



INTERIM REPORT

Submitted to

The Higher Learning Commission

Chief Executive Officer: President Reyes Gonzalez

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Chicago, Illinois

Interim Report to the Higher Learning Commission

The Higher Learning Commission included the following statement in its letter dated March 10, 2020 to St. Augustine College regarding the reaffirmation of its accreditation:

The institution is required to submit an additional interim report on enrollment and finances. The report, which is due by October 1, 2021, should include, at minimum, the following: 1) Enrollment figures through Fall 2021, with a three-year comparison showing Fall 2019 and Fall 2020; 2) Enrollment projection through Fall 2023 based on figures derived from enrollment planning procedures described in the report; and 3) Final operating budget figures for AY2020-2021 (FY21) and the approved operating budget for AY2020-2022.

The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2023-2024.

The following information responds to each of the subjects required in the report.

Action 1: Enrollment figures through Fall 2021 with a three-year comparison showing Fall 2019 and Fall 2020

Fall Enrollments – A Three-Year Comparison

Enrollment has declined slightly from 2019 which is primarily due to the impact of COVID 19. However, St. Augustine College is able to maintain its financial stability despite of the declined enrollment in 2020 and 2021. The college believes that enrollment will rebound with strategic efforts such as new certificate and associate programs, dual-credit partnerships with high school districts, online offerings available to a wider geographic area, and advanced digital marketing.

There is a reduction in enrollment that predates COVID-19 but was impacted by the pandemic, as many students weren't able to successfully manage the sudden transition from 100% face-to-face to 100% remote courses. A sustained reduction in overall enrollment is widespread in higher education institutions, but its impact was minimal at St. Augustine College due to an effective high-touch approach. A complete re-design in SAC's advising model included a more personalized and intrusive model via Learning Facilitators who act personal success coaches, mentors, and advisors for each and every student enrolled at the institution.

2019 Fall Enrollment	2020 Fall Enrollment	2021 Fall Enrollment
966	905	777

Action 2: Enrollment projections through Fall 2023 on figures derived from Enrollment planning procedures described in the report

Enrollment Projections Through Fall 2023

Enrollment projections for the next two school years are as follows:

Enrollment Projections

Spring 2022	975
Summer 2022	350
Fall 2022	1,034
Spring 2023	1,258
Summer 2023	400
Fall 2023	1,121

Enrollment and Retention

COVID-19 amplified decreasing enrollment trends. With a nationwide sustained decrease of about 10% (up to 30% for minority students), St. Augustine College has fared better than its peer institutions. While most saw decreases, St. Augustine College noted a modest increase in fall-to-fall retention, as evidenced below:

Academic Term	New Students	Retained the Following FA	FA-to-FA Retention %
FA 18	231	119	51.5%
FA 19	188	102	54.3%
FA 20	156	90	57.7%

For comparison purposes, the fall-to-fall retention of Hispanic students is 53% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2021).

Retention Strategies

Nevertheless, there is much to be improved. In that direction, a number of initiatives have been adopted in the last three years:

- 1. Transformation of the academic advising model into the Learning Facilitator model, in which the LF is the personal success coach of each student.***

The principal responsibility role of a Learning Facilitator is assisting students to meet the requirements of a St. Augustine College education and to prepare students

to function effectively as professionals, as community members, and as individuals. This means working with each student to ensure success within the policies, requirements, and expectations of the College and to fulfill the learning outcomes of the general education and professional curriculum. The Learning Facilitator (LF), with a specialty in the program they serve, is expected to help coordinate instruction, interventions, and support for struggling students. The Learning Facilitator is the person who connects the students to our College and assures that students have the support they need to graduate.

The Learning Facilitator works closely with the Program Directors in providing comprehensive support and early intervention to students to ensure persistence until graduation. The LF is responsible for coordinating support for students with faculty, the Director of the Student Success Center, financial aid, registration, and ensuring that students are familiar with college life and learning in a college environment. The Learning Facilitator coordinates all of the services that students need to be successful in college.

2. *Implementation of the Latino Education Model, that maximizes the student's achievements and is both technologically advanced and holistic.*

In the search of excellence, knowledge, and innovation, SAC faculty made a concerted effort to deliver education in the mediums needed by the Latino community. St. Augustine College proposed the Latino Educational Model. The Latino Educational Model can be defined as a culturally specialized educational approach for the Latino student that considers their unique context, reflects understanding of their life circumstances, and brings them tailor-made solutions that meet the demands of their life and educational goals. This model contains three emblematic foundations to support three pillars. The foundations of excellence, innovation, and knowledge set the parameters of functionality and operation of the three pillars, which include High-Touch, High-Support, and High-Tech. Each pillar embodies excellence, knowledge and innovation.

3. *SAC 101 and SAC 102*

SAC 101 is an expanded, zero-credit, 75% online/25% in-person Freshman Seminar course, taught by Learning Facilitators, and is required prior to beginning the first term at the College. Not having taken and passed SAC 101 prevents registration for the third term. Content is that of the traditional freshman seminar course plus information about St. Augustine College in its uniqueness. The first series was successfully offered prior to the beginning of the Fall 1 term in August, 2021.

SAC 102 is an Intro to Computer Science course, designed for students who need to learn the basics needed to be ready for online education and to improve basic computer literacy skills. SAC 102 is taught by a CIS professor in charge of educational technology at the institution.

4. *Daily monitoring of attendance throughout the first two weeks of the term.*

The Deans of Academic Affairs and Students have worked together to create an efficient system to monitor daily attendance at the beginning of the semester. An online submission form via the SignNow platform allows faculty to record attendance, sign to verify, and submit electronically.

At least for the first two weeks of the term, Learning Facilitators are expected to contact students who've missed classes within 24 hours. Attendance entered by faculty gets rolled into a daily report that LFs are expected to continuously monitor.

5. *Adoption of EvaluationKit to support instruction by evaluating instructors and courses.*

The institution moved from manual evaluation tools used for students to evaluate faculty at the end of the academic terms and adopted EvaluationKit, a software to evaluate instructors and courses. St. Augustine College uses the EvaluationKit platform to administer online student evaluations of faculty and courses at the end of each term. The evaluation period begins during week 6 of each academic term (week 14 for 16-week courses) and concludes the Sunday following final exams. A faculty is notified via e-mail of the dates of the evaluation period each term and receives a link to view results at the conclusion of the evaluation period. Results are accessed using the same credentials used to log into all other institutional platforms. Administrators also have access to the evaluation results of their direct reports for annual evaluation purposes. All faculty are responsible for downloading their results and saving them to their electronic portfolios for annual review, retention, and promotion decisions. Faculty are encouraged to allow students to access and complete the evaluations during class time. Institutional results are disseminated after the evaluation period through the Office of Academic Affairs newsletter, [The Quality Journey](#).

6. *The SAC Distance Learning Standards were developed for the delivery of online/remote education and for servicing students to ensure the integrity of the new Latino Education Model.*

The Distance Learning Standards were developed to serve as guidelines for the development of online courses and programs. The academic content and requirements for distance education programs and courses are equivalent to the academic content and requirements for campus-based programs and courses. The faculty, administrators, and staff have worked diligently to ensure that students reach the same rigorous learning outcomes regardless of modality.

7. *Early warning system, to be improved by adopting a full retention model (Jenzabar Retention being considered for implementation).*

A casualty of the online transition, the early warning system was associated with the attendance list generated during week 4 of the 16-week semester, in which faculty

entered U for students whose performance was unsatisfactory. U “grades” were also rolled to the daily report using the midterm grade field and were kept on until midterm grades were due. The early warning system now works through the same system we use for attendance and grades (SignNow); the aim is to replace it with Jenzabar Retention in the near future.

8. *Revitalization of the Institutional Retention and Persistence Committee, in line with the notion that retention and persistence are College-wide goals that involve all constituencies.*

The Persistence and Retention Committee is a standing committee of St. Augustine College, was reappointed by the President and charged with analyzing retention and persistence data on a regular basis and proposing specific actions aimed at increasing retention, persistence, and graduation rates. Additionally, the Institutional Persistence and Retention Committee provides support to the Dean of Students and, at the same time, evaluates retention initiatives at the college level. The Institutional Retention and Persistence Committee designed a retention model to provide students with centralized access to key resources through a new Student Success Center, where they can obtain early intervention support and a variety of assistance services including counseling, tutoring, career/transfer center assistance, academic advising, student life guidance, and mentoring. Students have access to these resources by using different means: email, phone, CANVAS, and flexible online tutoring.

9. *High-risk Assessment of Week 6*

Learning Facilitators evaluate their students’ performance at least three times in the 8-week term: Early Warning (week 2), midterm grades (week 4), and high-risk assessment (week 6). The latter is done through a report that includes students with D or F for one or more courses, and/or two or more absences in a row for one or more courses. Past data indicates that midterm notification of poor academic standing was not early enough to substantially improve the student’s standing in class by the end of the term. The new system is also aligned with the deadline to apply for AW/SW (withdrawals).

10. *Supplemental Instruction*

The tutoring system has multiple points of access and uses referrals from faculty, Learning Facilitators’ intervention, and direct requests from students to provide services. Predominantly online, tutors are also available in-person. Students receiving ADA accommodations are most often tutored on an individual basis.

11. *Financial Aid Support*

The College provides a generous financial aid package that complements federal and state grants with institutional funds, much in line with the mission of making education affordable to students with limited resources. For example, a 0 EFC

student will end up paying just the course materials fee (\$100 a term, no matter how many classes).

Enrollment Strategies

In April 2021, St. Augustine College hired the Director of Marketing and Recruitment. In the current year, the marketing department has worked to understand where St. Augustine's areas of opportunity lie and identified which marketing channels and tools are needed to grow enrollment. First, they completed an extensive market research study which outlined areas of opportunity for the college. For example, they identified unsaturated geographical areas in which potential students reside. Then, they shifted marketing investments into digital channels due to student increase use of digital platforms. This piece also entailed an investment in a new website which will be completed in November of this year. Finally, the company contracted for the website redesign also completed a new brand identity for the college that more accurately reflects the SAC brand. They above marketing initiatives will allow St. Augustine College to gain visibility leading to increased enrollment.

In addition, over the course of the last year, the Admissions Office at St. Augustine College has sought to achieve institutional enrollment goals through a number of strategies. First was to expand to new markets by engaging in relationships with high schools in the Chicagoland area. Given that traditional students are not the predominant St. Augustine College target audience, tangible results of this effort may be long-term. To this end, SAC has partnered with the Chicago Public School System (CPS) through their Compact Program to deepen the relationship with area high schools and identify those with populations we may best serve. In addition, SAC is in conversation with the Common App with the goal of offering that as an additional application method to gain more visibility with audiences applying to other colleges and universities. Using market research as a guide, SAC is also exploring recruitment opportunities and partnerships with organizations that might offer connections with individuals who look like St. Augustine's traditional audience. Another strategy is an investment in ongoing training for the admissions team to elevate the level of service provided to prospective students and increase conversion rates from inquiry to application to enrollment. Finally, SAC is mapping enrollment processes to identify opportunities for increased collaboration across departments while also assessing the organizational structure of the Admissions Office to increase effectiveness and provide paths for professional development. Following these strategies will help create a better student experience by strengthening an already high-touch process, expanding St. Augustine's reach and visibility and, ultimately, resulting in an increase in new enrollments.

Final operating budget for AY2020-2021 (FY21) and the approval operating budget for AY2021-2022.

Overview of Financial Position

Although enrollment has decreased slightly due to COVID 19 in fiscal years ended June 2020 and June 2021, St. Augustine College has been able to maintain its gross tuition and fees revenue. Total revenues increased significantly by \$4 million in fiscal year ended June 2021, due to PPP loans (Payroll Protection Program Loans Round I & II, both fully forgiven by SBA) and HEERF funding. St Augustine College increased scholarships distributions to its students considerably in fiscal year ended June 2021 as a result.

Workforce education certificate programs have been impacted more by the pandemic due to government- mandated shutdowns on work sites, and resultingly have yielded declined revenue in fiscal years ended June 2020 and June 2021. However, the College believes workforce education certificate programs will rebound well in the coming year as the industry recovers from COVID 19.

St Augustine College consolidated classes in the online environment during the fiscal year ended June 2021, resulting in lower instructional costs.

After receiving approval of distance education by Higher Learning Commission, the College also experimented with 8-week terms. The traditional 16-week semester was revised and the institution implemented two terms of 8-weeks. Students are now enrolling in more courses, at least two per term, which may generate additional tuition revenue for the college

The College has designed a new Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education given the overwhelming success of the College's Associate degree in Early Childhood. Currently, the Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood has been approved by HLC, IBHE, and is in the last stage of approval by the Illinois State Board of Education. The institution is expecting to launch the new bachelor degree in Spring 2022. The marketing assessment indicated that the bilingual ECE academic program with two endorsements, bilingual and English as a Second Language, would be a great source of revenue in the upcoming years.

With higher total revenues and lower costs in fiscal year 2020/21 compared to the prior year, St. Augustine College has achieved significant positive net earnings during this period (approximately \$4 million). Going forward as PPP loans and HEERF funding are not expected to recur after the pandemic, the College expects lower funding from such sources.

St. Augustine College projects an upward trend in student enrollment and tuition revenues in the next year. Instructional costs are expected to increase with higher compensation rates and lower course load requirements for resident faculty and Chairs. Maintenance costs such as utilities, security, rent, etc. are also expected to rise as the college reopens classrooms for faculty and students after the pandemic as the institution resumes in-person

instruction. St. Augustine College expects to see a positive net gain of \$1.4 million in the coming fiscal year.

Conclusion

Although COVID-19 brought institutional stress and academic losses, St. Augustine College transformed the losses into opportunities for growth. Many changes took place that ensured academic quality, enrollment improvements, and financial health. Working harmoniously to bring together technology, marketing, finance and enrollment experts along with new teaching and learning practices and innovative delivery models, the College is fulfilling its mission and is maintaining the Higher Learning Commission's standards for accreditation.

The adoption of necessary changes to break the institutional paralysis imposed by COVID were well received and accepted by our community. The improvements in marketing, enrollment, and retention practices are making positive effects on the organizational culture and climate of the college. St. Augustine College has improved financially by clearly identifying and working toward measurable, achievable indicators of academic and administrative quality.

In preparation for our accreditation visit in 2023-2024, St. Augustine College has already embarked on major strategic planning effort which will reaffirm our accreditation in 2023-2024.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr Reyes M. Gonzalez
President