

STUDENT SUCCESS BEST PRACTICE: NEW RIVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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STUDENT SUCCESS CATEGORY --

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

TITLE: "INTENTIONAL ENGAGEMENT"

PROCESS

Too many NRCC students fail to complete their programs of study. Research shows that low-income and first generation students are less likely than their counterparts to graduate. Schools like the University of Texas at Austin and the City University of New York are making a difference in their outcomes by using predictive analytics to identify groups of students who would benefit from a network of support and structure. But over 70% of NRCC students are low income and/or first generation college students, so our major student success initiatives must support the entire student body. Moreover, they must address more than our students' financial and academic needs; our efforts must also address their fears and doubts about their ability to succeed as college students. Our Student Success Advisory Committee which has guided this initiative has consisted of our President, Vice President for Instruction and Student Services, Dean of Student Services and Director and Associate Director of the Accountability in Student Learning Program. Our Director of Institutional Research and Information Technology staff have also been involved, given the important role data and technology play in our initiative. Finally, faculty members have helped with formulating the model through the Student Success Leadership Initiative meetings and focus groups.

STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

In order to socialize students into believing that they belong and that they can succeed, NRCC has created the intentional engagement model of student success which is characterized by:

- A custom-designed technology platform (Connecting Learning Assets and Students, or CLAS) that pulls actionable data (e.g. faculty concerns and praises, referrals, SIS data, action plans) into one place where referrals can be created and managed in real time;
- A team of Connection Specialists who act as guides to all NRCC students, starting at a required New Student Orientation;
- An Engagement Community for each student made up of his or her instructors, advisors, Connection Specialist, tutors and other staff who work with that student; and

- NRCC's student-centered culture where everyone, regardless of title or rank, is committed and empowered to support student success.

ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

NRCC began implementing its intentional engagement model as it currently exists – with all NRCC students - in Fall 2015. Even in this short period, we have seen a shift in short- and medium-term outcomes. From Fall 2014 to Fall 2015, withdrawal rates from individual courses decreased by 21%. Fall 2016 saw an additional decrease of around 4%, for a total of a 25% decrease since the model was implemented. Because the Fall 2016 term is not yet concluded, we only have withdrawal numbers to compare, but here are a few other data points comparing Fall 2015 and Fall 2014 that indicate some positive movement:

- Percent of students receiving an A, B, or C increased from 64% to 66% - showing that students weren't remaining in class only to fail later.
- First term students attending Orientation withdrew from classes at a rate 43% lower than those who did not attend orientation.
- Percent of first term students attending orientation receiving an A, B, or C increased at a rate 26% higher than those who did not attend orientation.

In the medium-term, retention rates for students in the Fall 2015 target cohort increased to the highest point in ten years compared to the average retention rates from the previous three years:

- Fall to Spring retention rate increased 10.5% and
- Fall to Fall retention rate increased 23.9%.

A year and a half in is too early to see any change in completion and transfer rates, but we eagerly anticipate seeing those results soon, too.

PLAN FOR SCALE & SUSTAINABILITY

Because our intentional engagement model is already being implemented with all NRCC students, we are already to scale. The sustainability of the model will largely depend on tweaking our caseload assignment formula so that our Connection Specialists are carrying manageable caseloads. Currently, our Connection Specialists who are solely assigned to this duty work for 29 hours a week and carry caseloads of about 500 students each. Improving the support we are able to offer students and increasing sustainability will require that we decrease these caseloads. In an effort to develop more manageable caseloads and deepen relationships with students, other integral student services staff members have begun managing caseloads. Our goal is to reduce caseloads to about 300 students which aligns with the VCCS' Rural Virginia Horseshoe Initiative (RVHI) caseload management model for career coaches.

COLLEGE DESCRIPTION

New River Community College was founded in 1969 as one of 23 public community colleges in Virginia supported by state appropriations and local funds. Since that date, the college has grown significantly, having reached the current enrollment of over 4,500 students. New River Community College is located in the New River Valley of southwestern Virginia, and provides educational opportunities to residents of Montgomery, Floyd, Giles and Pulaski counties, and the city of Radford. The four-county area encompasses a population of more than 160,000 people.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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