

New Classified Hiring/ Position Justification for Retention Specialist Oct 2019

1. Describe the specific needs for the position requested and the duties of this position in a brief statement.

As STEM grants have ended, there is a gap in services that have proven essential to our students. A Retention Specialist (RS) fulfills multiple roles within the STEM Center and is central to the culture of caring that makes Cañada's STEM Center so successful from the student perspective. The RS is that consistent guide that students asked for in *Student Voices*. First-time students can be unaware of support services or think that they would not benefit from these services. The RS can help them navigate programs and give them that nudge to participate that can change their college experience.

Peer mentors are a crucial part of helping new students, both because of the impact that peers can have and because it makes all of the college's programs more efficient. This RS position is responsible for running the STEM peer mentor program.

Major duties of this position include:

- Serve as primary contact person with students, from initial enrollment through first year of classes
- Recruit students for pre-term orientations. Planning and executing these sessions.
- Recruit, train, and supervise peer mentors; assign new students to peer mentors
- Connect students with appropriate counselor; follow up to ensure student has an SEP *and* registers for those classes
- Direct students to appropriate resources and programs (ex. EOPS, TRIO, MESA)
- Refer students to Financial Aid services; assist with scholarship applications and getting other needed financial resources
- Coordinate student interactions with discipline faculty via discussion groups to foster mentoring relationships.

2. Explain how this position aligns with and supports the mission and strategic goals of the college.

Mission and Strategic Goals:

*Cañada College provides our community with a **learning-centered environment**, ensuring that all students have **equitable opportunities to achieve** their transfer, career education, and lifelong learning educational goals. The college cultivates in its students the ability to think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, reason quantitatively, and understand and appreciate different points of view within a diverse community.*

1. **Student Completion/Success**

Provide educational and student services programs that highlight inclusivity, diversity, and equity in their mission to help students meet their unique educational goals and minimize logistical and financial barriers to success.

2. **Community Connections**

Build and strengthen collaborative relationships and partnerships that support the needs of, reflect, and enrich our diverse and vibrant local community.

3. **Organizational Development**

Focus institutional resources on the structures, processes, and practices that invest in a diverse student population and prioritize and promote equitable, inclusive, and transformative learning.

This position aligns directly with the college mission of **creating a learner-centered environment** by interacting intensively with students, understanding what each student needs at that point in their journey, and connecting them with the appropriate support services. This function is particularly important in **providing equity** for first-time, first-generation students who may be less familiar with college environments.

The RS helps students to achieve their academic goals (Strategic Goal #1) by getting them to the resources that will help. Too often our students think that support programs are not aimed at their particular case, or that it would be too cumbersome to participate that program. The RS helps to overcome that reluctance, get students engaged with a variety of support services, and promote formation of communities among students (Goals #1, 2).

Guided Pathways is now the college's major principle behind organization and delivery of support services. The STEM Center staff has been piloting various forms of student support services, basically operating as a Success Team, over the past decade. It is clear that the RS is a key position within Success Teams. This position can continue to develop best practices for RS operation and collaborations, thus easing implementation of Success Teams across the college (Goal #3).

3. Explain how adding this position will strengthen the department or division.

This position is *the* key component to STEM Center services. As outlined above, the RS is the face of the college for students, and a consistent guide to support services. STEM curriculum can be intellectually rigorous and time-consuming, especially with lab-based pathways. It is crucial to get the right support to students as they need it, but "If you build it, they will come" is NOT true for our students. The RS is the key to coordinating student engagement and building a supportive community of classmates, staff, and faculty. The combination of services and supportive community contributes greatly to the academic achievement of Cañada's STEM students.

4. Explain how this work will be accomplished if the position is not filled.

This work has been done by up to 3 Retention Specialists under a variety of STEM grants. These grants are ending and new grant proposals do not include these functions. Several years of pilot programs have demonstrated the value of these particular RS functions listed under question #1. If this position is not filled, these crucial programs will not be continued as the grants expire at the end of this year. It is expected that retention and persistence of students, especially first-gen, lower income students will decrease. These students are least familiar with navigating college academically and socially, and benefit greatly from the guidance of a Retention Specialist. The peer mentoring program requires training and supervision of mentors to be effective, and this would not be provided. Any boost of achievement from peer mentoring would likely decline or disappear. Student use of other support services across the campus – Sparkpoint, tutoring, DRC – could decline as fewer referrals are made, and without the urging of an RS.