Community College Needs Assessment
Student Support Services - Northern Illinois Region

Introduction

This document is a summary of the findings collected by a Northern Illinois P20 Network survey of community college district. The community colleges responded to the current practices and/or programs on their campus for each of the following areas: 1) College Success Course, 2) Academic Advising, 3) Transfer Preparation Services, 4) Career Planning Services and 5) Student-to-Student Peer Mentoring

Overview of Finding

A needs assessment survey was distributed to faculty and administration across northern Illinois to 1) identify effective programs in college success and career readiness and 2) to identify the gaps in programming. The results were originally shared in the aggregate with the entire group. In an effort to reduce duplication and simplify the results, a template was developed to identify top “themes”, best practices and other observations which are notable.

Themes

Retention and persistence seem to be the reoccurring at all colleges in all areas. Many of the colleges have a college success type course in place, they are not mandatory nor are they integrated within all aspects of college programming. Many of the colleges who completed the survey are working towards mandatory academic advising for new students and the development of educational or academic plans. Advising syllabi are used to educate students on the objectives of academic advising, which can include timelines, requirements and other college procedures. One area that is challenging for many of the colleges is transfer preparation. Educating staff and students on the tools is an on-going process. Timely updates of information and curriculum alignment seem to be the greatest challenges. There is a lack of transfer data shared between the colleges and universities on all levels (two and four-year) on student completion. Career Planning Services challenges are around adequate funding, student awareness and integration of services. A large number of students who enroll in the community college are “undecided”, thus the implication for career exploration at this level is vital. Student to Student Peer Mentoring programs are limited at community colleges. Colleges with federal programs such as TRIO or Title V has designed opportunities for students, often around issues related to academic performance.

Best Practices

Evaluating the effectiveness has been problematic for colleges in most of the student services areas. Instruments which have been utilized are the Noel –Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). ICCB Program review and in-house developed surveys are used as well.

Institutions which have moved toward mandatory advising and putting registration “holds” on student accounts are now beginning to look at whether these new polices will improve student outcomes and not impact overall college enrollment and be able to be managed by existing staffing limits. Colleges
which utilize technology with the Ellucian product, Student Planner, seem to have had positive outcomes on a small scale. The tool facilitates the ability to assign a student to a counselor/advisor, encourages early declaration of a major and keeps the student on track toward degree completion. Building the relationship with the student provides for a more meaningful experience during the advising interaction. Alert programs which identify students with at-risk behaviors, when identified early in the semester is yet another program colleges are seeking to improve.

Notes and Observations

One observation existing across all of the college respondents was a lack of continuity in definitions of programs and services. As colleges continue to partner to provide seamless transition for our students, consideration should be given to utilizing guidelines established by the Council for the Advancement of Standards CAS) in higher education, National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) and others as appropriate to develop clear standards.