

The Community College Connection Program:

A Smart Partnership to Increase the Retention and Success of Underprepared Students

The number of transfer students who begin their Bachelor's degree at a 2-year institution has increased over the years (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012). However, many scholars sustain that pursuing courses at a 2-year institution may present additional obstacles for students whose goal is to complete a Bachelor's degree (Grubb, 1991; Dougherty, 1994; Long & Kurlaender, 2009). Indeed, estimates from the most recent national longitudinal postsecondary study revealed that only 37% of students who graduated high school in 1992 and began at a community college eventually transferred to a four-year college (Adelman 2005).

The solution to avoid those obstacles may seem simple: "Let's have students start at a 4-year institution." Unfortunately, it is not that easy. More and more students graduate high school unprepared for college-level work. In fact, according to a study by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and the University of Minnesota (2010), 40% of the 13,000 graduates from public high schools in Minnesota who enrolled that year in public higher education in the state have taken at least one foundational course, with 6% having taken four or more of those courses. The problem is that 4-year institutions rarely have the capacity or the resources to serve students who need foundational education.

Under those circumstances, building smart partnerships between 2-year and 4-year institutions is imperative to serve underprepared students who need additional support, without exposing them to obstacles that may affect their retention and success. In addition, these partnerships have the potential to early engage students enrolled in foundational coursework into the 4-year college experience, increasing their odds of persistence and degree completion (Schreiner, 2010).

The Community College Connection Program (CCC) is a partnership between St. Cloud State University (SCSU) and St. Cloud Technical and Community College (SCTCC). The program admits underprepared students who are motivated to complete a Bachelor's degree, but who lack the adequate skills to succeed in college level courses. The partnership allows SCTCC to offer foundational courses on-site at SCSU, as well as general education courses, providing students with an opportunity to live on campus and engage in other academic and social initiatives while completing their pre-college requirements.

The benefits of this partnership for students are numerous, and include smaller classes, access to resources, activities, and services on both campuses, and academic support through a required Student Success Seminar (INTS 1155). Given the increasing demand for foundational education, these types of partnerships are fundamental for the long-term growth and sustainability efforts of higher education institutions in the United States.

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