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Academy of the Canyons Evaluation Brief Number 58

College of the Canyons

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

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Introduction

Academy of the Canyons (AOC), a middle college high school, just completed its 21st 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 to provide an alternative for students at risk of dropping out of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2003; La Guardia Community College). Today there are over 50 middle college high schools across the nation (Middle College National Consortium, 2021). Currently, the California Community College system funds 14 middle college high schools, which are serving almost 5,000 students (CBEDS, California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2021). 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 11th and 12th 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 2020, the goal remained surpassed with an enrollment of **412**, 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 2020-21 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, 31 percent of the student population identifies themselves as Asian/Pacific Islander; 30 percent identifies as White; 22 percent identifies as Hispanic/Latinx/o/a; 14 percent identifies as Filipinx/o/a; two percent identifies as Black/African-American; and one percent American Indian or Alaska Native. 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/Pacific Islander population (19 percent - 2014 to 31 percent -2020), with a concurrent decline in the White population (42 percent in 2014 compared to 30 percent in 2020).

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

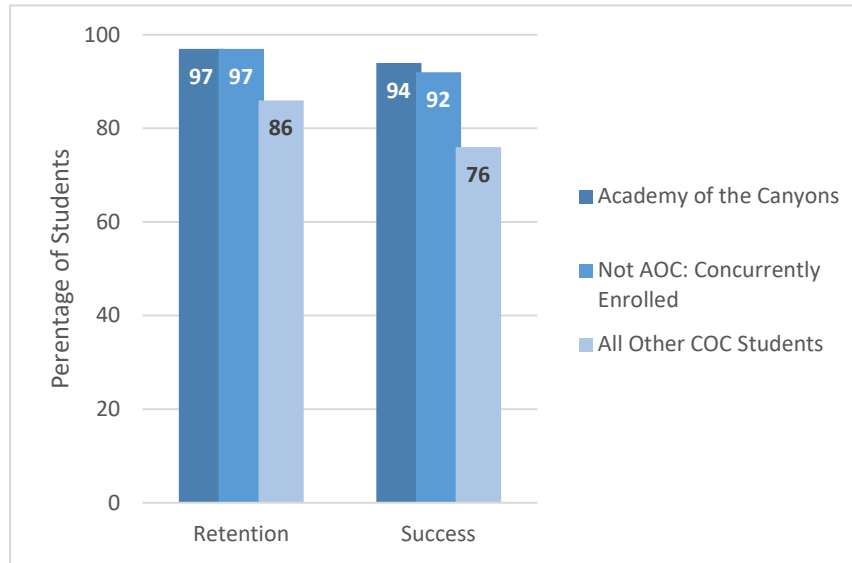
- Are selected based on a thorough application process, and may include an interview with prospective students and parents.
- Complete at least four high school courses and between 4 and 11 college units per semester depending on the grade level (the \$46/ unit college tuition is waived for all high 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-110 during the Spring semester of their 9th grade year, 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 2020 Retention and Success Rates for AOC Students Compared to Concurrently Enrolled Students (Not AOC) and Other COC Students



AOC continued to experience challenges during the 2020/21 academic year due to COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, resulting in a significant loss of face-to-face instructional time. This led to an increase in the need for student and staff social/emotional support and academic support. However, students were able to return to face-to-face instruction at the end of March 2021. These closures may have led 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 2020, the success rate for AOC students was two percentage points higher than other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and 18 percentage points higher than other COC students in the same classes, despite the significant challenges faced this semester!** Historically, success rates for AOC students have been higher than all other COC students enrolled in the same courses for the past 20 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, mental health, career readiness and advisement services at AOC; the majority of 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 2015, Fall 2016, Fall 2017, Fall 2018, Fall 2019, and Fall 2020

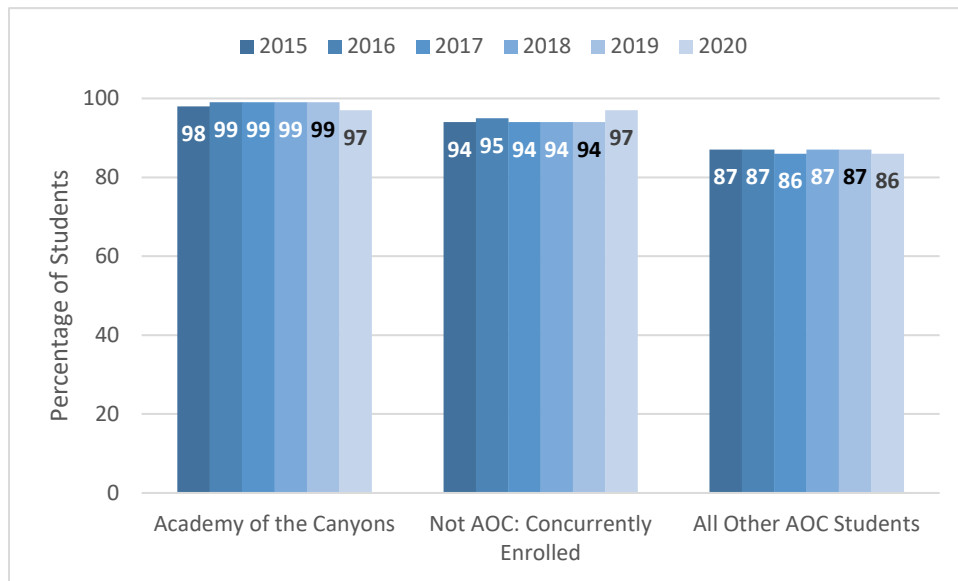


Figure 2 illustrates retention rates over time for AOC students compared to other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and other COC students in the same college classes. Overall, AOC retention rates were higher than other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC). AOC students also had higher retention rates than other COC students in the same classes (over 10 percentage points higher).

Success Rates

Figure 3. Success Rates for AOC Students Compared to Concurrently Enrolled Students (Not AOC) and Other COC Students: Fall 2015, Fall 2016, Fall 2017, Fall 2018, Fall 2019, and 2020

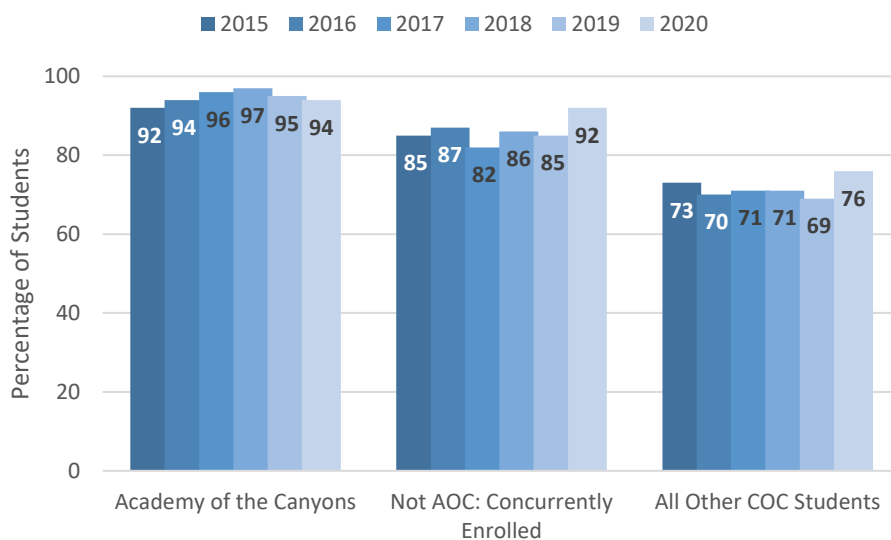


Figure 3 illustrates success rates over time for AOC students compared to other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and other COC students in the same college classes. Success rates for **AOC students** in Fall 2020 **remain high at 94 percent; however they decreased three percentage points from 2018**. Despite this slight decrease, **AOC student success rates have been consistently higher than other COC students by about 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 9th and 10th grade students with 11th and 12th grade students showed that success rates were 96 and 91 percent, respectively in Fall 2020. The difference in success rates is likely due to the difference in courses taken by each group. For example, AOC 9th and 10th grade students are permitted to enroll in a limited selection of classes. AOC 11th and 12th grade students enroll in a wide variety of courses. Courses taken by AOC juniors and seniors at COC in Fall 2020 with the highest enrollments included Chemistry-150 (General Chemistry), Math-140 (Introductory Statistics), Spanish-101 (Introductory Spanish), Math-212 (Calculus II), Math-104 (Pre-calculus), and Sign Language-101 (American Sign Language I).

During the Fall 2020 semester, AOC students enrolled in courses from 39 different departments (see Table 1), including 177 enrollments in Physical Education, 170 enrollments in Math, and 79 enrollments in Computer Applications and Web Technology.

Table 1. AOC Enrollment at COC by Academic Department: Fall 2020

Department	Enrollments	Department	Enrollments	Department	Enrollments
Administration of Justice	5	Engineering	1	Music	34
Anthropology	15	Environmental Studies	1	Ocean	1
Architecture	2	Fire Technology	1	Paralegal	5
Art	26	French	9	Philosophy	1
Astronomy	5	Geography	4	Photography	11
Biology	29	Geology	12	Physical Education	177
Business	15	German	2	Physics	14
Chemistry	41	Graphic and Multimedia Design	20	Physical Science	1
Cinema	9	History	15	Psychology	39
Communication Studies	4	Health Science	6	Sign Language	20
Computer Applications and Web Technology	79	Kinesiology	1	Sociology	14
Computer Science	14	Math	170	Spanish	38
Early Childhood Education	1	Media Entertainment Arts	31	Theatre	6

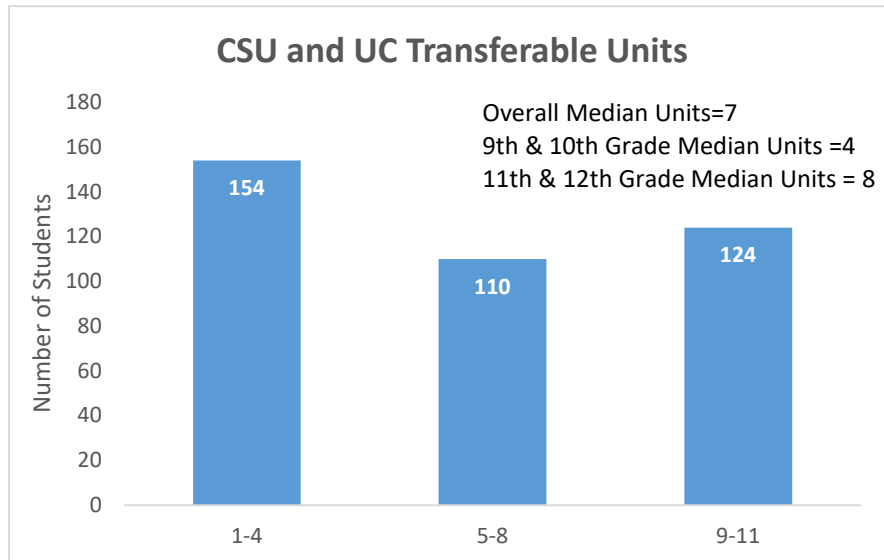
UC and CSU Transferable Units Completed

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 2020 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 2020 semester was seven. The median number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by 11th and 12th grade AOC students during

the Fall 2020 semester was eight. 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 2020 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 2020 Semester (Grades 9-12)



Notable Highlights in 2020/21

- Average GPA of AOC students was 3.58
- Fifteen students had a cumulative GPA of 4.0
- AOC graduating class of 2021 accumulated a total of 6449.5 college units in four years
- For the class of 2021, 70 students graduated with an Associate’s Degree
- Students faced and persevered through COVID-19 stay-at-home orders.

Image 1. AOC Students Returning to In Person Learning



References

Parker, C. M. & Meuschke, D. M.. (2020, August). *Evaluation Brief #57. Academy of the Canyons*. Santa Clarita: College of the Canyons.

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