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Campus Culture Dimension Report McHenry County College

Foundations Institutions make new students a high priority for faculty and staff. A culture of responsibility for the experiences of new students characterizes these institutions. This culture is realized through high-quality instruction, services, and support as well as substantial interaction with students both inside and outside the classroom. Campus leaders nurture this culture and support it by appropriate institutional recognition and rewards.

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Current Situation:

In the fall of 05, McHenry County College instituted a "First Year Experience" course entitled MCC 101, The College Experience. Our current practice is that a student must complete MCC 101 within their first year of attendance, with a grade of "D" or better. If the student has not fulfilled this requirement by the end of their first year then a block is put on their record making them unable to register for any future courses. The core topics that are covered in MCC 101 include Critical thinking, Diversity, Personal Responsibility (Student Code of Conduct) and Time management. The challenge we see here is the lack of motivation on the part of the students to become critical thinkers in a one credit hour course offering that doesn't transfer to most other institutions.

Our academic administrators encourage our faculty through means of professional development workshops, a faculty mentoring program, departmental meetings, and classroom evaluations. From the results of the faculty/staff survey though, it is apparent that we need to do more. Even though the survey results indicate a mean of 3.41 for the Campus Culture Dimension, six out of the nine questions that pertained to this dimension resulted in a score of 2.89 or lower, with 2.38 being the lowest. It is apparent to the committee from the survey results that even though Senior Administrators believe in the concept of the New Student, this is not being communicated or acted upon, which is a necessary component in making it a part of our campus culture.

As is stated in the Faculty Handbook, page 34, the college offers alternative pedagogies and instructional methods such as learning communities, service learning courses, and special curriculum infusions such as ethics across the curriculum, internships, individualized study, independent study, online learning and telecourses. Even though the college offers these alternative pedagogies and instructional methods, the faculty/staff survey results indicate a need for the senior administrators to communicate this concept better in order to build a "campus culture".

Areas of Concern:

- Expectations for involvement with new students are not clearly communicated to new highly hired instructors whether they are part-time or full-time. Evidence supports this by there not being a standard question formulated to address "New Students" in the hiring process of new instructors. (There is a standardized question formulated for the area of diversity.)
- Based on the responses we received from the various employee groups across campus to this question "Are the expectations for involvement with new students clearly communicated to you in your position at MCC?" - We discovered that this communication is not happening with newly hired or continuing instructors through the following examples of some of the responses:

- "Off the top of my head, I cannot recall any directions from administration over the years about involvement with new students.
 - "Not really, and I am faculty. I kind of just know, but nobody has spelled it out for me. Neither do we explain the services available to new students to our faculty."
 - "There is nothing in my job description as an executive dean relative to working with new students."
 - "No, never communicated to me."
 - "Umm, No."
 - "I am a faculty member, and no, I don't think we have a clear expectation regarding new students - just students in general."
- Our current Academic Progress Policy as is stated in the college catalog (pg.18): "If you have less than a 2.0 cumulative grade point average after 24 credit hours completed, you'll be required to meet with a counselor."
 - Is MCC 101 doing what's it is designed to do... should this be revisited? And does MCC need to require MCC 101 be a graduation requirement in order to make it easier to enforce? It is currently being offered under the guise that it is a requirement for those students who are enrolled full-time, making it somewhat difficult to enforce. As the course has only been in existence for approximately one year, assessing the value of this course has and will continue to be a challenge.
 - The observance of students sitting in their cars studying before or after class is an area of concern for this committee. Some may actually be just smoking in their car as this is a smoke free campus; however we have also observed students sitting on the floor waiting for their next class to begin.

Summary of Evidence

Based on the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2004.

Benchmark A. Active and Collaborative Learning: Students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Through collaboration with others to solve problems or master challenging content, students develop valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, community, and their personal lives.

The seven survey items that contribute to this benchmark include: 4a: Asking questions in class or contributing to class discussions, 4b: Making a class presentation, 4f: Working with other students on projects during class, 4g: Working with classmates on assignments outside of class, 4h: Tutoring other students, 4i: Participating in a community-based project as a part of a course, and 4r: Discussing ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class.

Benchmark D. Student-Faculty Interaction: The more contact students have with their teachers, the more likely they are to learn effectively and to persist toward achievement of their educational goals. Personal interaction with faculty members strengthens students' connections to the college and helps them focus on their academic progress. Working with an instructor lets students see first-hand how experts identify and solve practical problems, and faculty members become role models, mentors, and guides.

The six items in this benchmark include: 4k: Using email to communicate with an instructor, 4l: Discussing grades or assignments with an instructor, 4m: Talking about career plans with an instructor or advisor, 4n: Discussing ideas from your classes with instructors outside of class, 4o: Receiving prompt feedback from instructors on one's performance, and 4q) Working with instructors on activities other than coursework.

Benchmark E. Support for Learners: Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relationships among different groups on campus. Community college students also benefit from services targeted to assist them with academic and career planning, academic skill development, and other issues that may affect both learning and retention.

The following items are associated with benchmark E: 9b: Providing the support needed to help one succeed at this college, 9c: Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds, 9d: Helping one cope with non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.), 9e: Providing the support one needs to thrive socially, 9f: Providing the financial support one needs to afford education, 13a1: Using academic advising/planning services, and 13b1) Using career counseling services.

Table 1 MCC CCSSE Benchmark Comparisons

| Benchmark Name | MCC Score | Group Comparisons | | |
|----------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|----------|
| | | Means | Mid-Sized | All 2004 |

| | | <i>Colleges</i> | | <i>CCs</i> |
|--------------------------------------|------|-----------------|------|------------|
| A. Active and Collaborative Learning | 47.9 | Score | 49 | 50 |
| | | Difference | -1.1 | -2.1 |
| | | Difference | -4.1 | -4.6 |
| D. Student-Faculty Interaction | 43.4 | Score | 49.2 | 50 |
| | | Difference | -5.7 | -6.6 |
| E. Support for Learners | 43.8 | Score | 49.7 | 50 |
| | | Difference | -5.9 | -6.2 |

Our evidence shows that with a "learning community" there is a higher degree of interaction and involvement between teachers and students. They break down the barriers between disciplines and enable students to interact in new and unexpected ways with each other and the faculty. Learning Communities are an exciting and challenging approach to learning. Topics from separate courses are blended together in a unique way and the class is team-taught with both instructors present at all times. As discussion evolves, ideas are examined from different viewpoints. The instructors always work to stretch the students' minds.

From our CPI and the response from the Policy Center, we need to take a look at our Making Academic Progress Policy. Our current policy set at 24 credit hours might actually be too late in the process in order to retain students, especially those students enrolled in the developmental courses.

An observance of students studying in their cars and sitting outside classrooms on the floor, demonstrates the need from the committee's point of view that the students need a place of their own in which they can congregate and study; such as a "student lounge." In addition to the observation that was made by the committee, an informal panel discussion was held with a group of students to find out what kind of an environment they would like to see. Overwhelming the response from the students was; more comfortable seating areas spread out across the campus, which would create a more welcoming environment.

According to the Faculty/Staff Survey conducted in 2006 faculty involvement with new students is considered relatively high at a mean of 3.71 by Institutional leaders and even higher at the departmental level at a mean of 3.89, yet when asked "To what degree is excellence in teaching new students acknowledged, recognized, and or rewarded by: Institution leaders;" the mean drops to 2.76. The questions addressing the Hiring Process here at MCC resulted in even lower means ranging from 2.25 to 2.57.

Recommended Grade: C-

Recommended Action Items:

- MCC 101 - Learning Community (*High priority*)

Reformat MCC 101 - The College Experience into a Learning Community where MCC101 would be linked with CIS (Computer Literacy) and possible developmental reading or writing; for the equivalent of a three credit hour course. The coursework would be integrated to emphasize the connections between two or more subjects.

- Hiring Process (*High priority*)

Formulate a standard question in the hiring process of instructors addressing "New Students."

- Making Academic Progress Policy (*High priority*)

Re-evaluate our current policy of 24 credit hours. Our current Academic Progress Policy as is stated in the college catalog: "If you have less than a 2.0 cumulative grade point average after 24 credit hours completed, you'll be required to meet with a counselor."

- Professional Development (*High priority*)

Get Professional Development involved in the project/concept to help make faculty and staff aware of the responsibilities related to new students; by designing workshops geared to the "First Year Student."

- Physical Environment (*High priority*)

Create welcoming physical environments throughout campus. This action item came from the feedback we received during a focus group discussion that was held with a group of students and per the discussions we had at our dimension meetings.

Evaluate where students study and congregate and provide comfortable seating outside of classrooms and other areas across campus.

- Alternative Communication Tools (*High priority*)

Based on the feedback from our focus group discussion with the students, we found out they will not use e-mail. Students would utilize an MCC - My Space.

- Student Mentoring Program (*Medium priority*)

Develop a Student Mentoring Program. Per the results of our focus group discussion we discovered that students would like to learn from their fellow classmates. They also feel that they would like to learn as they go.