Student Engagement

A recent research and report project done by the ‘Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) urges colleges to be ‘deliberate and aggressive’ about creating opportunities to get students involved on campus activities and in their academic classes/programs.

The report is based on annual student surveys conducted over the past three years. This year’s survey was completed by about 310,000 students from over 500 community college campus’s nationwide.

The results of the report indicate students see the value in advising and career/educational planning. 61% stated the such services are very important. 89% stated that they think that they are somewhat important. Yet just 43% say they have met with an academic advisor to discuss their goals and career aspirations.

The most recent study done here at SCCC to evaluate decision making issues around the College mission and priorities found that 30% of our students are first generation students who may not have the support or experience to initiate contacts with support services at SCCC. 25% of our student population fell below the poverty line. The study also indicated that student retention is crucial during the first three quarters. About half of new students who enroll indicated the desire to transfer to four colleges after program completion. Counseling and Career Planning become crucial for these students. The CCSSE report and other studies indicate that students who have a plan early and set future goals tend to be more motivated and have a better success rate of completion.

The CCSSE Report urges community colleges to become more aggressive in their effort to retain students through mandatory admissions programs, such as advising and career planning. Faculty involvement is also key to student success, yet the SSCCE report found that only 15% of students say they discussed ideas about grades, class or assignments with faculty; 47% say they have never had such conversations. The report found that two thirds of students polled attend school part time while juggling jobs and family and that two thirds of the faculty overall are employed part time and spend little time outside of class on campus.

One issue that most agree with is that students will continue to look to community colleges to gain skills and improve their economic situations. The top three reasons students chose community college was flexibility, cost and location. The first quarter as indicated by our study and the SSCCE report is the most important contact period for providing a platform for student success. The good news is that many community colleges are responding to the call for increased student engagement by creating opportunities for staff, faculty and students to interact on a deeper level.