Community College of Philadelphia

The Path to Possibilities

FINAL REPORT

Getting to the Other Side:
Building the Relationship between Advising and Student Success

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Overview

The process of Academic Advising at Community College of Philadelphia involves both technology and human experience. While degree and course selection is the responsibility of the student, the advisor is available to assist the student in interpreting data and considering options. Advising should be more than just a face-to-face appointment. It should also involve an electronic degree planning system that is accessible to our faculty and students twenty-four hours a day. The goals of the project will align with the theme, *Retention: Fostering Student Engagement and Persistence* and address the needs of the self-advising student, the student who makes course selections under the guidance of an academic advisor or a faculty advisor, and the awareness of the faculty advisors.

Community College of Philadelphia currently has an electronic degree planning system exclusively to aide our faculty and advisors in advising their students. They have the ability to view students' academic programs, courses completed to date, remaining courses needed in order for students to complete their degree requirements, and their expected graduation dates. The faculty and advisors having the capability to navigate this savvy electronic system is commendable; however, it is equally important for self-advising students to have the same capability. When students become creators and narrators with their advising career, they are able to gain in-depth knowledge, experience ownership in the process, and are fully participating in the decision-making and goal-setting.

The team's goals are to ensure that online advising materials are in a location that is easily accessible to faculty, advisors, and students; to ensure there are advising tools available for the active student computer user as well as the non-active student computer user; and to increase faculty advisors' awareness of the online program compliance function through information sessions and faculty orientation.

The expected outcomes of the project are an improved advising system, increased faculty awareness, and increased student engagement in the advising process, which will provide students with the confidence necessary to persist in their academic programs to completion. There is a time line of completion by September, 2009 with anticipation that these improvements to Academic Advising will have longevity at the College.

A team of three individuals from different areas of the College are working to implement a system that will compliment the theme of the project. The team members are **Vanessa Brown**, Technical Specialist in the Office of Academic Affairs, **Henrietta Hadley**, Project Director of the New Choices/New Options program, and **Sarah Iepson**, Assistant Professor of Art. The team worked under the guidance of co-mentors, **Dr. Leah Hollis**, Director of Academic Advising (resigned) and **Ms. Lisa Cooper**, Dean, Educational Support Services.

Summary of Research

The team reviewed baseline information for current student persistence rates and institutional goals. "According to the College's Achieving the Dream (AtD) Implementation Plan, first-time fall-to-fall retention rates for each race/gender group will increase by 2% annually. The baseline of the of the institutional averages show that regardless of race or gender, 43% of recent first-time students returned for classes in the following fall term. This rate will increase to 47% in 2009 and to 51% by 2011." For detailed survey results, please visit www.ccp.edu/VPFIN-PL/ir (IR, AtD Fact Sheet # 13)

According to Institutional Research (IR) Report #177, which provides information based on the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction survey that was completed during the spring 2008 term, Approximately 1800 students completed the survey and ratings revealed that students were satisfied with Academic Advisors' knowledge of program requirements; however, students were less satisfied with feedback about the progress they were making in achieving their academic goals and availability of courses. CCP students placed a higher level of importance on academic advising services and were less satisfied with the services than their national community college peers. For detailed survey results, you may visit www.ccp.edu/VPFIN-PL/ir (IR, Report #177)

The project will contribute to the success of Community College of Philadelphia's Achieving the Dream initiatives and assist in meeting the goals of increasing student retention rates and meeting our students' needs by improving the academic advising process.

Process of Completion

Our group attended various Professional Development workshops offered to our faculty and advisors. We received support from administrators in the Academic Advising and Student Services departments. Marline Paramour, Sandra Gonzales-Torres, and Malissa Farrish facilitated student workshops that focused on assisting students in preparing for their Academic Advising sessions. A sample Educational Plan worksheet was distributed to students along with an evaluation form, which consisted of questions pertaining to the benefits of the worksheet.

Kris Henk, administrator in Marketing and Communications, is also working with our group on a marketing campaign for the Educational Plan worksheets and the timeline of marketing materials.

Our group was represented during a general assembly meeting with the Student Government Association (SGA). Students benefited from a presentation regarding the Educational Plan worksheets and provided positive feedback. The SGA is experiencing a shift in members because two of the members plan to graduate in May. Our group will maintain ongoing communication with the new President and Vice President of the SGA to market the Educational Plan worksheets to our students.

Members of our group met with the General Education Committee during the week of March 30. During this meeting, the group discussed the features of the worksheet and received suggestions for improvement from faculty and administrators.

Our group was represented during the Academic Affairs Department Head meeting on April 23. The Department Heads offered suggestions for improving the worksheet and also discussed which areas will take ownership of updating the worksheets as academic programs are revised.

Implementation

Under the direction of our mentor, Lisa Cooper, the Educational Plan worksheets for each academic program will be created by a full-time administrator in Academic Advising and implemented by Fall 2009. New students to the College during Fall 2009 will be introduced to the Educational Plan worksheets and will receive instructions on how to utilize them effectively. There will also be generic Educational Plan worksheets that will allow current students to record their completed courses and grades on the worksheet. We have confirmed the electronic Educational Plan worksheets will be housed on the Academic Advising website for easy access by faculty/advisors and students.

Long-Term Goals

This project has a promising future at the College. Our next step is to continue working with faculty, administrators, and students to continue to improve the Educational Plan worksheets. We are working with Marketing and Communications to market the worksheet to our faculty/advisors and students. We're also continuing to work closely with the Academic Advising department to complete implementation and to survey our students to assess the usage of the worksheets.

Assessment

Based on the results of the surveys distributed during the student workshops, the majority of students (53%) indicated that they are pleased with the Educational Plan worksheets and plan to use the worksheets to track their progress to degree completion. Students who visit the Academic Advising Center will also receive a short survey so we may continue to assess the benefits of the worksheets.

Summaries of Experience

Vanessa Brown

The Leadership Institute really paved the way for many rewarding opportunities. I was able to work with two talented women who are gifted in their areas of expertise and brought their talents to our team. I enjoyed our sub-group meetings because it really gave us time to really express how we were feeling about different areas of our project. The honesty that was expressed during our meetings built trust.

Our monthly sessions were informative and really helped me personally and professionally. The workshops that were of particular interest to me were the HBDI thinking model, public speaking, conflict resolution, and diversity. The HBDI confirmed what I already knew about myself. It was a great refresher of how I think and it prompted me to pay attention to my team members and have an open mind with my team members' ways of thinking. The workshop about public speaking was what I needed because I always become nervous when speaking before a large audience. It helped to boost my confidence level. Conflict resolution is always an interesting topic. We work with such a diverse population of students, faculty, and staff until conflict is bound to arise along the way. In the past, I have not handled conflict well because I allowed my emotions to interfere and it would prevent me from making objective decisions. The workshop helped me to realize that I needed to adjust my own lens so I can see the positive contributions of others and make objective decisions. This is helpful because a leader must have the ability to make objective decisions no matter what the current circumstances may be. I appreciated the diversity workshop because it gave me an opportunity to see how my LI peers perceive the diversity issues that exist at CCP and how it affects them. This was a powerful and moving session.

I feel proud of our group project because we had an opportunity to contribute to student success at CCP. It was a great experience to attend meetings with faculty, administrators, and students to discuss the benefits of our project. We received consistent positive feedback each time we presented our project to a group. Working on the project helped me to become familiar with faculty and administrators. It also helped me to explore creative ways of accomplishing a goal when faced with challenges.

Overall, I will carry my Leadership Institute experience with me throughout my career as I continue to grow professionally. The reading material was thought-provoking and opened my mind to new ideas. I have learned so much in such a short period of time. I would recommend the Leadership Institute to anyone at CCP who desires to broaden their knowledge of the College and is eager to develop their leadership skills. The Leadership Institute has taught me the true meaning of leadership because I had the opportunity to practice it on a level that I have not experienced in the past. Kudos to the Leadership Institute! It's a wonderful credit to CCP.

Henrietta Hadley

The Team Project afforded me an opportunity to participate in College's Achieving the Dream goals by selecting a team project that would build the relationship between Academic Advising and Student Success, which would improve the attrition rate here at CCP. In addition to many team project activities/ meetings, it was great to collaborate with other campus departments to implement the project on campus. Overall my experience working with the team was rewarding, educational and professional development received during the last seven months was priceless.

Sarah Iepson

When reflecting upon my experience in the Leadership Institute this year, I am surprised at the list of new tools that I now have at my disposal for work and life related issues. I feel as though the Leadership institute, the interesting and helpful sessions, and the group project have displayed my weaknesses, strengths, and the potential that I have not yet tapped within myself as an individual, as part of an academic team, and as a leader. I hope that I can continue to grow as a leader now that the Institute sessions have ended and that I can eventually reach my full potential.

The sessions themselves opened for me new avenues of thought. I was particularly drawn to the sessions on conflict resolution, diversity, and the analysis of our HBDI thinking. The conflict resolution session for me was particularly powerful, as I feel that this is one of my major weaknesses as a leader. I desire to become better at confronting conflict, dealing with conflict, and finding ways to work around issues that are potential roadblocks to success for me, my department, or my colleagues. I will consistently return to the readings we completed for that week, my notes from that session, and the incredible leadership books that we read in order to continue to improve my ability to deal with conflict in a successful fashion.

The diversity session and the session on our thinking styles both served me in terms of thinking about how I think in relation to the way in which others think, perceive, react, and define themselves. This, for me, is another major challenge. I now have a more firm grasp of the way in which I respond to specific issues and why. In addition, I feel as though I can better work with others because I can understand the ways in which other minds perceive of the same situation due to their own particular make-up. I will consistently remind myself that all sides of the story are truths, just truths seen through different lenses or experiences.

Finally, my group project opened my eyes to numerous issues regarding my ability and the way in which one must work in order to achieve one's desired outcome. I was very lucky to work with two teammates who were driven, organized, enthused, able, and extremely competent. They taught me so much about getting things done. As a faculty member, I often find myself turning my energy inward toward my classes and my department. In part, I do this because it seems so difficult to get anything done on an institutional level. I realized through this project that this is true. It is difficult to get things done. However, it is also incredibly rewarding when you do get a project completed. I feel that the knowledge I gained from my teammates and from

this project will encourage me to become more institutionally active and will give me more confidence to deal with institutional issues in the future.

I am grateful to the Institute, participants, and facilitators for an incredible experience. I look forward to challenging myself to continue to grow as a leader throughout my tenure here at the college.