



FOOTHILL COLLEGE

Institutional Research and Planning

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TO: Senior Staff, Foothill College

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RE: Themes from Student Support (Re)defined Study (2011-12)

Overview

The RP Group for California Community Colleges recently published its first year results from a three-year study titled: *Student Support (Re)defined*, which involved nearly 900 students across the state. De Anza College was one of 13 participating colleges.

Main research question: In an environment of extreme scarcity, which student support activities can be delivered inside and outside of the classroom to improve success for all students and, in particular, for African Americans and Latino learners?

For this first phase, the study focused on reflecting on the factors of success that students identify as important to their success as community college learners.

Below is a summary of the 5 key themes from the first year of the study:

1. Student Motivation - Acknowledge students as key agents in their own educational success while highlighting that the motivation learners bring to college may not be enough to guarantee completion. While many students arrive to college motivated, their drive needs to be continuously stoked and augmented with additional support in order for success to be realized. Students reported that colleges can foster their motivation by:

- Helping them develop a clear educational plan and assisting them in monitoring their progress
- Making direct links between their educational experience and their goals for career mobility and a better life
- Engaging them with course content in meaningful ways
- Providing them with opportunities to connect with other students and instructors through both formal and informal means
- Fostering their sense of place and belonging on campus
- Facilitating their achievement of early and frequent successes

2. Teach Students how to be Successful - Students spoke of their struggles to understand what they needed to do to succeed in college.

Students suggested several ways colleges could help learners see the benefits of these activities:

- Require that first-time students enroll in a high-quality student success course
- Widely advertise services, supports and activities designed to facilitate success
- Have faculty inform students about assistance, resources and extracurriculars available both at the college and in the local community
- Encourage faculty and staff to share with students their own success stories and what makes them feel connected to the college

3. Highlight the Value of Student Supports - This research suggests that colleges must also offer students the chance to experience all “six success factors”—directed, focused, nurtured, engaged, connected and valued—throughout their time with the institution. Students described how different factors interacted with each other to contribute to their success. They also identified relationships between the factors and noted how experiencing one factor often led to realizing another, or how two factors were inextricably linked to each other.

This research indicates that colleges should:

- Ensure all students have the opportunity to experience each success factor - directed, focused, nurtured, engaged, connected and valued
- Coordinate efforts to address specific success factors
- Build opportunities that intentionally integrate multiple success factors
- Tailor the combination of interventions based on the needs and strengths of the student population and stage in their educational journey

4. Provide Comprehensive Support to Underrepresented Populations - Colleges should consider investing in structures that connect more African-American, Latino and first-generation learners to existing services. While it may not be feasible to expand existing special populations programs, colleges must find a way to provide a significant proportion of these student groups with comprehensive support—at scale. If they do not, the equity gap will likely continue to grow.

African-American, Latino and first-generation students highlighted the following as keys to success:

- Connecting with necessary and available financial assistance
- Receiving explicit insight about how the experiences provided and approaches taken by their instructors, programs and institutions contribute to their achievement
- Experiencing opportunities to connect with others, including peers and educators, both during and outside of class
- Receiving academic assistance outside of class through either formal tutoring and mentoring programs or informal study groups and peer networks
- Feeling their success mattered to others
- Having their family history and culture valued in the educational setting
- Taking part in their campus community and feeling recognized for their contributions

5. Emphasize the Importance of the Campus Community - These findings underscore the importance of colleges promoting a culture where all individuals across the institution understand their role in advancing students' success. At the same time, students most commonly recognize faculty as having the greatest potential impact on their educational journeys. Hence, faculty have a significant opportunity and ability to influence students' success not just in, but beyond, the classroom. Some specific ways students noted faculty have a primary hand in helping them:

- Find direction by providing discipline-specific insight and advising
- Stay focused on their goals
- Develop connections to and actively engage with their student peers
- Link to resources and supports across their campus
- Feel that their success is important to their college
- Both contribute to and feel valued by their institutions

Methodology

Thirteen community colleges from across the state were involved in this study (15 were invited). Qualitative and quantitative methodology was used to collect the data. The sample included 900 students, who were identified through a stratified random sample of 10,918 students that oversampled African Americans and Latinos. Student participation occurred through phone surveys (785) and focus groups (102) and their demographics and academic history was linked to quantitative data from the CCC Chancellor's Office.

This phase of research focused on factors of success as identified by the students, considered the relationship among these factors and explored if these factors varied for different groups of students.

Source

Student Support (Re)defined web site: <http://www.rpgroup.org/projects/student-support>

Report brief:

<http://www.rpgroup.org/sites/default/files/StudentPerspectivesResearchBriefJan2013.pdf>

Full report:

<http://www.rpgroup.org/sites/default/files/StudentPerspectivesResearchReportJan2013.pdf>