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On January 8, 2015, President Barack Obama pushed community colleges into the spotlight of American society when he proclaimed, “What I’d like to do is see the first two years of community college free for everybody who’s willing to work for it.” Community colleges’ open-access mission already fulfills an important role in the educational goals of millions of Americans. However, community colleges have increasingly been under greater pressure, not only to be accountable for student learning and retention rates, but to do so at an accelerated pace. Since 2011, the Pell Grant program has been repeatedly cut by the federal government. As reported in the *Huffington Post*:

the Pell Grant now covers less than one-third of the cost of attendance at public four-year university, the lowest in its history.

Where the maximum Pell Grant once covered the entire cost of obtaining a two-year degree and 77 percent of the cost at a public university in 1980, it now covers only 62 percent of the cost of a two-year degree and 36 percent towards a public four-year degree. (Kingkade, 2012)

The low funding of the Pell Grant places an expectation on community colleges to move students through programs as quickly as possible, which is difficult when about 60% of community college students start with remediation before they are ready for college-level work, according to the Community College Research Center (2012) at Columbia University's Teachers College. Pell Grant funding continues to shrink, as the *Washington Post* reported in December 2014:

Congress will cut \$303 million in funding for a federal program that allows many of the nation's poorest students attend college, part of a massive spending package to keep the federal government open through the end of the year.

The measure, championed by Senate Democrats, would cut Pell Grants in order to free up money to pay companies that collect student loans on behalf of the Department of Education. (Douglas-Gabriel, 2014)

This puts enormous pressure on community colleges to accelerate students through two-year degrees as quickly as possible. Community colleges must reduce the amount of time students spend in developmental classes and improve retention and completion rates. Even as the nationwide debate about funding community college to be free for students rages on, some experts expect that it would not fund developmental classes. This makes sense, since taxpayer money was already spent for these students to learn this material in high school even though many do not arrive prepared for college-level coursework. Nevertheless, this would mean that if community college was offered free for everyone, there would be an increased pressure to improve developmental education, which is already under attack from organizations such as Complete College America, and states such as Florida have legislated that colleges are not allowed to force students to take developmental classes if they hold a high school diploma.

These issues on the national stage are also happening at Hudson County Community College in Jersey City, NJ, an inner-city, public community college. However, our Academic Support Services Department has spent the better part of the last twenty years developing exemplary Bridge and Enrichment Programs that have proven effective in accelerating student learning and increasing retention rates. This model can be implemented by two-

and four-year colleges throughout the country to accelerate students through developmental education and improve retention and completion rates.

Bridge Programs

The bridge programs offered by the Hudson County Community College Academic Support Services Department are designed to put incoming students ahead in their studies. The only students who are eligible for bridge programs are incoming students who take the placement test and receive scores that place them into developmental classes such as developmental math, algebra, and English. We offer bridge programs in the summer for sixteen days during July and August. An instructor runs the class for four hours each day, Monday through Thursday, guiding students through an intensive curriculum that prepares them for the expectations of a college-level student. The instructor is joined by two Academic Mentors who are trained, in-class tutors to support the instructor and provide more individualized attention to the students. On the final day of the program, the students retake the placement test, and their scores determine if they stay in developmental courses or begin the fall semester in college-level courses.

Enrichment Programs

Our Academic Support Services Department also offers Enrichment Programs for students in the winter and summer. These programs are designed for students who took a class the previous semester and did not exit into college-level courses or move up into the next level. We have strict requirements determining eligibility for these programs. For example, students who receive a grade of F in the course for the previous semester would not be eligible to take this program because an F indicates that the student did not complete enough of the assignments or failed due to attendance reasons. The program is about two

weeks long, meeting for four hours each day for four days per week. The instructor reviews and reinforces the course content, utilizing two Academic Mentors to identify areas that kept students back, and pushing them to improve. It is an intensive program, requiring students to complete a significant amount of homework each night. For instance, students in our developmental English program need to create a portfolio with the same number of essays and assignments as they needed to complete during the regular semester, and they are also required to spend at least two hours each night working in Accuplacer MyFoundationsLab software that creates a custom learning path based on their skills. On the final day, they are retested to determine if they are ready to move on to the next stage in their education. All of this work pays off, as a much higher percentage of these students exit to college-level coursework than the percentage of students during the regular semester.

Securing Funding and Promoting the Programs

There are many factors to consider when creating these programs, and the programs at Hudson County Community College have benefited from cooperation among different departments. The programs are funded from a variety of sources including the Academic Support Services Department budget, the college foundation, and grants. Recently, under a Title V grant, we were able to expand the programs and hire a full-time transitional programs coordinator. Collecting data about the programs year after year is important, and we continue to track students after they complete one of our programs to monitor their academic progress and calculate the impact on retention rates.

It is important to have buy-in from the departments that are connected with the program. Since the faculty are the ones interacting with the students regularly, they can be extremely helpful in promoting the Enrichment Programs and sending students to register. Faculty are

usually the ones who deliver the news to students that they did not pass the course, so they are often happy to have an alternative to offer their students another chance at completing the course before the next fall or spring semester. The department leadership is also crucial in running certain programs. For example, our Winter Enrichment Program needs to happen on a very tight schedule. Registration cannot begin until after all of the students have been tested, but to wait until all final grades are posted would give us no time before the program begins in the first week of January. We need those final days of December before the college closes for winter break to have students come into the Tutorial Center and register for a program. In order for this to happen, the directors of Academic Foundations Math and English will gather the exam scores in an Excel file and send it to our department so that when students come in to register, we can check their scores and know if they are eligible for the program or not. We also work with other departments such as Communications, which helps distribute promotional materials, and Advising, which can have advisors recommend the program to eligible students.

Developing the Curriculum and Materials

The curriculum for the Enrichment Programs is based entirely on the pre-existing curriculum for the related courses. The curriculum simply takes the most important topics and distills them into an intensive, accelerated program. The instructors of the programs are trained to adapt to the individualized needs of the students. Most of the students in these programs are close to competency, but need a little more time to improve their skills in the areas that prevented them from passing their exams. We use materials that were mostly compiled and created by the Academic Support Services Department, but we did so in collaboration with the faculty, coordinators, and directors of the related departments. We also use the Accuplacer

MyFoundationsLab software to support students. We continually review and update the materials based on feedback from instructors and other departments to ensure that they are as helpful and up-to-date as possible.

Assessing the Effectiveness of the Programs

Collecting data is crucial for program assessment. In order to register for the program, each student needs to complete an intake form with their student data, and as our staff processes the forms to register the student, we include information about the students' previous course grades and test scores. These can be compared against students' performance in the program, and we can also compare student performance in the program versus the overall student population. Each student also completes a survey near the end of the program, answering questions such as "The presenter(s) responded to the needs of the class" (in our Winter 2015 Enrichment Program, 98.99% of students answered "Always," to this question, and 1.01% answered "Usually."), "Do you feel that your scores will improve after working with this professor?" "Would you select his presenter again?" (100% of students answered "Yes" to these questions in Winter 2015), and "Will you recommend the program to future students?" (98.99% of students answered "Yes" and 1.01% answered "No" in Winter 2015). In the pre-college classes of our Winter 2015 Enrichment Program, there was an overall exit rate of 76.78% moving up to college-level courses. The highest exit rate was in developmental algebra, which had a 100% exit rate, and the lowest was in a pilot for our highest level of ESL, which had a 57.1% exit rate. These scores are typical of student progress in the Bridge and Enrichment Programs.

Accelerating Student Progress and Improving Retention and Graduation Rates

As Hudson County Community College demonstrates, Enrichment and Bridge Programs can be utilized to meet the challenges that are currently facing higher education. With less financial aid available to students and a push for colleges to be accountable for developmental education, these programs offer a way to enhance student learning at a faster pace. Many students who score too low on the placement test or need to repeat developmental classes are actually very close to achieving the skills they need to begin college-level coursework. Rather than have them spend another three months working on these skills, an intensive program that focuses on their needs in only two to four weeks can accelerate their progress and enhance their learning to put them on the best path to achieving a college degree.

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