HEWLETT

Leaders in Student Success

2009

Model for Change

During 2008 & 2009, the RP Group ran a program called the Hewlett Leaders in Student Success, which sought to focus attention on excellent work in basic skills education at California's community colleges. Beginning with a college-by-college analysis of the percentage of students starting in credit basic skills who went on to succeed in transfer-level English or math, we identified colleges that showed greater than average success and/or improvement in basic skills math and English. Top-ranking schools were visited by expert teams to determine whether this improvement was reflective of sustained, college-wide efforts. In examining the colleges that showed higher success rates, we found that while specific practices varied – one college might emphasize student success centers while another integrated basic skills and vocational instruction – the process that the colleges followed to create higher success rates were similar. Based on these commonalities, we created a model for the process of change experienced at the colleges.

Igniting Event

A small group within a college develops insight into factors shaping the student experience that require new, cross-cutting approaches.

Examples:

- Discussions about changes in the classroom and the need to implement larger-scale interventions.
- Reviewing data on student success rates, including equity.
- Inspiration from an innovative program.
- Leadership-driven initiatives—such as by the Academic Senate, senior management, or the board—to improve student success across campus.
- Changes in leadership.

Shared Leadership

Leaders across the college develop a shared vision and responsibility for creating change, and empower others to step outside of conventional organizational structures.

Examples:

- An environment of innovation is nurtured, characterized by collaboration, risk taking, and experimentation. College leadership publicly values efforts undertaken by faculty and staff.

- College leadership establishes accountability for these efforts, with clear benchmarks that address both institutional and student goals.
- In cases of accelerating incremental change, leaders set direction and general guidelines, and then empower small groups of specialists from faculty and student services to implement and evaluate new strategies. Leaders work with this team to map pathways for further development and wider impact.
- In cases of instigating institution-wide change, leaders sets clear priorities that ensure capacity-building and sustainability are built into designs, and that institutional focus and resources are allocated accordingly. Trade-offs are acknowledged and explained upfront.
- Those leading the effort re-define basic skills so that the issue can be viewed in a new way, such as looking at the role of ESL or contextualizing the proportion of students who qualify as basic skills. A common terminology is created so that practitioners can be on the same page about issues and potential solutions.

Data Gathering and Reflection

Space is created for reviewing internal and external information and reflecting on its implications.

Examples:

- The definition of success is articulated and built into research designs. Research questions are set before interventions are implemented to ensure evaluation is incorporated into the program. Results and implications are vigorously discussed.
- The research design is developed collaboratively with faculty, staff, and researchers to determine what types of information will help clarify existing structures and evaluate new ideas.
- Practitioners visit another college to learn about a program and time is set aside to discuss ideas before and after the visit.
- Information is gathered on effective practices and compared to current practices.
- Practitioners conduct action-research studies to gain practice-level insights.
- Interventions are evaluated by following specific groups of students over time. The results are analyzed to understand success rates for these specific groups and factors that may strengthen or inhibit success.

Experimentation

Time and resources are allocated to test new ideas using a learning community approach – research is embedded, mistakes are learned from, and work is measured against established goals.

Examples:

- Student success center staff and faculty design directed learning activities to build study skills while undertaking classroom assignments.
- Vocational and basic skills classes and units are integrated, with built-in support from student services.
- Basic skills classes include faculty-driven tutoring for students, where the model allows for faculty to determine how to integrate strategies into specific courses.

- Collaborative efforts are identified with high schools and community groups, to build a greater understanding of readiness and transition issues.
- Delivery structures are reconsidered, including acceleration via summer bridge programs, compressed courses, intensives, focused skill components, and embedded skills in applied courses.

Diffusion

Broad-based support is built beyond the initiating group because trusted representatives work with each constituency on campus. Change is made understandable and ownership is built.

Examples:

- Professional development programs are systematically designed to engage others in the findings, apply these approaches to their own work, and develop further innovations.
- Generous flex time is provided to allow faculty and staff to teach each other about new approaches.
- Research-faculty partnerships are created where faculty help to present data to their departments and shepherd inclusion of research into committee work.
- Skeptical faculty are encouraged to do research on new methods in their own classrooms.
- In planning for larger-scale implementation, the successful model is expanded from a small population to the larger student body, built on lessons that were learned in the experimentation phase.

Integration

Rather than create small-scale, funding-specific efforts, solutions revise internal structures to create collaborations that re-orient the college's interaction with students. Efforts are evaluated and adjusted in an ongoing way.

Examples:

- Existing resources are reallocated so that programs are not dependent on a specific funding source.
- Collaborations are created with other institutions to pool resources and share information.
- The allocation of space is restructured on campus to encourage collaboration.
- Hiring and assignment practices are aligned with values such as experimentation and working across disciplines.
- Adjunct faculty are engaged in improvement efforts.
- Content is blended among disciplines, such as integrating traditional counseling activities into classrooms or infusing basic skills content into career & technical education classes.
- Rather than viewing basic skills students as a special-needs subset, techniques developed for improving basic skills success are applied to all students.