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Teacher Learning Community: Retention
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Student Activities and Retention

Inspiration:

As a college student I was on the campus activities board of the university I attended for three years. I believe strongly that by becoming involved in student life on campus it helped shape me into who I am today. I am proud to be an alumnus of the university and I truly believe I had a full college experience.

Focus:

How becoming involved in student activities will increase retention through feeling better connected to the campus community.

Colleagues who Observed:

Sherri Cummins-Black, Tutor Coordinator and former Director of Student
Activities

Chi'na Marie, Adjunct Instructor

Marcia Sterling, Director of Student Activities

Summary of Classroom Activity:

I took parts of my ENGL 118: Technical Writing classroom sessions to help me with this activity. (Note: Technical Writing students must learn how to use proper design/layout techniques, etc for technical documents, including posters) At the beginning of class I had us sit in a circle and asked them prewritten questions. The questions were:

1. Have you ever been to an on or off campus activity sponsored by the college? If so, which type? What actual activity? What made you go there? Friends? Posters? Interest in topic? If not, why not? Time? Outside influences?
2. What kind of activities do you think the college sponsors?
3. Any suggestions on types of activities you would try to attend? What other factors might draw you in?
4. Do you feel connected with the campus?

5. Do you think being connected to the campus helps you and other students do better in academic courses?
6. How much information do you know about the activities that do take place?
Cost?
7. Do you think the promotion of an activity is well advertised?
8. Would you go to an activity by yourself? Why or why not?
9. What motivates you to stay in college?

I then gave my students an assignment. They must attend at least one student activity on campus, and design a poster advertising that particular event. I gave them two weeks to complete this assignment, so that they would have more opportunities to attend a variety of events if desired. The first few days they had to take notice of what activities were offered on campus on their own, however, during the next class sessions I showed them that week's events in order to help them know what activities they could attend.

On the due date of the poster assignment, I took another part of a class session to have some follow-up questions answered and to determine if this helped students want to attend another activity in the future, and if this particular course and/or event helped them feel better connected to the San Juan College campus community. The follow-up questions were:

1. After attending an activity would you attend another one? The same type?
2. What were your feelings before, during, and after the activity?
3. Did you feel that this activity was well advertised? Was it what you expected?
4. Did you meet anyone new?
5. Did you learn anything?
6. Do you think by attending activities you might feel better connected to the campus community?
7. How connected do you feel to the campus community?
8. What makes you feel connected to the campus community?

Results:

The response from the initial set of questions was intriguing. Many of the students had never attended an activity on campus. It was mostly due to other priorities and time constraints. Many of them have children and if they are already trying to balance family, work, and school time for extracurricular activities is limited.

Activities that they would be drawn to often involved free food. If a student did attend an activity it often was not a planned event, but rather something he/she “stumbled” upon.

Activities they would like to attend on one’s that interest them or will help them. One student suggested having a 12 Step Program or AA Meeting available on campus. Another student shared how fundraisers for medical causes grab her attention. Overall, however, many students felt that the events that did occur on campus were not well advertised, so they did not know when they could attend an activity.

Many do not feel very connected to the campus community. The factors that motivate them to stay in college are their parents encouraging them, the desire to better themselves for their children, and fear of failure. Some of these responses were delivered with a lot of emotion.

With the second set of questions, and overall results, the students found that they became more aware of what takes place on campus. They began to notice posters for events that were always there, but they never fully paid attention to them. They began to search out what might be of interest to them.

Most students attended a Family Swim Night or something that was specific to their field, such as an automotives get together. Many of them found that the activities that included their entire families were helpful. They had a lot of fun with their children, etc. and often invited someone else to go with them as well. One student said that she and a friend of hers took their children to Family Swim Night and then went to McDonald’s afterward. They made a whole night of it and it was a fun time to spend with their children. It was also something they were rarely able to do, so it was nice to take the time to do it.

Some students had preconceived ideas of what a student activity might be like. They often thought of cliques in high school and how they would feel left out, etc. In turn, they discovered that people who attended were just like them and that they were actually a lot of fun. The initial fear of not being accepted or simple

fears of inadequacy dissipated as they attended the activity. All students who attended an activity said they would now attend another one.

None of the students said they learned anything or that they met anyone new, however, this is only the beginning. One activity will not fulfill everything, however, it is a start for students to begin to branch out and become more involved with the campus community.

Future Modifications:

Due to time constraints and this being the first Teaching Learning Community on Retention, this classroom activity was done late into the semester. In the future, I would suggest doing it earlier in the semester AND allowing students more time to actually attend the activities offered through the college. This will affect how much time they are able to give to the project and how successful it truly can be.