

QEP STEERING COMMITTEE
Thursday, September 25, 2008

Attending: Mary Bantell, Adolfo Benavides, David Billeaux, Kent Byus, Marshall Collins, Margaret Dechant, Ann Degaish, David Grise, Bridgette Hardin, Mark Hartlaub, J. Carlos Huerta, Yolanda Keys, Joseph Loon, Frank Lucido, Gerardo Moreno, Nancy Nelson, Christine Shupala, Blair Sterba-Boatwright, Sarah Sutton, Susan Wolff-Murphy, Robert Wooster

Absent: Jim Needham, Robert Nelsen

Guest: Dr. Paul Orser

Wolff-Murphy introduced Dr. Orser who gave a presentation on student retention data he has compiled. Orser demonstrated his use of the Answer Tree program. Using 5,000 student records and sorting various data, such as gender, SAT scores, class rank, GPAs, family education history, financial need, and enrollment in developmental classes, he showed outcomes as to what makes a difference in retention rates.

It appeared that GPAs in students' first semester were most influential, i.e., higher GPAs indicated higher retention rates. GPAs were from students' first semester and did not include remedial/developmental classes. Development reading placement indicated a lower (2.05) GPA. Adding small high school class size lowered the GPA. Without development reading placement, and adding low class rank and gender was even lower (2.0). The data can help sort out what needs to be examined—looking for markers.

To indicate other factors regarding performance, a table was circulated with previous 5-year grade distributions for incoming freshman in large enrollment courses. Looking at percentage of below-C grades, including FW&IPs, in current year about 24% were below C, 16% FWIPs. Math & science are obvious problems but there were also differences within certain semesters. 2003, 2004 had lower percentages, 2005 & 2006—higher percentages. Possible focus for QEP is helping incoming students succeed in their first term. Doesn't mean grade inflation, but identifying students coming in with trouble and evaluating risk assessment tools and diagnostic systems. Student ability and attitude factors could play into the assessment to improve retention.

Question as to the learning/non learning community sections and how the below C courses are any more or less effective on retention. Orser can run data to determine what courses—electives, instructors, etc.—identify what may have an effect. He does not see taking it to the section level because that can put faculty on the defensive.

Discussion as to using retention rate and how much pre-admission data can be used. Dechant informed that class rank, income level, high school curriculum, distance from home and other factors are now available to plug into database. Loon asked about grade inflation and how that could affect retention. Is the teaching paradigm important to the QEP? To determine if learning has taken place, may need to change how we look at student learning/grades to indicate how student outcomes are improved.

Billeaux discussed that SACS does not see grades as the path to the outcome. Need to identify what the goals are, then work towards the learning outcomes. This data is a diagnostic tool to identify problems to address in the QEP. Have to focus on specific academic experience and then measure students and how grades are impacted. Can look at the steps to what actually improves retention, but SACS does not see that as a goal. SACS will look at the goals and the goals should show improvement.

Benavides asked about time of day of classes as a proxy to getting to attendance and how it affects students' performance. Orser discussed that the QEP's focus can diagnose a problem, set up the treatments, evaluate the effect of treatment, then see if there is an impact or improvement.

Orser looked at students who were not on scholastic probation after first semester, and found there is a correlation to retention. When students have 2.0 or higher, there are improvements in retention. A focus might be to help low scoring departments such as math to get the best return. The data gives some points to work from.

Wooster asked if there was any data on peer group student work. Orser has some data on student behavior as opposed to student cognitive ability. Discussion on students working away from campus and how much that takes from study time. Could show what the institution can do to address outside influences to student performance. More than likely, the solutions are going to be found in cultural, economic, and other support factors that interfere with performance.

Nelson suggested a theme could be engagement--ways to get students engaged to improve performance. Developmental reading students are not engaged in their courses, and do not feel a part of the university community. Orser indicated that students in math classes at various levels seemed to show that the fact of being in developmental classes did not matter as much as how they did in the class, which was somewhat unexpected.

Orser offered to the committee that this type of work is what his office can provide to assist with the QEP. Help with data, analysis, framing questions, assessment strategies, and other areas is available.

Wolff-Murphy: the revised Mission Statement has been approved by the Faculty Senate and is on the way to the Regents for approval. Some elements such as excellence in teaching, support of multicultural learning community, challenging educational experience, and closing historical educational gaps all connect to student learning. Loon discussed John Tagg "Learning Paradigm University" workshop. He recommends a program that assists with learning outcome—to find out if learning is taking place and how to look at it for the QEP. Orser suggested before getting much further, to decide what the topic is.

Wolff-Murphy wants to identify areas and responsible departments—refer to chart as a starting point for suggestion of elements and who might be responsible. There are other QEPs that can be looked at for ideas—link from the Web CT site. Billeaux suggested UAB's may be similar to our community, and gives examples of what learning outcomes are. Determine what areas the committee needs to start focusing on. Keys asked what parameters of first year would be. Concept of first year student is changing and committee should address what first year is as it relates to the QEP. Keys asked about core curriculum—will be linked through TAMUCC website. Next meeting: October 2, 2:30-4:30, location TBD.

Minutes submitted by: Ann Loberg

Approved by: Susan Wolff-Murphy & David Billeaux for submission to Committee

Approved by Committee: October 9, 2008