

OAKLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

(re?)Defining Our Students

A Report to the College Academic Senate

Ad Hoc Committee on Redefining Our Students

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Ad Hoc Committee on Redefining Our Students

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Background

In October of 2011, the Chancellor addressed the College Academic Senate and requested the Senate undertake an inquiry into “who should be considered our student whereby we have a reasonable probability of their success within our legislative mandate” (sic). An ad hoc committee was formed to consider this question with the intent to deliver an opinion as soon as possible after the beginning of the 2012 semester.

The committee met and reviewed institutional and national research on student persistence and success. They also reviewed the legislation establishing community colleges in Michigan, pertinent parts of the American with Disabilities Act and financial aid rules regarding ability to benefit. A variety of articles and other reports were also considered, which are listed in the reference section of this report.

Findings

We acknowledge and support that the primary goal of the institution is to deliver high quality, affordable and accessible educational opportunities for our community. In addition, we believe that the College should remain committed to the delivery of transfer and career education programs with a strong general education component. A curriculum with both depth and breadth in the liberal arts and sciences ensures that our graduates are best prepared to meet a changing world.

I. A core component of the community college mission is developmental education. OCC should continue to deliver a robust and effective program for addressing the needs of at-risk students.

Despite the continuing challenges, OCC cannot step away from the vital, necessary service we provide to students with developmental needs. Indeed, as noted in the Michigan Auditor General report “the need for developmental education at community college will continue to exist because of the number of non-traditional students who enroll.....and the diversity of students make it difficult to eliminate the need for developmental education” (2007).

We support the efforts of Achieving the Dream and other initiatives at the college to strengthen the efficacy of our developmental policy. The committee’s review of student success data, suggests that an upward revision of the placement range for ENG 1055 may be in order; we encourage the College to pursue a more in-depth review. It is incumbent on the College, however, to clearly communicate its expectations concerning college readiness to district high schools and incoming students and to rigorously enforce its own policies and procedures concerning placement, enrollment and progress to degree.

External forces will also negatively affect access at a regional and state level. For example, Pell grant funding will be restricted to students with a GED or high school diploma beginning July of 2012. The Michigan Auditor General’s report (2007) has recommended aligning placement scores and policies among all the state’s community

colleges. Availability of federal and state support for developmental coursework is being trimmed in a number of ways, limiting support for students who may be in the most need. While fiscal data was reviewed in preparation of this opinion, it became clear that an accurate picture of institutional expenditures on developmental education was simply not available. It is imperative that OCC develop the capacity to accurately assess its expenditures in this area in order to make informed decisions regarding allocation of resources.

II. The definition of student intent and related practices should be refined to improve our understanding and tracking of goal attainment.

Although student intent data is routinely collected during the registration process, there is room for improvement. Students routinely select undecided or non-degree seeking categories when unsure of their plan and never update this information. This makes it difficult to assess how much student demand there is for non-credit versus credit offerings or how many students are achieving their stated goals. More specific data collection which respect to student intent will allow for better allocation of resources to students in higher priority categories. For example, enrollment priority in credit classes might be given to students demonstrating progress in their defined program while limiting access to students designated as personal interest or non-degree seeking.

III. Financial constraints should be addressed through more intentional and targeted enrollment strategies in support of the College's commitment to the goals of college, transfer and employment readiness.

It does not appear that strengthening standards for placement and completion in the developmental course sequence will result in large savings to the college. For example, elimination of the bottom twenty percent of students with level one English placement would result in the reduction of less than 500 students. Further, utilization data gathered from Academic Support Centers demonstrates that the majority of students who access ASC services are not, in fact, developmental students.

Narrowing the range of students based on placement seems less effective in generating significant financial savings than other kinds of enrollment strategies. Such enrollment strategies could include implementing earlier admission and registration deadlines, preferential enrollment policies targeted to students more likely to complete a degree, accelerated programs for higher performing students, revision to the repeated course policy, etc. More targeted, intentional management of student enrollment is most likely to generate cost efficiencies while preserving the college's commitment to open enrollment and access.

IV. Continuing education and non-credit offerings could be expanded and improved as a strategy to meet the needs of some segments of the OCC student body. These offerings could be designed for students requiring remediation below available college courses or basic employability training. Additionally,

students pursuing personal interest may be better served in a non-credit environment.

Many community colleges nationally and within Michigan have much more robust opportunities for community members to take courses for personal interest with a non-credit or community education structure. At OCC, this area of enterprise has been long neglected. Creating more opportunities for students interested in personal or professional development in a non-credit environment might ease pressure in for credit programs. In addition, students with certain types of developmental need for literacy or job skills may be better served with targeted programs outside the traditional credit offerings. In addition, the college should more aggressively develop existing partnerships and pursue new opportunities to offer low cost alternatives to this demographic.

Conclusion

The committee suggests that the College does not need to re-define our student, for our student comes to us from our community and is largely defined for us by legislative mandate and Board policy. **Rather, success in reshaping the institution will come from reshaping the programs and services through which we serve our constituency.**

We support continuing the work begun with recent re-design and academic planning efforts and encourage the implementation of the strategies identified as a result of those efforts. An academically rigorous and focused curriculum designed to respond to the College goals of college, transfer and employment readiness combined with intentional and creative enrollment management can ensure organizational viability and success as we work to meet the challenges ahead.

It is time to determine which missions are most suitable for each community we serve. One college can't do everything. The democracy of education is still unfinished business, and community colleges must continue to wrestle with new and different ways to define their priorities and missions. Whether community colleges can manage their resources to sustain multiple missions or must scale back their missions to match the resources available to support them will continue to be at the heart of their current challenge (McPhail, 2004).

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