/20***

- Seventy percent of AOC graduating seniors earned at least one associate degree
- 100% graduation rate
- For the class of 2019, 82 percent of AOC graduates went on to attend a College/University and 17 percent community college.
- For the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) English Language Arts assessment, 100% “Exceeded Standard” and for the math assessment, 94% “Exceeded Standard”. AOC outperformed all schools in the Santa Clarita Valley and most in California
- Students faced and persevered through many challenges, including two fires, school shooting in the district, and COVID-19.

## References

Parker, C. M., Meuschke, D. M., & Gribbons, B. C. (2019, August). *Evaluation Brief #56. Academy of the Canyons*. Santa Clarita: College of the Canyons.

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