



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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QUERIES HELP INCREASE GRADUATE NUMBERS

Rarely can a processing change make an immediate impact. However, this one did. The administrative charge was to increase graduation numbers. Queries found more than 500 currently enrolled students had completed all of the courses for a certificate (typically requires 4-6 courses). Those students were contacted during the 2006-2007 academic year, resulting in an increase of 128% of certificates awarded. Total graduates (degrees, diplomas, and certificates) increased 34% over the same period. Colleges that offer certificates can increase graduation numbers *immediately* by using queries to find students who already have completed them.

Students reach goals in greater numbers than are reflected currently in degree completion rates. Community college students have various goals: successfully completing one class or completing a few; transferring to a four-year school; or completing a program. Using queries to find certificate-completers can document student success and goal completion more accurately.

Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) received an Achieving the Dream grant which infused \$400,000 into the college over a four-year period. Achieving the Dream focuses on increased use of data and concentration on retention and persistence through graduation. I thought about how I, as a registrar, could contribute to this effort.

GTCC circulated a white paper about how Baltimore County Community College (BCCC) increased its graduation numbers by using queries to search for students who were near program completion. The interim president challenged the school to increase its graduation numbers. The registrar said: "I can fix it."

Could queries at GTCC find students who are near degree, diploma, or certificate completion? Two problems presented themselves. First, many students completed all certificate requirements but never applied for the certificate—more than 500 students were in this population. Second, we needed additional resources to

review records of all students nearing degree, diploma, or certificate completion, and to contact them.

Queries were created to find students who had never applied for the certificate they had completed or students who were enrolled in the last course required for completion. The basic methodology of the query was to select all students currently enrolled and check their academic history for courses, grades, statuses, etc., to determine if they met the qualifications. All students who had received the certificate were removed from this population. Only students who had completed a certificate's requirements and had never applied for that certificate remained.

Students were informed via emails and postcards that they were eligible to apply for a certificate. Each department received a list of students who had completed certificates and was asked to contact them.

Ways to improve the process include:

- Disburse the processing needs across campus, or hire more student help.
- Ask a programmer to modify the outputs so that only those students who have completed all courses are placed on the Excel spreadsheet.
- Award the certificate outright with no application process.
- Modify to meet the needs of more proactive academic advising (e.g., "You have completed 22 of the 30 courses required for your diploma...").
- Continue the process so that this is not a one-time flash-in-the-pan success.

In the final analysis, there was an increase in the actual number of certificates awarded and reported in the overall project. This can happen at your college!

Brad Burch, Registrar

For further information, contact the author at Guilford Technical Community College, 601 High Point Road, Jamestown, NC 27282. Email: beburch@gtcc.edu



ORIENTATION TOWARD SUCCESS

Students often ask, often too late, what they need to do to get a certain grade or just pass a course. The questions need to be asked at the beginning of each class, not after significant problems develop. By the end of the second week of class, students should know exactly what they need to do to be successful. If they do not, they need to ask and be satisfied that they understand all the expectations and feel reasonably secure that, barring unforeseen circumstances, they will be able to devote the time and energy necessary to be successful. I advise:

1. Attend class regularly and on time. Being on time means being ready to learn, not entering the door.
2. Have pencil, paper, and whatever else the class requires ready. Turn off all external communication and entertainment devices.
3. Pay attention. Do not allow anyone or anything to divert your attention from the task-at-hand.
4. Complete the work, readings, assignments to submit at the beginning of class, not during class. Do not do work for another class during this one.
5. Organize non-classroom learning time for effectiveness and efficiency. Do not wait until the last minute to study or complete work.
6. Partner up. Everyone can use others as referents—e.g., do they understand it the way you do; are there discrepancies in understanding? If you have a partner, you will find it easier to format questions that can get you answers.
7. Go see the teacher. Find out about scheduled office hours, and then go there.
8. Respect yourself and the teacher. Ask for help in learning, not the answers to the test. Share problematic experiences if you wish, but know that, ultimately, you must solve the problems *and* do the work.
9. See each class as an opportunity to obtain information that helps you live life to the fullest, not as a hoop to jump through.
10. No matter how you feel about the subject, the teacher, or the methods, keep your eyes on the prize.

Jerry Clavner, *Professor, Social Sciences*

For further information, contact the author at Cuyahoga Community College, 700 Carnegie Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115. Email: jerry.clavner@tri-c.edu

Suane D. Roueche, Editor

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