The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Pulaski Technical College

Project Details

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<th>Intervention strategies to improve African-American male success during freshman year.</th>
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1: Project Goal

A: We are seeking to improve the retention, academic success and graduation rates of African-American male students. At the end of this action project, African-American males in the project will be retained in the first-year experience course as well as other courses at a higher rate than their peers. They will also be more engaged and connected with faculty and staff and participate in campus activities. They will have a better perspective on how education impacts their personal lives.

2: Reasons For Project

A: Pulaski Technical College is a predominately black institution, as approximately 50 percent of our students are African-American. There are large achievement gaps between Caucasian and African-American students, and there are considerably different achievement gaps between African-American females and African-American males. We have systematically reviewed student data from the last five years through our participation in the Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count and Foundations of Excellence in the First Year of College. This data clearly demonstrates that African-American males are not being retained, obtaining degrees or certificates or experiencing the same level of academic success as other populations at Pulaski Technical College. We were awarded a grant for Predominately Black Institutions (PBI) to improve the success rates of African-American males in October 2008. This action project would attempt to leverage activities in the grant with activities and instruction in the first-year freshman experience courses to enhance success of the African-American male population.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: The divisions most affected by this action project will be Student Services and Academic Success. Within Student Services, the advising program will be responsible enrolling black male students into appropriate College Seminar sections, and the Student Success office (which houses the PBI grant operations) will be responsible for hands-on case management once students are enrolled. The Academic Success division (an instructional division) houses the first-year experience course, College Seminar, and will appropriately staff and train instructors for sections targeted for this action project.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: The key organizational process to improve is student case management through proactive intervention strategies.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: This project will begin with recruitment of students in July 2009. Milestones will be the completion of the first two courses in December 2009, and completion of two additional sections in May 2010.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: At the end of this action project, African-American males in the project will be retained in the first-year experience course as well as other courses at a higher rate than their peers. They will also be more engaged and connected with faculty and staff and participate in campus activities. They will have a better perspective on how education impacts their personal lives.
Project Outcome Measures

A: The benefits of the project will be students with better academic skills, and higher retention and graduation rates. These students will be more engaged in the learning process, with faculty and staff and in campus activities. We will know we have accomplished our project when student evaluations of the course and retention data show improved success for African-American males participating in the course.

Other Information

A: Students will be recruited for the class through the required orientation program for all first-time entering degree seeking students in summer 2009. Staff from the PBI grant will assist with orientation and recruitment. Classes will be scheduled in state-of-the-art SMART classrooms. Instructors in these classes will serve as the student’s advisor, and students will be unable to change their schedule, drop or withdraw without meeting with their advisor. An advisor from the Advising and Career Center will also be assigned to each class to serve as a resource. Instructors will focus on connecting the student to tutoring and other campus services. Instructors will connect and serve as resources for the student’s instructors in other courses. Instructors and staff within the PBI grant will involve students in the activities under the grant to promote engagement on campus. Recognition activities will take place at the beginning and ending of the semester. An alternate book or movie of interest to the target population will be chosen as the Common Academic Experience for these sections of the first year experience. The Dean of the Academic Success division will schedule the classes and hire the faculty. The Dean of Enrollment Services will ensure activities under the PBI grant are available to students enrolled in the classes and that classes are scheduled in SMART classrooms. Two of the staff in the PBI grant have agreed to teach the courses.

Project Update

Project Accomplishments and Status

A: In fall 2009, two sections of the college’s first-year experience course, College Seminar: A Pathway to Excellence, were developed for African-American males based on data indicating that this population was succeeding at far lower rates than their peers. As an Achieving the Dream institution, the college has worked to meet one of the primary goals of that initiative, which is to raise the completion rates of students of color. This project was also designed to meet that goal.

Students were recruited for these classes by faculty and advisors during new student orientation sessions during July and August 2009. Faculty teaching the course met on a weekly basis throughout the semester to discuss proven pedagogical strategies, their effectiveness, and outcomes. Each section was assigned a college advisor and counselor to work directly with faculty and students in the class to provide additional academic assistance and guidance and address non-academic issues.

Data gathered included attendance, test scores, timeliness and quality of assignments, class preparation, retention and grades in the course and all other courses in which students were enrolled. The following are a summary of the findings:

- In fall 2009, 77% of African-American male students participating in the course earned an A, B or C grade compared to 53% of African-American male students in other college seminar sections and 67% of all students in all college seminar sections.

- Eighty-four percent (84%) of the African-American male students participating in the fall 2009 course returned for the spring 2010 semester compared to 69% of African-American male students in other college seminar sections and 77% of students in all college seminar sections.

- In fall 2009, African-American male students participating in the course earned a cumulative GPA of 2.97 compared to 2.49 for African-American male students in other college seminar sections and 2.90 for students in all college seminar sections.

- Utilizing study groups and accountability teams (AM I My Brother’s Keeper), test scores of participants increased from test to test, and students were more engaged and prepared as the semester progressed.
To promote engagement, students participated in a variety of college activities that linked to objectives of the course, such as Dress for Success, The Tie Game, and Freestyle Fridays. They also participated in cultural and community events.

A summer bridge class utilizing the African-American male college seminar class was offered for African-American males graduating from area high schools in May 2010. One hundred percent of these students were retained throughout the course and earned an A, B, or C grade.

Two additional sections of the course were offered in the spring and fall 2010 semesters. The African-American college seminar courses will continue even though this AQIP timeline is at a close.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The following are ways that the college community was involved in this project:

- The instructors, the Dean of Academic Success, the Dean of Enrollment and staff of the Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) program engaged in dialogue regarding the status of the project at weekly meetings.

- The success of the course motivated other first-year experience faculty to become engaged and look at how course strategies could be used in other courses to assist specific college populations.

- Staff in the Student Services division worked cooperatively with the Dean of Academic Success regarding enrollment procedures.

- Staff in Advising and Counseling supported the work of instructors of the course by working with the students enrolled in each section.

3: Next Steps

A: The course will continue with a minimum of two sections each semester and as a part of the summer bridge program. Faculty will continue to focus on additional active reading and writing activities to improve students' overall academic success. Additional strategies will be sought to promote student engagement and accountability in the course and on campus.

Faculty will seek to further engage advising, counseling, financial aid and student life and leadership staff in the course to ensure students have access to information and services. Plans are to link this course with developmental courses in a Learning Community.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The following effective practices resulted from this action project:

- One practice that proved to be effective involved the rearrangement of the course content based upon student self assessment, i.e. time management, conflict resolution, study skills and communication.

- Identifying and choosing a Common Academic Experience (CAE) common book targeted toward the interests and needs of the students proved to be very useful for student involvement and accountability. The CAE book chosen was the reading of the book We Beat the Streets.

- The instructors of the course collaborated with another Pulaski Technical College instructor to publish a first-year experience
textbook specifically for Men of Color. Instructors of the course were also selected to present at the 29th Annual First Year Experience (FYE) conference in Denver, Colorado. Several schools have expressed interest in assistance with helping to start a targeted FYE course.

- Utilizing student services activities and programs such as financial aid, advising, counseling, student life and leadership, TRIO scholars, Veterans Upward Bound and Career Pathways proved to be a valuable tool for maximizing student success and engagement.

### Project Challenges

#### A:
- One challenge is the implementation of active reading and writing into the course. Plans are to incorporate more of the Common Academic Experience (CAE) material and to continue to seek strong communication with reading and writing faculty.

- Other challenges focus on students' "non-academic" issues. The College will continue to connect students to appropriate supportive services on and off campus, as well as develop personal improvement plans for the students.

### Update Review

#### Project Accomplishments and Status

- The Action Project has achieved exceptional progress and accomplishment to improve retention, academic success and graduation rates of African American male students. Based on the response to this question and the subsequent questions, the institution has made progress with the goal to enhance the first-year experience course by using data and expanding effective strategies from a PBI grant (AQIP Category (7) Measuring Effectiveness, and AQIP Learning Principle). To date, the project is complete per the target date of May 30, and significant gains were made in course grades, cumulative GPA, and retention for the students participating in the two College Seminar: A Pathway to Excellence course sections. The integration and alignment of advisement and instruction through having advisors teach the course demonstrate the project team's commitment to ensure services add value and use expertise (AQIP Category (1) Helping Students Learn and AQIP Foresight Principle). The deployment of a common academic experience book, rearrangement of course content, use of study groups and accountability teams, and the integration of other support services reinforce the project's focus on improving academic success for the target population (AQIP Category (3) Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs). Although the completion date for the project has been reached, tracking the participant graduation rates as compared to peer cohorts may further demonstrate project success (AQIP Category (7) Measuring Effectiveness and AQIP Learning Principle). Because this project has made significant improvements, establishing a mechanism to quantifiably measure and analyze performance results for student engagement, connectivity with faculty and staff, increased participation in campus activities, and understanding of the impact of education may enable the institution to determine the effectiveness of the first-year courses on meeting these goals as outlined in the project description (AQIP Category (8) Planning for Continuous Improvement).

### Institution Involvement

- The coordinated efforts between academic services and student services demonstrate integrated collaboration and relationship building (AQIP Category (9) Building Collaborative Relationships) through the diverse participation (AQIP Involvement Principle) of instructors, deans, student services staff, advisors, and counselors in the planning and monitoring of the project. The collaboration between enrollment services and academic services to ensure that the courses were scheduled in SMART classrooms reinforce integrated teamwork and relationship building (AQIP Category (9) Building Collaborative Relationships). The institution has noted significant success with the summer bridge program for high school graduating seniors; consequently, developing a mechanism to include external stakeholders in future project planning may enable the institution to further demonstrate shared focus on student success through effective cooperative efforts with external partners (AQIP Collaboration and Involvement Principles).

### Next Steps

Although the project cycle is complete, the institution has identified appropriate next steps for the target population. The plan to continue with two sections of the course as part of the summer bridge program and to link the first-year course with other developmental courses through a learning community demonstrate a commitment to meeting the needs of the target population (AQIP Category (3) Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs). Because significant student performance outcomes were obtained from the project, detailing and defining the pedagogical approaches used such as case management, proactive intervention strategies, and use of SMART classrooms may enable the institution to determine what strategies were the most effective and will provide the data necessary to respond to changing conditions (AQIP Foresight Principle) and to develop a plan for improvement based on feedback results (AQIP Categories (7) Measuring Effectiveness and (8) Planning for Continuous Improvement).

**Resulting Effective Practices**

The institution has identified a number of potentially effective practices garnered from this project. The institution noted that the element of rearranging course content according to data gathered from the student self assessment (AQIP Category (1) Helping Students Learn, AQIP Learning Principle), choosing Common Academic Experience material (CAE) relating to student interests (AQIP Category (3) Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs), collaborating to publish a first-year course textbook for Men of Color (AQIP Category (9) Building Collaborative Relationships), and integrating support services into the course (AQIP Category (2) Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives) has contributed to the success of the target population and has increased individual’s understanding of how their work helps further the institution’s mission.

**Project Challenges**

The institution has identified appropriate challenges to the project plan, and the institution has plans for reasonable adjustments (AQIP Agility Principle) to broaden the Common Academic Experience (CAE) material to include reading and writing and to develop student personal improvement plans as a method to further address “non academic” issues.

**Project Outcome**

**Reason for completion**

The freshman experience class targeted toward African American males was offered in fall 2009 and spring 2010. The intervention strategies imbedded in the class proved successful in promoting African American male retention and academic success. The college is committed to continuance of the class for future semesters.

**Success Factors**

- Increase in student retention and GPA as compared to African American males enrolled in other College Seminar sections.

- Revision of the class curriculum to address issues relevant to the target population instead of following a “one size fits all” model.

- Identifying and choosing a Common Academic Experience (CAE) book targeted towards the interests and needs of the students

- Linking the class to developmental classes in fall 2010 to form learning communities for African American males.

- Rearrangement of course content based upon data gathered from student assessments

- Utilization of student services (financial aid, registration, advising/counseling, student life & leadership, disability services, etc.) and other program initiatives (TRIO scholars, Veterans Upward Bounds, Career Pathways, etc.)
### Unsuccessful Factors

**A:**

- We could have included a strategy for follow up with students completing the class. Students need to be linked with other campus services and organizations such as the Network for Student Success to promote continued retention and success.

- Inadequate focus on active reading and writing.

- Inadequate resources to address student “non-academic” issues that impact retention and academic success.