

# STUDENT SUCCESS BEST PRACTICE: VIRGINIA WESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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## STUDENT SUCCESS CATEGORY --

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

## TITLE: "NAVIGATING GUIDED PATHWAYS WITH PROGRAM ADVISORS"

### PROCESS

This strategy was initiated through the college's development of its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for our decennial SACSCOC reaffirmation. As the development team, which consisted of staff and faculty from across campus as well as a student leader, consulted results from focus groups and survey data, the need for additional clarification and development of our advising team became apparent. Focus groups revealed that students were unclear where to go to seek advising, and that the advising center was so inundated with students it could not serve them appropriately. Team advising was identified by the college community as its desired goal for our QEP and a literature review identified the importance of an advising team consisting of both student services and faculty advisors. Additionally, initial data from 2011 revealed that graduating students' satisfaction for advising was below our threshold for concern in 2011 (3.18 out of 4) while CCESE data showed that only 30% of respondents were satisfied with academic advising, with only 35% of CCESE respondents reporting discussing career plans with an academic advisor. This data, along with our dissatisfaction on the graduation and retention rates of our program-placed students (19% and 50% respectively) led us to the creation of a new position on our advising team. This position--which came to be known as Program Advisors--is a student services professional who specializes in the programs within his/her academic school and advises students within each school.

### STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

A small group of the QEP implementation team consulted a variety of student services staff members as they developed the job descriptions for these positions. Several refinements were made as different groups on campus were asked to offer their feedback. Once the position descriptions were refined and finalized, the Dean of Student Services, along with the Enrollment Center Manager, initiated the hiring process. Once the three positions were filled, these new advisors began their training with the Enrollment Center Manager. To demonstrate the college's commitment to this concept, these three positions were included as permanent positions in the budget.

### ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

The evaluation of our outcomes includes both quantitative and qualitative data. Student focus groups and surveys provide an extensive amount of positive feedback regarding program advisors. 32% of CCESE students from our 2016 CCESE survey note that their program advisor is their best source of academic advising. We are also assessing our success by examining our retention and graduation rates for program placed students (as these are the students who are impacted by the program advisor positions). The retention rate for this group has risen to 54.5% while the graduation rate has risen to 25.8%. We are also tracking the percent of credits a student takes that is directly related to his/her declared program of study, and have found that this percentage has increased to 79.2%, which is above our measure of success.

On average, each program advisors has seen 700 students between April 1, 2016 and August 30, 2016 for individual advising sessions. They have also cleared almost 1400 SAILS flags. SAILS flags are only considered cleared when the program advisor has made personal contact with the student and engaged them in a conversation about their success issue. This does not include contacts through email or by leaving voice mail messages. Those contacts are in addition to the 1400 cleared flags.

### PLAN FOR SCALE & SUSTAINABILITY

These positions are already incorporated into the fabric of our college and included in our budget, with the advising team as a sustainable part of the student services we offer our students. We would like to add more program advisors, first adding one to our school of Health Professions, then adding another position for each of the other academic schools. These additions will enable our advisors to focus even more on developmental advising and retention initiatives, while offering more availability to assist students and faculty.

### COLLEGE DESCRIPTION

Virginia Western Community College (VWCC), located within the City of Roanoke, initiated academic programming in 1966 as one of the first two-year institutions established under the Virginia Community College System. The College operates under the policies established by the State Board for Community Colleges and the Virginia Western Community College Local Advisory Board. The College is located on a 70-acre campus and includes a new state-of-the art Health Professions complex and Student Center. In 2017, Virginia Western will begin construction on a new STEM facility.

The mission of the College is to provide quality educational opportunities that empower students for success and strengthen communities. The College has grown from an initial enrollment of 1,352 students to its current enrollment of over 12,500. The College's service region encompasses a population of over 308,000 in Roanoke County, Craig county, southern Botetourt County, Franklin County and the cities of Roanoke and Salem. The nearest largest city is Richmond, more than three hours (189 miles) distant.

As the only public institution of higher education in the greater Roanoke Valley, Virginia Western is the center of learning for the community. With the nearest public institution 40-miles away, Virginia Western is the only option for higher education for the many low income students in the area. Approximately 48% of curricular students are low income, 26% are first-generation college students, and 4.2% of our students have disabilities. Fifty-six percent of the student population is female and 44 percent are males.

Virginia Western has 68 Associate degrees, Certificates, and Career Studies Certificates available, and guaranteed admissions agreements with 32 four-year institutions. Twenty-three of our degrees are designed for transfer students. The College has the Hall Associates Career Center which assists students and alumni with finding internships and employment.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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