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Access & Opportunity in Higher Education

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There is a direct link between student enrollment and retention, once a student completes the enrollment process a plan to retain that student must be placed. The emphasis must be on completion, the goal must be ensuring that students achieve what they came for. Individuals that come to community colleges make many sacrifices, these sacrifices consist of time, money, energy and missing out on personal events. Community colleges must acknowledge the sacrifices students make ensuring that those efforts result in a positive return on their investment (Vander Ark, 2012). The areas to measure are enrollment, persistence, graduation/transfer, goals achieved and success in obtaining employment in their field of study. It is also beneficial to identify the cost of obtaining the education received and the ability to pay debt that was incurred in the process. The fact that students have many options in obtaining a college degree exist should be at the forefront of every college institution. Demonstrating that the college values their student population and has the ability and willingness to help them achieve their educational goals should be every college student experience.

The student experience throughout the enrollment process plays a huge influence on whether students complete or drop out. Colleges must consider if the student is interacting with simple but effective tools. Is the application easy to complete, every task in the enrollment process and the tools utilized must be simple, easy and practical. Students need to feel unencumbered and confident that they can achieve the first tasks they are assigned. Recognizing that this is a learning experience and the responsibility to support this learning belongs to the college is imperative. Colleges must also meet students where they are, student support needs to be available to every student from every demographic recognizing the reason and need for pursuing a college degree (Anderson, 2023).

The simplistic way to attract or lead interested individuals to the enrollment process is to offer a *Get Started* link visible on the colleges main page. Once *Get Started* is clicked the *Apply Now* button would be listed at the top. The following options would be offered:

- New Students
- Returning Students
- Bachelor Applicants
- Transfer Students
- Students Under the Age of 18
- International Students
- Non- Credit Students

A statement or message informing applicants that they can obtain assistance in applying by contacting the Enrollment Team with a phone number provided would be helpful.

The student experience must offer a sense of belonging, students need to feel comfortable in the learning environment/community around them. Data shows that a higher rate of retention exists when student feel like they are part of their learning community (Bowen, 2021). The data can be measured by offering a survey to students prior to enrollment and at the end of the course. To measure outcomes should identify the goals and importance of what the objective is or what is trying to be achieved. Measurements will be effective if indicators are put in place. Create a way or method to track indicators that have been identified. Review the data obtained and measure the data to outcome goals and create an analysis. Measuring achievement standards and growth in academic development is beneficial (Vander Ark, 2012).

To determine efficacy, follow these steps:

- Identify program goals
- Identify performance indicators
- Collect data
- Analyze the results
- Identify goals and benchmarks and determine if they were met

Consistency is also crucial in the student experience; processes must be functional and resources must be reliable. It is important to monitor if effectiveness in utilization of these areas is taking place ensuring academic success. Community colleges must recognize the hardship on students desiring to pursue a higher education. The desire to obtain a college degree is a weighty financial commitment for students. The importance to provide student confidence in assuring them that a college degree is a worthy investment belongs to each member serving community colleges. It is the colleges obligation to provide alternative options to pay for college, the objective is easing the financial burden. Changes require identifying other factors influencing retention.

Student retention data help community colleges to identify areas that need improvement and can assess areas of success. The goal of community colleges is to help students enroll and achieve the educational goals; graduation is more than completion it is a priceless lifetime achievement. Engagement with the student population is pivotal, colleges rely on advisors, mentors and counselors to attain these connections. College staff must continually and consistently communicate to students the importance of success, achievement and obtaining what they came for. Students must receive this message from every level of the college and demonstrating that each member is available to them is paramount. Acknowledging the presence

of students and the fact that they have many options in pursuing a higher education should be at the forefront of every college.

The following proposal is being offered to increase student enrollment and student success. It should be the responsibility of every college and university to help their student population achieve higher education by informing them of all the possibilities and guiding them through the process. This can be achieved by;

- Incorporate FYE101/103 into GED programs upon completion of the program and successfully passing the GED exam. This serves as an introduction to the college encouraging students to continue their education.
- Offer Career Counseling to ESL students which would serve as an opportunity to explore their career options, presents an opportunity to encourage students to take college courses.

Colleges must be creative in their efforts to increase enrollment. The easiest way to achieve this is to target students enrolled in a program and provide opportunities to retain this population.

Technology can play a huge role in supporting students and student success. I have provided a simple example of a webpage offering videos of common tasks students are required to complete. The popularity of YouTube has successfully attracted many, especially the younger generation, individuals to watch and learn. I feel that this resource would be extremely beneficial to visual learners and encourages students to visit the page over and over to complete a variety of tasks. It also serves as a learning tool demonstrating the reasoning behind procedures in place allowing the student to gain understanding of how things work and why. Community colleges should not only be concerned with students enrolling and leaving but a greater concern should be

the fact that an assignment was started that was not finalized. Colleges would benefit from early intervention in its efforts to retain students (Chandra, 2021). Being proactive in identifying when students need us most is key in seeing students to the finish line because, 'Their Success is Our Success.'

The meaning behind the success of a program is priceless and endless. It means that students can achieve success at our institution and that we can continue to meet the needs and goals of those students. It means having a reputation of effectiveness when being compared to other institutions. It means being an asset in the communities we serve and making a positive impact toward workforce preparedness and demands. It means that the large population serving at college institutions can continue to educate a nation.

Program outcomes can be assessed in infinite ways, they can be assessed through evaluations, surveys, feedback, standardized testing, portfolios, capstone projects, performance and through data from job placements and employer fulfillment. It is important work that provides opportunities for community colleges to learn about what efforts are working and which need improvement or are just not producing the outcomes that colleges are seeking. Efforts to continue meeting the needs of students and demands of today's workforce with significant consideration to the influence technology has on every aspect of our life today is necessary.

References

- Vander Ark, Tom. (2012). College Completion: Still a Big Deal, So Let's Make It Easier and Cheaper. retrieved from <https://www.gettingsmart.com/2012/05/10/college-completion-still-a-big-deal-so-lets-make-it-easier-and-cheaper/>
- Anderson, Aaron. (2023). Verity; What the Research Tells Us About College Student Retention. retrieved from <https://blog.verityiq.com/what-the-research-tells-us-about-college-student-retention>.
- Bowen, J. (2021). College of Education News; Why is it Important for Students to Feel a Sense of Belonging at School? 'Students Choose to be in Environments That Make Them Feel a Sense of Fit,' Says Associate Professor DeLeon Gray. retrieved from <https://ced.ncsu.edu/news/2021/10/21/why-is-it-important-for-students-to-feel-a-sense-of-belonging-at-school-students-choose-to-be-in-environments-that-make-them-feel-a-sense-of-fit-says-associate-professor-deleon-gray>
- Chandra, Stephanie. (2021). Campus Groups; 12 Key Strategies to Improve Student Retention. retrieved from <https://blog.campusgroups/2021/5/25/strategies-to-improve-student-retention>

Rio Salado Website

Webpage – Rio Salado Video Library

Onboarding/ Enrollment Steps

A video
demonstrating
Submitting
application,
Authentication

Introduction to RioLearn Student Center

A video
regarding
RioLearn
demo
Student Center
demo

Enrolling Into courses

A video
demonstrating
how to enroll
into courses
with a mention
on the
prerequisite
approval

Prerequisite Approval

A video
demonstrating
the process for
Prerequisite
approval

8 week option

A video
demonstrating
how to change
course to an
8 week option

Block Calendar

A video
explaining
Block Calendar
and how it
works including
an Q&A

Resources

A video on
how to
locate resources
Tutoring
Counseling
Instructional
Helpdesk etc.

Transcript(s)

A video on
how to submit
and obtain
college or high
school
transcripts

Communication

A video on how
to communicate
with Instructors,
Departments,
College
President,
District
Office/Chancellor