COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA
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Student Classroom Orientation and Retention Efforts
<u>S.C.O.R.E.</u>

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INTRODUCTION

One of the goals of the Leadership Institute is to train potential college leaders by increasing their understanding of the organizational culture of the College and to gain insight into specific ways the local, state, national and global environment may impact community colleges. One issue that many colleges face is the issue of retention. This retention is impacted by faculty, staff, curricula, environment and so may other factors.

Student Classroom Orientation and Retention Efforts (S.C.O.R.E.) is a project put together by Lucille Paramo, Terry Naana, and Kimberly Taylor Benns and is a result of the retention issue at Community College of Philadelphia. Research has taught that teachers' actions in the classroom have twice the impact on student achievement as do school policies regarding curriculum, assessment, staff collegiality, and community involvement (Marzano, 2003a). Regardless of a student's background, evidence indicates they came to college for reasons we would applaud: to learn things that interest them; to get training for a specific career; to gain general appreciation of ideas; or to prepare for graduate or professional school (Calvin Peters, 2006). This holds true for our students at the Community College of Philadelphia also. Our mission states that

the College "*is an open-admission, associate-degree-granting institution which provides access to higher education for all who may benefit. Its programs of study in the liberal arts and sciences, career technologies, and basic academic skills provide a coherent foundation for college transfer, employment, and life-long learning. The College serves Philadelphia by preparing its students to be informed and concerned citizens, active participants in the cultural life of the city, and enabled to meet the changing needs of business, industry and the professions. To help address broad economic, cultural and political concerns in the city and beyond, the College draws together students from a wide range of ages and backgrounds and seeks to provide the programs and support they need to achieve their goals. Community College of Philadelphia seeks to create a caring environment, which is intellectually and culturally dynamic and encourages all students to achieve:*

- *Greater insight into their strengths, needs, and aspirations, and greater appreciation of their own cultural background and experience;*

- *Increased awareness and appreciation of a diverse world where all are interdependent;*

- *Heightened curiosity and active interest in intellectual questions and social issues;*

- *Improved ability to pursue paths of inquiry, to interpret and evaluate what is discovered, and to express reactions effectively;*

- *Self-fulfillment based on service to others, preparation for future work and study, and enjoyment of present challenges and accomplishments"*

PROPOSAL/GOALS

Our group measured student retention based on their experience with their faculty in the classroom and with each other. Our questionnaire focused on such questions as why students leave the college (or why they stay). We obtained data from students in their classrooms to help formulate the questions.

This project was an opportunity for us and the College to gain insight about students' interaction with other students, teachers in the classroom and the impact that the classroom environment has on retention. It is also an attempt to raise awareness among the College community and improve student success.

METHOD

At CCP, we conducted focus groups, followed by a survey from their comments.

The three areas of focus were the physical classroom, teachers and teaching, and student/teacher relationships and their impact on retention. Community College of Philadelphia is committed to the success of all students regardless of race, religion, economic background, etc. It has to be understood by every member of the institution that students enter the college at varying levels of preparedness and how we as an institution receive these students will determine their success and impact our retention rates.

Physical Classroom

In looking at the physical classroom we asked students how the physical environment in the classroom affected their learning. We wanted to know if certain factors had an effect on learning in the classroom, such as well-lit classroom, air conditioning in the summer and heat in the winter and availability of chalk, markers or dry erases. We wanted to know if students felt safe and secure in our classrooms. Finally, we asked if equipment in the classroom worked including overheads and smart carts, etc. We wanted as much information as the students could provide.

Student/Student Interaction

This area of the project focused on how students' interaction with other students impacted retention. We asked such questions as whether students preferred to work in groups or whether they work better as individuals; if faculty paired them in groups or whether they worked solo. We wanted to know if students gravitated toward the same culture, gender or if there were no preference at all.

Student /Faculty Interaction

We spent a lot of time in this area, because research has shown that teachers actions and interaction with students in the classroom have twice the impact on student achievement and retention as do school polices regarding curriculum, assessment, staff collegiality and community involvement (Marzano, 2003a). The challenge of today's faculty in reaching students, particularly students who commute and have to juggle other responsibilities, (i.e. jobs,

careers, family) adds a different dynamic to the classroom and the work that the faculty must do to keep these students engaged. Some of the questions we posed to students included:

- If professors were engaging
- Whether the faculty provided office hours and were easily accessible after class or before class
- If faculty practiced inclusiveness or whether some students felt left out
- Whether instructors were prepared for class
- If they distributed a syllabus
- Whether the syllabus was followed throughout the semester
- If faculty encouraged group activities
- If faculty were adept at using technology (smart carts, etc.)
- Whether students were given feedback
- Whether students were given opportunities to improve their grades
- If instructors used real world problems to increase student learning

It is important as a college that we take a look at past practices for retention and focus on what will increase our numbers. As a college we are committed to the success of our students. In order to level the playing field, we have to recognize that CCP is the first exposure to new people, ideas, value systems and experiences which may be significantly different from past and current experience. As a college we want this experience to impact their lives in a positive way.

The Process

Various steps were taken to accomplish S.C.O.R.E. We brainstormed the needs of the college in relationship to the mission and vision and ***"Achieving the Dream Project".*** We chose the three areas in which to focus and conducted

student "rap" sessions to gain insight from students about our topic. Based on the "rap" sessions we formulated our questionnaire. Several meetings with the College's IT Office led to the questions being posted on the College's website (Banner). Approximately 530 students responded to the questionnaire. We analyzed the responses and formulated conclusions.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A total of 25 questions were planned, designed, conduced and collected through the Banner system. Our interviews consisted of two focus groups with 18 and 21 students to complete 39 participants. During these interviews general questions of the tree major categories were the task for the 39 students. The information obtained from 526 students (n = 526) was summarized in table 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Table 1

Socio-demographic description of students at CCP (n=526). Survey analysis

Characteristics	Total responses	Percentage
Gender	478	
Male	241	50.4%
Female	237	49.6%
Age		
18- 24 years old	226	47.4%
25-35 years old	141	29.6%
36-49	87	18.2%
Ethnic		
Caucasian	194	42.7%
African-American	180	39.7%
Hispanic	26	5.7%
Asian	25	5.1%
When do you attend classes?	560	
Main campus	402	71.8%
Regional center	136	24.3%
Site location	22	4.0%
Day	371	57.3%
Evening	203	31.4%

The data showed that   (50.4%) were male and 49.6% women. The ethnicity was formed by almost equal percentage for Caucasian (42.7%) and Afro-American (39.7%). Another two close groups were represented by Hispanic (5.7%) and Asian (5.7%). The majority of students that participated in the survey were between 18 and 24 years old representing 47.4%. The second group (29.6%) was between 25-35 years old and the third group with 18.2% between 36- 49 years old.

These students (n= 526) that participated in this project are taken classes during the day 57.34%, evening 31.38% and 11.3 online. There were 71.8% students who are enrolled in classes at Main Campus; 24.3% in all regional centers and only 3 % in alternative sites.

In order to have a better analysis of the answers we combined the results between students who answered strongly agree and agree percentage to formulate a larger scale.

Table 2

Classroom description by students at CCP (n=501)

	Statement	Total responses	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
1	Classroom provides a safe environment	526	120	22.8%	332	63.1%	63	12.0%	11	2.1%
2	Classroom are clean	523	74	14.1%	297	56.8%	123	23.5%	29	5.5%
3	Classroom are comfortable	521	34	6.5%	207	39.7%	210	40.3%	70	13.4%

The positive results were obtained as a summatory have strongly agree and agree percentages .The information obtained from table 2 confirms that students (86%) feel safe in this institution. Students interviewed in groups mentioned that the safety system in the college is perceived as secure. There are 71% of students who feel that the classrooms are sanitary. Classrooms were graded poorly because 54% were discontent with the accommodations within the class.

Table 3

Student/student interaction and learning of students at CCP (n = 516)

	Statement	Total responses	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4	Social interaction with students from different ethnic groups increases my learning	516	146 2 8.3%	287 55.6%	65 12.6%	18 3.5%
5	Participation in study groups helps me in preparing for test/exams	506	107 21.2%	251 49.6%	126 24.9%	22 4.3%
6	Classes include activities to help students	498	51 10.2%	197 39.6%	204 41.0%	46 9.2%

Student/student learning

The data suggested that social interaction help students in the integration with the institution (84%) and with the preparation of their exams (71%). However, only 60% confirmed that classes included activities to help understand different ethnic cultures.

Table 4

Student/teacher description of students at CCP (n= 501)

	Statement	Total responses	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
1	Instructors assign office hours	501	176	35.1%	274	54.7%	45	9%	6	1.2%
2	Instructors encourage communication	500	200	40%	241	48.2%	50	10%	9	1.8%
3	Instructors encourage and motivate students	497	124	25%	275	55.3%	82	16.5%	16	3.2%

Student /teacher learning

Students marked 90% affirmatively that instructors assigned office hours to tutoring students. Similar results were obtained for good communication (88%) and motivation (80%) between students and their teachers respectively.

Table 5

Instructors' description by CCP students (n = 496). Analysis survey

	Statement	Total responses	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
1	Instructors distribute and follow syllabus	496	170	34.3%	276	55.6%	43	8.7%	7	1.4%
2	Instructors are prepared for each class	495	184	37.1%	284	57.3%	23	4.6%	4	0.8%
3	Instructors lecture the entire class	491	115	23.4%	226	46%	135	27.5%	15	3.0%
4	Instructors maintain control during class	494	181	36.6%	285	57.7%	25	5%	3	0.6%
5	Instructors encourage group activities	487	89	18.3%	271	55.6%	111	22.8%	16	3.3%

6	Instructors use audio/visual technology	483	88	18.2%	256	53%	111	23%	28	5.8%
7	Instructors give frequent feedback to students	482	148	30.7%	261	54.2%	63	13%	10	2 2%
8	Instructors give the students extra opportunity to improve their grades	479	67	14%	234	48.9%	128	26.7%	50	10.4%
9	Instructors use real world problems to increase student learning	481	116	24 .1%	279	58%	73	15.2%	13	2.7%

Instruction learning

It was demonstrated that 94% of students think that professors were readily prepared for their classes. Also, 90% of professors use and follow the syllabus. It was confirmed that teachers give frequent feedback to the students (85%) and they use critical thinking that can be applied in the real world (82%). It was exemplified, by students, that teachers encouraged group activities (73%) and the use of audio/visual technology in class (71%). Finally, 69% of students believe that professors do not provide enough participation and hands on activities within the classroom. A percentage of 63% considered that instructors give extra opportunities to improve student's grades.

CONCLUSIONS

Recent research on retention has found similar factors determined by this study to be significant to persistence. An achievement analysis of the data presented indicates that factors within the college context, including institutional

factors, play an important role in the student's retention. The following

conclusions are presented from all results obtained with the survey. The data

indicated:

1. Students in general feel that this institution is safe for them and perceive
   that they are safe physically and psychologically. The data confirm that
   classroom accommodations are not met.

2. Students recognized that interrelation with other ethnic groups is important
   in the learning process and retention.

3. Students pointed that teachers are well prepared for their classes, they
   distribute syllabi and they have the control in their classes. Teachers give
   good feedback after distribution of assignments and exams and they use
   implementation of real world problems.

4. According to the data, professors who offered encouragement had an
   enormous impact during critical turning points of the participants'
   academic retention.

5. Relation between students and faculty was an important factor that
   affected the participants' persistence.

6. This information showed that Community College of Philadelphia is
   working well with all its principles. This institution follows the statements of
   its mission and vision but this institution can improve on areas mentioned.

7. Finally, this project is related to this year's theme of "Building on the
   Strengths of A Diverse Institution".

RECOMENDATIONS

The conclusions of this project allow us to establish recommendations, which can be observed by administrators and teachers. These factors that were considered in the survey could be a pragmatic set because all them can be addressed immediately without access to difficult or expensive resources.

1. Improve classroom accommodations.

2. Encourage teachers to include more activities that can help students to understand different ethnic groups.

3. Encourage teachers to prepare exercises   and exams to provide students with the opportunity to improve their grades.

4. Encourage teachers to use more visual technology and more group activities.

This data can be used by other areas of the College for research and/or information required to determine retention factors. If pertinent, experts can look at our information and compare future responses with the results obtained from our project. The value of this project is that we were able to poll a diverse group of students and were not limited by factors such as, gender, culture, enrollment, campus, curriculum, academic level and day, online or evening students.

SUMMARY AND INDIVUAL OPINION

Terry Naana

Project S.C.O.R.E. is an attempt to take a look inside the classroom and examine areas where improvements are needed to enhance student learning here at Community College of Philadelphia.

What I was happy to learn is that our students are relatively pleased with their classroom experiences.   As the survey results imply, there are some areas that can be improved upon. The experience of going into the classroom and talking with students was very educational for me. I learned that these young adults are not just here because they should be. They truly care about their education and recognize the importance of their surroundings to enhance their learning.

The impact it had on me as a leader is that I gained a new perspective toward helping students "achieve their dream", and I would like to continue to be a part of the solution. ***Theresa Naana***

Kimberly Benns

Community College of Philadelphia has the same issues as other colleges across America. Retention is a major issue, in a community college this figure doubles. A resolution for changing retention seems to always be at bay. It is impossible to fix this problem immediately, we must look at various areas in the college to try and pinpoint the weak areas that impact retention and work toward change.

Project SCORE focused on three of these areas and attempted to assess the impact on student retention. I enjoy my interaction with students, and I truly believe that they are the heart of the college and know everything that is going on, (except for financial aid). It was enlightening to visit the classrooms and speak with them and to also learn that we are not as bad off as we think in the eyes of our students. They seem to know what they want and we as an institution somehow is delivering. As part of the "achieving the dream" project, I feel that in some small way we are helping students accomplish this. *Kimberly Benns*

Lucila Paramo

S.C.O.R.E. represented a project of an effective leadership team of a purposeful community. Despite the differences of personalities, skills, beliefs, culture, knowledge, aptitudes we were able to demonstrate a hard work ethic. All information and practices that were presented in the Institute of Leadership during all sections give us the responsibility to represent ourselves as change agents in each position of leadership. The more we know about the internal workings of this institution, the more that we are able to participate and lead changes in this institution.

We hope that our findings and conclusions of our project can be accommodated into a plan of action that will help this institution articulate and realize a powerful vision for enhanced retention and achievement of students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS