

Moorpark College

Introduction

Moorpark is driven by a commitment to prepare students for their post-college life. It recognizes that while the institution sits in an affluent service area, many Moorpark students come from communities with historically limited access to economic opportunity. As Amanuel Gebru, Vice President of Student Support, shares, the college focuses on helping these students find a path to greater security, explaining, “Students know that, ‘When I come here, I want to get to the next step. The next step will help me get the next degree. The next degree will help me get a better job. That way, I’ll be financially secure.’”

Pre-COVID-19, surveys revealed significant food and housing insecurity among Moorpark’s students, galvanizing the college to have difficult conversations about who it serves and what different student groups need to succeed. During COVID-19, Moorpark saw students living even more tenuously than previously realized. And as COVID-19 evolves, Moorpark recognizes it must address these issues while preparing students differently. As Mary Rees, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs, explains, “Building back up is going to take so much work. The [student] engagement, their mental health [needs], the new careers.... People are going to be intrigued with higher wages. But with inflation, they’ll get caught in a spiral that will hurt them more if they step away from education.... We have to help students where they are at and prepare them for a different world.”

Numerous institutional practices are helping Moorpark fulfill this imperative. Even with a relatively high completion rate, Moorpark has a laser focus on supporting the 36 percent of students who do not complete on time. Its Educational Master Plan provides clear guidance for this work, and all student financial stability efforts connect to the college’s five strategic directions.

COLLEGE QUICK FACTS*

Location:

Moorpark, CA

Campus Setting:

Midsized Suburb

Fall 2020 Enrollment:

12,709

% Pell Grant Recipients:

27%

(First-Time, Full-Time Students)

**Most recent data available in Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)*

STUDENT FINANCIAL STABILITY DEFINED

Colleges that foster student financial stability work to ensure that students are financially secure across their higher education journey, through both financial aid and other sources. They are intentional about helping students:

- **Cover college costs**, such as tuition, books, supplies, materials, and fees.
- **Address basic needs**, including housing, food, childcare, technology, transportation, health care, mental health, and utilities.
- **Make informed choices about their education and career** so their decisions improve their economic and social mobility.

Further, a robust practice of data-informed decision-making, heavy investment in professional development, and a highly integrated organizational structure are helping Moorpark scale efforts to effectively align with students' cultural experiences and economic needs. Examples include a year-long orientation for all new faculty and classified staff and a week-long professional development for all personnel to ensure all employees know the importance of supporting the whole student and are equipped to do so. Each college leader manages a mix of academic and student services departments, and everyone around a student is part of a team. Combined, these institutional approaches are promoting the college's culture of centering student success and a shared commitment to warm handoffs, as described below.

Student Financial Stability in Action

Supporting Students in Making Informed College and Career Choices

With a clear equity imperative, a large part of Moorpark's focus is on helping students understand the intergenerational implications of their educational and career choices and make informed decisions accordingly. As President Julius Sokenu states,

“At the center of the work we're doing is the belief that we're equipping people for life. So whether we're equipping them for life in terms of providing them pathways to career success, building skill sets and habits of mind that they can take from the learning environment in the classroom to their lived lives as productive members of a community, and making informed choices that are not just about building wealth, but the fact that wealth is generational and that the way in which we can help provide for our students today and model behaviors for them, which they can then model for their children, the members of their family, their community and build community success and community capacity.”

Moorpark offers eight areas of interest, including an “exploratory” option for undecided students. Students in the exploratory area of interest receive dedicated support (e.g., strong recommendation to enroll in the Career and Life Planning course) in the first semester to help them make an informed choice about their area of interest by the second semester. Further, the college has partnered with Career Launch, an organization based at Santa Clara University, to help students identify the appropriate area of interest and program of study that will equip them with building their professional acumen and a sustainable income. This virtual platform provides an array of activities and supports, and the college is integrating its use into a variety of student experiences, including developing a full internship course around it and infusing it into programs for specific priority populations.

The college also uses Program Mapper to facilitate efficient degree completion by providing students information about program opportunities along with career and salary information. It proactively sends out program maps and recommended first semester coursework to new, incoming students pre-enrollment based on their expressed area of interest/major. That way, they are equipped to select aligned courses — saving both time and money. Additionally, the Area of Interest page in Program Mapper includes updated labor market data, so students can access information about related careers, average initial salary, and projected growth as they are deciding on upcoming coursework.

Moorpark additionally embeds financial information in a variety of student-centered spaces, so they are empowered along their college journeys. Online Canvas shells for each area of interest include a suite of

15 video modules related to financial literacy and management. Cohort-based student support programs (e.g., African American Male Education Network Development [A²MEND], Collaborative for Hispanics in Higher Education and Student Success [CHESS]) and student leadership programs (e.g., MC L.E.A.D.S.) also serve as a conduit for this information. For example, students in the A²MEND charter meet monthly to discuss a variety of emerging financial topics (e.g., wealth accumulation, cryptocurrency, stock market), traditional financial literacy and management topics (e.g., balancing checkbooks, paying for college), and prep for a post-Moorpark life. The emphasis here is not just on addressing financial needs, but also about fostering behaviors that lead to long-term stability.

In addition, the college also has a robust near-fully-adopted internship program. In fact, 95 percent of programs across the college have either a paid and/or unpaid internship component (i.e., M80 internship course). Unlike many colleges where internships are managed by a student services department, Moorpark's internship courses are embedded in each program of study.

Equipping Students to Meet Their Basic Needs

As Sokenu explains, data collected on students' food and housing insecurity — coupled with personnel's experiences with students — made clear that “our notion of who is hungry, our notion of who is homeless, or who is in these interstitial spaces of economic success and economic viability was quite outdated.” The college asked itself, “How are we putting students first?” and answered, “By making sure students aren't hungry and by connecting them to resources at Moorpark and in the surrounding community that helps them be academically successful.”

Reflective of its integrated approach to whole-student support, Moorpark offers multiple hubs for students to access timely and relevant assistance. A virtual welcome center serves as a centralized source for communication and directs students with basic needs concerns to appropriate people and resources on campus. The college maintains a long-standing Student Services Syllabus (a compendium of non-academic supports along with important dates and deadlines as well as points of contact), which it continues to update every summer and distribute electronically to faculty and staff to share with students. Additional efforts are underway to develop a Canvas channel that includes resources for faculty, staff, and students, given the success of these virtual supports. Further, the college has launched student success teams, co-led by instructional and counseling faculty and inclusive of a representative from Financial Aid.

The college also now ensures that basic needs assistance and financial literacy efforts are integrated into all grant-funded programs and activities. For example, Moorpark's Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) efforts, such as Project STEM Impacto and the Attract, Inspire, Mentor, and Support Students (AIMS2), include economic supports for participants, like book vouchers and relevant paid work experience. Both basic needs and financial literacy are also embedded into initiatives that support the colleges' priority student equity groups.

Moving Forward

Moorpark knows that it must continue to evolve to meet the needs of each student who comes through its doors. For the college, that means continuing to scale features of comprehensive, cohort-based programs so that every student can benefit from those experiences. While Moorpark has many student-centered programs and services in motion, the college recognizes the opportunity to continue refining its approach so students can practically navigate its systems to find the information they need at the time they need it.

The college also recognizes that to continue fostering students' financial stability and long-term success, it must be a learning institution. Sokenu asserts, "We have to learn from our students. We have to learn from our community. We have to learn from one another. I would also say [that in addition to being student-ready,] we have to be chaos-ready.... Change is inevitable... more so now than ever." Yet while Moorpark recognizes it must adapt, it will do so by relying on its long-term, shared commitment to student success, inclusive of fostering students' financial stability. As Rees concludes, "The culture's always been very steadfast.... [The leadership has] been fierce in maintaining [it]. And I think it's been impactful for our students."