



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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INCREASING STUDENT SUCCESS AND ENGAGEMENT

Three years ago, our college initiated a three-year strategic plan which promoted learning excellence and embraced emerging technology to transform learning environments. Now in 2008, all faculty members have computers (more than 80% of classrooms are multi-media—more than 100), more than 1100 computers are on campus, a fiber optic backbone ties campus technology together, and there are four wireless hotspots. Furthermore, there are 35 additional computer labs available for instructors and students campuswide. Student success rates have improved tremendously. In the English Department in spring 2004, the pass rate in English 101 was 62.4%. Just two years later, in fall 2006, the pass rates had improved to 84.4%, with 985 students enrolled. The innovations on this campus assisted in this dramatic improvement of student success. After analyzing the data, the three variables responsible for the improvement of student success in English 101 were access to technology and the implementation of two support programs: Educators of Learning-Centered Excellence (ELCE) and Master Teacher Groups.

The Beginning

In 2002-2003, Wallace State Community College had approximately 10 computer labs with 200 computers campuswide, servicing 5500 students. The departments that had access to technology were OAD (22 computers for keyboarding), computer science (three labs for class work with a five-computer homework lab), health (one lab with 22 computers), and business (one classroom for typing). The English Department, servicing approximately 2000 students each semester on campus, utilized one lab with 30 outdated computers and dot-matrix printers. By fall 2004, the department had received one computer lab with 35 computers, one laser printer, and three new multi-media classrooms, never used by faculty. The pass rate for English 101 was merely 62.4%.

Two Years Later

By spring 2006, the department had two updated computer labs with printers (one housed 40 computers

and Smart technology, and one 32 computers), one portable lab with printer (34 laptops), and 80% of classrooms with multimedia equipment, which included computers, Internet access, digital cameras, DVD/VCR combinations, and Smart Boards. Spring 2008, 100% of classrooms were equipped. All English 101 students have access to computers. Incredibly, student pass rates improved to 84.4%. Withdrawals also declined: 19% to 13%. Pass rates for English 102 rose, as well, from 78.7% (spring 2004) to 84% (spring 2006). Few variables had changed within this two-year period: the instructors, both full-time and adjunct, were similar; the text was the same; the state requirements remained consistent. After examining the data, the only altered variables were the access to technology and the two programs initiated for training.

Students finally had access to computers for writing assignments and research. Students could participate in the research with instructors as part of classroom assignments as well as visit sites on the Alabama Virtual Library for writing ideas and models. Computers augmented the efficiency of the editing process; editing became more efficient and time-effective for students and faculty. Instructors used the Smart equipment to engage in the process: handouts were used on the digital camera, and the Internet provided opportunities for practice in grammar, punctuation, and MLA documentation. All faculty and students had access to technology, and an English website was developed. Study guides for all English 101 tests, chapter summaries, essay guidelines to help with outlines, writing techniques, and numerous web links for grammar, punctuation, research, and documentation practice were created. Students could locate all faculty contact information and email addresses; English course syllabi and rules; and policies of the department. Faculty training became an immediate necessity.

Faculty Training

Wallace State underwent reaccreditation in 2004, and developed a three-year Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The goals were to improve student learning outcomes, implement a learning-centered curriculum, and create a learning-centered environment. The



transformation included providing professional development that facilitated dialogue, developed technological competence, and initiated a community of learners among its faculty and staff. This paradigm focused on measurable learning outcomes and learning strategies to engage students. Seventy percent of the full-time faculty in the English Department participated in ELCE, changing roles for instructors and students. By using technology and instructor serving as a collaborator, coursework was redesigned, moving away from the traditional delivery method of lecture to concentrating on learning styles, various forms of assessment, and innovative instructional strategies.

The English faculty participating in ELCE focused on transforming their own classes. Topics included instructional design, outcomes, learning styles, adult learning theories, alternative assessments, critical-thinking skills, and learning-centered syllabus. Instructors attended the overview of ELCE, wrote measurable learning outcomes, reviewed personal instructional strategies, and shared ideas with other team members. Classroom observations were conducted, and course outcomes were evaluated. All syllabi were redesigned to include and promote our student-first philosophy. Now, all English students receive a syllabus with the department's philosophy, a course description, assignment opportunities, evaluation methods, measurable outcomes, ADA Coordinator information, tutoring services, and any required or optional text/readings. After discussing the syllabus on the first day of class, students provide contact information for instructors and receive the list of policies and procedures for the course, a grading rubric for all assignments, and a class schedule with due dates and faculty contact information (office, phone, and email).

The final variable resulting in greater student success was the initiation of the Master Teacher Group. This seminar was designed to create the environment and provide the opportunity for instructors to share and learn from one another; using personal resources from actual teaching experiences. Requirements include sharing strategies that stimulate discussion or assist students; developing ideas for lectures, testing, grading, presentations, and/or group interactions; and sharing instructors' most enjoyable or unusual effective methods. Fifty percent of the English faculty participated in this activity, providing additional support with overall development of course offerings.

Conclusion

We have made remarkable strides in the last three years, and many of the new initiatives have resulted in greater student success. With the influx of new faculty

and techniques, on-going professional development remains extremely crucial. In 2006-2007, 117 workshops were offered for professional development opportunities. In fall 2008, the English Department added multimedia equipment to another writing lab (70% of labs will have equipment); utilized Tegrity for all course offerings, especially our hybrid and/or online offerings (now 10 different courses); and structured pilot-learning communities and a Structured Learning Assistance (SLA) course in English 101.

Learning communities provide a ready-made community of study groups for students, as well as promote greater collaboration among faculty. SLAs require tutoring as part of the course grade. As the college continues to strive for excellence in teaching and learning, and support learning-college concepts, one constant always remains—educators must provide services and instruction that promote continued student success.

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