Building Communication for Student Success

Hillsborough Community College
Faculty In-Service, 8/20/07

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Today’s Presentation

• Broad Themes:
  – Improving Organizational Communication
  – Reviewing the Gateway Project
  – Defining Learning Outcomes
  – Student Retention
  – Suggestions for Practice
The Gateway Project: A QEP that “Gets it Right”

- Inclusive, broad faculty involvement
- Faculty-driven
- Effectively uses insights from the literature
- Particularly rigorous example of a meaningful educational research design
- Something in which everyone can take pride, help sustain, and help improve
Communication Process

Designing → Sending → Receiving → Interpreting
Organizational Communication: Open Systems View

Organizational Boundaries

Constraints

Organizational Communication Processes

Facilitators
Organizational Communication

- Both a process and an outcome
- Mediated by organizational and external constraints and facilitators
Focus on the Right End First!
Structural Determinants of Communication

- Physical Location
- Structural Organization and Disciplinary Groupings
- Centralization versus Decentralization
Cultural Determinants of Communication – Goal Clarity

• Important: knowing what we want
• A shared sense of mission, vision, and undergirding values aids alignment and communication
• Example: SCAD Mission Statement
  – The Savannah College of Art and Design exists to prepare talented students for professional careers, emphasizing learning through individual attention in a positively oriented university environment.
Goal Clarity: Motivators and Demotivators

- **Motivators:**
  - Broad-based involvement
  - Shared understanding
  - Knowing where the college is headed
  - Seeing the progress
  - Knowing our own voice matters

- **Demotivators:**
  - No communication of purpose or direction
  - No knowledge of progress made
  - No sense of involvement or feeling that our voice matters
Goal Clarity: HCC Mission

- Hillsborough Community College, a public, comprehensive institution of higher education, empowers students to excel through its superior teaching and service in an innovative learning environment.
Goal Clarity: QEP Goals

- **Goal I:** To achieve demonstrable student learning gains in identified gateway college-level knowledge, skills and abilities.

- **Goal II:** To increase the student success rate in subsequent program work through demonstrable student learning gains in identified gateway college-level knowledge, skills and abilities utilized in those courses.
Gateway Project:
Advantages in Goal Clarity

• Simple, clear focus
• Purpose completely appropriate to community college education
• Implementation that relies on faculty developing and owning a sense of what is important in student learning
Cultural Determinants of Communication: Role Clarity

- What is the nature of our contract and our work?
- Building a community of reflective practice
  - People working together on a common problem
  - Using information on student learning
  - Reflecting and discerning what is working comparatively better,
  - Diffusing good teaching and learning practice
Wergin (2003): Faculty Motivators

- **Autonomy**, the freedom to contribute to the common good;
- **Community**, the opportunity to be a vital part of a group of scholars;
- **Recognition**, or public validation, and
- **Efficacy**, the sense that what we do matters.
The Languages We Speak

- Disciplinary linguistic conventions (e.g., Delta $\Delta$ for engineers vs. pre-test/post-test difference for psychologists)
- Differences among cultures of the academy (cf. Bergquist, 1992)
- Accreditation agencies
- State coordinating board
Defining A Shared Language

- What about a shared language that...
  - Spans boundaries and is understandable to faculty, administrators, students, advisory boards, and members of the public
  - Is a way of discussing what we do in a way that helps communicate and coordinate our efforts within and between departments
  - Is a way of communicating the progress our students are showing -- in a way that all parties can understand
The Shift to Student Learning

• “The shift to student learning poses many questions:
  – Can we change the structure of higher education so it measures students' progress by their learning achievements rather than by how long they sit in a classroom?
  – Is our curriculum structured and coordinated in such a way that facilitates interdisciplinary thinking?
  – Can we allocate the valuable time of faculty toward those students who might benefit the most from faculty attention?
  – Can we more fully exploit technology to enhance student learning at less cost?”

• “The answers to all of these questions are much easier if we focus on learning outcomes.”

- Harvey Perlman, Chancellor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (2004).
Emergence of a Shared Language via the Gateway Project

- Growth spiral put into operation:
  - building a shared language and understanding through a focus on student competencies
  - Extending the mapping process for key KSAs
  - Engaging faculty in the disciplines
  - Building communication within and between departments: operationalizing faculty expectations for student learning
Operationalizing Faculty Expectations for Student Learning

Focus: Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

Engineering: Design Process

Nursing: Problem-Solving Process

End Game: Student Progress on Problem-Solving through Definition, Measurement, Reflection, and Diffusion of Good Practices
Building Communication with Students

• Do students understand what they are expected to master?
• Do we understand their communication norms?
• Do we understand student linguistic conventions?
Millennial Students

- Need to understand why they are doing what they are doing – the objectives of classroom activities and projects.
- Want to have input into their educational processes.
- Want to be involved in meaningful activities, not mundane work.
- Think it is cool to be smart.
- Will respond well to programs like “learning communities and service learning.”
- Are likely to appreciate clear expectations, explicit syllabi, and well structured assignments.
- Expect detailed instructions and guidelines for completing assignments.
- Want to know what will be covered on tests and what exactly must be done to earn an “A” and
- Because of their high expectations of themselves, students may become demoralized by earning a B or C in college.

Source: Manning, Everett, and Roberts (2007)
Summary So Far

• The Gateway Project has given us:
  – Clear, succinct goals
  – A purpose for coming together and a problem to solve
  – A situation that involves important motivators for faculty
  – A way to communicate
    • Within and across departments
    • Between faculty and administration
    • Between faculty and students
Defining Retention

• **Institution-centric definition**
  – Term-to-term return
  – Year-to-year return

• **Student-centric definition**
  – Got what they came for
  – Early leavers with marketable skills
  – Economic impact of their college courses
Building Student Retention

- No quick fixes within the open access policy and mission of the community college
- It takes sustained organizational alignment: Georgia Tech example
  - In 1998: 85% first-year retention rate
  - Interventions: first-year seminars, peer-to-peer advising, small group work in large lecture courses
  - In 2006: 93% first-year retention rate
Retention: Main Points

• Retention is an outcome of organizational processes
  – It doesn’t happen overnight
  – It takes all parts of the college working together to succeed
  – The benefits are incremental
  – We just have to keep looking at the results and talking it over as a community of practice to figure out what works and put it in place in our institutions.

• Question: how can other elements of the college align with the academic component of the QEP?
Bucket Theory (Crow, 2007)

- Understanding student backgrounds and experiences at a more granular level
- Understanding student departure as a set of disparate behaviors

Key elements:
- Development of a practical student typology
- Disaggregating disparate departure behaviors
- Close inspection of influences from divergent sources upon the predicted probability of early departure by different types of students
Faculty: What is our role in building communication for student success?

• Teaching Practices that Facilitate Engagement and Retention
  – Clear understanding of evaluation standards for student work: developmental rubrics
  – Clear expectations: curriculum maps
  – Feedback and critique
  – Leveraging technology
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**Key**
- T: competency is taught
- R: competency is reinforced
- I: competency is fully utilized/integrated
Summary: Building communication for student success means:

- Clearly communicating goals across the college
- Using a common language to communicate: framing discussions in terms of student learning
- Creating motivating and engaging opportunities for faculty to develop a community of practice
- Using data from measurement of student gains to engage in critical reflection on teaching practice
Summary: Building communication for student success means:

- Adopting successful teaching practices that facilitate student engagement, retention of material, and success through gateway courses and beyond
- Aligning academic processes to facilitate student knowledge gains, success and retention
- Aligning college processes to facilitate student success and retention
- Acknowledging and honoring faculty successes in furthering student success under the Gateway Project
Thank You!

Questions and Discussion?