South Suburban College
Environmental Scan Report

Executive Summary

Submitted by:

Maher & Maher
Investment Advisors for Talent Development.

Maher & Maher
3535 Route 66, Bldg. 4
Neptune, NJ 07753
www.mahernet.com

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Maher & Maher
Investment Advisors for Talent Development.

3535 Route 66, Bldg. 4 • Neptune, NJ 07753 • 732-918-8000 • www.mahernet.com

PART I: BACKGROUND, INTRODUCTION, AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Background

In 2013, South Suburban College (SSC) embarked upon an effort to develop a new strategic plan for the college. The strategic planning process SSC is pursuing is intentionally inclusive, and actively engages diverse stakeholders in the community – as well as internal college personnel and current and former students – to provide input to plan priorities and development.

SSC's strategic planning process is guided by a dual focus upon supporting student success and advancing community prosperity. The framework for SSC's strategic planning process revolves around three primary elements, drawn from the American Association of Community College's (AACC) 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges 2012 report, *Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation's Future*:

- ❖ Increasing students' readiness to undertake college-level work;
- ❖ Improving completion rates, whether the completion is marked by attainment of an occupational certification(s) or a diploma; and
- ❖ Closing skill gaps in the community; that is, aligning graduates' learning and credentials with industry and occupational demand.

Woven throughout all three of these elements are themes related to college advocacy, accountability, and policy and investment. Taken together, these areas of focus drive the strategic planning process, and will also serve as the organizing framework for SSC's February 12-13, 2014 strategic planning retreat (as well as the college's development of the strategic plan itself).

A critical component of SSC's strategic planning process is the development of this environmental scan, which will be used to inform planning retreat discussions, and, ultimately, development of the college's strategic plan. The environmental scan is designed to provide:

- ❖ A sense of what internal college and external community stakeholders from a variety of sectors think and believe about SSC, as well as what they expect and would like to see from the college; and

❖ An economic and workforce data and program gap and surplus analysis that conveys an understanding concerning the business, education, and labor market climate in SSC's service area.

In order to obtain the input of internal and external stakeholders, SSC conducted an online survey via SurveyMonkey. Stakeholder survey responses are discussed in Part II of the full environmental scan report.

The economic and workforce data and program gap and surplus analysis portion of the scan is provided in Part III of the full report.

High-level observations about both the stakeholder survey responses and the economic and workforce data analysis are provided here in Part I, Section C: Executive Summary.

B. Introduction

In an article on the use of environmental scanning in institutional research contexts, James L. Morrison notes that:
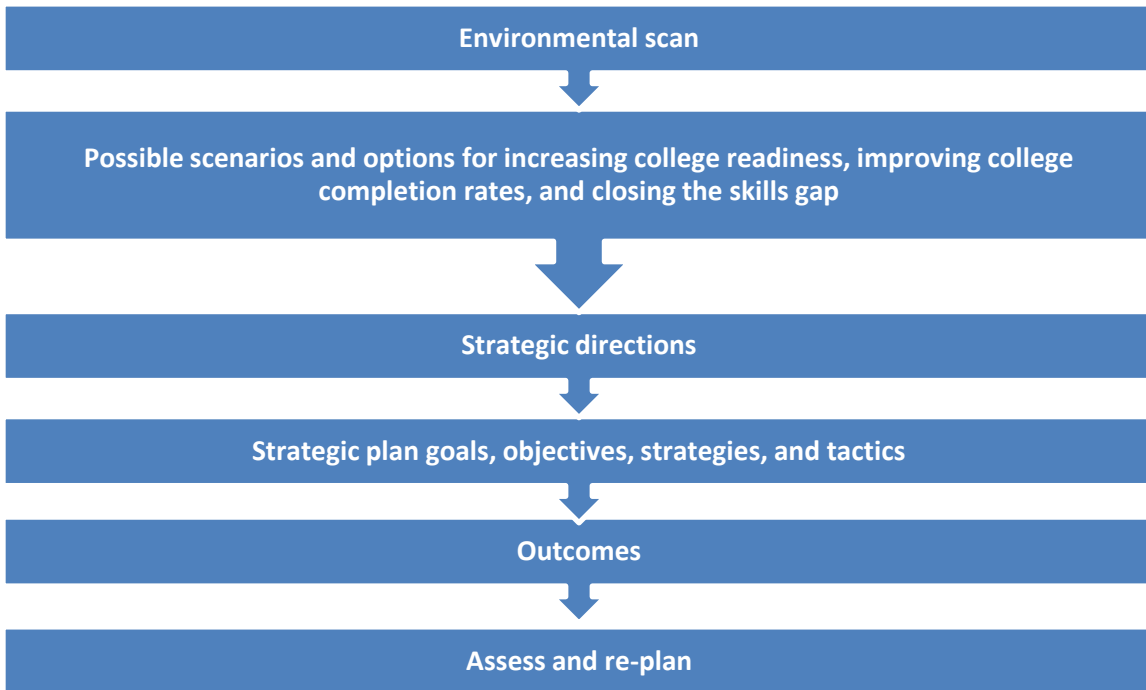
> "Successful management of colleges and universities depends upon the ability of the senior leaders to adapt to a rapidly changing external environment. Unfortunately, the lead time once enjoyed by decision makers to analyze and respond to these and other changes is decreasing. Traditional long-range planning models, with their inward focus and reliance on historical data, do not encourage decision makers to anticipate environmental changes and assess their impact on the organization.
>
> "What is needed is a method that enables decision makers both to understand the external environment and the interconnections of its various sectors and to translate this understanding into the institution's planning and decision making processes. *Environmental scanning* is a method of accomplishing this."[1]

Within the bounds of the overall project objectives and process, the funding available for any environmental scanning activity will largely determine the type, level, and intensity employed. Admittedly, the environmental scanning employed in this project is foundational in nature. Yet, it is an important beginning and foundation for future work. Environmental scanning is not designed to be fully exhaustive or quantitative. Rather, it is meant to identify trends and thereby detect early signs of opportunities and threats that may influence the institution's current and future plans.

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[1] Morrison, J. L. (1992). Environmental Scanning. In M. A. Whitely, J. D. Porter, and R. H. Fenske (Eds.), *A primer for new institutional researchers* (pp. 86-99). Tallahassee, Florida: The Association for Institutional Research.

The collection of quantitative data, via the economic and workforce data and program gap and surplus analysis, complements the qualitative (some might say "anecdotal") information collected via the stakeholder survey. Comprising the combined environmental scan, these two components inform one another, and serve as the foundation for collaborative development of possible scenarios and options for the future, so that productive strategic directions can be determined, plans formulated and implemented, results/outcomes identified, and re-analysis commenced. This process, as employed in this project, may be pictured as follows:

Environmental scan

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Possible scenarios and options for increasing college readiness, improving college completion rates, and closing the skills gap

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Strategic directions

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Strategic plan goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics

↓

Outcomes

↓

Assess and re-plan

In the end, the best strategic planning processes identify seemingly isolated issues and events, group them into recognizable trends, identify the ones that are likely to be drivers of change, and result in a plan that deals effectively with those changes. Older strategic planning models tend to rely heavily upon historical trends and institutional assumptions that are likely to be outdated and no longer accurate. The most useful environmental scans leverage valuable institutional knowledge and historical data, but also draw upon "real-time" stakeholder input and future-looking data and projections.

It is important to note, in closing, that the practice of environmental scanning is not designed to be a "one-time" event. Rather, it should be an ongoing effort to regularly assess current and projected needs, conditions, challenges, and opportunities, and to respond accordingly. Taking this continuous approach to environmental scanning positions colleges to be most proactive and agile in addressing quickly-changing dynamics in the regions they serve.

C. Executive Summary

1. Stakeholder Survey

Background and Response Summary

In the fall of 2013, SSC conducted an online survey of both internal (i.e., college personnel and current and former students) and external college stakeholders (i.e., community organizations and partners). 1,432 individuals completed the survey. Responses from internal college stakeholders comprised the vast majority – 86% – of the total survey response. Current and former students/graduates made up the bulk of this internal stakeholder response. Responses from stakeholders external to the college – such as employers, community partner organizations, and other education partners – comprised just 9% of the overall response. As such, survey results largely reflect internal perspectives about SSC, rather than the perspectives of external customers, partners, and stakeholders. However, SSC has been provided with survey response data broken out by individual respondent group to enable the college to more fully examine perspectives from discrete respondent categories.

Survey Highlights and Potential Areas of Focus Moving Forward

The survey solicited input in several broad categories:

- ❖ Perceptions about the college;
- ❖ The quality of education and of supporting student services;
- ❖ SSC's employer engagement and workforce development efforts; and
- ❖ SSC's role as a community leader and its relationships with partner organizations.

On the whole, survey respondents appear to feel that SSC is doing an adequate-to-good job in delivering a quality education, providing services that help students be successful, offering education and training that is relevant to local labor market needs, and partnering with stakeholders in the community. However, while the majority of respondents did not indicate that SSC is performing poorly in any of these areas, their input also suggests that SSC has significant opportunities to enhance its performance in these areas. Some particular areas of focus in the new strategic planning cycle may include:

- ❖ Enhance SSC's supporting and administrative services, such as counseling and advising, career development support, admissions and registration, and financial aid services.
- ❖ Expand program capacity to address program completion and credential attainment delays.
- ❖ Address gaps in college readiness that necessitate significant developmental education, and accelerate developmental education to move students into college-level work more quickly.
- ❖ Enhance sustained partnerships with employers in regionally-important industry sectors to better understand their talent and workforce needs, and align college programs and curriculum accordingly.
- ❖ Offer students more practical, "hands-on" learning opportunities, such as internships, workplace-based learning, and apprenticeship-style learning.

❖ Increase the college's capacity to "stay current" with and responsive to changing needs and trends in the communities it serves. This may include better use of current and projected economic, workforce, and education data, as well as closer partnerships with organizations that can help SSC anticipate and address evolving dynamics and needs.

❖ Enhance the college's role as a visible, proactive, and respected community leader and convener, particularly around key community challenges and opportunities.

❖ Continue efforts to expand and strengthen meaningful, strategic partnerships with diverse stakeholders in the community, including industries/employers, economic development organizations, secondary and post-secondary educational systems, workforce development entities, community-based organizations, and others.

2. Data Study: Economic and Workforce Data and Program Gap and Surplus Analysis

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify economic and labor market trends that will shape future demand for education and training programs at SSC, a community college enrolling an average of 17,000 students from the south suburbs of Chicago and the surrounding region. Specifically, this report focuses on the following questions:

1. How is the regional economy performing overall?
2. Which industries and occupations are growing or declining?
3. Are education and training programs at SSC and other institutions in the region well aligned to workforce demand, and are they producing enough graduates?
4. What occupations are facing shortages and should be considered for new programs at SSC?
5. What occupations are in an oversupply situation, where SSC could scale back capacity?

Study Area

The study area for this assessment is a three-county region including Cook County and Will County in Illinois and Lake County in Indiana (referred to in this report as "SSC region").

SSC Study Area
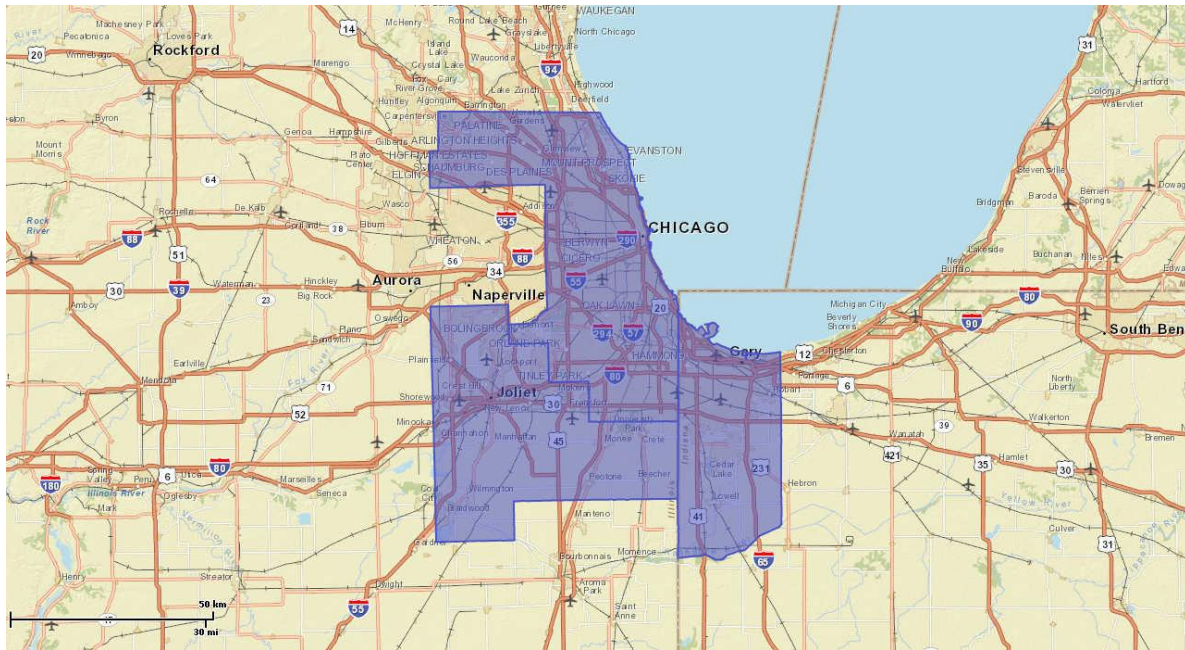
Source: ESRI

Maher & Maher collaborated with SSC representatives on defining the study area. The three counties were selected based on SSC's service area, knowledge of where most SSC students lived and were likely to look for work opportunities, and locations of major industries and employers.

Study Highlights

❖ The SSC regional economy is slowly recovering from the 2008-2009 recession, but the long-term trend of job creation is stagnant. Will County is growing quickly, but the three-county region as a whole trails Illinois, Indiana, and the U.S. on most measures of economic performance.

❖ Education and health care are driving recent employment gains in the SSC region, like in many other places around the U.S. But web-based businesses and automobile manufacturing have also emerged as bright spots during the region's post-recession recovery.

❖ Temporary and contract employment agencies have played a significant role in post-recession job creation in the SSC region, as employers take a cautious approach to hiring.

❖ According to data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education, there are 168 postsecondary education institutions currently operating in the three-county SSC region, offering a wide range of degree programs and non-degree credentials. Consequently, there's considerable overlap and potential duplication in education and training programs offered in the region. However, despite the abundant supply of higher education in the region, there are opportunities for SSC to offer associate degree and certificate programs that can help close gaps in certain occupations.

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Recommendations

SSC is competing against a large pool of other institutions in the region offering similar degree and non-degree, certification or credentialing programs. As a result, there are usually many more graduates than job openings in most occupations. However, there are projected deficits in some occupations requiring an associate's degree or postsecondary non-degree award, where SSC could consider either scaling up existing programs or adding new programs to meet demand. These occupations include:

- ❖ Dental Hygienists
- ❖ Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technicians
- ❖ Chemical Technicians
- ❖ Radio, Cellular, and Tower Equipment Installers and Repairers
- ❖ Life, Physical, and Social Science Technicians
- ❖ Environmental Engineering Technicians
- ❖ Civil Engineering Technicians
- ❖ Electrical and Electronics Drafters
- ❖ Forest and Conservation Technicians
- ❖ Geological and Petroleum Technicians
- ❖ Nuclear Technicians
- ❖ Aerospace Engineering and Operations Technicians
- ❖ Agricultural and Food Science Technicians
- ❖ Fish and Game Wardens
- ❖ Camera and Photographic Equipment Repairers
- ❖ Legal Secretaries
- ❖ Firefighters
- ❖ Library Technicians
- ❖ Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists
- ❖ Real Estate Sales Agents
- ❖ Telecommunications Equipment Installers and Repairers, Except Line Installers
- ❖ First-Line Supervisors of Fire Fighting and Prevention Workers
- ❖ Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians
- ❖ Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers
- ❖ Computer, Automated Teller, and Office Machine Repairers
- ❖ Electronic Home Entertainment Equipment Installers and Repairs
- ❖ Commercial Pilots
- ❖ Insurance Appraisers, Auto Damage
- ❖ Psychiatric Technicians
- ❖ Jewelers and Precious Stone and Metal Workers
- ❖ Hearing Aid Specialists
- ❖ Medical Transcriptionists

Other occupations are in a clear oversupply situation—i.e. program graduates outnumber available job openings—but may still warrant consideration during SSC's strategic planning process. For example, in 2012, the region's education institutions graduated 3,533 students prepared to enter the workforce as registered nurses, but the region is expected to have only 1,929 job openings annually over the next ten years. SSC could interpret this oversupply situation as a signal to decrease capacity in registered nursing since employer demand appears to be well covered. On the other hand, another interpretation suggests that SSC has an opportunity in registered nursing to increase its graduates from 81 in 2012 to a greater percentage of the total 3,533, if SSC can offer a superior program compared to other schools. Thus, not all cases where supply (graduates) is greater than demand (job openings) should be dismissed without careful consideration from a variety of perspectives during the strategic planning process.

A list of these "oversupply" or "surplus" occupations requiring an associate's degree or postsecondary non-degree award includes:

- ❖ Registered Nurses
- ❖ Occupational Therapy Assistants
- ❖ Radiologic Technologists
- ❖ Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses
- ❖ Medical Records and Health Information Technicians
- ❖ Cardiovascular Technologists and Technicians
- ❖ Diagnostic Medical Sonographers
- ❖ Orderlies
- ❖ Nursing Assistants
- ❖ Paralegals and Legal Assistants
- ❖ Court Reporters
- ❖ Computer Network Support Specialists
- ❖ Computer User Support Specialists
- ❖ Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics

Part III of the full environmental scan report provides SSC with the information necessary to evaluate "surplus" or "deficit" occupations based on expected demand between 2013 and 2023. A complete database listing the number of graduates ("completions") by occupation and instructional program for all 168 education institutions in the region is provided to SSC as an accompanying file to this report.

In addition, SSC could use wage data to further prioritize the occupations listed above, as well as provide guidance to students in general about what various jobs pay in the region. Entry wage and average wage are noted in many of the tables in Part III of the full environmental scan report and are included in data files that accompany the full report.