

## **Making a Positive Difference through Advisement: Creating a Model for Improving Student Success**

### **A QEP Proposal**

Improving student retention and success has always presented a formidable challenge to community colleges. For more than a hundred years, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College has been committed to helping students to be successful. Our *Strategic Plan 2020* promises we will support student success through “counseling, advisement, study skills...” Traditionally, most advising has been prescriptive, working with the student on which courses to take. However, recent scholarship suggests a developmental approach is needed. Developmental advising requires discussing career and life goals with a student. Research shows that advising can improve student retention and persistence. (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). Creating a more dynamic model of prescriptive and developmental advising offers the best approach (and the most pragmatic) to impact student success and retention.

Research indicates the type of advising program we should design and implement. Most experts advocate an intrusive or proactive approach to student advisement. In a classic study, done at UNLV, professors were trained in a proactive or intrusive approach and required freshman to meet with them. Reportedly, attrition was dramatically reduced among freshmen (45% to 6%) (Schnebel 2012). Studies that are more recent also reveal a significant positive impact on student retention and success. Molina found that more intrusive advising actually improved GPAs among the students with the more intrusive advisement (Molina and Abelman 2001). Molina's subjects were students in academic trouble: some received intrusive advisement (telephone calls and required meetings with trained advisers), while another group received standard advisement. Of course, if a group today replicated this study, technology could be used (personalized text messaging as well as an e-mail). Furthermore, students reported a higher satisfaction rate with the advisement process. (Schnebel)

Initially, our institution could focus on students with a high attrition rate. For example, retention and academic success among First-generation students is particularly problematic. They do not possess

the "college knowledge" or what sociologists call "cultural capital"--how the system of higher education works. Further, they lack the support networks available to others who have parents who received degrees. Studies show these students respond to proactive advisement: a faculty adviser who uses a developmental, "intrusive" approach in dealing with advisees. For example, text message directly to students with reminders about pre-registration advisement or even checking up on his/her academic progress.(Swecker 2014). Similarly, students with a low placement scores are at a higher risk of dropping out. As Molina and Abelman show in their research, those with academic challenges can benefit profoundly from a proactive approach.

### **Strategies to be Implemented**

**(1) An early warning system.** With these students, implement a proactive or intrusive advisement for higher risk students. Students who are first generation college students (parents who do not have a college degree), students with a GED, those who have attained low test scores, and those students with an ADA accommodation.

**(2) Professional Development.** As research shows, students respond well to knowledgeable advisers ( Anderson 2014). Counselors and instructors should be trained in a developmental approach to advising. Employees should be conversant on all MGCCC programs and transfer requirements and trained in the enhanced advisement system. Employee development programs could also ensure faculty-advisers understand how to understand career assessment scores as well as resources to help students with financial and other personal problems.

**(3) More required meetings (face-to-face or sometimes virtually).** Online assessments to determine career interests and aptitude. Such surveys and assessments could be used in meetings with students to determine if they are in the correct program and on the right path. This is a more developmental approach: discussion of career goals, life goals rather than just a planning a schedule of classes.

## **Student Cohort**

The group we have determined to be high risk will be the primary focus of our system of advisement although all students will benefit. Dr. Suzi Brown utilized Argos to determine which students are participates from the Collegiate Academy. Similarly, we could this system for faculty-advisers to determine which students are in the high-risk category and need a proactive advisement.

## **Measurements and Assessments**

A proactive advisement model could be evaluated in numerous ways. The most obvious would be to look at our retention rates of the cohort from Fall to Fall compared to previous years before the study is initiated. Surveys and interviews with the targeted at-risk group or general student population will yield quantitative and qualitative data to assess our effectiveness.

## **Resources**

- (1) Student services will determine if the student belongs to the at-risk group (through surveys and assessments of new students). Their personnel will facilitate employee development sessions.
- (2) The Faculty will be primary advisers, and the point of contact for most students. They will be trained to become proficient in the system.
- (3) IT will have to implement any software changes.
- (4) Administration will have to coordinate our efforts and give us access to the necessary resources.

## **Name and Contact Information**

We believe a program for improved advisement is the most effective way to impact student success and retention. We thank you for considering our proposal.

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