

Interim Report
CCSU Retention and Graduation Council
February 2008

INTRODUCTION

The Retention and Graduation Council was established in April 2007 to gain a better understanding of why students leave CCSU and why so many fail to graduate in six years and to make recommendations for increasing student persistence and academic success. The Council, which is jointly chaired by Dr. Carl Lovitt, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Dr. Margaret Toston, Vice President for Student Affairs, is composed of representatives from units that have a direct impact on student retention and graduation, as well as faculty representatives from the four academic schools and representatives from the student body (see membership list below). The Council has held monthly meetings since April 2007.

The Council elected to approach its charge by organizing into subcommittees, each of which studied retention and graduation with reference to a particular subpopulation of students: residential, commuter, transfer, and part-time; in addition, a subcommittee of the Council studied students who successfully completed CCSU degrees within six years, and a member of the Council surveyed students who had left CCSU without completing their degrees.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

We list below some of Council's findings concerning factors that influence students' retention and graduation:

- There is a strong and direct correlation between a student's first semester GPA and her/his ability to graduate within the six year period. Students who earn less than a 2.0 their first semester have a 9% chance of graduating within six years, whereas students who earn a 3.0 or better their first semester have a 70% chance of graduating within six years.
- Students who take courses during winter/summer sessions graduate at higher rates
- Students who report spending less than ten hours per week on academic work outside of the classrooms may be adversely impacted as to their ability to graduate within the six year period.
- The amount of reading done by student relates to their graduation success rate.
- A review of First-time Full-time Matriculated Freshmen Cohort indicates that Residential students have higher retention rates and slightly higher graduation rates.

The Council also identified the following factors as influencing student satisfaction, which may affect whether students remain at CCSU or complete their degrees within six years:

- Students complain about getting the "runaround"

- Students express concern about not enough courses being offered in their programs, as well as about the availability of general education courses.
- Students are dissatisfied with the quality of advising
- Students complain about the lack of services available in the evening
- Students complain about parking and about the food service
- Residential students had a higher level of satisfaction with their CCSU experience than commuter students, which may be attributable to the support that they receive from RAs and members of the Residence Life staff

The Council also raised the following questions, which we propose to investigate:

- How many students leave the university in good standing and why?
- Which students who begin full time change to part-time status and why?
- How many students complete significantly more credits than are required to complete a degree at CCSU? Could we consider a supplemental charge to students who complete over 140 credits?
- How many students are admitted to CCSU who don't meet our admission criteria? The Council raised the possibility of instituting a required intervention as a condition for students on probation to re-enroll. Should we consider admitting students who do not meet our admission criteria on a part-time basis their first semester and enrolling them in a curriculum to improve their chances of academic success?

ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

Although the Council has primarily focused to date on gathering information about the characteristics of specific student populations, the Council has been active in promoting institutional changes and policies that will increase student retention and graduation. Listed below are some of the actions that have been influenced by the Council:

- Encouraged approval of required mid-term grades for first-year and 100-level course
- Established a subcommittee to develop an intervention plan for students who are experiencing academic difficulty
- Initiated the recommendation to the Senate to rescind its ban on offering online courses during the fall and spring semesters
- Established Academic Advising Task Force
- SGA instituted help sessions for advising and registration
- A "Financial Aid Satisfactory Progress" document has been developed to inform students about the consequences of dropping below full-time status.
- Held advising workshop for new faculty
- Held transfer student focus groups
- Held two advising/registration days for transfer students
- Obtained approval to move the deposit date for returning students to March 1, from April 1. The outcomes are to confirm spaces for some new incoming students early, to increase public relations and retain new potential students before they choose other schools.
- Increased programming in residence halls for all students

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our research over the past year, the Retention and Graduation Council has developed specific recommendations that are intended to improve student satisfaction, retention, and graduation. The first set of recommendations below have implications for all CCSU students. Following those are recommendations for actions to improve the academic success of specific subpopulations of students. We conclude with recommendations to improve academic advising at CCSU, although the Academic Advising Task Force will shortly release its recommendations for a more comprehensive approach to academic advising:

- Foster a culture that takes pride in the high quality of its service to students
- Explore the feasibility of a common reading program
- Ensure that all student workers are properly trained and supervised and that they perform their duties with appropriate professionalism
- Update CCSU Web site to include virtual tour and “How To” podcasts.
- Encourage faculty to require more reading and writing of students
- Require mid-term grades for all first-year and 100-level courses,
 - Urge faculty to consider issuing three- and six-week grade reports
 - Send mid-term grades to advisors, as we do for athletes
- Consider options and alternatives for students who switch majors in the middle of their undergraduate academic careers or who are unable to meet the entrance requirements for a program.
 - Should we consider offering a General Studies/Liberal Studies degree as Charter Oak does?
 - What about offering this as an online degree?
- Inform parents and students about FERPA release form.
- Inform students about the implications of withdrawing from classes.
- Identify student problems early and institute mandatory interventions for students who are having difficulty. A curriculum needs to be developed, which would have both academic and co-curricular components.
- Develop an instrument for first-year students that could predict poor performance within the first three weeks of school
- Provide all students with a CD/flashdrive to include the catalog, academic affairs policies, general education presentation, etc.
- Institute an exit interview process for all students.
- Urge students’ major departments to schedule interviews when students request transcripts.
- Follow up with students who do not register for the next semester.
- Develop a more student-friendly process for distributing catalogs

Recommendations for Commuter Students

- Establish a “Commuter Students” tab on the Website with information about campus services in an FAQ format
- Develop a Commuter Student Handbook
- Obtain commuters’ off-campus addresses
- Continue the Commuter Coffees periodically during the semester
- Compose a “Did You Know...” checklist for commuter students.
- Create Informational Boards

- Institute a “Central Call Center,” staffed from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.; callers reach a live person; each unit should appoint a “point person” to serve as information resource for the unit.
- Explore establishing a commuter students’ organization
- Explore options for additional space dedicated to commuter students

Recommendations for Residential Students

- Conduct on-site peer/advising sessions directly in the halls during registration, similar to the project SGA did this past year.
- Compare graduation rates of non-resident students who started the same semester and year as RL students.
- Cautiously explore establishment of living-learning communities in the residence halls.

Recommendations for Transfer Students

- Identify and market the Office of Transfer Articulation and Partnerships as the contact office for transfer services for internal and external communities
- Create a tab on the Website for Transfer Students
- Advise students promptly about course transfer and transfer credits
- Hire faculty to advise students during summer and winter sessions
- Host transfer student orientation; recruit representatives from all academic programs
- Create an on-line orientation program to supplement formal advising and orientation days
- Address transfer student concerns about difficulty navigating Central Pipeline
- Publish an electronic newsletter for transfer students; academic departments can communicate with students and include updates
- Develop a transfer experience course to parallel the FYE (Computer Electronics and Graphics Technology Department is offering a course just for transfer students). This concept was opposed by students, who advise us not to make it a requirement.
- Simplify course substitution process
- Give chairs access to Brio Transcript Report

Recommendations for Part-Time Students

- Initiate a chapter of Alpha Sigma Lambda, an honor society for non-traditional college students, during the spring 2008 semester.
- Research the number of degree programs that may actually be completed on a part-time basis in the evening or on Saturdays.
- Increase the availability of resources after 5 p.m. i.e., bursar, advising, admissions, financial aid.
- Increase the availability of online CCSU courses during the fall and spring semesters.
- Encourage extension of operating hours of the library and computer center during the summer and winter sessions. Currently there are no weekend hours of operation.
- Increase the number of full-time faculty who teach in the evening.
- Increase the number of evening and weekend classes.
- Offer day care and other services to address the needs of older/married students.

Recommendations for Improving Advising

- Ensure that all advising units receive all relevant information: catalog in CD and hard copy, technology guide manual for students, guide to campus resources, etc.
- Help students plan their curricula at least two years in advance.
 - Students should know in their second year what courses they will need to take in their third and fourth years to graduate on time.
 - Use AdAstra to project course needs.
- Make sure evening students have the same advising opportunities as day students
- Make sure transfer students are adequately advised
- Provide incentives and professional development to encourage advisors' dedication to helping students complete their studies successfully
- Address problem of uneven distribution of advisees among faculty to ensure that students in all majors are appropriately advised.
- Consider assigning students to a "team" of advisors, rather than to individual advisors, to ensure availability of advising.
- Post all curriculum sheets on our website
- Explore options and create protocols for online advising

FUTURE ACTIONS PLANNED

The Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Student Affairs propose to award grants of \$5,000 in spring 2008 to each of the Council's subcommittees to support the implementation of the recommendations above. With feedback from the CCSU community, each subcommittee will prioritize recommendations and begin in spring 2008 to develop specific action plans for implementing its highest priority recommendations.

Retention and Graduation Council Members

Alicandro, Jean – Residence Life
Bigley, Mary Pat - Education/Professional Studies
Bunce, Paula – Research/Assessment
Chasse, Emily - Library
Corbitt, Timothy – Counseling/Wellness
Cox, Stephen – Criminology/Criminal Justice
Craine, Timothy – Mathematical Sciences
Davis, Michael – Biomolecular Sciences
Deloy, Pat – Career Services
Estrom, Alexander Charles – Student Government Association
Fangiullo, Elizabeth - Bursar
Frazier, Allan – Financial Aid
Garcia-Bowen, Myrna – Academic Articulations/Partnerships
Gimmartino, Mariette – Registrar's
Greene, Henry –Marketing
Hazan, Scott – Student Activities
Hensley, Patricia – Social Work
Hernandez, Ramon – Student Affairs
Hicks, Elizabeth – Advising
Horan, Mary – Arts and Sciences
Horrax, Sarah Jane - Student Government Association
Hosch, Braden – Research/Assessment
Lake-Piano, Kristin N. - Admissions
Leake, Margaret - Learning Center
Lovitt, Carl – Academic Affairs
McLaughlin, Mark – Marketing/Communications
Nunn, Mary Anne - English
Paige, Joseph - Academic Affairs
Petkova, Olga – Management Information Systems
Petrosino, Susan – Registrar's
Reasco, Awilda – Pre-Collegiate Access Services
Schuberth, Peggy – Continuing Education
Toston, Margaret – Student Affairs
Vincenti, Michael – Technology/Engineering Education
Washko, Lisa Ricci – Information Technology Services