Research Findings:
Good Practices in Student Retention and the First Year Experience

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Foundations of Excellence™
In the First College Year
The Current State of Affairs

- Community Colleges award between 600,000 – 650,000 degrees/year

- 39% students (who eventually enrolled in CC) had risk factors for dropping out of high school (NELS 1992 data)
  - 54% entered CC with one or more risk factors for college dropout

- 50-60% of students who enroll at CCs with intention of completing a degree, certificate, or transfer (to 4-yr), do so.
  - About 10-11% of students enter CC with no intent of achieving degree/certificate
Persistence and Transfer

- Half of the students in an entering cohort who drop out will do so in the first year. (ACT, 1999)

- Once transfer is made CC students show no disadvantage (compared to native students) in:
  - Graduation with bachelors degree
  - Aspiration to graduate school
  - Enrollment in graduate school

- CC attendance leads to enrollment in “more selective” 4-year institution
Foundations of Excellence®

a comprehensive, externally guided self-study and improvement process for the first year that enhances an institution's ability to realize its goals for student learning, success, and persistence.

Policy Center on the First Year of College

John Gardner
Betsy Barefoot

http://www.fyfoundations.org
Foundational Dimensions for 2-year colleges

- **Set of 9 research-based guidelines**
  - “aspirational” statements

- **Comprehensive model for evaluation and improvement**
Implications for the First Year

1. Are no silver bullets. Searching for “best practices” contributes to the segmentation and separation of structures, policies, curricula, activities, and programs.

2. Consider extent to which courses, programs, services, activities, and policies rest on the dimensions of effective practice.

3. Examine extent to which programs, services, and policies constitute an integrated, coordinated whole.
The Dimension Statements

Institutions should…

- intentionally cultivate learning environments for new students that emerge from a philosophy of two-year colleges as gateways to higher education.
  - Build upon current statements, focusing on first year
Organization Dimension

- provide a comprehensive, coordinated, and flexible approach to the new student experience through effective organizational structures and policies.
  - FYE office/Dean of the First Year/Coordinating committee
  - Affordable Child Care
  - Use of technology to support learning
Learning Dimension

- deliver curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage new students in order to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the institutional mission, students’ academic and career goals, and workplace expectations.
  - First-Year Seminars
  - Learning Communities
  - Common, integrated learning experiences
Campus Culture Dimension

- make new students a high priority for faculty and staff.
  - Faculty advising
    - Developmental v. Prescriptive approach
    - Comprehensive and integrated
  - Engagement in FYS/Learning Communities
  - Reward systems
  - In-service/training focus on FY student needs
  - Use of part-time faculty??
Transitions Dimension

- facilitate appropriate student transitions beginning with outreach and recruitment and continuing throughout the period of enrollment.
  - Assessing and placing students in courses
  - Orientation
  - Faculty socialization
  - Pre-College Prep Programs/Courses
    - Focus on critical thinking
    - Pre-calculus
    - College writing
All Students Dimension

- serve all new students according to their varied needs.
  - Know your students
  - Recognize diversity
  - Support for academic success of developmental students
  - Challenges for gifted students
Diversity Dimension

- ensure that new students experience ongoing exploration of diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and participation in pluralistic communities.
  
  - Professional development for faculty and staff
  - Support for diverse students and student groups
  - Instructional practices
  - Hiring/retention of diverse staff
Roles and Purposes Dimension

- promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education and those unique to two-year institutions, both for the individual and society.
  - MCCC’s two-pronged purpose—transfer and career preparation
  - Learning for personal growth
  - Engaged citizenship
  - Assessment of students’ purposes
Improvement Dimension

- conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to effect improvement.
  - FY student assessment instruments
  - Needs assessment
  - Tracking system to monitor student use of services
Take Home Message

◆ Comprehensive, Integrated approach
◆ Retention as “necessary but insufficient”
◆ Focus on Connections and Community
◆ Academic success for all students
  • Developmental
  • Gifted
◆ Use on-going assessment to:
  • Understand who students are
  • Evaluate program effectiveness
  • Selection of appropriate FY goals
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