Community College of Philadelphia
Leadership Institute 2009-2010

Final Project Report
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Project Title

MTM (Motivational Team Building and Mentorship) for Gateway to College

Team Participants

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Statement of Need

The MTM for Gateway to College project addresses the challenge of low retention and graduation rates of students in the Gateway to College program at Community College of Philadelphia. The Gateway to College already includes support services that are designed to retain students in the program. These services include an academic coordinator for students to receive individualized attention; skills for problem solving, time management and stress management; tips for studying, balancing schoolwork and family life; and additional resources including tutoring, student activities, and health services. Despite these retention efforts, the most recent completion rate (Spring 2008-Fall 2008) for students in the Foundation classes is 63.9%. For students who continue in the program beyond the Foundation classes, the graduation rate is only 37%.

There are a several obstacles that students in the Gateway program face that affect retention and graduation rates. Many academic obstacles involve students being underprepared for the process of learning: learning how to learn and adapting to instructors' expectations. Other obstacles include emotional, mental health and engagement issues. The existing Gateway model works to address many of these factors. However, many students come into the Gateway program with low self-esteem and self-confidence. They are less mature and often lack self-control or good decision-making skills. These issues significantly affect students' chances of academic success but are not addressed in the current Gateway to College model. Character Education is a teaching model that has been shown to effectively improve self-care, self-mastery, self-advocacy. The MTM for Gateway to College project will provide resources on how to incorporate character education into the Gateway to College model in order improve student retention and graduation rates by directly tackling key factors that lead to student attrition.

Purpose of Project

The purpose of the MTM for Gateway to College project is to offer strategies to help at-risk students develop a sense of self as it relates to being a college student in both the classroom and in the college community at large. This project focuses on is the Gateway to College program because students who participate in this program are not achieving the levels of success that program managers, college administration, and students have wanted. After several meetings with Gateway staff, it became clear that the factors hindering these students from meeting academic success fall under the behavioral umbrella rather than because of their academic ability. Character education is necessary for this group of students. By infusing the courses and other areas of the Gateway to College program with character education strategies, students will have a better understanding of what is required of them and teachers can be reassured that they have a mechanism to help students achieve this understanding.

Overview of Project

The two components of the MTM for Gateway to College project are 1) a character education curriculum map, which will serve as a list of materials and activities for Gateway instructors, and 2) tools for assessing the impact of the curriculum.

The curriculum will address the following character traits: **Perseverance, Responsibility, Self-Control, Respect, Attitude, Integrity and Commitment**. For each of the seven concepts, the curriculum map will outline objectives for student achievement, activities and assignments, and resources needed.

Gateway to College students will experience an interdisciplinary, character-centered, culturally-appropriate, multiple-intelligence based program to remain an integral and successful part of Community College of Philadelphia from the onset until they matriculate. Each of the college courses (English, Math and FOS) will have a central focus and theme that will include engaging learning strategies and character building. To provide an understanding of the connection between the classroom experience and the "real world," the students will engage in service learning projects. Students will be responsible for completing a project, including community service and / or shadowing someone, related to their identity, goals, and interests. These projects will serve to empower the students with the opportunity to acquire and apply the skills necessary to become life-long learners with a purpose and mission to impact their own world as well as the entire world.

Each week or month, Instructors will focus on their content and one of Community College of Philadelphia's "Core Values"-"Integrity," "Academic Excellence," "Diversity," "Commitment to Teaching and Learning," "[Effective] Communication," and "Respect." Based upon the agreed upon value, each Instructor will gear his or her lesson and subject matter to address a problem facing the students, school, neighborhood, city, country, and / or world. In turn,

students will work collaboratively to solve an issue implementing the content and skills provided for the course combined with the assigned value.

The materials and methods of teaching will be student-centered and culturally-appropriate. Each of the students will see and hear themselves in the curriculum, so they recognize their value for being a part of Community College of Philadelphia and Gateway to College. For example, they will see a reflection of themselves in others, such as guest speakers and mentors, who have overcome obstacles to achieve their goals. Using Alumni, professionals willing to volunteer their time and talent, and organizations willing to volunteer their services and resources, students will have the opportunity to learn experientially. Guest speakers and mentors will share their testimonies with the students through various means—i.e. forums, lectures—and/or students would be granted time as an extern to visit and shadow someone in their profession of interest.

Another component that would give students an incentive for success and remaining a valuable part of Community College and Gateway to College is taking the students on field trips. Once or twice a year, particularly at the beginning and end, there will be a time of socialization and community building via a field trip to a Rock Climbing Gym, for example, and a follow-up lesson that will integrate values in the class. Another example of an event could be a play centered on the "Core Values" and identity that leads to the students composing their own scenarios in class or for an audience, like a neighborhood school or nursing home. Activities associated could entail reflective writings; students could maintain a journal about their journey during the program. Journal entries could foster motivation and inspiration for having a purpose and developing a plan of action as the students respond to an affirmation, quote, or proverb.

Lastly, to culminate the idea of the "Core Values," life-long learning, and serving the community, the program will conclude with a celebratory ceremony. Students will present their projects and receive a reward (cash prizes, certificate, etc.) to show them one aspect of being a valuable part of Gateway to College and Community College of Philadelphia.

Advantage to Students/Benefits to College Community
Community College of Philadelphia is an institution with a mission and vision centered on education and core values. MTM for Gateway to College is a model program structured to acquire, retain, and promote students, which is aligned with Community College's participation in the Achieving the Dream initiative. The College will improve its retention rate and reputation by positively impacting the lives of their enrolled students. The students will experience empowerment and value as a result of being a part of an environment that invests in their education and character. They will have a greater capacity to impact their personal worlds and the motivation and tools to influence the entire world.

Implementation Plan
The curriculum is designed to include character education resources for instructors of the English, Freshman Orientation and Math courses. The three classes will be independent to ensure that instructors maintain academic freedom but will have shared components, such as an attendance policy, classroom expectations and an interdisciplinary assignment. In the Gateway to College model, instructors have designated time to meet during the semester, so they will have the opportunity to discuss how their classes can include character education in a cohesive way. The curriculum is designed as a list of choices for instructors. The three instructors will decide together what character trait to focus on in the classroom.

In terms of rolling out the character education curriculum to the broader college community, the MTM for Gateway to College project will piloted in Nichole Webster's English classes during Summer 2010. Her plan is to include the FOS and Math instructors of her cohort in the pilot, so that character education is truly interdisciplinary and the MTM for Gateway to College curriculum is utilized to its fullest capacity.

Evaluation of Project
This project seeks to improve student success through the implementation of a character education curriculum in the Gateway to College program. Success of the project will be defined by improved rates of student retention, attendance, and graduation as measured by the College. Success will also be measured by improved student behaviors in the classroom and positive changes in how students perceive and reflect on the character traits outlined in the curriculum.

Community College of Philadelphia already examines performance measures of Gateway students each academic term in a summary report. The following performance measures will be analyzed to measure the effectiveness of Character Building curriculum in the Gateway program: attendance, completion and persistence of students in the Foundation Curriculum, persistence of students after the Foundation Course Curriculum, and number of program graduates.

To measure student engagement and self-reported performance, this project will include student surveys and opportunities for reflective writing. The College's existing student satisfaction survey is relevant to this project and will measure challenges affecting students (i.e. problems with peers, absence or presence of caring adults), career and education goals (i.e. Bachelor's degree), and academic performance compared to before enrollment in Gateway program (i.e. feeling of engagement).

The MTM for Gateway to College project will introduce a series of student surveys that will be completed in the classroom at the beginning, middle and end

of each term. The surveys will ask questions directly related to the seven character traits outlined in the curriculum. The surveys will be anonymous and have both quantitative and qualitative components. Stephanie Booker will tabulate responses to the surveys.

Budget

The Journal of Research in Character Education serves an audience of researchers, policymakers, teacher educators, and school practitioners concerned with the development of character education as efforts to help young people develop good character, which includes knowing about, caring about, and acting on core ethical values such as fairness, honesty, compassion, responsibility, and respect for self and others. Subscription Rate for Institutions: $190.00

Plan for Sharing Results of Project with College Community

The Leadership Institute Team has several avenues by which to present the results of the MTM project. Options include sharing evaluations with the Office of Institutional Research; broadcasting results via the College's CNews and CCPTV; presentations before our colleagues at the College; and the distribution of printed materials that outline the curriculum and results, and how the curriculum could be useful to other cohorts of students at the College.