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STUDENT SUCCESS CATEGORY --

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

TITLE: "STUDENTS TRANSITIONING THROUGH EDUCATION PROGRAMS SUCCESSFULLY (S.T.E.P.S.) –
A RESEARCHED-BASED, EVIDENCE-DRIVEN MODEL FOR EFFECTIVELY SERVING UNDERSERVED STUDENTS"

PROCESS

Students Transitioning through Education Programs Successfully (S.T.E.P.S.) was developed by Paul D. Camp Community College (PDCCC) in September 2012, in response to the Virginia Community College System's (VCCS), Chancellor's College Success Coach Initiative (CCSCI). The VCCS provides the nine participating institutions grant funding up to $150,000 annually. This initiative has supported the last two VCCS strategic plans (Achieve 2015 and most recently Complete 2021), as an intervention to increase the number of underserved students that graduate, transfer, or earn non-credit credentials. Students are selected based upon meeting one or more of the following criteria: First–generation, ethnic minority, and Pell grant eligible; and earned 14 or fewer college credits. The VCCS defines the aforementioned students as underserved. Data analysis conducted on the past five years of student retention outcomes at PDCCC revealed challenges in producing graduates – the institution consistently ranked in the bottom third of the 23 VCCS institutions. Additionally, informed by Goldrick-Rab's (2010) analysis that included 750 community colleges, the S.T.E.P.S. team focused on implementing interventions that would address low student retention rates that have typically been attributed to a myriad of factors including academic unpreparedness, limited financial resources, family obligations, and/or social incongruence, in particular regard to underserved students. Two success coaches, two co-program directors, a campus dean, and the Vice President of Academic and Student Development, collaborated to develop the strategy for S.T.E.P.S.

STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

Personalized coaching is at the heart of S.T.E.P.S. Bettinger and Baker (2011) found that students who have consistent contact with coaches are situated to "develop a clear vision of their goals, to guide them in connecting daily activities to their long term goals, and to support them in building skills." S.T.E.P.S. coaches act as guides for students by helping them to navigate and interpret the organization and link them to on and off campus resources. This approach empowers students not only to identify resources, but to also feel confident enough to access resources. Strategies and interventions employed by the coaches are

bundled as follows: Academic monitoring and tracking systems; academic and career plans; The Community Resources Toolkit (an online resource listing over 230 non-academic resources); community service projects; College Success Toolkits (backpacks loaded with resources); learning communities; Pre-exam events; program intake forms; scholarship search and application assistance; SMART Goals framework; Student Success Symposium; transportation (free bus passes); weekly workshops (Campus Conversations and Tuesday Talks); weekly newsletter; and Welcome Back Week. Students meeting the criteria for participation in S.T.E.P.S., as defined by the VCCS, are identified and selected through a variety of means, including a list provided by the VCCS, self-referrals, and referrals made by PDCCC employees and the coaching staff. Participation in S.T.E.P.S. is voluntary. Within the first 60 days of the program's inception, program staff (a) designed the academic/career plan, intake form, and participation agreement; (b) facilitated information sessions and classroom presentations; and (c) produced marketing materials bearing a self-designed logo that garnered college-wide buy-in of S.T.E.P.S. At the onset of the program, a student information system (SIS) was being utilized by the PDCCC as the primary student data management system. In fall 2013, Student Assistance and Intervention for Learning Success (SAILS), a retention solutions system, was launched at PDCCC. Within SAILS, students are identified by campus and a code that links them to S.T.E.P.S. SAILS allows the coaches to (a) access real-time data related to students' academic progress and enrollment patterns; (b) track alerts sent or received by faculty and staff listed in students' network of classes and programs; and (c) send positive reinforcements to students who may be struggling academically or worthy of academic recognition. Quantitative and qualitative data, including baseline measures, program goals and student outcomes are captured on word processing files and spreadsheets.

ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

S.T.E.P.S. is a holistically-assessed program at PDCCC that is showing promise. To date, the program has served 513 students (six cohorts). In order to assess the overall impact and effectiveness of the program, both quantitative and qualitative data processes are employed. Complete quantitative data is available on the first five cohorts (433 students). Primarily, data are collected on the most recent measures provided by the VCCS, including: pass rates in student development courses (SDV); developmental English and math; college English and math; GPA's; completion of degrees, certificates, career studies certificates, and other credentials; and transfers to 4-year institutions. Emerging data reveal the following significant outcomes: (a) 70% of students maintained a 2.0 or above GPA; (b) 134 degrees, diplomas, certificates, or other credentials have been earned; (c) over $235,000 in scholarships awarded; and (d) 3-year average retentions rates: fall to spring (77.86%) and fall to fall (49.46%), which consistently exceed the VCCS and PDCCC rates by 7% to 18%. To put into perspective, in alignment with Complete 2021, S.T.E.P.S. tripled the number of credentials earned by the end of Year 3 funding when compared to the baseline group. Equally impressive are the numerous testimonials offered by students, faculty and staff. For example, a student who recently graduated and transferred to a 4-year institution stated "I didn't really know how to function…I had an adult figure [the success coach] to help guide me along…" Moreover, according to a long-time faculty member, "More students complete their courses. It is my observation that more students seem to actually enjoy their academic studies. I attribute these observations not to my teaching style, but to the S.T.E.P.S. program in general and to the individual coaches in particular. Students sense when somebody actually cares about them." The Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) selected the team's peer reviewed research paper, demonstrating the impact and effectiveness of S.T.E.P.S., for presentation at the 2016 National Symposium on Student Retention (NSSR). In 2015, using FY2013 and FY2014 data, the VCCS calculated the 3-year return on investment at $3,062,800 for the nine-institution coaching initiative.

PLAN FOR SCALE & SUSTAINABILITY

Low retention rates among underserved students persist at institutions of higher learning regardless of size or location, which gives S.T.E.P.S. broad-based appeal. For example, in 2014, PDCCC shared the S.T.E.P.S. model with Germanna Community College (GCC), a VCCS institution that has a larger enrollment. This collaboration contributed to the launch of a new student success coaching program at GCC that includes seven coaches. Additionally, S.T.E.P.S. coaches routinely engage in work groups that include other institutions participating in the Chancellor's College Success Coach Initiative. Leveraging S.T.E.P.S. as a best practices model for student retention is very simple–it involves re-imagining student success, not reinventing the wheel. For example, in March 2016, the S.T.E.P.S. team took the lead in planning and hosting the first ever Student Success Symposium held at PDCCC – 150 students, staff and faculty attended. PDCCC was awarded a 2016-17 Chancellor's Innovation Fund (CIF) grant in the amount of $14,000 that is designed to scale up the Student Success Symposium that includes both nationally and internationally recognized guest speakers and community partners. Additionally, PDCCC's Strategic Plan (2015-16 to 2017-18) and Student Success Leadership Institute Action Plan (SSLI) include goals and objectives designed to sustain and scale effective strategies implemented by the S.T.E.P.S. program, by seeking a Title III Strengthening Institutions Grant for 2017.

COLLEGE DESCRIPTION

Opened in 1971, PDCCC serves the counties of Southampton and Isle of Wight, and the cities of Franklin and Suffolk, encompassing an area of 1,123 square miles in rural southeast Virginia. PDCCC offers courses at its campuses in Franklin and Suffolk, a center in Smithfield, online, and at ten other sites, mostly high schools. The third smallest of the VCCS colleges, PDCCC serves approximately 2,000 credit-seeking students each year. Of these, 17% are full-time and 83% are part-time, 33% are male and 67% are female and 35% of students are age 25 and older.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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