National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability

**NCWD** For Youth

Navigating the Road to Work

Supporting Student Success through

# CONNECTING ACTIVITIES

## *Info Brief Series for Community Colleges*

*This Info Brief series describes strategies for community colleges to help students access services, activities, and supports relevant to their individual needs and goals to boost college retention and success.*

OCTOBER 2016

## ACADEMIC SKILLS TRAINING & ASSISTANCE

Community college students vary greatly in their level of academic preparedness. Federal data indicates that 68 percent of community college students need to take at least one developmental education course (Jaggars & Stacey, 2014). Community colleges can support students' success by providing academic supports such as tutoring services for specific courses and assignments and guidance on study skills and time management. In addition, some student with disabilities may need academic accommodations and assistive technology.

### ALL STUDENTS NEED OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN ACADEMIC SUCCESS SKILLS & STRATEGIES

As students transition from high school to college, they face a very big change in both the structure of the educational experience and the academic demands. Classes may now be scheduled for any time during the day, not all together in a regular daily block

of time. Students are less likely to have regular daily assignments and more likely to have fewer, larger assignments spread throughout the semester that are worth more of their total grade. Without some guidance on how to adjust to the college context, students may struggle.

Colleges can help students adjust by providing information, guidance, and instruction on academic success skills and strategies. Some common ways that colleges do this include providing information in the student handbook, holding study skills workshops during freshman orientation, offering or requiring student success courses, offering academic coaching, and engaging other students as peer mentors.

Research studies indicate that student success courses may also be a particularly valuable strategy. Multiple studies at both four-year institutions and community colleges have found that participation in student success courses leads to greater academic achievement and persistence among students at least in the short-term (Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagano, 2007; Karp, Raufman, Efthimiou, & Ritze, 2015). In their study of students' opinions of student success courses at two community colleges, O'Gara, Karp, and Hughes (2009) found that students valued this type of course both for the information they gained and for the relationships they built with school faculty and staff. Students reported that the course helped them develop both their time management and study skills, which are needed to be successful. Given the numerous commitments that community college students are often juggling, appropriate time management is a critical skill for college success.

One recent study indicates that integrating opportunities to practice skills into student success courses increases student outcomes. This is the approach taken by the Bronx Community College (BCC), which redesigned its student success course in an effort to make it more effective. Karp and colleagues (2015) evaluated BCC's new course design and found that the majority of students reported using the skills they learned after they completed the course. Compared to students who did not participate, the course participants had higher grades and stronger persistence from one semester to the next.

## WHAT ARE COLLEGES DOING?

**Bronx Community College (BCC), N.Y.** – First semester freshman at BCC have the opportunity to take a First Year Seminar course that expands upon the lessons typically offered in college orientation courses. First Year Seminar courses use a curriculum that combines college preparation skills, such as communication strategies, time management, stress management, and study skills, and an introduction to academic content in a small seminar setting in order to prepare students for college success. The course also includes mandatory advising and personal development to support students as they make decisions in their first semester. The seminar courses meet once a week for two hours at a time. The Community College Research Center has published a **report** on the early outcomes of the BCC First Year Seminar. This report not only provides information about what BCC has done, but additional information about Student Success Courses and the ways that they have been successful.

**Valencia College, Fla.** – At Valencia, first-year students are able to enroll in a course called Student Success. Through this course, students are guided in the development of personal and

career goals, given an introduction to the resources available at Valencia, and provided with training in skills to succeed in college, such as time management and study skills. The incorporation of goal setting in the Student Success course makes this program unique. Valencia has taken an approach to student success that focuses on the need for students to get early orientation and advising that gives them a clear pathway to their desired goals. Valencia College was awarded the **Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence** in 2011 for their efforts to support student success.

**Anne Arundel Community College (AACC), Md.** – AACC offers a wide variety of workshops through its Pathways to Success Workshop Series. Workshops are held on topics such as comprehensive success strategies and using your Meyer-Brigg personality type indicator to learn effectively. The college offers an online workshop on time management that is done independently and available for students 24/7.

### RESOURCES

"**Student Success Courses for Sustained Impact**" is a publication of the Community College Research Center with advice on designing student success courses in a way that will have a lasting impact on students through the completion of their program.

**The National Academic Advising Association** website provides some articles and other resources on **academic coaching** and **peer mentoring and advising**.

## ALL STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW WHERE TO GO FOR ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE

Many community colleges offer free tutoring for students and have a place where students can go to get academic support. If students do not know that this service exists or where it is located, they are unlikely to use it. It is important for colleges to be very clear with students about what kind of services are offered and where to go if they need help or just have a question. While this information may be provided in a student handbook or on the college's website, it will be helpful for this information to be reinforced multiple times. If visiting the campus tutoring center is a part of new student orientation, it can be expected that students will be more likely to go back and use it. Students in the O'Gara, Karp, and Hughes (2009) study were not able to point to a "consistent and reliable" (p. 10) source of information and indicated that any information that they received prior to the student success course was more often something they just happened upon, such as a sign on a random bulletin board. Ensuring that all students know what academic supports are available and where to go to get help will greatly increase their likelihood of using these services, getting the help that they need, and continuing until the completion of their program.

Peer mentors and tutors are useful strategies for assisting students to get oriented to the academic assistance offered by their school, as well as providing academic support. While peer mentoring programs vary greatly from one institution to another, these programs have been perceived by mentors and mentees as beneficial to their college success (Hill & Reddy, 2007). There is an added value in the information that a peer men-

tor is able to share with their mentee as a fellow student who has recently been in their mentee's place. For example, a new student or a student who is struggling may feel more comfortable talking to another student rather than college faculty or staff. Some colleges have incorporated peer mentoring into student success courses or developmental education classes by assigning a continuing student to a course who provides support during and outside of class time (Cerna & Platania, 2012; Karp, Raufman, Efthimiou, & Ritze, 2015). Meeting with students outside of class time allows the peer mentor to check on students' progress between classes and to answer questions that the student may not have wanted to ask during class. Specific offices such as disability services or multicultural affairs may also provide peer mentoring programs as an additional support to the students they serve. For students with disabilities, mentoring can be a valuable support mechanism as they learn to navigate the transition from high school to college (Stumbo et al., 2010). College upperclassman with and without disabilities can support incoming freshman in a variety of ways, including coaching on organizational and academic skills, learning how to access support services, dealing with transition anxiety, and developing social connections (Giust & Valle-Riestra, 2014; Stumbo et al., 2010).

Many colleges use early alert systems that bring attention to early signs of academic struggle among students. The use of an effective intervention at the first sign of academic difficulty has been found to reduce student attrition (Tampke, 2013). The implementation of early alert systems varies from campus to campus. Some colleges use the system for certain groups of students, typically those considered at-risk, and others make it a campus-wide program. Early alert sys-

tems are typically web-based programs that are incorporated into student tracking and advising software. Advising or support staff receive notifications through the system of a concern such as a low grade, a missing assignment, or a faculty referral. The student's advisor or counselor is then able to connect with the student, talk with them about what is going on, and provide them with the support options available. The early alert system gives someone on campus the knowledge and opportunity to reach out to students when they are beginning to struggle and when it will be easiest to help them get back on track. Students who need help may feel uncomfortable seeking out assistance on their own. By having their advisor contact them, students can feel supported in a personal way and get the assistance that they need.

## WHAT ARE COLLEGES DOING?

**Howard Community College (HCC), Md.** – HCC provides a wide variety of academic supports to their students, including skills workshops and math review, group tutoring, online writing assistance, math video tutorials, drop-in tutoring, computer-aided tutorials, and scheduled tutoring for students who qualify. The details for each type of assistance are provided on their website. Specific support programs are provided for minority students, students with disabilities, low-income students, and first-generation college students.

**Pellissippi State Community College (PSCC), Tenn.** – An Academic Support Center is available for students at each of PSCC's campuses. At these centers, students are able to access tutoring on a walk-in basis on a wide-range of subjects. PSCC also offers an English Center where students can receive help with writing assignments, an Ascatutor service through which

students are able to submit their assignments through email and receive feedback within 24 hours, and a Math Lab at all of its campuses. Through a partnership with Tutor.com, PSCC makes online tutoring available to students for 24/7 tutoring services.

**Sinclair Community College (SCC), Ohio** – Sinclair developed its own comprehensive Student Success Plan software in 2005 in order to support its students to complete their program by providing intensive, wrap-around support services through a web-based system. Incorporated into the program is an early alert system in which instructors are able to notify an advisor and/or counselor when a student is beginning to show signs of difficulty in a class. Instructors may make notifications when a student has not attended class or is excessively absent, is frequently tardy, or has low homework, quiz, or test scores.

**Paradise Valley Community College (PVCC), Ariz.** – At PVCC, the peer mentor program for first-year students is structured as a formal leadership opportunity for its selected mentors. Mentors are assigned a student success class and work during class time to assist with the course and are also available for students outside of class time.

**Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC)** – The Disability Services Office at NICC runs the Support Through the Encouragement of Peers (STEP) program. The program provides students with disabilities support academically, personally, and socially through peer-driven groups. Students build relationships, are assisted in navigating their college courses and programs, and are encouraged in the development of their self-reliance and self-advocacy. The office also

provides a peer mentoring program for students who may need a one-on-one relationship.

**Oberlin College, Ohio** – Through its Office of Disability Services, Oberlin College runs a peer mentoring program in which upperclassman with disabilities, called Student Accessibility Advocates (SAAs), are paired with incoming freshman to connect them with resources on campus and provide support as people who have been in their position. SAAs spend a week training in the summer and are then paired as mentors with up to six incoming freshman. The program's slogan is "been there, done that, and thriving."

## RESOURCES

***Leading by example: A case study of peer leader programs at two achieving the dream colleges*** – This case study report by MDRC shares practices and lessons learned from peer mentoring approaches at two community colleges.

**Tutor.com** – One of the many online tutoring services, tutor.com can provide students with access to an online tutor at any time. For higher education institutions, tutor.com also collects data on concept mastery and prior knowledge, which will be available to the college to assist it in understanding their students' needs.

**National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Clearinghouse** – NACADA provides information and resources on different early alert systems, including the pros and cons of a web-based system of advising, as well as peer mentoring and advising resources.

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES MAY NEED GUIDANCE ON REQUESTING ACCOMMODATIONS & DISABILITY-RELATED SERVICES

Some students with disabilities may need academic accommodations and supports. When providing information at orientation to all students about the academic support services available and where to access these services, it is important to also provide information on how to request academic accommodations and other disability related services. In order to receive accommodations in college, students with disabilities must disclose their disability and request these services from their college before they are needed (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). The proportion of college students with disabilities who choose to disclose and request accommodations is low. According to one study of high school students with disabilities who went on to college, only 37 percent identified themselves as having a disability once they were in college and only 24 percent received disability-related accommodations and supports from their post-secondary institution (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009). While some students with non-apparent disabilities choose not to disclose due to concerns about how faculty and peers will perceive them, other students may simply lack the information about what, how, and when to disclose their disability. Assuming responsibility for seeking out accommodations is new for students who previously received them in high school without needing to make a request. In addition, they may be unaware that it will take time for the college to consider any requests for accommodations and that the process includes providing documentation to establish their eli-

gibility. By providing information about accessing disability services early in the matriculation process and reminding all students before classes begin, colleges can encourage students who may need accommodations to think ahead and be proactive about meeting with the disability services office as soon as possible. In addition, orienting faculty to the accommodation process and encouraging them to remind all students about accommodations on the first day of class can help to reduce the stigma that some students may feel is associated with needing extra help. Students may feel uncomfortable asking for help, so receiving consistent messages that seeking support is a common part of the college experience for all students may help decrease students' reluctance to use support services and accommodations when needed. Additional strategies that colleges use to reduce stigma and promote students' use of accommodations include offering training on self-determination skills, organizing peer support groups, and matching students with peer mentors with disabilities (Getzel, 2008).

### RESOURCES

*Making My Way Through College* – This guide provides information for students with disabilities who are preparing to enter or have recently started college. The section on Decisions about Disability Disclosure and Connecting to Disability Services provides a helpful overview of the process for requesting accommodations and other disability services during college.

**Sharing Your Disability** – The Virginia Commonwealth University's **Going to College** website for students with disabilities includes short video interviews and tips from college students on how to handle disability disclosure conversations with faculty and others.

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES MAY NEED TO KNOW HOW TO ACCESS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

In addition to accommodations that may be offered through the disability services office, such as extended time for testing and assistance with note-taking, some students with disabilities may also need access to assistive technology to help them successfully complete their coursework. The Americans with Disabilities Act defines assistive technology as "any item, piece of equipment, or system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is commonly used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities." Some common types of assistive technology include speech-to-text programs, screen readers, mobility tools, magnification devices, adaptive keyboards and mice, and recording devices. Access to the appropriate assistive technology can greatly enhance a student's ability to succeed in college. It is also important that students are given the training and support to correctly utilize their assistive technology. While some students may use an assistive technology device that is the same or similar to one that they used in high school, it may be best for other students to use a new assistive technology device. The use of new devices and technologies will require both training and support. Colleges can provide students with information on the assistive technology that is available to them and how to access the appropriate technology, as well as provide support to students as they learn how to navigate new devices and deal with any challenges that arise with the technology. Colleges may find it helpful to partner with their state's Vocational Rehabilitation agency or Assistive Technology Act program in order to support students who utilize assistive technology.

## WHAT ARE COLLEGES DOING?

**Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC), N.Y.** – HVCC supports students with disabilities through the Center for Access and Assistive Technology. The college focuses on ensuring that students with disabilities are provided with the supports that they need in order to be successful in college and are able to act "as independently as possible in a supportive environment that promotes self-reliance." HVCC evaluates students on their assistive technology needs and provides supports for students as they decide what will work best for them and navigates the funding options for assistive technology. Through this well-informed support structure, HVCC is able to assist students with disabilities with the resources that will help them to meet their academic goals.

## RESOURCES

**Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology in Postsecondary Education** – This project, sponsored by the Great Lakes ADA Center and the Southwest ADA Center, offers tools and resources to postsecondary institutions to evaluate their services. They also provide a tool for students and families to assist them in preparing for transition from using assistive technology in high school to the postsecondary setting.

**National Center on Accessible Educational Materials at CAST** – This website provides an overview of assistive technology and links to related state and national resources. In addition, it provides guidance to colleges on ensuring that all educational materials are available in accessible formats.

**Directory of State Rehabilitation Service Agencies** – Every state offers Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to assist eligible residents with disabilities in attaining their employment-related goals. These services include obtaining the appropriate assistive technology to perform their job. For some students, a connection with these services will be very helpful as they pursue their employment goals.

**Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs (ATAP)** – ATAP provides a directory of Assistive Technology Act Programs in each state. ATAP works to ensure that Statewide Assistive Technology Programs continue to be strong and effective in order to promote education about and access to assistive technology in their state.

As students enter community college, they come from a wide range of academic backgrounds and with varying levels of readiness. It is very important for colleges to provide academic supports to help students be successful in their coursework. Colleges also need to ensure that students with disabilities understand how and when to request academic accommodations and assistive technology. By providing the appropriate academic supports to all students, colleges equip students with the resources they need to succeed in their courses and complete their program.

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