

# STUDENT SUCCESS BEST PRACTICE: MOUNTAIN EMPIRE COMMUNITY COLLEGE



ADDRESS: 3441 MOUNTAIN EMPIRE RD  
BIG STONE GAP, VA 24219

WEBSITE: WWW.MECC.EDU

## STUDENT SUCCESS CATEGORY --

- ACADEMIC PROGRAM
- STUDENT SERVICES
- WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
- COLLEGE BUSINESS PRACTICE
- TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION
- OTHER:

## TITLE: "CENTER FOR STUDENT OUTREACH AND SUCCESS: INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICE TO EMPOWER SUCCESS"

### PROCESS

Based upon qualitative data gathered during focus group and interview sessions with a broad sector of students, three specific themes emerged in relation to their access and progress experiences at Mountain Empire Community College: 1) there is a need for a comprehensive center (one-stop-shop) to assist new students through the admission/enrollment processes; 2) there is not a coordinated approach among departments to prepare middle and high school students for a post-secondary education; and, 3) there needs to be a comprehensive student retention program. To address these three needs in a cohesive approach, a team composed of the Vice President of Academic & Student Services and members of her staff, proposed the development of a Center for Student Outreach and Success.

An analysis of our current practices led to the proposed student success plan.

1) New students applying for admission to MECC often find themselves wandering from building to building to complete the processes for enrollment. This process was very burdensome and frustrating for students, and many students would leave without getting their needs met. A review of student application data indicated a large number of students applied for admission, but did not follow through with the required processes to the point of enrollment.

2) Several positions at MECC are designed to interact directly with students at the middle school and high school levels in the college's service region. These positions include two Talent Search advisors, four part-time career coaches, a dual enrollment coordinator, a recruiter, and a testing coordinator. Two college success coaches also provide advising services to high school seniors both on-campus and at the high schools. Although the goals of these positions were interrelated, there was little coordination and/or communication among the different offices because of the previous organizational structure. This lack of coordination hindered the effectiveness of the College's student outreach initiatives, and often resulted in duplication of services, and/or missed opportunities to provide further services. Each of the positions identified above were employees located in different areas on the College campus. With the development of this student success plan, a structural reorganization plan was also submitted and approved to the VCCS to address these concerns and mainstream the services being offered.

3) Since its inception, the College Success Coaches program at MECC had focused on a limited number of students meeting the under-represented, first generation college student criteria. The Student Success Coaches utilized SAILS for monitoring alerts and concerns raised by faculty for their program participants, and interacted with their cohorts on a regular basis. All other SAILS alerts and retention activities were managed by the college's Student Advocate, who, at the time, served under the guidelines of a Title II funded project. The number of students served by the Student Advocate increased dramatically with the implementation of SAILS, reducing the amount of time available for the Student Advocate to provide other services to stimulate retention.

The College felt the creation of the Center for Student Outreach and Success advanced the mission, goals and published initiatives of both the College at the VCCS. To build upon the successes of the College Success Coach program, MECC combined the efforts of the college success coaches, the career coaches, and the student advocate under the auspices of the Center for Student Outreach and Success.

## STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

In August 2014, the Chancellor approved MECC's Student Success Plan and the creation of the Center for Student Outreach and Success to include the high school career coaches, colleges success coaches, a coordinated effort for middle/high school outreach, and a central location to house retention efforts. The College Success Coaches and the High School Career Coaches were restructured and moved to operate out of the SOS Center. To effectuate this plan in an efficient and timely manner, the College realigned the position of Student Advocate to that of Coordinator of the Center for Student Outreach and Success in order to oversee the Center and the initiatives identified, utilizing the funding provided under the Student Success distribution model.

## ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

The Center for Student Outreach and Success has become the central location for any student needing assistance.

- When students enter the SOS center they sign in as a way to keep track of students receiving services. The center's program specialist maintains the data from the sign-in sheet on an excel spreadsheet. From January 2016 through November 2016, there have been just over 1600 students sign in for services through the SOS center.

- During the 2015-2016 academic year, the four part-time high school career coaches served 10 high schools in MECC's service region. According to the DOE website, there was 4,813 students in MECC's service region in grades 9-12 in the 2015-2016 academic year. According to the VCCS's Case Management System, MECC's High School Career Coaches served 4,808 unduplicated students. The HS Career Coaches also referred 60 at-risk graduating students to the SOS center to be considered for the College Success Coach program. In July 2016, MECC joined the RVHI and 3 out of 4 of our career coaches have become full time employees working Aug-May.

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- MECC is leading the way among the colleges participating in the Chancellor's College Success Coach Initiative. The VCCS provides data to the College's that compares their cohort students against a controlled group of students who meet the criteria to be apart of their cohort, but were not selected to participate. According to the data provided by the VCCS, MECC is the only participating college whose cohort students out measured the control group students in all performance measures for Fall 2013 to Fall 2014. The VCCS just provided the college with Fall 2015 data, and MECC's CSC cohort students out measured the controlled group students in all performance measures. Only individual college data was provided by the VCCS for Fall 2015.

- MECC utilizes SAILS in an effort to address retention concerns. Data is provided to MECC through the SAILS website. Since the inception of SAILS, MECC has had the highest percentages of faculty who complete the progress surveys in SAILS of all community colleges. The faculty at MECC are highly dedicated and believe in using the SAILS system as a way to support student success and retention efforts.

Additional data is provided in our PowerPoint.

## PLAN FOR SCALE & SUSTAINABILITY

To bring the Center for Student Outreach and Success to scale, a number of initiatives are planned and/or have begun:

\* MECC has joined the Rural Virginia Horseshoe Initiative with the support of the MECC Foundation. This has enabled the hiring of three full-time career coaches (1 shared with SWCC).

\* The College has embedded the efforts and design of the SOS Center into its current SSLI Plan. This is a five-year plan and will ensure that the goals of both are conducive to student success efforts.

\* The College's strategic plan includes the creation of a comprehensive Student Center for Access, which will expand the SOS Center model into other student services areas: Enrollment, Financial Aid, Testing, Advising, etc. The idea is to centralize all of the functions of the Enrollment Services/Financial Aid Office, Office of Student Services, and the Center of Student Outreach and Success into one building to improve the flow of students from admission to advising. This will be a continuation of our efforts to change the campus culture to dissolve "silos" of services, as well as reinforce the college's efforts to help students realize that "advising matters." The Advising Matters! campaign began in Fall, 2016 and will continue for several semesters to encourage students to see their advisors often.

## COLLEGE DESCRIPTION

Mountain Empire Community College (MECC) is a two-year, public community college which serves approximately 3,700 credit students (1,800 FTE) and 1,300 noncredit students each year in a service region that covers one city (Norton) and

four counties (Dickenson, Lee, Scott, and Wise) in rural southwestern Virginia.

The area's 100,000 residents have high rates of poverty (22.4% vs. 11.8% statewide) and unemployment (7.92% vs. 4.2% statewide) and low educational attainment rates (13.2% of adults hold bachelor's degrees vs. 35.8% statewide). MECC consistently ranks first among the twenty-three institutions in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) in the percent of total headcount receiving financial aid.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Victoria Ratliff, Ed.D.

Vice President, Academic & Student Services

[vratliff@mecc.edu](mailto:vratliff@mecc.edu)

276-523-7467