In the last few years, the governor and the legislature have chosen to target increased community college spending in very specific areas, like the Distance Education Initiative, the Basic Skills Initiative, the Student Success and Support Programs reforms, and the Student Equity Program. In the short run, the lack of discretionary funding (e.g., we are receiving very low Cost of Living Allowances that would allow local decision-making on how best to address the college’s needs) has created a LOT of interest in how to spend the dedicated funds that the state has recently made available.

In Cabrillo’s case, categorical spending for the Basic Skills Initiative, SSSP programs (formerly Matriculation, now centered on orientation, assessment, and educational plans), and Student Equity totals more than a million dollars of annual spending. With the state’s January deadline for Student Equity Plans fast approaching, Cabrillo must craft meaningful ways to locally address student access, success, and achievement gaps across student populations. This effort has begun in earnest.

You can review both the old (2004) and proposed draft of the new plan on Cabrillo’s Student Services website - http://www.cabrillo.edu/services/studserv/. The new plan will be briefly discussed at the Faculty Senate meeting this Tuesday, Oct. 7. I expect that our conversations will become more focused and directed in the next 4-6 weeks.

Equity is not equality. It is not about offering every student the same programs. Equity is about fairness of opportunity and recognizing that many of our students arrive with unequal academic preparation and readiness for college-level work. It’s about trying to level an unequal playing field.

Up to this point, based upon my conversations with Academic Senate leaders around the state, I have been promoting the ideas that the college needs to:

1. Analyze, discuss, and continue to gather data that can inform decisions and help to focus efforts to address the unique barriers faced by particular populations served by Cabrillo.
2. The Student Services and Instructional components of the college need to work together to achieve meaningful reform.
3. Rather than using the funds to hire a few administrator/directors, the college would be well served by investing in the faculty, staff, administrators, and students already here. Still, some direction will be needed as the plan gets implemented.
4. Rather than spreading new funding among numerous (deserving) programs, the college should focus on one or two agreed-upon, transformative goals and target our efforts on one or two easily understood objectives.

Faculty input, perspective, and buy-in are, in my opinion, the most important ingredients in the successful implementation of the plan. The good news is that faculty groups – I am most familiar with the Faculty Workgroup for Student Success (now labeled the O2 Workgroup) that has met for more than
50 hours over the last couple of years – have been discussing these themes, often at Faculty Senate meetings. I expect that these conversations are about to influence the specific directions of the plans being developed at the college.

My hope is that we use this moment to seize the opportunity to make a positive difference in the college experience of many of our students.

But the challenge is that we’re working on a tight timeline. We still need to build consensus on the principal goals and groups to serve from our analysis of the data. We have dozens of worthy programs asking for money to help them do their work better, and some of them will see their budgets augmented by these new state funds. However, I remain hopeful that we keep the focus on one or two areas of transformative change. If you are interested, please review the information available on the Student Services webpage, contact your Faculty Senate representative, or attend our meetings over the next few weeks.

Stay tuned.