Observations on the Environmental Scan -- External Trends Report  
created for the Education Master Plan process at CCSF  

www.tinyurl.com/commentvoorhees in pdf  
www.tinyurl.com/commentvoorheesdoc in Word  

Karen Saginor, ksaginor@ccsf.edu  
February 3, 2014 (revised 2/18/14)  

Find the Report discussed in these observations at  
http://www.ccsf.edu/NEW/content/dam/Organizational_Assets/Department/Research_Planning_Grants/EMP/CCSFEnvironmentalScan_EMP.pdf  
OR  
http://tinyurl.com/voorheesdata

The Environmental Scan -- External Trends Report created for City College of San Francisco by the Voorhees Group has two crucial and closely related functions. It is part of fulfilling accreditation requirements for research and planning, especially as articulated in Standard I.B and several items on the Roadmap. It is also the basis for major and far-reaching decisions about what our institution will be and do in coming years. For both of these purposes it is mandatory that the Environmental Scan -- External Trends Report have integrity in the scope of data collected, the accuracy of assertions and their relevance to the needs of the communities we serve. To state the obvious, we are making data-driven decision so the quality of the data doing the driving is crucial.

The Voorhees Environmental Scan -- External Trends Report has serious difficulties:
  - It contains misinformation.
  - It has serious lacunae in areas of major importance to City College of San Francisco.
  - Some of the Implications for CCSF’s Future (placed in yellow boxes) do not appear to be well supported by facts.

As currently written, the report is not adequate for our needs. If the CCSF administration is serious about practicing data-driven decision making with integrity, the Voorhees Report needs to be improved in accuracy and in scope.

Misinformation

The following general comments come from applying the process of evaluating sources of information that CCSF librarians teach to City College students.

1) Most of the data are very current, but some are not. Examples of out-of-date sources include the very first citation (national census data collected before the results of the 2010 census were available) and a statistic on completion rates for ninth graders published in 2006 and cited on p. 13.

2) Many of the links to the sources are dead. After encountering many dead links I systematically checked the first five and the last five and found that 4 out of the ten were bad. Additionally, some of the URLs in the Voorhees Report were not formatted correctly to link -- this latter is an inconvenience. This criteria is somewhat superficial, but gives readers of any report an impression of lack of care taken.

3) A large part of the information is from reliable sources - the Census Bureau, the Chronicle of Higher Education, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, etc. However, some of the data
are from unreliable sources -- advocacy groups. In general advocacy websites should be avoided since they tend to cherry pick facts to support their cause. And some advocacy groups misrepresent information or even publish out-and-out lies. Some of the key pieces of information in the Voorhees Report are drawn from materials prepared by advocacy groups -- including the Campaign for College Opportunity, Lumina, California Competes, and others with a reputation for bias and distortion. This is a problem that needs to be corrected for a professional report on which CCSF will base major decisions.

**Follow up on one citation**

An additional problem, compounding use by consultants of biased data prepared by advocacy groups, is the mischaracterization of specific data cited. Taking a closer look at one citation in the Voorhees Group’s report, I’m sorry to say that it weakens the report’s credibility.

The Voorhees Report cites data compiled in a chart by California Competes, and then misinterprets it, drawing erroneous conclusions. The Voorhees Report states (at top of p.11):


“Participation rate” for a zip code area with low levels of education would compare the number of students from that area with the total population in that area expressed as a percentage – what percentage of that population are students. However, the chart on the California Competes website does not show that ratio. The numbers on the California Competes website is comparing the number of students from the zip codes with low levels of education to the total number of students at the college – what percentage of the students live a particular zip code. The California Competes chart doesn’t label this “participation rate,” it is labeled “Enrollment from zip codes with low levels of education (few college degrees.)”

Not surprisingly, these numbers reflect the general demographics of the area in which each college is located, and tells little or nothing about the success of the college in attracting underserved populations. College of Marin, San Mateo, DeAnza, Glendale and other schools located in affluent areas with high levels of education are all near the bottom of the list. The top of the chart has a college that is at 99% -- all of its students are from zip codes with low levels of education. If it was supposed to be the participation rate, that percentage of 99% would mean that virtually every inhabitant was going to school! College Competes does not appear to be making that assertion. The error appears to have been introduced by the Voorhees Group when items were written and compiled for the report.

The Voorhees Report erroneously reports this statistic as a ranking that reflects poorly on City College. This misinformation is the only item for the part titled City and County of San Francisco in the “Community Colleges and Higher Education section. This misinformation needs to be removed and replaced with other established facts about CCSF and higher education, which could include information about how CCSF places on the CCCCO scorecard that is cited in the California part of this section.

**Follow up on another citation**

To test the assumption that perhaps I had accidentally chosen the only bad piece of data in the Report, I took a close look at one additional item. I found that the presentation of this second item is misleading, omitting context that would make it meaningful for CCSF.

This second item is found at the top of p.2:
Asia has surpassed Latin America as the leading source of immigrants to California. This trend will continue for the foreseeable future. [Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved December 27, 2013 at http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/jtf/JTF_Immigrants[TF].pdf]

The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) describes itself as a nonpartisan organization that provides independent research information to inform improve public policy. The organization does not endorse legislation, ballot measures or candidates. Those criteria are a good start, but not sufficient to assure objective information –ALEC makes the same claims. The particular PPIC document cited by the Voorhees report, is one of a series called “Just the Facts.” It has a date of May, 2013. It is list of seven bulleted statements and two graphs. At the bottom of the page gives as sources “U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Censuses, American Community Survey, and the Department of Homeland Security” without identifying which sources were used for which statement. One of the bullets on the PPIC document says:

**Most immigrants in California come from Latin America, but recent arrivals are primarily from Asia.**
**The vast majority of California’s immigrants were born in Latin America (53%) and Asia (37%).**

California has sizeable populations of immigrants from dozens of countries; Mexico (4.3 million), the Philippines (812,000), and China (760,700) are the leading countries of origin. However, more than half (53%) of those arriving in the state between 2007 and 2011 were born in Asia; only 31% came from Latin America.

Also relevant to the Voorhees Report is one of the charts posted by PPIC showing new arrivals 2005-2011.

The Environmental Scan External Trends Report not only asserts that the number of immigrants from Asia has surpassed those from Latin America, but that this trend will continue for the foreseeable future. The second part of that statement is not asserted in the PPIC source. The chart shows that immigration from the two areas was about the same in 2006, and then from 2007-2011, Asian immigration fluctuated at around the same number (150,000 plus/minus 10,000) while immigration from Latin America dropped sharply through the recession and was still on a downward trend in 2011. From other sources I have learned that immigration from Latin America had been increasing though-out the 90’s and into the early 2000’s – dramatically in some years. It would seem to be too early to draw conclusions on whether the recent downward shift was temporary (with the recession) or a long-lasting change in decades-long trend. I also found that the PPIC document includes another bullet saying that 60% of immigrants who came from Asia have bachelor’s or more compared with a 25% average for attaining at least a bachelor’s degree for all foreign born California residents (including those from Asia). The information that most immigrants from Asia already hold a bachelor’s degree is a necessary to make the statistic meaningful for planning for City College. Persons who already hold a bachelor’s degree or higher benefit from courses at City College, but they generally use different services and take courses in different patterns than students who do not yet have an associate degree.

Because an examination of two pieces of information has uncovered deficiencies in both cases, I am forced to the unfortunate conclusion that the Voorhees Report is an unreliable source of factual information. This can be corrected by a careful review and fact-checking of the entire document, correcting or removing all questionable or misleading statistics.

**Lacunae in major areas**
I can identify six areas in which the Environmental Scan -- External Trends Report fails to provide any information about environmental factors that are of great significance for City College of San Francisco. I have listed those six areas below, but I am not claiming that these six are the only significant gaps. Other perspectives beside mine are needed to adequately identify areas that must be included for this
document to be adequate for comprehensive planning at the level needed for the Educational Master Plan.

1) **Loss of middle-income job opportunities and growing economic inequality.** This major long-term and continuing trend has been well documented at the national and international level, in California, and in the Bay area. The Voorhees Report documents the need for higher education to become employed, but does not offer information about the increasing competition for a shrinking number of well-paying jobs overall, nor does it ask us to consider how the decreasing buying power, decreasing benefits, and increasing job insecurity for employees might inform our planning to meet the educational needs of our communities.

2) **Long term unemployed and under-employed.** Closely connected to the first area is the need for information about members of our communities who have already fallen off the bottom of the economic ladder, or are likely to do so in the new economy. There are many data sources that show a national, long-term trend of decreasing workforce participation rates for the adult population. What are the numbers for long-time unemployed and under-employed in our area? What are their educational needs? Are we effective in improving outcomes for them through current programs? Should CCSF plan to increase the capacity of our programs for the previously incarcerated, Californians who left high school without a diploma, and homeless and at-risk students? Are other programs needed for the economic health of our community? The Voorhees Report does not supply data to inform such decisions.

3) **Retraining/re-education needs.** It has become a common truism that lifelong careers are a thing of the past. It is no longer the case that before entering the labor market, people acquire the majority of the skills they will need for many years of employment. At the same time, fewer U.S. companies provide on-the-job training or cross-training to ready their current employees for future needs. Increasingly, it is the responsibility of employees to keep their skills up-to-date in order to stay relevant to the needs of business and to qualify for promotion. Some pursue certificate or degree programs to change careers or to advance to new levels of professional responsibility in their current field. Others find that a few courses, or even a single course, will provide them with valuable workplace skills and knowledge. We know that many current and former students at CCSF have enrolled to meet this need for ongoing training, but the Voorhees Report provides no data about trends in these areas or citations for research that can help CCSF make plans to stay relevant and effective in meeting the need of employees to have marketable skills and the need of employers for up-to-date workers.

4) **Opportunities for educational funding.** The Voorhees Report contains a section on financing of higher education that focuses on funding by the State of California. This section needs to be expanded. The report expresses assumptions about political values and policy actions that exclude information about the political values of the Bay Area and alternate possibilities for state funding. Voters in our community, and policy makers representing the Bay Area in Sacramento, do not, for the most part, support performance-based funding, certain aspects of the Student Success Task Force recommendations, and other retrenchments on public education for the public good. Examples of this difference in approach that have added very significant funding to our resources are the 2012 San Francisco parcel tax that passed with 73% of the vote, and the influence of San Francisco and Bay Area voters on the approval of Proposition 30 for the state of California in that same election. Perhaps it is the narrowness of focus in this section that has unbalanced the analysis provided at the end. As currently written, the Voorhees Report states that City College needs to “get ahead” of educational reform ideas, although these are not current state policy, may never become state policy, and run contrary to the values of the communities we serve.
5) **Shrinking enrollments.** City College of San Francisco currently has about 25% fewer students than two years ago. Enrollment numbers are a background theme in the Voorhees Report, but information is lacking about the size and suddenness of CCSF’s enrollment drop. Realistic enrollment expectation are essential for effective planning, as is candid information about the multiple factors have depressed our enrollment numbers. Although we may not know yet whether the shrinking of CCSF is a temporary or permanent phenomenon, adequate planning cannot be accomplished without open and accurate information about this.

6) **Environmental environment.** California is currently in the grip of drought, with 2013 the driest year since record keeping began in 1877, perhaps the driest years in centuries. Other parts of the U.S. and other parts of the world are experiencing extreme weather conditions with growing frequency. Extreme or catastrophic natural events can result in sudden major shifts in the economic and demographic environment. The Voorhees Group cannot be expected to predict the results or the pace of climate change. However, some general information in this area would support a very helpful recommendation to expect change and build flexibility into planning for the future of CCSF.

**Implications for CCSF’s Future**

It’s difficult to assess the accuracy of the implications stated until misinformation listed as fact has been corrected, and missing relevant information supplied.

Here are my comments on a few of the implications given on p. 12 of the Voorhees Report:

**Voorhees Report assertion:** Community colleges in California are for the first time facing a state funding model based on performance.

**Comment:** Community Colleges in California are funded on an apportionment model.

**Voorhees Report assertion:** Legislators will continue to demand measurable outcomes, particularly those that lead to transfer and employment.

**Comment:** The performance based funding legislation proposed by Carol Liu was defeated by the votes of legislators.

**Voorhees Report assertion:** Another potential causality in hard financial times is remedial education. The “catch up” work now required for large numbers of community college students is a prime candidate for elimination on almost everybody’s list.

**Comment:** Another potential casualty -- in addition to what? Basic skills (no longer called remedial education) still receives extra funding from the State Chancellor’s office. Governor Brown’s January budget proposal for the community colleges included $100 million “to close achievement gaps in access and achievement in underrepresented student groups” Certainly there are entities advocating for the reduction or even elimination of funding for Basic Skills, but there are also proponents for increasing such funding, and groups that encourage projects by offering grants. It is quite a stretch to say the “almost everyone” wants to eliminate basic skills.

**Voorhees Report assertion:** City College will need to “get ahead” of the state policy initiatives now underway in California. It appears that these new initiatives may be tied to an increasing share of state appropriations to community colleges.

**Comment:** Many initiatives to change state policy never make it out of committee. It may be more prudent for CCSF to comply with current state law and regulation while striving to actualize the mission of the College.
**Conclusion**

As currently written, the Environmental Scan -- External Trends Report created for City College of San Francisco by the Voorhees Group is not adequate for the needs of CCSF because of inaccuracy and because it lacks necessary relevant data. If the CCSF administration is serious about practicing data-driven decision making with integrity, then gaps in areas of great significance to CCSF need to be bridged with relevant information, and all items reviewed and fact-checked for accuracy. I hope that necessary steps will be taken to enable data-driven decision-making using accurate, relevant data as is required to produce a useful and successful Educational Master Plan and to meet accreditation standards.