

Archived Information

LET'S TALK TRIO – SPRING NEWSLETTER

Serving in Communities

TRIO services are beginning to evolve from the traditional method of serving students on an individual basis. By serving students with similar needs and experiences as a group, students develop a network and support system of their peers. These communities of learners allow such students to develop a sense of self-sufficiency and interdependence for supporting their own learning. However, mere grouping of students is not enough to create what is known in the field as a “learning community.” It is the relation among group members that leads to a meaningful engagement in learning, a connection between students and their teachers, and the development of responsibility towards creating and belonging to a community of peers.

There are a variety of learning strategies that can be employed in these communities. Collaborative and cooperative learning allows students to learn actively, through their participation in shared discovery of knowledge. Discussion groups and seminars allow teachers and students to converse about the various concepts introduced in their learning community courses. And lastly, opportunities for ongoing reflection provides the time, space, instruction, and encouragement students often need to examine the content, process, and relevancy of what they have learned and is a critical piece of most successful learning communities.

Research has shown that learning communities increase student retention, involvement, and motivation, shorten students' time to degree completion, and enhance student intellectual development. By being involved in learning communities, students become more intellectually mature and accountable for their own learning as well as more interested in the learning of their peers. Learning communities increase students' academic achievement and completion rates in both developmental and college-level courses, particularly when the communities are focused on those who may be under prepared for such courses.

Regardless of the structure, all learning communities share the common goals of fostering kinship among students and connections among courses, and creating more sustained intellectual interaction among students and their teachers. A sense of group success and persistence is developed when students are served as a group and provided a community to which they can relate. Since college enrollment and completion are the primary TRIO goals, learning communities can be an efficient and effective vehicle for ensuring that grant funds positively impact the maximum number of students while maintaining a high level of program quality.

QUOTES

“I think a lot of us will look back on this moment in time as the ‘tipping point.’ It is the time where we changed our mindset. We stopped measuring educational success by inputs ... and instead started examining outputs, measuring whether students are indeed learning.”

—Rod Paige, Secretary of Education

“Definiteness of purpose is the starting point of all achievement.”
—W. Clement Stone, Founder of Combined Insurance Company

“In every success story, you find someone has made a courageous decision.”
—Peter F. Drucker, Writer and 2002 recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom

“Service is just a day in, day out, ongoing, never ending, unremitting, persevering, compassionate type of activity.”
—Leon Gorman, Chairman of the Board and Former Chief Executive Officer of L.L. Bean, Inc.

Message from the Director

As new grants are being competed, project objectives must be written in measurable terms. For instance, in the recent Student Support Services (SSS) competition, applicants were instructed to include objectives, based on cohort groups made up of the students accepted into the SSS project each year. These objectives address the reasons identified in the “Need for Project” section of the application. As an illustration of this, an acceptable persistence objective for a two-year institution would measure the percentage of each cohort that remains enrolled in the institution and those who transfer or graduate each year over the measurement period. Additionally, in developing the need for the project, only data that relate to students who may be assisted by the project would be allowed. Therefore, for example, demographic data of students not enrolled or accepted for enrollment at the applicant institution would not be considered in determining the need for the grant.

By strengthening application criteria and refining project proposal objectives, we will begin to see an increase in the number of TRIO projects for which success in meeting their objectives can be accurately determined and, more importantly, the needs of the students served.

Ideas into Action

The University of New Orleans uses a portion of its TRIO funds to support their SSS Freshman Experience Program (FEP). The FEP is a structured approach to helping students succeed in their first year of college. The program involves block enrollment in developmental math, English, and two designated elective courses. FEP students attend classes together as a group, receive weekly small-group tutoring sessions, led by both an instructor and a peer tutor, and participate in a study-skills development course. Participants also attend three counseling sessions each semester.

A coalition of university offices (e.g., admissions, retention, financial aid, TRIO programs, etc.) works to identify 40 first-time students for the FEP. Selected students enroll in FEP before the start of their first semester and attend a summer recruitment meeting and a special orientation during which they register for their first semester courses.

The FEP has resulted in higher course pass rates compared to overall university rates. This success is attributed to more intensive instruction, greater opportunities for students to interact with instructors, and the importance of peer reinforcement. For more information on this project, contact Ellen Levitov at 504-280-7036.

Department Highlights

TRIO programs are designed to provide a wide range of services to reach and support students who are low-income, first-generation college, or with disabilities, enroll in, persist through, and complete college. The Institutional Development and Undergraduate Educational Service (IDUES) provide support complementary to that of TRIO. Within IDUES, Title III and Title V programs support eligible institutions of higher education by providing funds for faculty development, for administrative management, for development and improvement of academic programs, and for student services improvement and strengthening of academic quality. In FY 2004, approximately \$95 million was awarded through IDUES for one-year planning grants and five-year development grants to support these efforts.

With a focus on both institutional improvements and undergraduate incentives, IDUES provides another avenue for institutions of higher learning to continue to enhance their abilities in supporting students to succeed.

Visit the IDUES web site at <http://www.ed.gov/ope/idues> for more information.

Tough Problems/Smart Solutions

Question: For the next grant cycle competition, I want to be certain that I receive my full number of prior experience (PE) points. What is the best way to do that?

Answer: To maximize prior experience (PE) points for the next grant cycle competition, projects must be high quality and provide the Department with performance data that are accurate, complete, and readily verifiable. This means you must maintain documentation supporting data submitted to the Department. You may consider organizing your data in the following categories:

- * eligibility of students being served,
- * services provided, and
- * objectives.

The performance data obtained during a Department site visit will be used to compute PE points for the grant. If, during a site visit, it is not possible to verify the data submitted in the performance report, then the accuracy of the data submitted for prior budget periods in the grant cycle, as well as the grantees' recordkeeping system, are called into question. In this case, the Department would not award PE points for previous budget periods in the grant cycle. Also, the Department would not award PE points in future periods in the same cycle unless the grantee's independent auditor verifies that the project has implemented the appropriate policies and procedures for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of performance report data.

Upcoming Key Dates

March

- 1 - Official establishment of the Peace Corps, in 1961
- 2 - Birthday of Theodor "Dr. Seuss" Geisel (1904–1991)
- 5 - CCAMPIS grant application workshop in Charleston, S.C.
- 17 - St. Patrick's Day
- 27 - Easter

April

SSS grants awarded

- 2 - The first U.S. Mint was established in Philadelphia, Pa., in 1792
- 3 - Daylight-saving time begins
- 15 - The luxury liner Titanic sank on its maiden voyage, in 1912
- 24 - Passover

May

- 5 - Holocaust Remembrance Day
- 8 - Mother's Day
- 21 - The American Red Cross was founded, in 1881
- 30 - Memorial Day

Mark Your Calendar

TS/EOC application workshops will be held in June and July in Washington D.C, Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, San Francisco, Denver, Seattle, Phoenix, Miami, and San Juan, P.R.

1, 2, TRIO

UB / UBMS / VUB – Passage of the president's FY 2006 budget request will impact all Upward Bound projects in the 2007–2008 project/school year.

TS / EOC – Passage of the president's FY 2006 budget request will impact current four-year TS projects in the 2006–2007 project/school year and current five-year grantees in the 2007–2008 project/school year.

We expect applications for new grant projects will be due in August. Application workshops will be held in Washington D.C., Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, San Francisco, Denver, Seattle, Phoenix, Miami, and San Juan, P.R. in June and July.

SSS – New grants will be awarded in late April. We expect to make 975 awards.

McNair – Thanks for taking time from your busy schedules to meet the deadline for submitting your annual performance reports!

Dissemination – Thank you to grantees who have submitted reports of accomplishments for FY 2004. TRIO staff is working on developing an evaluation instrument for project reporting that will be due in the fall of 2005.

CCAMPIS – Applications for new grant projects will be due in July. We expect to make over 200 awards.

Resources

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), an organization well-known for its commitment to developing and disseminating program standards, has developed Standards and Guidelines for TRIO and Other Educational Opportunity Programs. These standards and guidelines clearly communicate the characteristics and expectations of high-quality, successful TRIO programs. They are available through the “CAS TRIO Standards and Guidelines Toolkit” that includes these standards and guidelines, research papers, an online tutorial, models of TRIO programs that have implemented the standards, an online chat room, and other useful features. The toolkit may be accessed at no cost from www.pellinstitute.org/castoolkits.

The Counselors and Mentors Handbook on Federal Student Aid: 2005–06, the 2005–06 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and other helpful resources are posted on the FSA for Counselors Web site www.fsa4schools.ed.gov/counselors.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) offers the college pocket guide, College: What You Need to Know Before You Go, for college-bound students and parents to use during campus visits. The guide lists a number of questions that research, over the last 30 years, has shown to be positively related to high levels of student learning and development during college. It is intended to get prospective college students and their parents to think about these types of questions during the college decision-making process. The guide may be downloaded from NSSE's Web site www.iub.edu/~nsse.

Learning Community Resources

* <http://www.ed.gov/programs/slcp/strategies.html> – Is an overview of strategies that may be used to create smaller learning communities.

* <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/index.shtml> – Is a result of the Smaller Learning Communities Program of the U.S. Department of Education and provides information on key components of learning communities.

* http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/208 – Discusses the physical structures of schools to support small learning communities and how it is important educationally to have small learning communities.

* <http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu/> – Is the National Learning Communities Project home page, and provides learning community resources for college and university educators.

GOOD IDEAS

A Structured Freshman Year for At-Risk Students provides good information on serving students in groups. Go to www.eric.ed.gov/ and enter ERIC # ED420265 for the full report.

GROUP SUCCESS

Last school year, SSS students in the University of New Orleans (UNO) Freshman Experience Program had pass rates that exceeded their UNO peers ranging from 22 percent to 37 percent!

RESULTS MATTER

The University of New Orleans (UNO) SSS participant graduate rate based on the six-year period from September 1998 to August 2004 was 15.2 percent higher than that of a comparison cohort group and higher than UNO as a whole!

Note: The comparison cohort group consisted of UNO's College Life Program that is another program with comparable low-income and first-generation students.

BE PROUD

Ninety-five percent of the VUB participants enrolled in postsecondary education are in good standing at their institutions.