



THE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT MODEL AS A HIGH IMPACT PRACTICE

For presentation at the Association of American Colleges and Universities Conference

Washington D.C.

January 21, 2010

**Jack Calareso,
President
Anna Maria College
jcalareso@annamaria.edu**

**Andrew Klein
Dean of Student Affairs and Retention
Anna Maria College
aklein@annamaria.edu**

**Stephen Neun
Dean of Academic Affairs
Anna Maria College
sneun@annamaria.edu.**

The Student Engagement Model as a High Impact Practice

Executive Summary

Anna Maria College is a four-year, private, co-ed, Catholic liberal arts college located in Paxton Massachusetts with an undergraduate enrollment of 768 and graduate student enrollment of 274. The college was established in 1946 by the Sisters of St. Anne with a mission to foster in its students intellectual involvement, career preparation, social awareness, dedication to justice and peace, and religious and moral sensitivity. As with many small tuition-driven colleges, Anna Maria faces the challenge posed by limited resources while attempting to identify high-impact practices that will support the student success. Buoyed by a strategic plan that includes a commitment to the Student Engagement Model and collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, Anna Maria College has identified a number of effective strategies. This program is designed to share some of those practices and the measures of their success as well as foster a discussion centered on the program development process that brought together different campus constituencies.

The basic approach to the Student Engagement Model has the whole hearted endorsement by the President and the Deans of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. These individuals brought to Anna Maria programs that they were familiar with from previous institutions, such as Boston University, Ohio Dominican University and Utica College, and they refined the programs so they would be effective at their current institution. As faculty and staff were shown that the outcomes of these programs mirrored their own goals for student success, it was relatively easy to bring the two constituencies together and collaborate on the new initiatives.

Critical to the success of the Student Engagement Model is to identify students in academic trouble early and provide support services throughout the entire semester. The model takes a holistic view of student success and centers around three basic points of engagement:

1. An Early alert system.
2. The mid-term warning system
3. The review of student success at the conclusion of the semester by the Eligibility Committee

An Early Alert System

Faculty members are asked to identify students who are showing signs of struggling as early as two weeks into each semester. These reports are submitted to a Dean's Council comprised of the Dean of Student Affairs, Dean of Academic Affairs and four other Student Affairs staff members including the Director of the Learning Center. At these meetings the council determines a proper intervention for each student and the responsible member also reports back to the faculty member who initiated the concern. As faculty saw that someone was responding to their alerts, and more importantly, that students were responding to the interventions, the faculty developed more confidence in the program and the number of alerts submitted has increased steadily.

The Mid-term Warning System

Faculty members are asked to submit mid-warnings to the Academic Dean's office after mid-term exams. Once they are received copies are sent to the students, the student's advisor and to the Director of the Learning Center. This information is then used to determine if additional academic support is needed. This coming semester we are replacing the mid-term warning system with a mid-term grade system and faculty will be required to submit mid-term grades through college's information system. The advantage of this approach is twofold. First, the Dean's Council, the Learning Center and advisors will have a much more complete academic picture of each student and, second, students will be able to access their grades through the web and assess their own academic progress.

The Review of Student Success at the Conclusion of the Semester

At the conclusion of each semester the Dean of Academic Affairs calls together the Eligibility Committee to review the academic status of each who has a GPA under 2.0. The committee is chaired by the Dean of Academic Affairs and is composed of the faculty (Division Chairs and Chairs of the major committees), the Dean of Student Affairs and Retention, and the Director of the Learning Center. The Committee reviews the academic record of each student with a GPA under 2.0 to determine if they should be placed on Academic Warning, Academic Probation or Suspension. While a GPA criterion has been established and is applied, the Committee uses its judgment when evaluating students. Students placed on suspension must make an appointment with the Dean of Academic Affairs to discuss their situation, are limited to 12 credit hours for the upcoming semester, may be required to take a College Learning Strategies course, and are required to meet with the Director of the Learning Center to craft an Academic Success Contract. We view probation as a plan of action rather than a penalty and the academic progress of each student on probation is monitored the following semester.

Other successful programs that have depended on the collaboration between departments include the Success Contracts for students on probation, Conditional Acceptance programs, a new Honors Program and the drive to establish a student organization affiliated with each major on campus.

Assessment

The fact that Anna Maria College is a small institution affords us the luxury of assessing the effectiveness of these programs by studying the academic success of the individual students. The Dean of Student Affairs maintains a list of all students discussed in the Dean's Council meetings and is able to assess the effectiveness of interventions by the academic performance and persistence of the student. Detailed records are kept on the performance of students on probation, and we have learned that each semester, over 85% of the students on probation who take part in the Success Program increase their GPA over the previous semester. In the aggregate, we have also seen an increase in retention rates and are predicting a corresponding increase in six-year graduation rates.

NOTES