
HOW CAN INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS PROMOTE CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS' SUCCESS?

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ABSTRACT

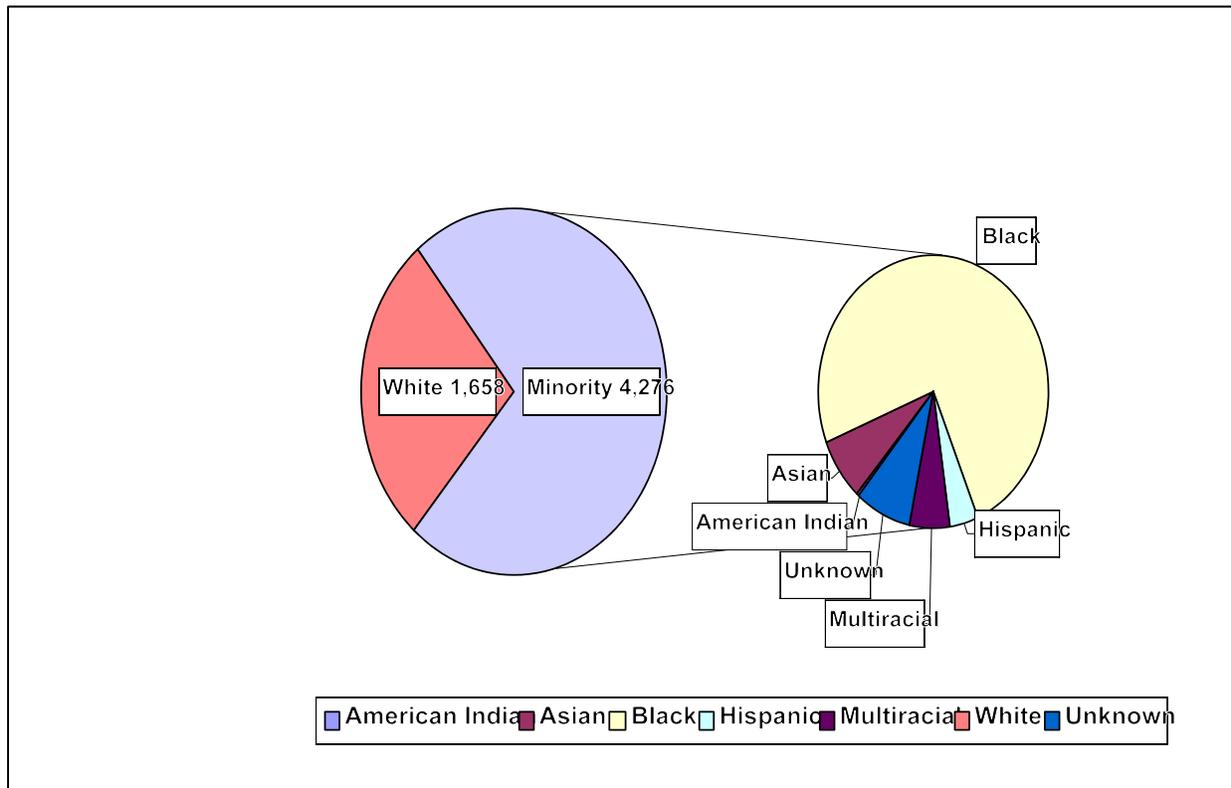
This paper will attempt to explain how interdisciplinary collaboration between different two career schools (i.e., School of Nursing and School of Business within the same university) can improve the academic success of culturally diverse students. Existing collaboration between the schools will be reviewed and statistical supporting data will indicate why retention is a challenging problem for diverse student populations. Once diverse students' problems have been identified, the study will focus on (a) how two schools attempt to understand the diverse student population, and (b) how both schools developed innovative enrollment and retention models for students who were not progressing satisfactorily.

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses interdisciplinary collaboration at Clayton State University (CSU), a technology-focused, suburban, commuter university with a very diverse student population. Although it is located in a suburban area, CSU, located in Morrow, Georgia, shares many characteristics of urban universities. Its diverse student body varies by age, culture, and ethnicity. In the spring of 2008, the average age of the 5,935 students in the university (and in the School of Business) was 28 years, and the average age of the nursing students was 29 years. The university student body was 70.0% females and 30.09% males. Both the 2002 and the 2005 editions of *America's Best Colleges*, published by U.S. News and World Report, stated that CSU had the most diverse student body among comprehensive baccalaureate granting colleges in the southern United States. As of spring, 2008, the university's student body included a population of 27.94% White and 54.21% African-Americans.

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Although the institution embraces its richly diverse student population, there are challenges to teaching and retaining them due to a variety of factors. Many students attending CSU are first generation college students, single parents, hold full time jobs and/or speak English as their second language. According to Schmidt (2008), the single factor that has made a difference on behalf of minority students is the attention given to them and improving how they are served. This paper describes collaborative efforts between the School of Business and School of Nursing to fulfill the institution's mission to improve student success. Prior to describing these collaborative strategies, a brief literature review is provided on the meaning of interdisciplinary collaboration.



THE MEANING OF INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

Collaboration implies “collective action oriented toward a common goal” (D-Amour et al., 2005, p. 116). A review of seminal educational literature reveals the common characteristics of collaboration that include the sharing of common goals and values, engagement in an interactive process, mutual control over decisions made and actions taken, and shared ownership of responsibilities and outcomes (Casto & Julia, 1994; Hord, 1986; Knapp, 1998; McCroskey & Einbinder, 1998; Wood & Gray, 1991).

In their review of the literature for definitions of collaboration, D-Amour, et al. (2005) identified the term *sharing* used in the form of shared responsibilities (Arcangelo, 1994; Arslanian-Engoren, 1995; Cowan & Tviet, 1994; Henneman, Lee & Cohen, 1995; Liedtka & Whitten, 1998; Lindeke & Block, 1998), shared values (Clark, 1997; Henneman, 1995), and shared planning and intervention (Baggs & Schmitt, 1988; Lindeke & Block, 1998). They also identified the term *partnership* that is characterized by a collegial relationship (Arslanina-Engoren, 1995; Henneman, 1995; King, 1990).

Martin-Rodriguez, et al. (2005) describes the educational system as “one of the main determinants of interprofessional collaborative practice” (p. 137) and explains that interdisciplinary collaboration promotes students’ awareness, sharing and the “integration of their knowledge and practices” (p. 137). They further explain that, although university faculty work together on collaborative projects to promote the university’s mission,

members of each profession know little about the values and expertise of their colleagues because of their involvement in teaching their respective discipline-specific frameworks. Therefore, understanding the roles of other disciplines in the university facilitates the development of interdisciplinary collaboration and the accomplishment of the university's mission, in this case, to promote student success (Silen-Lipponen, et al., 2002).

Institutional support is critical not only to academic disciplines as they promote the fulfillment of the institution's mission, but also when disciplines seek collaboration as a means to draw upon the strengths of each to develop strategies to promote student success. The School of Business and the School of Nursing became interested in collaborating during the establishment of the university's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) in preparation for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reaffirmation visit. Part of this process involved the appointment of representing members from every academic discipline to develop a focus of the QEP. The success of this process was based largely on the institutional support received and the committee members' commitment to fulfill the university's vision, promoting student success as evidenced by improved retention. Abelman, et al. (2007) defines institutional vision as a way of knowing about the university's learning community. Vision also "fosters genuine commitment among all concerned parties (p. 4). It is within this spirit that the School of Business and School of Nursing began its collaborative efforts to promote student success.

THE NEED FOR COLLABORATION: BACKGROUND AND ISSUES RELATED TO STUDENT ATTRITION AND GRADUATION

Student attrition and graduation rates are two major factors that many institutions use to measure the quality of their programs. Dr. Johnetta Cross Brazzell, the past vice-president of Spelman College aptly stated, "Retention is the lifeblood of an institution" (Hurd, 2000). A review of applicable literature in the area of student attrition and retention offers an insight into many variables affecting the retention rate of universities.

Since African-American students comprise 54.21 % of the student population at CSU (Spring, 2008, Office of Institutional Research and Planning), it is important that the institution's academic units pay close attention to their retention rates. According to the Frederick D. Patterson Institute (Historically Black Colleges and Universities, 1999), the national average retention rate of African-American students is 45% after five years, compared to a 57% average retention rate for White students. The academic performance of first-generation students, especially African-Americans and Latinos, also tends to be lower because those students often have trouble balancing the demands between family and school (Comarow, 2000). Most of the students enrolled in the programs from the two schools are first generation college students.

In another study of African-American colleges and universities, Hurd (2000) reported that two common reasons African-American students have poor academic performance are a lack of financial well being and academic under-preparation. Additionally, many African-Americans are first generation college students, so the family support of "been there, done that" is not available, and more and more students are holding a full-time job and taking a full load of classes (Hurd, 2000).

Students describe the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (B.S.N.) and Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.) programs as rigorous. They inform faculty that they have to give up their social lives, rearrange work schedules, and spend less time with their families in order to focus on their studies. For some students, obtaining a B.S.N. or B.B.A. degree is the most important objective in their lives; it is a way for them to achieve financial security and benefits for their families. However, when students fail courses in either of the programs, it is very traumatic for them because they feel that their families depend on them obtaining a degree in their specific fields.

Students get a second attempt in the nursing program if it is their first course failure and students in the B.B.A. program have three attempts, but when students fail on their last attempt, this result in program dismissal. Eighty-five percent of CSU's business students are already working and need the degree for advancement and when they fail, they often tell faculty that they realize they will not be able to advance in their careers. In a survey of students (CSU Survey data, fall, 2004), about 8% reported "no chance" that he or she would "receive emotional support from my family if I experience problems in college".

Research also indicated that CSU was at one time a predominantly White college campus. In an examination of African-American college students' needs on predominantly White college campuses, Rowser (1997) found that the key to improving the academic performance of African-American students was early identification of the causes of poor academic performance and intervention. Successful institutions identify at-risk students within the first three weeks of a semester. She further indicated that the image of an entire university could be affected if the attrition rate of African-American students was higher than that of White students, as it is at many universities.

Kalsner (1996) found that approximately six of every ten African-American students who do not receive financial aid withdraw from school. Dr. Antoine Garibaldi, Provost of Howard University, stated that many African-American students leave because of financial reasons. One of the major reasons cited by students for poor academic performance is increased financial pressure. More than 50 % of currently enrolled nursing students at CSU are forced to work 30-40 hours per week in order to pay their bills while attending school, and 65% of the School of Business students work full-time. Scholarships and financial aid funds have reduced outside work for some students and have contributed to improved success. However, some financial aid funds are restricted to students enrolled in the nursing program and do not extend to pre-entry preparation or earlier collegiate work.

The article by Rowser (1997) also noted some disturbing data about the success of African-American students. Most of the students (99%) felt that after their freshmen year, their GPA would be above a 2.0; they had high perceptions of academic performance and for graduation and strongly valued education. However, even when they had adequate financial resources, because of some societal and background disadvantages, disadvantages in skills or academic preparation, and background disadvantages, they often performed poorly. They had less academic success than whites during their freshmen year and throughout their college careers, and they were much more likely to withdraw from school during their first two years (Rowser).

Some studies identified the reasons for high attrition rates of students. In the Cleave study (1996), social interests were the highest ranking variable when students considered continuing their education and convenience factors was ranked second. Academic assistance programs, including developing studies, workshops, classroom presentations, review sessions, tutorial services, personal and group counseling, and outreach appear to have an effect on student retention (Higbee and Dwinell, 1997). By offering learning support services to a diverse population, development education programs can play an integral role in increasing retention rates. One of the beneficial advantages of academic assistance programs was smaller class sizes and individual instruction (Higbee and Dwinell). The authors concluded that academic assistance programs play a significant role in student retention, but that the programs must receive proper funding to increase the programs themselves and to improve graduation rate percentages.

A weak knowledge base is one of the factors negatively impacting student performance. In some cases, students are simply unprepared for college level work. Some students report having been "A" students until they were admitted to the nursing program. Students, particularly those for whom English is a second language (ESL), are more accustomed to using rote memorization techniques rather than utilizing learning strategies involving

higher level thought processes such as synthesis and evaluation. Upon entrance to the nursing program, students are expected to engage in critical thinking activities that involve decision making and problem solving; this adjustment is often difficult for the minority students. Although students admitted to the program met the criteria for admission, they often experience academic difficulty at some point in their programs. In summary, the literature highlights many of the challenges facing minority students.

University-wide, the trend in minority enrollment increased from 17.2% in the fall of 1990 to 72.06 % in the spring of 2008. A majority white enrollment decreased from 82.8% to 27.94% of the student population during that time, while total enrollment increased from 3,414 in 1990 to 5,934. The Clayton State University (CSU) School of Business enrollment parallels the university as a whole. Enrollment (Spring, 2008) in the School of Business had a student population that was 28.73% White, 52.23% African American, and 6.37% Asian or Pacific Islander American. Enrollment (Spring, 2008) of the School of Nursing had a student population that was 23.32% White, 60.4% African American, and 4.28% Asian or Pacific Islander American.

In addition, the gender makeup of the School of Business was 52.47% female and 37.00% male, and the gender makeup of the School of Nursing was 90.16% female and 9.84% male. A comparison of race/ethnicity of (a) the School of Business versus the entire CSU student body and (b) the School of Nursing versus the entire CSU student body for the spring of 2008 is shown in Table 1.

RACE/ETHNICITY	BBA	BSN	CSU
American or Pacific Islander American	5 (0.47%)	0 (0.00%)	22 (.37%)
Asian or Pacific Islander American	48 (4.53%)	4 (3.22%)	274 (4.59)
African American/Non-Hispanic American	514 (48.54%)	54 (43.54%)	2899 (48.60%)
Hispanic American	22 (2.08%)	1 (0.8%)	145 (2.43%)
Multiracial	63 (5.95%)	0 (0.0%)	344 (5.77%)
White/Non-Hispanic American	407 (38.43%)	66 (53.22%)	2281 (38.24%)

Source: CSU Office of Institutional Research Records

Diversity within the nursing program is even greater than in the School of Business. In 1992, minority students accounted for almost 35% of the enrollment in the nursing program. At that time, the campus had an enrollment of 4866 students, with less than 20 % of the students from racial and ethnic minority groups. For the fall 2004 semester, the nursing program had a student population that was 53% White, 44% African American, and 3% Asian or Pacific Islander American. The gender makeup of the nursing program was 111 (89.5%) female and 13 (10%) male (the highest number of males ever enrolled in the nursing program). These numbers show an increase in the number of diverse students enrolled in the nursing program. For instance, in 2001-2002, there were a total of 202 students enrolled in the nursing program. Of those, 111 were African American and 38 were White-non-Hispanic. The total number of graduates for both groups was 25 and 18, respectively.

Although these data demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the recruitment of minority students, the percentage of these students achieving program completion and licensure, shown in the Tables 2 and 3, is unacceptably low.

Table 2: CSU Nursing Program Graduation Rates from 2001-2007

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Black/African American	10	18	25	18	27	39	41
Asian	0	2	0	1	2	7	7
Hispanic	0	1	0	0	2	0	0
White Disadvantaged	6	8	6	4	11	4	11
White Non-Disadvantaged	15	12	11	12	26	23	17
Total Number of Graduates	31	41	42	35	68	74	76
% Minority/Disadvantaged	52%	63%	74%	63%	62%	69%	77%

Source: CSU Graduation Lists and Department of Nursing Records

Table 3: CSU School of Business Graduation Rates by Ethnicity from 2001 – 2007

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Asian or Pacific Islander	4 (4%)	3 (3%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	4 (4%)	4 (3%)	11 (11%)
Black (Non-Hispanic Origin)	27 (27%)	32 (27%)	49 (37%)	28 (28%)	47 (42%)	54 (39%)	40 (38%)
Hispanic	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	4 (4%)	2 (1%)	3 (3%)
Multiracial	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	3 (3%)	7 (6%)	5 (4%)	6 (6%)
White (Non-Hispanic Origin)	67 (67%)	79 (67%)	79 (60%)	67 (67%)	48 (42%)	72 (52%)	43 (41%)
Total Graduates	100	118	131	100	111	138	104

Source: CSU Graduation Lists and office of Institutional Research Records

Enrollment data for both schools are shown in Tables 4 and 5. Attrition continues to be a problem. As shown in Table 4, the minority/disadvantaged attrition rate for the nursing program decreased between the fall, 2000 and the fall, 2001. The School of Nursing established a goal of obtaining an attrition rate of 25% or less for all students enrolled in its program, including minority and disadvantaged students. However, in the fall 2002, the grade necessary to pass a course was raised from 70 to 75, which probably caused the slight increase in the fall, 2002 data.

It is also noted that the nursing program minority attrition rate has become more aligned with the overall attrition rate of the university. This is partially due to the fact that a higher percentage of the enrollees are minorities. The overall attrition rate will continue to get closer to the minority attrition rate as the percentage of

minority students increases. Although the minority students represent a majority of the attrition rate, the proportion of these students in the attrition rate appears to be decreasing.

Table 4: Nursing Program Enrollment Data for 2000 through 2007

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
BSN Enrollees	48	47	54	56	48	41	47	45
Minority/Disadvantaged BSN Enrollees	21	23	32	43	35	22	30	33
Percent of Enrollees Who Are Minority/Disadvantaged	44%	49%	59%	77%	73%	55%	64%	73%
BSN Withdrawals	9	6	16	na	na	5	5	7
Minority/Disadvantaged BSN Withdrawals	9	5	10	na	na	4	3	5
Percent of Withdrawals Who Are Minority/Disadvantaged	100%	83%	63%	na	na	80%	60%	71%
BSN Attrition Rate	19%	13%	30%	na	na	13%	11%	16%
Minority/Disadvantaged BSN Attrition Rate	43%	22%	31%	na	na	18%	10%	15%

Source: CSU Enrollment Lists, School of Nursing Records, CSU Graduation Lists

Table 5: CSU School of Business Enrollment Data for 2000 through 2007

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
American Indian/Alaskan Native	8 (.9%)	7 (.8%)	8 (.8%)	4 (.4%)	4 (.4%)	3 (.3%)	3 (.3%)	4 (.4%)
Asian or Pacific Islander American	27 (3.0%)	38 (4.1%)	39 (4.0%)	38 (3.9%)	48 (4.5%)	53 (5.1%)	70 (6.7%)	62 (5.8%)
Black/Non-Hispanic American	312 (34.7%)	324 (34.5%)	382 (38.9%)	402 (41.32%)	518 (48.7%)	515 (49.5%)	531 (50.5%)	566 (52.9%)
Hispanic American	17 (1.9%)	28 (3.0%)	22 (2.2%)	29 (2.98%)	23 (2.2%)	29 (2.8%)	30 (2.8%)	28 (2.6%)
MultiRacial	14 (1.6%)	23 (2.6%)	33 (3.46%)	54 (5.55%)	64 (6.0%)	72 (6.9%)	69 (6.6%)	47 (4.4%)
White/Non-Hispanic American	520 (57.9%)	519 (55.4%)	499 (50.7%)	446 (45.84%)	407 (38.3%)	369 (35.4%)	336 (32%)	314 (29.4%)
Ethnicity Unknown							12 (1.1%)	48 (4.5%)

Source: CSU Enrollment Lists, Office of Institutional Research

COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES BETWEEN THE SCHOOLS

Collaborative strategies between the School of Business and the School of Nursing were designed around the QEP because of its well-defined strategic context to address critical needs identified through an exhaustive process of data collection and analysis. The plan was also designed to enhance student success while building on the university's greatest asset—the strong commitment of its faculty and staff to student learning. The goals and objectives for each of three planning themes are described in Table 6. Table 7 highlights the specific collaborative activities between the School of Business and School of Nursing as they related to the QEP planning themes and the institution's mission to promote student success.

Theme 1: Student Success and Faculty Development	Theme 2: Student Intervention and Faculty/Staff Involvement	Theme 3: Advisement and Mentoring
Goal 1: To establish ongoing faculty development programs related to student success	Goal 1: To establish institutional policies, procedures and priorities that maximize student success.	Goal 1: To improve the knowledge level of Advisors.
Goal 2: To implement Instructional strategies that Promote student success.	Goal 2: To implement methods for early detection and remediation of at-risk students.	Goal 2: To improve freshman advisement/orientation.
	Goal 3: To involve faculty staff, and Students in providing academic Assistance for at-risk students.	Goal 3: To improve the uses of technology in the advisement of students. Goal: To enhance student Success through increased faculty-student interaction outside the classroom.

Theme 1: Student Success and Faculty Development	Theme 2: Student Intervention and Faculty/Staff Involvement	Theme 3: Advising and Mentoring
Goal 2: To implement Instructional strategies that promotes student success	Goal 2: To implement methods for early detection and remediation of at-risk students	Goal 2: To improve freshman advisement /orientation
	Goal 3: To involve faculty, staff, and students in providing academic assistance for at-risk students.	Goal 4: To enhance student success through increased faculty/student interaction outside the classroom
Collaborative efforts between the schools:	Collaborative efforts between the schools:	Collaborative efforts between the schools:
Development of Instructional strategies that can be utilized by both Schools.	Development of the School of Nursing Student Navigator	Faculty/Student Mentoring Program
Development of an Active Learning Strategies Database	Implementation of the Skills Tutor Computer Program	Information sessions for pre-business and pre-nursing students

Theme 1: Student Success and Faculty Development

Sometimes one academic discipline, (e.g., School of Business) has no idea what another academic discipline (e.g., School of Nursing) might be doing to improve the academic performance of a culturally diverse student body. This is not the case at CSU, where faculties from the two schools understand the positive impact of interdisciplinary collaboration on student performance. Faculty from the Schools of Business and Nursing are continually working together, through meetings and joint collaboration, to gain a better understanding of the academic performance of all students currently enrolled in the two programs.

Between 2003 and 2007, faculty from the two schools collaborated to discuss and develop active pedagogies to promote student success. During this time, the faculty met monthly to discuss active learning strategies used in their respective classrooms. Members of the faculty presented each active learning strategy in a roundtable format specifically sharing the name of the strategy, function and goals of the strategy, suggestions for use, audience, ease of use, class size, background knowledge needed by the students to successfully engage in the strategy, and the procedure for implementing the strategy. The Director of the Center for Instructional Development facilitated the faculty discussions about their experiences implementing the strategies in their classrooms. The meetings and discussions resulted in the development of a campus-wide active learning strategies data base that faculty across the disciplines may access, select and print to implement in their classrooms.

Example of an Active Learning Strategy Developed by a School of Business Faculty Member**Group Grid****Description**

In this activity, students sort pieces of information by placing them in the blank cells of a grid. The grid's columns and rows consist of superordinate concepts. Student groups receive scrambled lists of subordinate terms, names, equations, images, or other items that belong in the categories. Teams then sort the subordinate items in the correct grid categories.

Function: Assimilating & Organizing Content, Collaborative Work**Goals**

The goal is to help students learn the basic schema and categorization rules of the discipline.

Suggestions for Use

Group Grid is most useful in introductory courses.

Audience:

Arts & Sciences, Business, Health Sciences, Information & Mathematical Sciences, Technology

Ease of Use

Instructor: Easy Student: Easy

Class Size

Small, Medium, Large

Background Knowledge

Students should have read the related text chapters and received a lecture on the concepts.

Procedure: 1. Design a grid or matrix. The best grids have multiple columns and rows. The top horizontal row should identify one level of organization and the far left vertical column identify another level of organization. The items placed at the points of intersections (cells) must meet both column and row classification criteria. For example, in a communication course, the basic types of written messages (information, bad news, persuasive) could be listed in the horizontal headings and the basic parts of the message (introduction, body, closing) could be listed in the left vertical column. Students could then be asked to sort a list of guidelines into the appropriate cells. 2. Form groups and distribute the blank grid as a handout, or have students copy the grid from a PowerPoint slide. 3. Give students the list of scrambled items of information. 4. Have students fill in the blank cells. Teams can come to consensus about how the items should be sorted, and fill out the grid as a group project. Or individual students can take turns in a round robin order, filling in one cell per turn. 5. Students can submit a completed grid for assessment or you can post a correctly completed grid for them to check for accuracy (Barkley, et al., 2005).

Example of an Active Learning Strategy Developed by a Nursing Faculty Member**Conference Style Learning****Description**

Conference-style learning at its best meaningfully engages and challenges students and instructors. Students learn key critical thinking skills from instructors and one another, with particular emphasis on hearing differing viewpoints respectfully. It was developed at Reed College to promote critical thinking about primary sources (such as journal articles and historical documents). The conference method of teaching is a form of group tutorial. Students read primary source materials that are chosen carefully to challenge them to think in depth. They then meet in small groups with the instructor to discuss the readings. Instructors model critical thinking by asking strategic, Socratic-style questions that encourage analysis and evaluation of evidence, arguments, and methodology, as well as integration and synthesis of original arguments. Through such discussions, students learn to ask one another questions in this manner; of equal importance, according to Underwood and Wald, is that they learn to respect their own intuitions and those of classmates. The authors argue that conference learning provides the ideal type of social context necessary for optimal critical thinking skill development.

Function

Discussion

Goals

1. To encourage students to identify main ideas or key elements of a primary source.
2. To encourage active discussion of the reading material
3. To encourage the formulation and expression of opinions about sources read.
4. To encourage students to respect the opinions of others.

Suggestions for Use

1. This strategy may be used to promote discussion of ethical or controversial issues
2. This strategy may be used to improve students' critical reading skills
3. The strategy may be used to evaluate student learning.

Audience

Arts & Sciences, Business, Health Sciences, Information & Mathematical Sciences, Technology

Ease of Use

Instructor: Moderate Student: Moderate

Class Size

Small, Medium

Background Knowledge

Students must possess effective reading and critical thinking skills as well as knowledge of the concepts taught in the class in which this strategy is implemented.

Procedure

1. Determine the topic to be discussed.
2. Select the reading material
3. Explain the guidelines for engaging in the reading process.
4. Give students guiding questions to refer to as they read the material.
5. During the discussion period, the faculty asks high-level probing questions that students must answer. The faculty may encourage the expression of many viewpoints or opinions about the

same topic. As different opinions are expressed, students learn that it is acceptable to not always agree with one another. Each student leaves the class feeling respected.

6. At the end of the discussion, the faculty provides an overview of the important information that students should have gained from the reading and discussion (Underwood & Wald, 1995).

Theme 2: Student Intervention and Faculty/Staff Involvement

One of the keys to promoting student success is the early identification and remediation of at-risk students. Collaborative efforts between the schools involved the School of Nursing sharing its experiences with the development of the role of Student Navigator. This position is filled by a School of Nursing faculty member who is responsible for identifying pre-nursing students at-risk for not being admitted to the nursing program because of academic deficiencies. The Student Navigator “navigates” students into the nursing program by either pairing them with a faculty mentor and/or locating appropriate community and university resources that students may need to alleviate personal stressors affecting their academic performance. Members of the School of Business engaged School of Nursing faculty in dialogue on how they addressed the needs of their academically challenging students. Through dialogue, both schools agreed that the Student Navigator role could be easily duplicated in the School of Business.

The School of Nursing also purchased an online academic enhancement program, Skills Tutor, in conjunction with the CSU Center for Academic Success. Pre-nursing and nursing students’ level of proficiency in the areas of math, reading, and writing can be easily assessed and remediation plans developed. Following the completion of the remediation plans, students take post tests that indicate how successful the remediation plan was in helping students to improve their academic skills. The Skills Tutor program is accessible to both the School of Business faculty and students.

Theme 3: Advisement and Mentoring

The advising and mentoring process in both schools have been greatly improved as a result of collaboration. For instance, the School of Business did not have a full-time academic advisor until 2002. Until then faculty had provided all student advising. After observing how well the School of Nursing academic advisor assisted the faculty, the School of Business obtained approval for such a position and now has two on staff. The School of Business’ Academic Office now meets with all business and pre-business students at least once a year to determine if they understand where they are headed in their university studies, and how they should proceed toward graduation. The School of Business Advisors are responsible for advising students in selecting and planning an appropriate career path, working with the career planning module in the Managerial Communication course, and maintaining the student advisement career development website. In addition, the advisors are expected to develop appropriate internship opportunities for business students.

Data show that when students are interested and committed to their own learning, academic advisors can be more effective in terms of helping them plan for the future (Hurt, 2007; Smith, 2003). The Office of Academic Advisement meets with students and attempts to guide them toward a timely graduation by taking a personal interest and helping students to choose the right academic courses in the proper sequences. In addition, the Office of Academic Advisement works with traditional and non-traditional students, returning students, and transferees to ensure that prerequisites, admission procedures, and curriculum changes are understood.

In the nursing program, a key ingredient to improving student success early on has involved the establishment of program advisors. Their role is to advise the pre-nursing students to ensure they are completing their core, provide information about the School of Nursing admissions process, and ensure that students' applications are complete prior to being submitted to the Admissions and Progressions Committee. Having just one or two individuals in which to interact in one particular location has alleviated much student anxiety about the nursing program. Students feel valued and believe that they are able to get information when they need it. The program advisors also play a key role in the application review process. Once a student has met all the nursing program admission criteria, their files are submitted to the Admissions and Progressions Committee. This committee ranks eligible applicants using students' overall grade point average (GPA, the average score of their critical thinking skills on the Nurse Entrance Exam (NET), and their science and math GPA. The most qualified students are interviewed, and the committee makes their final selections. At the point students are admitted to the nursing program, they are assigned a faculty advisor. The relationship between faculty and student advisee continues through to graduation.

Other collaborative activities to promote student engagement include pre-major information sessions. After observing the School of Business' success with their pre-major information sessions, the faculty conducted information sessions for pre-nursing majors. These optional information sessions provided a forum for pre-nursing majors to meet the nursing faculty and associate dean. Information packets and information sheets outlining the core requirements and the nursing curriculum, similar to those used by the School of Business, were also distributed at the information sessions. Through ideas gained from the two schools' collaborative meetings, the School of Nursing implemented the strategy of having student representatives from the Student Nurses Association (SNA) attend the information sessions to encourage pre-nursing students to become involved in the organization even before admission to the nursing program. SNA representatives shared their experiences of being a student in the nursing program.

The advisement and mentoring processes described by both schools were developed using an engagement model of academic advisement (Yarbrough, 2002). This method involves faculty in the advisement process before students are admitted to the business and nursing programs. Relationship building between faculty and student is an essential strategy used to empower students as they attempt to gain admission and meet degree requirements once admitted. Focus groups with pre-major and major students and faculty advisors/mentor revealed their perceptions of what constitutes a good faculty advisor/mentor and good student advisee (Table 8).

Faculty Advisor/Mentor Perceptions of a Good Mentor	Student Advisee Perceptions of a Good Mentor
Coach	Coach
Tutor	Encourager
Cheerleader	Listener
Listener	Supporter
Faculty Mentor Perceptions of a Good Advisee	Student Advisee Perceptions of a Good Mentor
Eager to learn	Good listener
Shares own ideas	Does assignment
Displays a positive attitude	Able to see improvement

SUMMARY, REFLECTION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The key ingredients that have made interdisciplinary collaboration a success between the two schools include improving the advisement process, continued development of an understanding of the demographics of the students enrolled in the programs, developing strategies leading to student success, being committed to success, and giving students a chance.

Measurable Evidence of Improving the Advisement Process

Faculty from both the School of Nursing and the School of Business are continually reviewing surveys to determine what type of assistance should be offered from the advising offices from both schools. In a recent survey of students (CSU Survey data, Fall, 2004), 62% of the students reported “very good chance” and 34% reported “some chance” that they would seek assistance from the appropriate advising office for personal, career, or academic problems.

Continued development of an understanding of the demographics of the students enrolled in the programs

Faculty from both schools work closely with the Director of Institutional Research to better understand the diversity of the student population. In addition, efforts to track students enrolled in the two programs are improving due to an advisor tracking program, Advisor Trac.

Developing strategies leading to student success

In the School of Business, as part of showing a commitment to retention and student success, an assessment program has been developed and students’ prior knowledge is assessed at the beginning of each course. In the nursing program, efforts to prepare students ahead for the rigor of the nursing program included assessing minority students’ academic skills in the SOS program. Through assessment, students are able to identify their academic weaknesses and concentrate on improving those areas of concern. These proactive efforts appear to have curtailed the number of students dismissed from both programs. Measures were also instituted for students having academic difficulty after being admitted to the program. Through standardized testing following each nursing course, students’ areas of strengths and weaknesses in a particular content area are identified. One of the roles of the faculty mentor and the faculty advisor is to assist students with developing a remediation plan addressing the identified weak areas.

Being committed to student success

CSU participates in the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education program. Under this program, assessment of student learning is integrated into all aspects of the general education curriculum at the university. The three purposes of the assessment process are: 1) to enhance individual student learning 2) refine and revise curricula as a whole and 3) use it as a marker of educational effectiveness. In addition, the university recently started a Quality Enhancement Program that focuses on identifying student needs and enhancing the

quality of the educational experience at CSU. This type of university-wide commitment to helping students succeed reduces the attrition rate.

Giving the students a chance

The nursing program's two-attempt policy gives students an opportunity to remain in the program after failing one nursing course. By getting a second chance, many students who would have otherwise been dismissed for academic reasons are able to complete the program.

There is more to retaining a student than just getting better students. The purpose of the interdisciplinary collaboration has been to improve the chances of diverse groups being able to be successful in their desired programs at CSU. Key to the success of such an initiative must be a continuous examination of what has been undertaken in the past and what needs to be done in the future. Faculty, staff, administrators, and students can all provide valuable input towards needed collaboration.

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