I. **Recommendation:** Develop a completely new College website to replace the existing version.

**Rationale:** The COM website should be the number one marketing piece for the institution. Students, staff and instructors that provided feedback, report that the current website is the number one negative aspect of College of Marin. The website in its present format is not intuitive for the public user and is a barrier to access for new students and anyone interested in COM.

**Potential Steps:**

Rather than continuing to attempt adjustments and improvements to the existing website, I recommend hiring an independent contractor web developer to start from scratch and build a new site. A *web developer* rather than a *web designer* is recommended. A web designer is essentially an artist and places importance on the aesthetics over function. A web developer is concerned with not only the appearance of the website but also the ultimate function and usability of the site.

I recommend a neutral person/group that is not familiar with the institution and therefore has the ability to apply his/her expertise without the assumptions of knowledge that come with an in-house individual. This is critical to developing a website that is user-friendly to a new user or non-COM employee.

**Ideas**

- A local firm by the name of Thomas Digital Design based in San Francisco; website@ [http://thomasdigitaldesign.com/](http://thomasdigitaldesign.com/), recommends 6 key factors when hiring a web developer:
  
  A. Do not pay too little  
  B. Do not pay too much  
  C. Hire a web developer not a web designer  
  D. Get a CMS (Content Management System) to make your site work for you  
  E. Lookout for hidden fees in a contract such as maintenance  
  F. Be extremely well versed in SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and Social Media

- Estimated cost for this service is approximately $3,000 – 5,000 and monthly maintenance after launch of approximately $100-500. All details for services and pricing are available on their website as well as their portfolio.
II. **Recommendation:** Restructure and ramp-up IT department programmer staffing.

**Rationale:** The existing programmers are not able to implement previously purchased software and are barely able to maintain the current systems. The technology that exists is not being used to its optimal level due to insufficient programmer hours to enhance current software. A structured plan for assessing the College’s need and then identifying the number of hours/days/weeks/months to complete the jobs as well as the level and area of programmer expertise needed for each job.

**Potential Steps:**

- Have the IT Director take a complete inventory of currently owned or leased software to determine needs, use and efficiency of each and every program.
- Develop a plan to implement all worthy existing software that takes the following list into consideration: number of programmers, programmer hours and programmer skill sets.
- Determine cost and options for filling programming needs. Possible options:
  
  A. Retain independent contractors who are “generalists” to maintain existing systems while current programmers implement and launch unused software.
  
  B. Hire independent contractors who are known experts in particular software systems to come in for a finite period of time to implement and launch unused software.
  
  C. Hire a Banner expert consultant to assess current usage and assist current programmers in customizing Banner to fulfill COM’s needs.
  
  D. Depending on the formula used from the above-stated options options, I project a need for a minimum of 3-5 additional short-term and long-term programmers in some combination for the future sustainability of COM’s IT systems.

**Additional Steps**

- The IT programmers will work closely with the Web Developer to assure user-friendly applications that are in sync with the new COM website.
- Use student focus groups at each step of the process for any student-use program or application.
- Each application or program that will be implemented should be ‘piloted’ or tested in a manner that solicits feedback from users.
- The IT Director will develop a check-list for each project that assures interaction with existing systems compatibly and intelligently.
- The College will provide multiple user experiences and trainings when launching any new major conversion or system.
III. **Recommendation:** Go paperless, automated and “real time” with every student communication and transaction in all Student Services departments.

**Rationale:** Going paperless supports the College’s commitment to sustainability initiative highlighted in their Strategic Plan. Going “green” is non-negotiable in our current world and COM needs to lead by example. Additionally going paperless and automating all functions provides better access for students, greatly reduces staff handling and processing time, saves money, improves security and privacy of student records and personal information, and offers improved transparency within departments and across institution.

**Potential Steps:** Listed chronologically for the most part.

- Convert all forms used by students, staff, instructors, management and the general public, to automated versions. Utilize SharePoint®, Adobe LiveCycle® - type applications to convert all existing manual forms to online and interactive. Combine and condense existing forms into multi-use intuitive ‘smart-forms’ that change depending on the user’s response to key questions.
- Examples of departments that would benefit from conversion to automated forms: Including but not limited to Admissions & Records, Financial Aid, Community Education, Counseling, Assessment, Human Resources and Library.
- Once forms are received electronically they can be handled and processed electronically by appropriate staff. When complete, the document may be stored in the IT Filer or if it is a paper document it can be scanned/imaged, stored in IT filer and shredded immediately.
- All departments should have scanners as desktop office equipment that are connected or closely located to document shredders for student record security.
- Any time an action is taken or made to a student record, whether initiated by a staff member or the student, an email confirmation should be sent to the student automatically and immediately to the student portal. All actions should be transparent to COM staff that has a legitimate educational interest. Staff and students should be able to log on to student record portal and be able to determine the exact status of a student at any given time.
- Implement ‘Instant Admission’, welcome email that is generated and sent within 1-2 minutes maximum, to each and every new or returning student that includes an outline of the next steps to take with active webpage links that guides them through each and every step.
- Implement a ‘check-back’ process that is automated to contact students who have applied but not followed any of the recommended steps or taken any steps at all.
• Implement a reward system of sorts for each student as they make their way through the process – much like levels in a video game. No matter the level of the user, the student is incentivized to take the next steps or “pass a level” if they are entitled to an exemption from a step.

• For example when a student clicks on Assessment, they will be prompted to answer a couple key questions to determine assessment needs and then connect them with an online appointment scheduling system for taking the test(s). Notes on this page would also give a brief overview of assessment testing benefits/options.

• Orientation could be handled in the same manner as Assessment

• Once a student reaches this level – they would be issued an “Express Ticket” to Counseling to develop their Educational Plan. If the student had already done preliminary Ed. Plan on Degree Works they would get a higher level express ticket – A “First Class Express Ticket” for a Counseling appointment that would be prime appointment times and length that rewards them for their advance preparation and demonstrated motivation to succeed.

• The Educational Plan is entered in Degree Works online so that student, counselor, and appropriate staff are able to view in myCOM portal in the future. As a student enrolls and completes the recommended courses they are ‘checked off’ to illustrate progress and highlight the next steps.

• With these systems in place, the VPI and Dean of Instruction are able to utilize aggregate data in the Ed Plans to efficiently plan the Schedule of Classes for future semesters including pertinent information such as preferred class days, times, instructors, campus etc…

• The data that will be available through this process will allow COM to predict Student Success Scorecard outcomes and plan incremental, intelligent growth and improve outcomes.

• Registration and Enrollment process will illustrate for the student, their Ed Plan for each semester and guide him/her accurately and effectively to stay on track for success.

• Eliminate in-person registration and make all registrations occur in “real-time”.

• Once enrolled, a student’s success will be tracked continuously. Alerts will “pop-up” or be sent when they veer off the plotted course such as: dropping a class, opting for P/NP, or unsatisfactory progress at midterm. Tools would be provided to assist them in making good decisions and provide referrals to Counseling, tutorial center or connecting with the instructor. These alerts would be visible to appropriate COM staff so they are able to respond/reach out to student at critical decision points.

• Implement CRM software such as Constant Contact® to communicate with student at critical points in each semester. This is separate from the myCOM portal – a more visual interactive type of email communication that goes directly to their personal email.

• Automate Wait List function so that WL-students move into a secure enrollment automatically as other students on the active roster drop.
• Implement mandatory instructor no-show drops to better manage enrollments and open up seats for other students and assure proper Financial Aid disbursements.
• Automate parking permits and consider an outside vendor such as Credentials Inc. ® to handle the process completely.

**Telephone communication**
• Automate the College switchboard completely. Consider converting to a Cisco®-type system that manages all calls. The management of the system could be handled in A & R but should not require A & R staff to answer all calls and place long-distance calls for the entire College.
IV. **Recommendation**: Establish a “Student Success & Completion” campaign.

**Rationale**: This is a clear way to inform and incentivize the student to understand their role as a student from the very first time they express interest in COM and how to be successful in this role. The “Student Success and Completion” model lays out a path for success for the individual that is consistently clear to both the student and College staff who serve them.

Begin with the understanding that being a student may well be the first and most important decision makes. The experience and relative success of the individual hinges on that decision-making process and experience. Future jobs, careers, professions will be predicated on the student experience and for many, that path begins at a community college. While evaluating the following steps, look through the lens of it being a “first-time student experience:

**Potential Steps:**

- When looking for a college, today’s students research online first, and locate opportunities through advertisements on the Web. Once an institution is identified that the student wants to apply to, he or she will likely explore the college website to acquaint themselves with what the college is about on every level. He or she will want to see photographs of EVERYTHING – the instructors, the campus, the buildings, the students who attend, the activities they can participate in, the food that is available and student life. They will be curious about what technology will be available to them and the website functionality will be a huge indicator of College technology. Additionally, they will ask friends, family and acquaintances what they know about the college.

- The potential student will look at the descriptions for a student to determine which type of path is best for them: part-time, full-time, certificate or degree? The description will give a full understanding to the student about what is expected of them in order to be successful and what the daily and long-term benefits will be.

- Apply – the next step after narrowing down college options is to apply for admission to the college – this process must be online and accessible through their computer, laptop, tablet or smart phone. They may be applying to more than one college so an instant response after applying is critical – today’s student wants instant gratification. If COM doesn’t give it, another college will.

- After the student is accepted for admission, Assessment is the next step much like taking a skills test with a potential employer to determine a good “job fit” – the same must be done for a student – an assessment test or tests to assure that the student is appropriately placed in courses in order to succeed.
• Once the best fit is determined, the student is welcomed to the college with an orientation – the orientation is mandatory because the student needs to know so many things about the college and its culture in order to be successful. Much like a new job – there is not just one orientation but a series of orientations that take place incrementally to allow the information to be absorbed and integrated by the student. The student then visits a Counselor to discuss their goals and objectives and develop a plan for advancement. This plan, once developed, will be available to them 24/7 during their time at COM.
• Next they register for classes in order to fulfill the goals established with their counselor.
• Once they have their plan established and are enrolled in classes, they begin their going to classes and producing the work assigned to them
• Once they are on settled in to their semester classes, there are regular check-ins or ‘touch-points’ for a student it would be mid-term progress reports but also regular communication with instructors about performance.
• Should the student not be able to keep up with their academic work, an intervention with a counselor or a referral to the tutorial center would be made.
• In most aspects of life, “All work – no play,” causes morale to wane. Therefore, it is good to infuse activities with work that connect the student to new interests and to others in the community. The student should be exposed to club membership opportunities, committee positions that allow them to affect change, and avenues to connect with their greater community as a COM representative.
• Instructors will provide the day-to-day training, education, feedback and opportunities to practice and demonstrate new skills in a safe environment.
• If a student is at risk of not passing their probationary period, he or she should be notified in a timely manner and given the tools and opportunity to recover with institutional assistance.
• If the student completes their first semester, they become a continuing student of the institution and continue to receive the benefits that allow them to achieve and complete their goals.
• If the student does not succeed and chooses to take leave of their student status, it would be beneficial to have an “exit interview” to determine how the college and student might do things differently in the future to change the outcome the next time.
• “Invest in the Student You Want to Retain.”
V. **Recommendation**: Remove all Bursar functions from the Admissions & Records office.

**Rationale**: The Bursar at a college is an officer who is responsible for the disbursement and accounting for all funds distributed to students. These functions must be separated from the admission, registration, enrollment and records functions. The accounting for student fees and financial aid disbursements is an accounting responsibility and belongs in the Business Office of the College with a person or persons who are highly qualified in proper accounting methods handling the intake and disbursements of monies.

**Potential Steps:**

- Hire an individual with strong Bursar experience that will assess all aspects of COM’s accounting in the receipt, collection and deposit of all revenues including tuition and fees.
- **Remove** all aspects of these processes from Admissions & Records office *except* the acceptance of payments.
- The Bursar’s office will provide the highest level of professional, efficient and responsive customer service.
- The Bursar’s office will be responsible for:
  1) Accepting payments for student accounts made by cash, check, money order, or credit card
  2) Application of Financial Aid disbursements to student accounts
  3) Billing student account receivables
  4) Collection of delinquent student accounts
  5) Collection for return checks
  6) Depositing funds received from all departments
  7) Posting and billing of employee tuition benefits (If applicable)
  8) Billing for Third Party Accounts
  9) Posting of student refund checks and adjustments.
VI. **Recommendation**: Move Community Education application, registration and fees processes out of Admissions & Records completely.

**Rationale**: A student’s permanent academic record should be discreet and separate from any other type of enrollment – specifically a community education course enrollment. The admission criteria and process, enrollment in courses, and the billing and collection of fees for Community Education courses should be its own entity to eliminate confusion between student types. Separating Community Education from credit and non-credit classes will allow this program to flourish independently and without the hindrances embedded in the credit program for matriculating students.

**Potential Steps:**

- Remove all Community Education functions from the credit system and out of Admissions & Records
- Establish a job description for a staff person in Community Education to handle all aspects of admissions, registration and enrollment for Comm. Ed. Courses.
- All processes should move toward automation in order to be compliant with the sustainability initiative and to track the program accurately and efficiently at every level.
VII. **Recommendation:** Upgrade and Improve Physical Space and Staff Professional Development for all of Student Services.

**Rationale:** *Physical space* – the current space in the Student Services could be more welcoming, open, accessible, friendly and logical. Making it so, would heighten the student’s COM experience, decrease student frustration, lessen new student’s anxiety, and provide excellent customer service.  
*Staff Professional Development* – knowledge and education build self-esteem, encourage aspiration to higher achievement and professional growth, expands understanding of the College, broaden viewpoints and perspectives while encouraging stronger teamwork and breaking down of silos.

**Potential Steps:**

- **Physical space** – Open up Admissions & Records. Take down walls, put in clear glass walls from the counter upwards to ceiling. Remove copper hood over fire pit to increase visibility to students in lobby, locate student computer kiosks in a more open format to provide privacy, allow more personal physical space and make them closer and more accessible to A & R staff. Put in a door that goes directly to lobby for staff to have quick access to students.
- Cross train staff and have all technicians work at counter on a regular basis to prevent staff burn-out, and encourage teamwork.
- Consider having Financial Aid windows in A & R to alleviate having a student run around and prevent bounce-backs.
- Implement “Three’s a Crowd” in a line meaning another window is opened if there are more than three students in line at any given time.
- Clean and brighten the space everywhere. Paint, new carpet, eliminate clutter, and open offices up to make all spaces more welcoming.
- Place an Information/Greeter booth at one or both entrances in Student Services Building staffed with student ambassadors. Implement “Ask Me!” campaign – staff wears buttons and signs prompt student with FAQ’s.

- **Staff Professional Development** –
  
  - Establish a “Student Services Generalist” position to be located at the IVC campus. This position would be knowledgeable in all Student Service areas thus eliminating staggered hours, days and staffing from all the Kentfield campus. One or two generalists who are at IVC full time with a broad knowledge base and the ability to communicate effectively with Kentfield staff as needed for more complex matters.
  - Set up IM – Live chat abilities on the COM website for more streamlined communication and problem-solving between the two campuses.
- A similar IM-Live chat system could be utilized as a “Help-line” for students. Regular rotation of staff as the help-line operator, increases staff awareness of student needs, provides excellent customer service and promotes student success.
- Implement intensive customer service training for any and all staff that interacts with students.
- Provide software application training – then train them to train fellow staff. “Learn one-Do one-Teach-one” is the way surgeons learn.
- Have staff join campus-wide committees to improve relationships, impart knowledge and understanding and open communications across departments.
- Send all staff to conferences and workshops in order to stay current, relevant, in touch with best-practices, networking opportunities with counterparts at other colleges and view vendor solutions for College needs.
- Have each department provide “in-service” trainings and workshops to fellow staff and to other departments to increase knowledge and understanding and allow better communication throughout.
- Each department in Student Services should implement a Program SLO that documents their contribution to student learning and success with specific attention to the Student Success Act requirements. For example, Financial Aid’s SLO could be “Measuring the success of students who apply for the BOG fee waiver.”
- Have each staff member provide regular mini-trainings to fellow staff to develop awareness and move towards effective cross-training.
- Institute a “We Care” program that solicits regular and ongoing feedback from students that the staff serves.
- Institute an “Appreciation Award” within departments that allows staff to acknowledge and appreciate each other on a weekly basis within their own department and with other departments across the College.