



# Research Findings: Good Practices in Student Retention and the First Year Experience

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*Foundations of Excellence™  
In the First College Year*

# The Current State of Affairs

- ◆ **Community Colleges award between 600,000 – 650,000 degrees/year**
- ◆ **39% students (who eventually enrolled in CC) had risk factors for dropping out of high school (NELS 1992 data)**
  - 54% entered CC with one or more risk factors for college dropout
- ◆ **50-60% of students who enroll at CCs with intention of completing a degree, certificate, or transfer (to 4-yr), do so.**
  - About 10-11% of students enter CC with no intent of achieving degree/certificate

# Persistence and Transfer

- ◆ **Half of the students in an entering cohort who drop out will do so in the first year. (ACT, 1999)**
- ◆ **Once transfer is made CC students show no disadvantage (compared to native students) in:**
  - Graduation with bachelors degree
  - Aspiration to graduate school
  - Enrollment in graduate school
- ◆ **CC attendance leads to enrollment in “more selective” 4-year institution**

# **Foundations of Excellence<sup>®</sup>**

a comprehensive, externally guided self-study and improvement process for the first year that enhances an institution's ability to realize its goals for student learning, success, and persistence.

**Policy Center on the First Year of College**

**John Gardner**

**Betsy Barefoot**

**<http://www.fyfoundations.org>**

# **Foundational Dimensions for 2-year colleges**

- ◆ **Set of 9 research-based guidelines**
  - “aspirational” statements
  
- ◆ **Comprehensive model for evaluation and improvement**

# *Implications for the First Year*

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- 1. Are no silver bullets. Searching for “best practices” contributes to the segmentation and separation of structures, policies, curricula, activities, and programs.**
- 2. Consider extent to which courses, programs, services, activities, and policies rest on the dimensions of effective practice.**
- 3. Examine extent to which programs, services, and policies constitute an integrated, coordinated whole.**

# The Dimension Statements

**Institutions should...**

- ◆ **intentionally cultivate learning environments for new students that emerge from a philosophy of two-year colleges as gateways to higher education.**
  - Build upon current statements, focusing on first year

# Organization Dimension

- ◆ **provide a comprehensive, coordinated, and flexible approach to the new student experience through effective organizational structures and policies.**
  - FYE office/Dean of the First Year/Coordinating committee
  - Affordable Child Care
  - Use of technology to support learning

# Learning Dimension

- ◆ **deliver curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage new students in order to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the institutional mission, students' academic and career goals, and workplace expectations.**
  - First-Year Seminars
  - Learning Communities
  - Common, integrated learning experiences

# Campus Culture Dimension

- ◆ **make new students a high priority for faculty and staff.**
  - Faculty advising
    - Developmental v. Prescriptive approach
    - Comprehensive and integrated
  - Engagement in FYS/Learning Communities
  - Reward systems
  - In-service/training focus on FY student needs
  - Use of part-time faculty??

# Transitions Dimension

- ◆ **facilitate appropriate student transitions beginning with outreach and recruitment and continuing throughout the period of enrollment.**
  - Assessing and placing students in courses
  - Orientation
  - Faculty socialization
  - Pre-College Prep Programs/Courses
    - Focus on critical thinking
    - Pre-calculus
    - College writing

# All Students Dimension

- ◆ **serve all new students according to their varied needs.**
  - Know your students
  - Recognize diversity
  - Support for academic success of developmental students
  - Challenges for gifted students

# Diversity Dimension

- ◆ **ensure that new students experience ongoing exploration of diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and participation in pluralistic communities.**
  - Professional development for faculty and staff
  - Support for diverse students and student groups
  - Instructional practices
  - Hiring/retention of diverse staff

# Roles and Purposes Dimension

- ◆ **promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education and those unique to two-year institutions, both for the individual and society.**
  - MCCC's two-pronged purpose—transfer and career preparation
  - Learning for personal growth
  - Engaged citizenship
  - Assessment of students' purposes

# Improvement Dimension

- ◆ **conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to effect improvement.**
  - FY student assessment instruments
  - Needs assessment
  - Tracking system to monitor student use of services

# Take Home Message

- ◆ **Comprehensive, Integrated approach**
- ◆ **Retention as “necessary but insufficient”**
- ◆ **Focus on Connections and Community**
- ◆ **Academic success for all students**
  - Developmental
  - Gifted
- ◆ **Use on-going assessment to:**
  - Understand who students are
  - Evaluate program effectiveness
  - Selection of appropriate FY goals



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