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Academy of the Canyons Evaluation Brief Number 61

College of the Canyons

Santa Clarita Community College District
26455 Rockwell Canyon
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

Institutional Research, Planning, and
Institutional Effectiveness

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Introduction

Academy of the Canyons (AOC), a middle college high school, just completed its 24th year of operation on the College of the Canyons campus in the Dr. Dianne G. Van Hook University Center! AOC opened its doors in August 2000. AOC is a collaboration between the William S. Hart Union High School District and College of the Canyons designed to provide a supportive, flexible, and academically enriched environment for students whose needs are not being met by the large comprehensive high schools. AOC was awarded a six-year accreditation through 2028 by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and was named a National Blue-Ribbon School in 2015.

Brief History of Middle College High Schools

The first middle college high school was founded in 1974, by La Guardia Professor Janet Lieberman, on the campus of La Guardia Community College in New York City to help remove the barriers between high school and college and to provide an alternative for students at-risk of dropping out of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2003; La Guardia Community College). Today there are over 40 middle college high schools across the nation (Middle College National Consortium, 2024). Currently, the California Community College system funds 14 middle college high schools, which are serving nearly 5,000 students (CBEDS, California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2024). The two initial sites in California were Los Angeles Southwest and Contra Costa community colleges and were founded in 1988.

AOC's Student Population

Academy of the Canyons is open to high school students in grades 9-12 who "...are looking for a unique high school experience" that affords them the opportunity to complete high school requirements and take college courses at College of the Canyons' Valencia campus (AOC brochure). Prior to Fall 2009 AOC was open to 11th and 12th grade students. Beginning Fall 2009, AOC added grades 9 and 10. The goal for total student enrollment for the middle college high school is 400 students. Fall 2023, enrollment was **388**, which is twice the enrollment of 191 in Fall 2005, five years after it opened. Recruitment focuses on students who meet at least one of four criteria: students who are under-represented in the college environment, students who have high potential but are low performing, students of lower socio-economic status, and first-generation college students. AOC's student body in 2023-24 included **76 percent** who were ***ethnic minority***, excluding White not of Hispanic origin and students for whom ethnicity was not reported. AOC's diverse student population closely reflects the demographics of the greater Santa Clarita Valley. Specifically, 41 percent of the AOC student population identifies themselves as Asian/Pacific Islander; 24 percent identifies as White; 25 percent identifies as Hispanic/Latinx/o/a; three percent identifies as Black/African-American; and 6 percent identify as two or more races (excludes race/ethnicity data not reported for 5 students). Over the past eight years, the most significant change in the ethnic composition of the AOC student body has been a decline in the White population (39 percent in 2016 compared to 24 percent in 2023). Providing this opportunity to students who are first generation college students, ethnic minority, low-income, and / or have lower academic performance, is a component of the early college high school initiative, as well as the mission of the middle college high school. The student body is smaller than traditional high schools, which allows students to get to know each other and their teachers better than they might at a traditional high school. All AOC students are enrolled in "Advisement,"

a college readiness class designed to “...support students academically and socially in the college setting” (AOC brochure). The faculty member for the class serves as the students’ advisor throughout the school year. This class fosters interaction and communication between students and teachers since students are enrolled in Advisement with their teacher/advisor as one of their high school classes.

AOC Students

- Are selected based on a thorough application process, and may include an interview with prospective students and parents.
- Take regular high school classes in addition to the college classes.
- Complete at least four high school courses and between 4 and 11 college units per semester depending on the grade level (the \$46/ unit college tuition is waived for all high school students).
- Earn dual credit for college courses, which is recorded on both their college and high school transcripts.
- Use college support services, such as the library, computer labs, tutors, counseling and career centers.
- Complete College of the Canyons Counseling-110 during the Spring semester of their 9th grade year, which helps students with career planning.
- Receive high support at each grade level with advisement on how to navigate the college environment, develop college level study skills and habits, develop effective time management skills.
- Participate in peer support is fostered through group projects and peer tutors in addition to the counseling staff supporting students’ educational plans.
- Students at AOC have the opportunity to participate in clubs, including the National Honor Society.
- Typically, AOC students have a high school GPA of 3.0 or higher and have shown to be motivated, mature, independent learners.

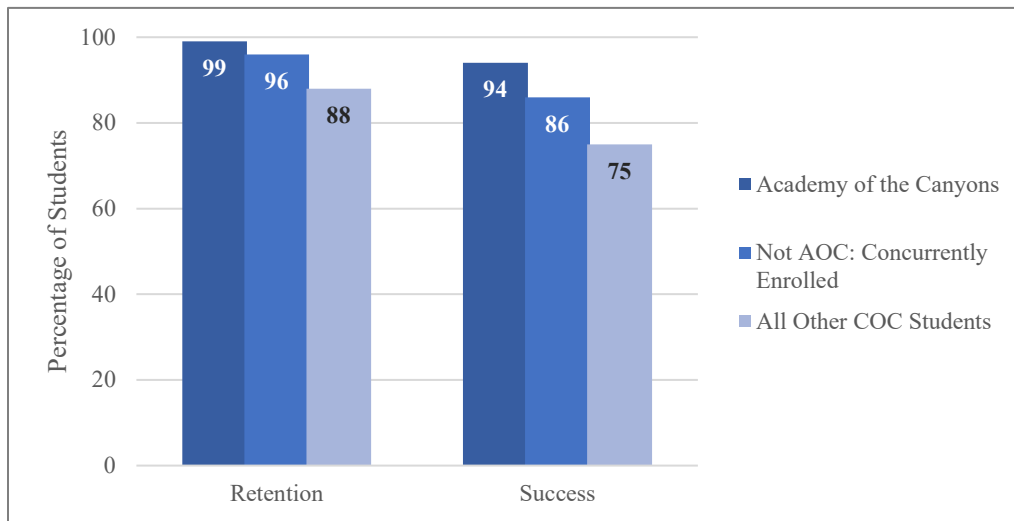


Pictured above: AOC's Mock Trial team wins first place for the second year in a row at the Antelope Valley Annual Mock Trial Competition. Featured here the mock trial comprised of students from grades 9-12.

Source: [AOC FAQs](#)

Retention and Success Rates

Figure 1. Fall 2023 Retention and Success Rates for AOC Students Compared to Concurrently Enrolled Students (Not AOC) and Other COC Students in similar courses



Academy of the Canyons was evaluated using outcome measures that were based on students' success in college courses. Two measures used were students' retention (completing the college courses without withdrawing) and success (passing the college courses with a "C" or better). AOC students were compared to other (not AOC) concurrently enrolled students and all other (non-high school) COC students in the *same college classes*. As is evidenced by Figure 1, AOC students outperformed other COC students in the same classes. **In Fall 2023, the success rate for AOC students was 8 percentage points higher than other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and 19 percentage points higher than other COC students in the same classes.** Historically, for more than 20 years, success rates for AOC students have been higher than all other COC students enrolled in the same courses.

Consistently, high success rates of AOC students (see Figure 3) could be attributed to a number of factors including: the support services and resources available through the counseling, mental health, career readiness and advisement services at AOC; the majority of students attending AOC for all four years of their high school career (starting in 2013-14 to the present); accelerated math and English courses offered at COC; and availability of COC services such as the Tutoring/Learning/Computing Lab and Supplemental Learning workshops.

Retention Rates

Figure 2. Retention Rates for AOC Students Compared to Concurrently Enrolled Students (Not AOC) and Other COC Students: Fall 2019, Fall 2020, Fall 2021, Fall 2022 and Fall 2023 in similar courses

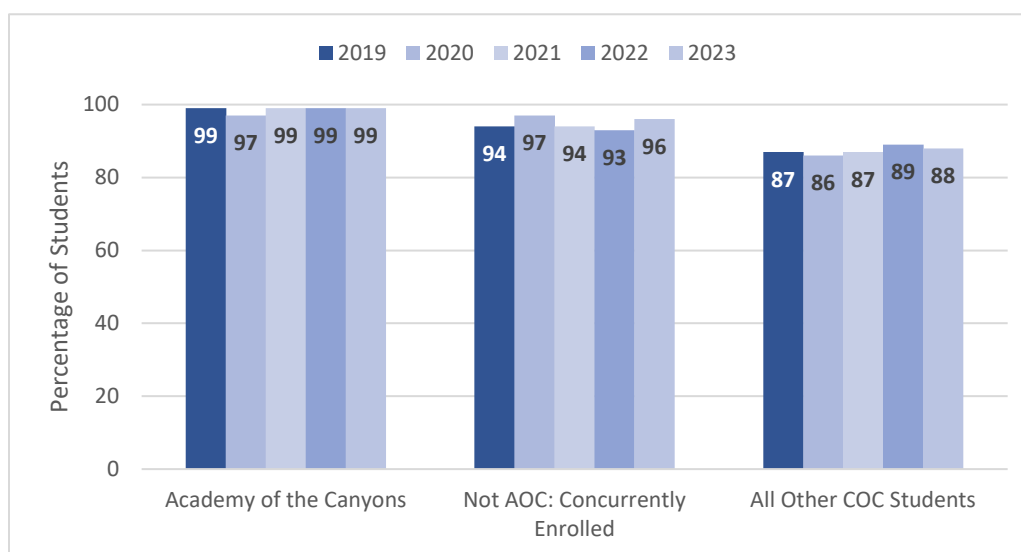


Figure 2 illustrates retention rates over time for AOC students compared to other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and other COC students in the same college classes. Overall, AOC retention rates were higher than other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC), with the exception of fall 2020 (first fall with COVID19 protocols), when the rates were the same. AOC students also had higher retention rates than other COC students in the same classes (10 or more percentage points higher).

Success Rates

Figure 3. Success Rates for AOC Students Compared to Concurrently Enrolled Students (Not AOC) and Other COC Students: Fall 2019, Fall 2020, Fall 2021, Fall 2022 and Fall 2023 in similar courses

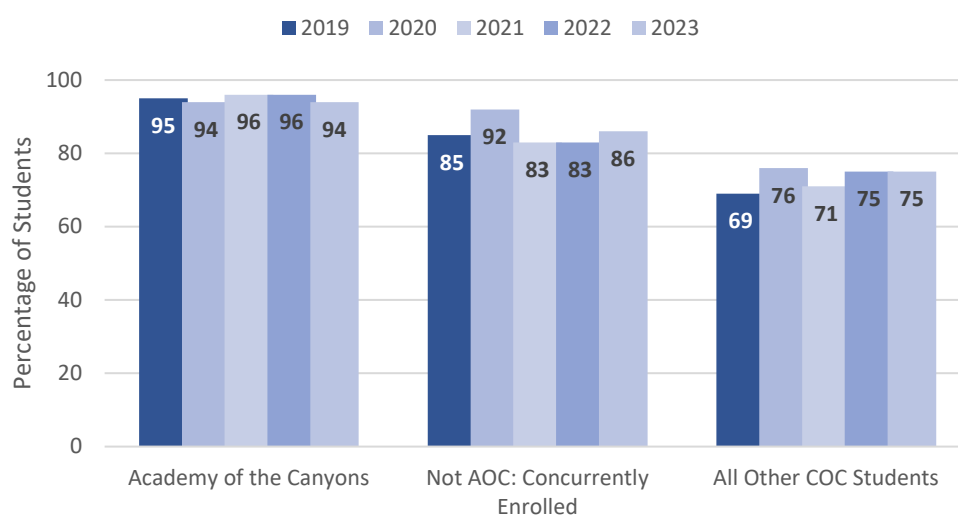


Figure 3 illustrates success rates over time for AOC students compared to other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and other COC students in the same college classes. Success rates for **AOC students** in Fall 2023 **remain high at 94 percent, which is consistently higher than ‘all other COC students’ by 18 or more percentage points over the past five years!** Historically, AOC success rates have been higher than non-AOC, concurrently enrolled students.

Additional analyses comparing AOC 9th and 10th grade students with 11th and 12th grade students showed that success rates were 99 percent for AOC 9th and 10th grade students and 89 percent for 11th and 12th grade AOC students in Fall 2023. The difference in success rates is likely due to the difference in courses taken by each group. For example, AOC 9th and 10th grade students are permitted to enroll in a limited selection of classes. AOC 11th and 12th grade students enroll in a wide variety of courses. Courses taken by AOC juniors and seniors at COC in Fall 2023 with the highest enrollments included Chem-151 (Preparatory General Chemistry), Math-140 (Introductory Statistics), Sign-101 (American Sign Language I), Math-212 (Calculus II), and Spanish-101 (Introductory Spanish).

During the Fall 2023 semester, AOC students enrolled in courses in 38 different departments (see Table 1), including 177 enrollments in Physical Education/Kinesiology, 150 enrollments in Math, and 93 enrollments in Computer Applications and Web Technology.

Table 1. AOC Enrollment at COC by Academic Department: Fall 2023

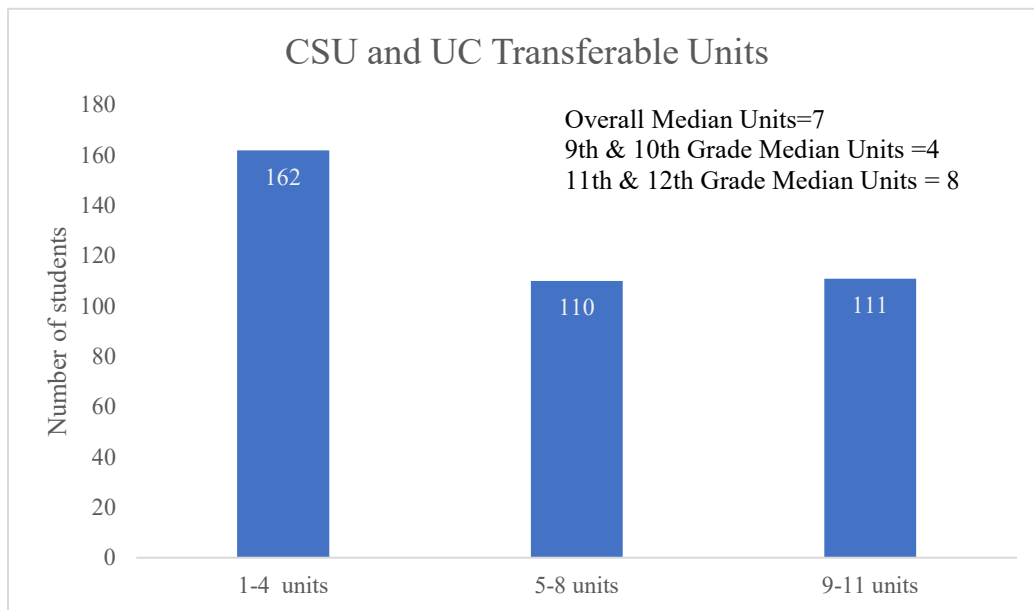
Department	Enrollments	Department	Enrollments	Department	Enrollments
Anthropology	4	French	1	Paralegal Studies	1
Art	26	Geography	3	Philosophy	3
Biological Sciences	11	Geology	8	Photography	11
Business	7	German	7	Physical Sciences	2
Computer Applications & Web Technologies	93	Graphic Multimedia Design	1	Physics	12
Chemistry	33	History	9	Political Science	1
Chinese	5	Health Sciences	2	Psychology	26
Computer Science	3	Interior Design	1	Physical Education (Kinesiology/ PhysEd)	177
Communication Studies	21	Italian	1	Sign Language	31
Counseling	1	Math	150	Sociology	10
Work Experience Education	1	Media Entertainment Arts	31	Spanish	28
Early Childhood Education	1	Music	34	Theatre	17
Environmental Sciences	1	Oceanography	16		

UC and CSU Transferable Units Completed

UC/CSU Transferable Units Successfully Completed

An analysis was done to determine the number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by AOC students during the Fall 2023 semester (Note: successfully completed is defined as passing UC / CSU transferable courses with a “C” or better). Overall, the median number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by all AOC students during the Fall 2023 semester was seven. The median number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by 11th and 12th grade AOC students during the Fall 2023 semester was seven, and in spite of restrictions on the range of college classes available to them, the median number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by AOC students in grades 9 and 10 was four. Note: According to California State law, dually enrolled students are not permitted to enroll in more than 11 college units per semester.

Figure 4. CSU and UC Transferable Units Successfully Completed by AOC Students Present During the Fall 2023 Semester (Grades 9-12)



Notable Highlights in 2023/24

- 99 graduating seniors in the class of 2024
- 18 AOC graduates maintained a 4.0 GPA throughout their time at COC
- 63 AOC graduates earned a 3.5 to 3.99 GPA during their time at COC
- 71 students graduated with at least one Associate degree
- 81% of the 2024 graduating class will be attending a 4-year institution
- 35% will be attending a UC institution
- 29% are headed for a CSU institution
- 14% will be attending a community college



Pictured above: Senior class of 2024 holds balloons to be released in memory of our beloved classmate, Louis Barba who passed away in October of 2023. This was a special image created before graduation held on May 30th.

Pictured below: Senior class of 2024 ASB Senior Sunset event. All seniors participated in cap decorating, signing yearbooks and an ice cream party the day before graduation. Staff and students spent time together.



For more information on this evaluation brief, email Dr. Daylene Meuschke, Associate Vice President of Institutional Research, Planning, Effectiveness and Student Experience Redesign at Daylene.Meuschke@canyons.edu or Dr. Preeta Saxena, Director, Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness at Preeta.Saxena@canyons.edu.