Assessing the American Democracy Project Pilot at Castleton State College

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The American Democracy Project (ADP) is a multicampus initiative aimed at increasing civic engagement among college undergraduates. The project is sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the New York Times. Currently, 144 AASCU institutions are participating in ADP (AASCU, 2005). These institutions are attempting to restructure their campus environments in order to increase the number of students who are willing to take meaningful action within their communities and our democracy. AASCU lets each institution develop a plan of how to increase civic engagement. Institutions are encouraged to include administrators, faculty, and students to develop an institutional commitment to ADP.

Castleton State College selected a committee to develop a pilot ADP program during the 2003-2004 academic year consisting of an academic dean, associate academic dean, six faculty members, one undergraduate student, and one graduate student. The faculty represented six different academic disciplines: education, history, business, psychology, anthropology, and political science. In the summer of 2004, the committee introduced the pilot ADP learning community with the overarching theme of Individual in Society, which was used to link the disparate coursework. The six faculty members agreed, in addition to course-specific texts, to use the *New York Times* as a common text in their first-year seminars (FYS) to introduce political and civic engagement themes. The committee also planned a number of ADP-related events such as visits by Howard Dean (Democratic National Committee Chairman), Howard Zinn (an influential American historian and political scientist, and one of the most well-known figures of the radical Left in the United States), and a campus-production of the musical, Hair. ADP students also took part in voter registration drives, sponsored a Democracy Day to celebrate the signing of the Constitution, and participated in a Political Fair.

In addition to implementing ADP, the committee selected values of ADP at Castleton: respect, activism, awareness, and optimism. In accordance with one of the national goals, the Castleton ADP committee assessed the pilot project. The goal of this assessment was to measure ADP students' attitudes regarding these values before and after taking an ADP course. To gauge changes among ADP students, participants in the pilot project were assessed along with a control group of non-ADP students. Five of the six

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ADP sections (80 students) and 8 non-ADP sections (94 students) participated in both pre- and post-pilot assessments.

The assessment instrument contained several subscales within the four broad values. Under the "respect" category, the instrument measured (a) participants' view of how they treat other people in their life; (b) participants' respect for other's civil rights; and (c) participants' views about political influence by racial or religious groups. In the "optimism" category, the scale measured participants' outlook on their future and whether they thought they could have an impact on what the government does in their community. To measure "awareness," participants were asked about how much news they obtain from various mediums and about the benefits of reading newspapers. To measure "activism," participants were asked about (a) what kinds of things are important to them; (b) their interest in being involved in various political activities; and (c) their involvement in clubs and community activities.

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Statistically significant results revealed three major successes for the ADP pilot:

- At post-assessment, ADP students had a stronger focus on quality of life such as (a) raising a family, (b) helping others, and (c) developing a meaningful philosophy of life. Non-ADP students had a stronger focus on financial success such as (a) being very well off financially, and (b) being successful in a business of their own.

- ADP students were registered to vote (87%) and voted at much higher rates (69%) than non-ADP students (72% registered, 46% voted). Both groups entered college with 50% registered.

- The results showed that ADP was successful in sustaining newspaper readership among ADP students while non-ADP students experienced a decline.

ADP participants and non-participants both felt significantly less able to impact what the government does in their community in post-pilot assessment. From the results, ADP was not causal in lowering participants' view of their impact, but failed to prevent this reaction. More research is needed to understand the finding.

The results should, as a whole, be interpreted with some caution since the assessed time span is just one fraction of a student's academic career. We expect greater differences to emerge between ADP and non-ADP participants as students' involvement in the ADP programs continues. Further quantitative research is needed.

In addition to the quantitative assessment, ADP students and faculty were also asked to write reflections on the value of participation in the FYS ADP learning community. In general, ADP students felt that the participation in the ADP pilot was beneficial.

Of the students, 75% claimed that their FYS section covered the theme of Individual in Society well, and twice as many students stated that it was a positive college experience that helped them build connections between democracy and education. Positive written responses about ADP included:

"It made me more aware of the world around me."

"ADP helped me become more aware of political issues."

"I voted when I would not have."

A minority of students felt that participation in the learning community took time away from their major.

Similarly, the majority of faculty who participated in the ADP pilot viewed it as a positive experience. All six faculty members enjoyed meeting and working together as a team. Sharing ideas, syllabi, and teaching experiences helped to improve their pedagogy and gave them the opportunity to know one another better. Most of the ADP faculty stated that organizing the learning community around a common theme and using the *New York Times* allowed them to better bring current events and political issues into the classroom. Stresses associated with participating as an ADP faculty member included increased time commitments and logistical problems of organizing 120 students.

Overall, the ADP pilot was successful. It accomplished many of the goals of the learning community including students' increased awareness of the world around them, building connections between the democratic process and education, increasing student interest in and turn out for the 2004 elections, sustaining newspaper readership, and helping students develop a meaningful philosophy of life-long learning.

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What's Happening

The inaugural Paul P. Fidler Research Grant's deadline was on August 1, and 60 applications were submitted. The grant, which includes both financial and travel support, is designed to encourage significant research on college student transitions. Though review of the proposals has just begun, five finalists will be selected by the end of August. A final, blind review, to be conducted by current and former members of the Center's National Advisory Board, will determine a winner in mid-September.

The Center has also begun final preparations for the *2005 National Survey on Sophomore-Year Initiatives*. This study will explore how the nation's colleges and universities are responding, at the institutional level, to the challenges facing second-year college students. As a first of its kind study, the *2005 National Survey on Sophomore-Year Initiatives* will shed new light on a topic of growing interest to institutions of higher education. The survey's pilot test was completed in July, and the full-scale survey will be distributed to chief student affairs officers in October.

Infusing and Assessing Information Literacy in First-Year Seminars

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Incorporation of information literacy skills into first-year seminars is a critical goal for first-year success. Student success requires the ability to access and evaluate information—basic skills for lifelong learning. For several years, the general goal of the Penn State Capital College first-year seminar (FYS) was to enhance students' information literacy skills. Specific objectives included demonstration of library and electronic research skills and critical evaluation of information sources. At the core of the FYS information literacy program are two modules. The first—called Library Skills Module—focuses on orienting students to basic Penn State research resources, as well as introducing basic database search techniques. The second—Internet Skills Module—focuses on developing students' information evaluation skills by introducing criteria for evaluation. The modules use components of the University Libraries Instructional Programs Department's *Information Literacy & You* online tutorial to introduce students to research resources and concepts (Wright, Henderson, Sheehy, Snavely, Wishard, & Zabel, 2002).

The skills modules direct students to sections of the tutorial instructing them on web site evaluation, differences between popular, trade, and scholarly journals, key-word searching, and obtaining materials through the library, as well as describing various library resources and their uses. To complete these out-of-class assignments, students use the information found in the tutorial to first answer five to six questions, then demonstrate what they have learned.

For the Library Skills Module, they must use library resources to provide book, article, and government document citations, and for the Internet Skills Module they use the given criteria (currency, authority, accuracy, audience, point of view, and comparison to other resources) to evaluate a web page of their choosing. In addition, FYS faculty have the option of inviting the librarian to conduct an in-class bibliographic session. (Modules available from authors upon request.)

Students may also attend an array of literacy skills programs offered as part of the FYS cocurricular requirement. Students in all sections of the FYS attend 10 co-curricular programs. Library programs include a Library Open House to introduce students to resources, services, and staff in a fun and relaxed way, which is intended to reduce students' library anxiety and to eliminate this potential barrier to academic achievement (Brown, Weingart, & Johnson, 2004). Additional workshops introduce students to general research skills, essential research resources for their major, information evaluation, and the basics of APA and MLA citation styles.

To assess the FYS cocurricular programs, as well as provide a record of student attendance, the FYS Program adopted a one-minute reflection form (see Appendix A). This form asks students to rate the usefulness of the session on a scale of 1 to 5 and to reflect on the session by briefly writing what they believe to be the major point of the workshop and how it relates to each of them personally. Results indicate that 52% of students attending the Library Open House found it to be very or extremely useful, 31% found it moderately

useful, and 17% found it not at all or somewhat useful. Although the attendance at some sessions was small, overall results indicate that participating students found the subject-specific research database workshops to be very or extremely useful learning experiences. Students attending workshops focused on evaluating web sites and on citation styles found them to be very, or extremely helpful—59% and 71%, respectively.

Qualitative responses verified they understood the purpose of the workshops. For example, the following comment was made about the Library Open House: "The major point was basically about getting your way around the library and to have fun with that. To learn about what all is there for you to use and get your work done with." A student attending library workshops commented: "Very informative, I used the web many times, but [this] raised new things."

Our results indicate that, for the most part, we were successful in achieving the FYS literacy goal. To focus on clear outcomes for future assessment efforts, we used ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* and *Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Librarians* (2000; 2001). While the *Competency Standards* provide broad standards, performance indicators, and outcomes, the *Objectives* break these down into specific measurable results more practical for librarians' use in developing institutional-level information literacy goals. ACRL standards were reviewed and appropriate information literacy competencies for first-year students were identified, recognizing that information literacy cannot be completely attained during this one-semester, one-credit course. The outcomes we wanted for existing skills modules and workshops included that the student can:

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- Identify the value and differences of a variety of potential resources, including both print (e.g., books, encyclopedias, and other reference materials) and electronic (e.g., research databases, Internet) sources of information;
- Identify the purpose and audience of potential resources (e.g., can differentiate between popular and scholarly sources);
- Select the most efficient and effective method for locating and accessing the information needed (e.g., knows how to choose between the library catalog, research databases, and Internet to locate and access information based on the information needed);
- Effectively search for the information needed by identifying key words, synonyms, and related search terms;
- Use different search systems to locate information in a variety of formats;
- Examine and compare information from a variety of sources to evaluate readability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias;
- Participate in classroom and other discussions in order to validate understanding and interpretation of the information retrieved through discussion with peers and professors.

These outcomes will guide the content of skill modules and workshops this coming year, with further assessment to evaluate student attainment of these objectives.

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Appendix A

Sample One-Minute Reflection Form

First-Year Student Resources and Support Program

One-Minute Reflection

Please print the information requested below. The top copy of this form will be given to your FYS instructor. Keep the bottom copy for your records.

Student name _____ Date _____

Today's topic/program title _____

Today's event speaker(s) _____

Your FYS course (CAP 110S, 120S etc)_____and section_____

Course instructor's name _____

Consider the following questions as you write your reflection: What do you think is the major point of this session, and how does it relate to you personally? What about this topic remains unanswered for you? How interesting/helpful did you find the information presented in this session? Please circle your number rating below:

1 = Not at all   2 = Somewhat   3 = Moderately   4 = Very   5 = Extremely

I give permission for the information on this form to be used for research purposes.

1 = Yes   2 = No

Strategies for Managing the Mental Health Crisis on College Campuses

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Since 1988, colleges have seen a drastic increase in the number of mental health issues surfacing on campuses (Marano, 2004). Increasingly, youth are being diagnosed with very severe issues (e.g., depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, bipolar disorder) that are kept under control by newer, more effective drugs. Many of these students, with care, are able to be mainstreamed into the college environment and succeed (Marano, 2004). Nevertheless, because of the stressful lifestyle of college students, a percentage of this mentally ill group can have major behavioral issues while trying to pursue an academic career (see http://www.psychiatrictimes.com/p021001a.htm).

For many mental illnesses, the onset age is between the ages of 18 and 22, which are traditional college ages, so many students discover their illness on campus. But the good news is that there is a heightened awareness of illnesses, and students are asking for help (P. Liggett, personal communication, March 28, 2005).

A practical way to increase mental health awareness on campuses is to incorporate it into an introductory class or first-year seminar. This allows instructors to address these issues, educate incoming students, and provide a safe haven for students when they feel overwhelmed. In these types of courses, issues such as the importance of balancing healthy eating, sleep, and exercise; the use of stress- and time- management skills, campus resources and outlets; and self-assessment are addressed in order to arm students with the necessary tools to succeed on their own.

The University of South Carolina's Counseling and Human Development Center (CHDC) performs a number of outreach services for its campus community. The Center facilitates over 100 custom-designed presentations reaching 5,000 students each year. All faculty and administrators working directly with students are invited to learn about mental health issues during an annual campus-wide presentation in January. They also learn about these issues while training to be a University 101 instructor and through Campus Retention Committee work (P. Liggett, personal communication, June 22, 2005).

USC residence halls are also important settings for the detection of mental health issues. The CHDC has partnered with the Department of Residence Life to develop a Behavioral Health Information/Procedures manual for residence hall directors and student staff. Contained in the manual is a contact list including the e-mail addresses and phone numbers of several on-call university psychologists and a residential life staff liaison to CHDC. Also in the manual are:

- Behavioral health policy (e.g., mental health definitions, and training strategies for student affairs professionals who deal with behavioral issues)
- Intervention plan (e.g., calling campus police, contacting a supervisor, and writing an incident report)
- List of warning signs (e.g., sudden change in academic performance, dependency, physical changes, withdrawal, and strange behavior)
- Guidelines for interactions (e.g., talking to the student in private, listening carefully, avoiding judgment, suggesting the counseling center, and contacting a supervisor)
- Qualities of a good response to students' mental health issues (e.g., empathy, genuineness, respect, objectivity, and confidentiality)

Other campuses also have collaborations designed to address mental health concerns. At the University of New Hampshire, Residential Life and the Counseling Center have developed a very close relationship over the years. Resident assistants (RAs) are taught about suicide signs, helping skills, and the Counseling Center during training. RAs act as referral agents. They pay attention to their residents and communicate with their residence hall directors if they notice any problems. It is not uncommon for a Residential Life staff member to consult with a counselor about how to advise a student. This October, the University of New Hampshire will host a staff development day to address mental health concerns including how these issues affect the various offices around campus and how to respond to the needs of the students. The day will include a keynote presentation and a series of breakout sessions.

With a unified effort of communication and proactive planning across campus, students' mental health does not have to be a stressful issue for campus professionals or students.

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College Success in the Palm of Your Hands

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Imagine having important strategies for college success at the tip of your fingers. Now imagine holding those strategies in the palm of your hand, on a compact disk or an iPod—recorded to the sound of music. At University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (UMass Dartmouth), we created *Jazz for Success*, a compact disk (CD) that combines the traditional expectations of music with a series of presentations on the college experience.

Miller and Schyb (1989) assert that "background music has become an almost ubiquitous aspect of contemporary living" (p. 42). The results of Stratton and Zalanowski's (2003) study of the daily music listening habits of college students at Penn State's Altoona campus indicated that most college students "listen to music while doing something else… studying, driving, dressing and socializing…. Students usually found themselves in a better mood after listening to music, regardless of whether it is rock or classical" (Blaum, 2003, p. 1). We decided to harness this phenomenon with important strategies, timely information, and creative ideas that would enable first-year students to cope with various transitional issues.

We chose a smooth jazz music format. Instead of seeking the expressed written consent of popular recording artists to include their music in *Jazz for Success*, we decided to feature the music of Royal Hartigan, an associate profes-

sor of music in the College of Visual and Performing Arts at UMass Dartmouth, from his 1993 CD entitled *Blood Drum Spirit*.

During the 2004 spring semester, focus group interviews with 20 upperclass student leaders were held at UMass Dartmouth. As part of the interviewing process, students were asked to reflect on their first-year experience, and to describe negative feelings that may have emerged to impede their success. A detailed presentation of the data generated by these focus group interviews is beyond the scope of this article. However, the salient, grounded interpretative categories of destructive feelings experienced by participating students resulted from their efforts to: (a) cope with change during this period of transition, (b) develop self-awareness/self-discovery, (c) understand available campus resources, and (d) engage in college life beyond academics.

Within the thematic framework and categories of destructive feelings that emerged from the focus group interviews, selected faculty and administrators were asked to provide important strategies, timely information, and creative ideas to encourage students in making a successful transition into the university, and in developing methods of self-change in the affective, behavioral, or cognitive domains. They were also asked to provide an inspiring 2-3 minute presentation that challenged students to use self-awareness
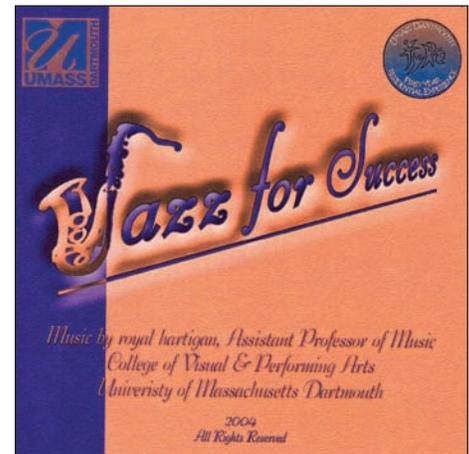
and critical thinking in examining the values, dreams, and expectations they bring to the campus environment.

Among the many faculty and administrators who made presentations on *Jazz for Success* were the Provost, an Academic Dean, Dean of the Library, Director of Academic Advising, the Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, a Resident Director, Director of the University Counseling Center, the Assistant Director of Career Services, Director of Alumni Affairs, Director of Computer Services, and tenured professors representing five different academic disciplines. Their audio presentations were arranged into four separate tracks, which included *Transition to College, Self-Awareness/Self-Discovery, Academic Support Services,* and *Beyond Academics.*

In developing *Jazz for Success,* we knew that the CD would not have the same effect on every student. Nor would every student appreciate our approach, which included a smooth jazz music format, recorded messages by selected faculty and administrators, and a DJ format that introduced the various

(Continued from page 6)

tracks on the CD. We also knew that most first-year students think little about the importance of developing strategies to (a) manage toxic emotions, (b) enhance skills in concentration, memorization, or the acquisition of information, and (c) transition successfully into the university. Yet, by listening to *Jazz for Success,* we believe students would:

- Obtain timely information, creative ideas, and inspiring messages to be successful
- Develop self-awareness and critical thinking in examining the values, dreams, and expectations they bring to college
- Connect with faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals
- Understand the influence of music on mind and body, particularly memorization, relaxation, and the acquisition of information
- Learn strategies to manage toxic emotions
- Gain an appreciation of jazz music

During the 2004 fall semester, copies of *Jazz for Success* were distributed to 1,100 first-year students: (800 of whom participated in various residential programming initiatives; 250 of whom were at-risk students and entered the University through an alternative admissions program; and 50 of whom enrolled in *UNV100: The First-Year Seminar* course). Although we did not fully assess the effectiveness of this CD in meeting established goals and objectives, a number of the students enrolled in *The First-Year Seminar* provided valuable feedback in a series of essays associated with class assignments.

A general response to the CD was, "This CD should be a required listening piece for all first-year students at UMass, as well as [students] at other colleges" (Gianna Abbondanza, Class of 2008). Another student particularly liked the format: "I listened to the *Jazz for Success* CD, and thought it was very good. The music was very soothing and it helped me hear the messages a little easier. I really liked this CD and I am glad I had the opportunity to listen to it" (Darlene Martins, Class of 2008).

Some students responded positively to the topics: "In the CD *Jazz for Success,* there are teachers, advisors, psychologists, and [administrators] saying the important and good things you need to do for success here at UMass Dartmouth - in school and in class" (Danilda Martins, Class of 2008); "*Jazz for Success* delivers on its purpose of giving important strategies for students to excel in academic and social areas in college. With these messages in mind, a student can follow creative elements of success and have confidence in themselves" (Kevin Jose, Class of 2008).

Other students found the choice of speakers helpful: "The speech that really stuck out to me was given by Ellen Christian, Director of Academic Advising. She talked about studying abroad, and how to go about it. This interested me the most because my dream is to study overseas" (Ashley Santagata, Class of 2008); "The best thing about this CD is that it comes from people who have already been successful – our faculty" (Michelle Jimenez, Class of 2008); "Each professor gives advise [on how] to succeed. If one listens, one will take in all the vital information that is given on this one CD" (Christopher Botelho, Class of 2008).

Also, the class of 2008 is the first generation to grow up completely digital. The Internet, digital versatile disc (DVD), iPods, and other digital technology have become an integral part of the way in which this generation of college students learn, play, and communicate (Tapscott, 1997). Thus, by putting *Jazz for Success* in the hands of today's digital-savvy college students, we hope to transform the ways in which our faculty and administrators communicate important strategies for success—in the classroom, in the campus center, and in life. While it may be difficult for *Jazz for Success* to appeal to the music listening preferences of all students, we believe that this approach can help many first-year students make a smooth and successful transition to college.

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Forging Campus Links for Commuter Students

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Middlesex Community College in Middletown (MxCC), Connecticut, is addressing a challenge that many commuter-based colleges encounter—encouraging students to attend a variety of co-curricular campus activities. One way in which faculty members are attempting to increase enrollment at these different events (e.g., workshops, lectures, fairs) is to link curricular with co-curricular activities within the courses themselves. The first-year seminar (FS100) is one example. As a small college (with 2,500 full- and part-time students), MxCC runs about two to four first-year seminars each semester. The course is strongly recommended for students in developmental studies courses.

Because students in developmental writing, reading, and math tend to face many academic challenges as they transition from high school to college, linking a curricular with a co-curricular activity becomes a way of easing this transition. Even more, thoughtfully linking curricular activity with co-curricular events increases students' knowledge, awareness, and comfort levels; broadens their cultural base; forges a connection to the college beyond the classroom; encourages additional interaction with faculty and staff; and ultimately allows students to practice their skill use across the curriculum.

In some first-year seminars, students are assigned a campus event report. Basically, the assignment asks students to attend a campus event and to write a brief report about the event and their experience. Since FS100 is targeted for developmental students, the one- to two-page report consists of a very basic introduction, body, and conclusion. In the report, the students are asked to describe and evaluate the event in detail. Proper guidance is given in the directions of the assignment to ensure that the students understand what to include in the report. In essence, the students are asked to practice their writing and critical analysis skills—skills from their writing and reading courses.

In terms of scheduling, the report may be assigned in a variety of ways. It may be linked with a specific campus event (e.g., international day, career fair, lecture from a state representative) when dates are known. If the dates and events are unknown, the report may be assigned at the beginning of the semester and due at the end of the term. This way, announcements can be made in class about campus events that would meet the report requirements.

How then can such an assignment be integrated into a syllabus by faculty? MxCC has made it quite easy. Once a week, MxCC hosts an open activity period—an approximately one-hour period early Wednesday afternoons when most classes are not held. During this time, faculty and staff may schedule workshops, lectures, presentations, etc., in a variety of areas to attract the entire campus, including students who would be available during this free period. Thus, scheduling a link between the curricular and co-curricular becomes quite manageable. At the beginning of the semester, different offices or centers also publish a schedule of workshops or activities.

For some commuter students who also have work and family responsibilities, scheduling challenges may be inevitable. However, when a college provides an array of opportunities in the day and evening, these challenges may be overcome, especially as the co-curricular activity is linked to a graded class assignment.

Careful planning and balance are the keys that will assist faculty in coordinating a curricular activity with a co-curricular event without infringing upon course objectives and outcomes. While there are certainly academic and cultural benefits to the curricular and co-curricular link, new students in particular may benefit from the social aspect as they transition to college and forge a bond with their campus and peers, helping them to persist to graduation. In a meaningful manner, the college and the faculty elevate the first-year experience of commuter students.

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What's Happening

The FYA-List essay series resumed in July with a piece from Sherry Woosley, Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness at Ball State University. In her essay, Dr. Woosley describes an innovative assessment program that helps new transfer students make a successful transition to her campus. The essay can be found at http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/assessment/newessay/author/woosley.html.

Meeting the Challenge of Student Persistence With Success Coaching

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Despite an array of programs at colleges and universities aimed at retaining first-year students, attrition numbers remain high. Many institutions continue to lose more than one out of every four first-year students within the first year. Research shows that students drop out of school for many reasons beyond academics, including financial difficulties, poor time-management skills, lack of motivation, conflicts with work, and family responsibilities (particularly for older students).

While enhanced first-year orientation programs, first-year seminars, learning communities, academic counseling, and peer mentoring programs play an important role in student success, studies indicate that student performance (and propensity to stay in school) is more significantly improved when students receive frequent, individualized support focused on enhancing their overall personal development.

In order to impact student persistence more directly and significantly, several colleges and universities have implemented a new program called Success Coaching that gets to the heart of the retention issue —student motivation, academic and personal effectiveness, and satisfaction with the college experience. Over the past three years, 13 institutions have participated in controlled studies to test the viability of this new approach to retaining students.

The Success Coaching model was developed to respond to the entire range of issues that can affect first-year students and to provide the structure, support, and one-on-one guidance and feedback that many students need to become more motivated so that they stay in school and graduate.

Beginning in the first semester, students meet weekly with their personal Success Coach for approximately 30 minutes. As the year progresses, meeting frequency is adapted to meet each student's individual development or support needs.

In a typical coaching session, coaches and students work together to improve student performance in the key areas that determine success:

- Academics (i.e., developing studying, writing, and test-taking skills; taking advantage of on-campus resources such as libraries and tutoring centers)
- Finances (i.e., understanding the factors that can impact financial aid, encouraging better money-management skills)
- Managing commitments (e.g., balancing academics with work or family obligations, dealing with a difficult living situation)
- Campus community (i.e., engaging in social and extracurricular activities);
- School systems and policies (e.g., navigating processes such as class registration)
- Future plans (i.e., connecting academic pursuits with career goals)
- Health (i.e., managing stress, eating well, taking care of themselves)
- General effectiveness (e.g., planning, organizing, time-management and problem-solving skills, confidence level, and goal-setting)

The program's Success Coaches bring experience in managing, teaching, training, coaching, and counseling people and come from a range of professions. All have demonstrated success in inspiring, motivating, and developing others, and participate in an extensive training program.

The 13 institutions offering first-year student Success Coaching have experienced a 14.4% increase in the number of retained students and a 10-15% increase in total enrollment and tuition revenue. Coached students also experienced improved academic performance (regardless of incoming GPA or academic preparedness), more productive relationships with faculty and staff, and increased involvement in campus life. As a result, these students reported greater satisfaction with their school experience than their non-coached peers and had higher persistence rates.

One important objective of the Success Coaching program is to facilitate the connection between student and institution by encouraging students to take advantage of the breadth of services and opportunities available to them. Some institutions using this method have reported that coaching complements other programs and services for first-year students already in existence on their campuses. In addition, faculty and staff point to the improved quality of interactions with students who participate in the program —students are more prepared, more accountable, and take more responsibility for their own success.

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Pell Report Highlights Institutions That Successfully Graduate Low-Income College Students

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Raising the Graduation Rates of Low-Income College Students

A report published by
The Pell Institute for the
Study of Opportunity in Higher Education
December 2004
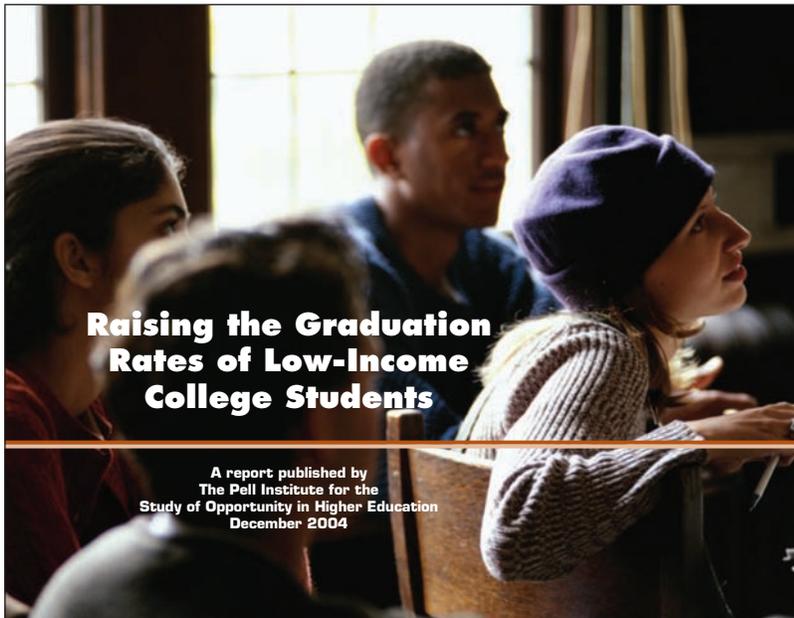
Low-income students face many challenges getting to college and succeeding when they get there. Institutions have found ways to make attending college a successful venture for low-income students. The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education recently published a report on the graduation rates of low-income college students. These students are identified as less prepared academically for college, less likely to receive encouragement from family and teachers regarding college, less likely to have financial aid opportunities, and less likely to attend college. The report was designed as an introductory work to examine successful practices among institutions and encourage future research on the success rates of these students.

Both quantitative and qualitative research was conducted. Institutional data and data obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) were used to determine the number of Pell Grant recipients on a campus and graduation rates. Researchers used these data to select 20 four-year institutions. Of these, 10 institutions had above average graduation rates, and 10 had below average graduation rates. These 20 institutions included public and private institutions, institutions with various enrollment sizes, and institutions that varied in geographical location. Additional data were collected from the institutions, IPEDS, *Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. Researchers also made brief site visits (approximately two days) at 19 of the 20 institutions, where they interviewed faculty, staff, and students to determine common practices and institutional initiatives at each. In addition, research teams investigated the participants' perspectives on retaining students and promoting their success.

Institutions with high graduation rates were found to have more traditional-aged students (18-25), more full-time faculty, lower student-faculty ratios, and more full-time students than institutions with low graduation rates. Additionally, most of the high graduation-rate institutions offered some developmental education programs for low-income students. Institutions with low graduation rates had lower per-student expenditures and had a larger population of adult students than did institutions with high graduation rates.

Some of the common practices among institutions with high graduation rates included intentional academic advising plans, early alert systems, first-year student interest groups, cluster courses in learning communities, and academic support programs. Several institutions also had strong residential components on the campus, such as learning communities in the residence halls and facilities for commuter students, allowing the students to become integrated into the campus community. These traits were common among institutions with high graduation rates, but as the authors note, may not be the direct causes of these rates.

The report provides a snapshot of characteristics, programs, philosophies, and ideas as a resource for institutions that are struggling to create stronger support programs to increase graduation rates of low-income students. For more information, or to view the complete report, see www.pellinstitute.org.

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What's Happening

Conferences

Fall Institute for Academic Deans and Department Chairs, October 23-25, 2005, Savannah, Georgia

12th National Conference on Students in Transition, November 6-8, 2005, Costa Mesa, California

25th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience, February 24-28, 2006, Atlanta, Georgia

Call for Submissions

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition invites you to share your campus-specific research on second-year students and initiatives. *Exploring the Evidence: Reporting Research on the Second Year of College* is part of the series of monographs reporting assessment and research findings about topics of emerging importance in higher education. Submissions to *Exploring the Evidence* are welcomed along two tracks: (a) general research on your institution's second-year students (e.g., satisfaction, engagement, study habits) and (b) assessment of programs and activities intentionally geared toward second-year students. The deadline for submissions is February 1, 2006. Complete details are available at http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/soph/index.html.

Resource Review

Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter

The American Association for Higher Education has published *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, a comprehensive resource for anyone interested in creating a successful on-campus learning environment. This resource is based on the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) project from the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University and includes examples of successful practices at 20 institutions, both large and small, public and private.

Student Success in College is divided into four parts:

Part 1 discusses the important role engagement plays in student success. In Part 2, properties and conditions common to educationally effective colleges are described, and the DEEP institutions are introduced. Effective practices used at DEEP colleges and universities are explored in Part 3, while recommendations and principles for promoting student success are presented in Part 4. This resource emphasizes what strong-performing institutions do to promote student success and focuses on six fundamental features common to DEEP colleges and universities.

Faculty and education administrators, in particular, will benefit greatly from using this resource when developing and implementing policies and practices for promoting student success. In addition, this book serves as a guide for creating classroom conditions that enhance student success.
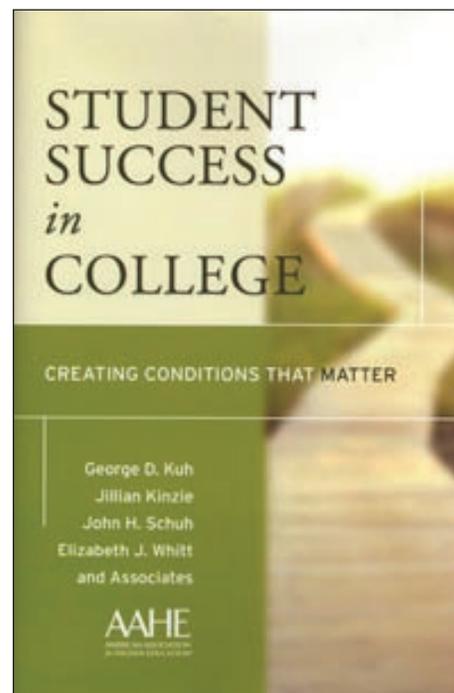
The resource can be purchased from the National Resource Center at http://www.sc.edu/fye/publications/jb/index.html.

Editor's Note: *If you have read a book that you think might interest your colleagues, please submit a short article summarizing what you found valuable. Thank you.*