

Written confirmation to hire Umoja Coordinator/Counselor vs. General Counselor - Spring 2026

Presented by Cuyamaca College President - Dr. Jessica Robinson, MSW

General Counseling was ranked seventh on the 2025–2026 Faculty Hiring Priorities Committee list; consistent with that process, the college is moving forward with a counseling faculty position, and that position will be structured as an Umoja Coordinator/Counselor to align with identified equity gaps and the college's strategic priorities.

This written confirmation is grounded in documented equity gaps, enrollment and persistence data, and the explicit commitments outlined in both the college's strategic priorities and the 2025 Student Equity Plan. While General Counseling remains essential to the college's operations and overall student success, the Umoja Coordinator/Counselor position is designed to meet the distinct, high-need supports of Black and African American students through a programmatic, longitudinal model that cannot be effectively provided within a general counseling assignment. This reflects strategic prioritization, not a reduction in the value of general counseling services.

Rationale for proceeding with an Umoja Coordinator/Counselor Position

Direct Alignment with the 2025 Student Equity Plan and the College's Strategic Priorities

- Black and African American students are a strategic focus population in the 2025 Student Equity Plan and are explicitly prioritized within the college's Strategic Plan goals related to persistence, completion, and equity-minded student support.
- The Student Equity Plan identifies Umoja as a primary institutional strategy for addressing documented enrollment, persistence, and completion gaps, directly aligning with the Strategic Plan's emphasis on improving student outcomes through targeted, high-impact practices.
- Key Equity Plan and Strategic Plan strategies include:
 - Direct engagement and recruitment of Black and African American students into Umoja learning communities, Umoja Summer Bridge, and early onboarding initiatives that support early momentum and persistence
 - Umoja transfer institution visits, including HBCU engagement, aligned with Strategic Plan goals focused on completion and transfer pathways
 - Increased access to comprehensive education plans and sustained, intrusive, equity-minded counseling support to promote persistence and timely completion
- These strategies require counselors whose assignments are structurally embedded within Umoja and cannot be implemented with fidelity through a general counseling assignment alone.

Scope of Work Exceeds a General Counseling Model

- The Umoja Counselor role is programmatic, relational, and longitudinal. Core responsibilities include:
 - Proactive outreach to all students who identify as Black or African American
 - Embedded counseling within English, Counseling, and possible Math learning communities
 - Summer Bridge coordination and first-year cohort development
 - Transfer pathway development, including HBCU tours and external partnerships

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- These responsibilities are time-intensive and high-touch and cannot reasonably be added to a general counseling caseload without dilution of services or risk of burnout.

Enrollment and Recruitment Imperative

- Black and African American student enrollment has declined for three consecutive years.
- At the same time, significant growth opportunities exist:
 - The Grossmont Union High School District enrolled 1,259 Black and African American students this past year, representing a strong dual enrollment and recruitment pipeline.
 - The GCCCD service area includes approximately 28,000 Black and African American residents.

Persistent Equity Gaps in Student Outcomes

- Black and African American students experience significant and persistent equity gaps:
 - Course success rate: 67% (college-wide: 77%)
 - Fall-to-Spring persistence: 59%
 - Fall-to-Fall persistence: 49%
 - Four-year completion or transfer rate: 40%
- Closing these gaps requires culturally responsive, sustained, longitudinal counseling.
- The Umoja model is intentionally designed to provide early intervention, continuous academic planning, and cohort-based support.

Representation and Campus Climate

- Dedicated Umoja Counselors strengthens validation, belonging, and institutional trust for students most impacted by equity gaps.

Targeted vs. Universal Impact

- General counselors serve a broad student population and provide essential access.
- However, the Equity Plan identifies populations for whom universal services alone have not closed gaps.
- This hire prioritizes a targeted intervention where the data show the greatest need and the highest potential return for student success.

Intentional Staffing Configuration and Shared Capacity

- The college currently has one Umoja counselor/coordinator at 1.0 FTE, who will transition to a .5 Umoja / .5 General Counseling assignment.
- The proposed hire would mirror this configuration, resulting in:
 - Two counselors each assigned .5 to Umoja and .5 to General Counseling.
- This structure intentionally:
 - Preserves and contributes to general counseling capacity when needed

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- Allows for partnered counseling support within Umoja, which is necessary to enroll and retain Black and African American students
- Provides coverage and continuity when one counselor is off schedule, ensuring uninterrupted student support
- Aligns with feedback from State Umoja site visits, which recommended shared counseling and coordination responsibilities to support the existing Umoja program model and prevent overextension of a single position.

System-Wide Capacity Considerations

- This recommendation does not negate the importance of general counseling nor remove services from other students.
- Instead, it:
 - Creates capacity relief by deeply serving a defined population
 - Maintains general counseling support through the shared assignment

Governance Considerations

This decision may raise questions regarding alignment with shared governance processes. These considerations were taken seriously.

Cuyamaca's definition of "Shared Governance" is "inclusive and collaborative decision-making that reflects the diverse voices of our campus community" ([Cuyamaca College Participatory Governance Handbook](#)). The role of the College President is to receive the recommendations produced through effective shared governance and make final decisions based on full consideration of all interest holder feedback and the totality of the needs of the campus as they align with stated priorities and goals.

Recommendations for a general counseling position were clearly carefully reviewed through shared governance via Program Review and the work of the Faculty Hiring Priorities Committee. In addition, it is important to note that campus-wide shared governance processes also document the magnitude of need and persistent equity gaps experienced by our Black and African American students. These same processes have produced calls to action for our institution to dedicate resources to addressing these needs and closing equity gaps. These can be found documented in:

- [2025-2026 FHPC List](#) Identified the need to hire a counselor; ranked seventh on the Faculty Hiring Priorities Committee. The full program review request identifies "clos[ing] equity gaps for Black and Latiné students by increasing access to counseling services, in the interest of increasing persistence between fall-spring semesters" as a goal.
- [2025 Student Equity Plan](#) Black and African American students are a strategic focus population
- [Strategic Goals](#)
 - Increase Equitable Access
 - Eliminate Equity Gaps in Course Success

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- Increase Persistence and Eliminate Equity Gaps
- Increase Completion and Eliminate Equity Gaps
- Increase Hiring and Retention of Diverse Employees
- [Mission, Vision, and Values](#)
 - Vision: “Equity, Excellence, and Social Justice through Education”
 - Values:
 - Student-centered
 - Equity
 - Student Success
 - Innovation
 - Excellence
 - Social Justice

The above campus priorities and commitments are the product of careful and collaborative campus-wide shared governance and reflect the diverse voices of our campus community. They all speak to the need to serve students through an equity lens and document a campus-wide commitment to “work together to make systemic changes to actively dismantle the racism and inequalities ingrained in the fabric of traditional institutions in order to safeguard human rights, increase access, promote participation, and further equity ([Cuyamaca’s definition of “social justice”](#)).

Furthermore, feedback provided by faculty within shared governance spaces and through elected and appointed faculty representatives have continuously called for more pro-active approaches to problem-solving and intentional resource allocation to support our campus goals and initiatives as well as better institute cultures of care that will address and prevent burnout.

While the original request specifies a general counselor, careful consideration of all the work done through shared governance led to the conclusion that an Umoja Coordinator/Counselor Position more-fully addresses urgent college needs and priorities. This approach moves forward with hiring another counselor and identifies a targeted role within that job description. Our strategic priorities and Student Equity Plan explicitly call for focused, equity-minded interventions to improve outcomes for historically underserved student populations. Equity requires differentiated responses when outcomes differ, and targeted investment is a necessary strategy for closing those gaps.