

Champions' Report: Student Services
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to the
Quality Enhancement Committee of
El Centro College
15 December 2010

Abstract

This report will review current problems that may be remediated by changes in student services – college readiness, student advising, the particular problems of non-traditional (AKA, first generation or first-gen) students – and the manner in which these issues are currently addressed at El Centro College. Various alternatives to the methodologies currently in use will be explored with recommendations for changes in both process and policy as they apply to first-time college students entering El Centro College.

Statement of Problem

As an open-admissions institution, El Centro College (ECC) admits all students who apply. The result of this policy (i.e., the policy of the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD)) is that students entering ECC are often minimally prepared for college-level work. Many of ECC's students are not reading/writing/math met at enrolment, and they do not receive appropriate academic advising prior to registration for classes. Current policy permits student enrolment in 2000-level courses prior to completion of core courses in English, Reading, and Mathematics, a policy that sets students up for failure as they lack the basic skills required for success in coursework at this level.

Specific areas of concern are as follow:

- Students are permitted to take courses out-of-sequence (e.g., PSYC 2314 prior to or concurrent with PSYC 2301);
- Many students are not information literate (i.e., they lack basic computer use knowledge, are unfamiliar with word-processing software, and have no internet skills);

- Unrealistic expectations of students as compared with those of their professors.

Learning Audience

The primary target of this proposal is the non-traditional/first generation (AKA, first-gen) college student; first-gen is defined as the student having no parent with a four-year college degree at the time of the student's entry into college (Collier and Morgan, 2008). First-gen students lack family environment that transmits "what to expect" in college; such students often do not know what questions to ask of academic advisors and professors. This ignorance results in an overall lack of communication that is detrimental to students' best interests relative to performance in any given class.

Learning Objective

The objective of any proposed change in current student services is insuring all ECC students are prepared for college-level work, both in terms of satisfactory completion of prerequisite coursework and student understanding of faculty expectations. Collier and Morgan (2008) refer to mastery of the role of "college student" as the student's personal attainment of insight, including time management skills and understanding of the requirements of a given course. While procrastination is epidemic among college students in general, this problem is exacerbated among first-gen students (Zarick and Stonebraker, 2009) due to the disconnect between expectations of students and those of faculty. First-gen students traditionally suffer more acutely from such problems than do traditional students, because their family culture lacks the college experience and did not transmit these expectations and values.

Contributing to the problems of first-gen students is inadequate academic advising of students entering ECC as first-time college students. At present, first-time students may enrol online and take online classes without having first had the college classroom experience, resulting in failure of classes accompanied by frustration and the idea that they are unable meet the expectations – the challenges – of college-level work. First-time and first-gen students need the discipline and rigour of the classroom and face-to-face contact with instructors in order to understand the role of "college-student" (Collier and Morgan, 2008). Basic prerequisites (English, Reading, and Math) are not currently enforced at time of

registration, and 2000-level courses abound with students who are not reading/writing/math met.

Students unable to read and comprehend college texts and write coherently due to lack of these most basic of academic skills are doomed to fail; they are not well-served by our failure to enforce prerequisites. Enforcement of *successful* completion of prerequisites (e.g., English 1301 and English 1302) prior to enrolment in 2000 level classes gives students an improved chance at successful completion of those classes.

Academic advising of first-time – and particularly first-gen – college students should be done by *faculty* rather than staff or student advisors. Students should not be permitted to take sequentially numbered courses out of order or concurrently (e.g., successful completion of PSYC 2301 *must precede* enrolment in PSYC 2314 or PSYC 2319); such courses build on knowledge accumulated as a result of *successful* completion of introductory courses in any discipline. Failure to comply with the sequence – often through no fault of their own – sets students up for failure. First-time and first-gen students should not be permitted to “late register” for classes, as information critical to success in a given course is often transmitted during the first two class meetings.

Possible Delivery Methods

Faculty (i.e., full-time and discipline coordinators) should be *first-line advisors to new students* to insure prerequisites are met. First-time/first-gen college students should be blocked from registering online, and all students enrolling for online classes should be required to pass an information/computer literacy exam to insure they have the requisite skills to succeed in an online environment.

Possible Outcome Measurements

End-of-term grades are an excellent and easily obtained outcome measure for all students, and particularly so for first-time/first-gen students. It is anticipated that students required to complete all prerequisites prior to enrolment in 2000 level classes will show higher success rates (i.e., passing grade of C or better at end-of-term) than those lacking that background. Those disciplines requiring exit exams at end-of-term will have that measurement available in addition to end-of-term grades. As these

data are available through the Office of Institutional Research, no additional expenditures are anticipated in the implementation of these measures.

Required Resources

Full-time faculty must be enlisted to “work registration” both as advisors and as those actually enrolling students in classes. This will not be a popular requirement among faculty; however, our goal must be that of what is in the best interest of our students rather than whether or not members of the Quality Enhancement Program are popular among faculty.

References

- Collier, P. J., & Morgan, D. L. (2008, April). "Is that paper really due today?" Differences in first-generation and traditional college students' understandings of faculty expectations. *Higher Education: The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*, 55(4), 425-446. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ787423)
- Zarick, L. M., & Stonebraker, R. (2009, Fall). I will do it tomorrow: The logic of procrastination. *College Teaching*, 57(4), 211-215. Retrieved from ERIC database. (44500504)