Achieving the Dream – Data Team

Notes

October 5, 2011
2:30
HLRC 4th Floor

Present: Celena Alcala, Elizabeth Bell, Betsy Regalado, Matthew Robertson, Kell Stone, Rebecca Tillberg, Beraki Woldehaimenot

1. *Achieving the Dream – goals, principles, process*. The group briefly reviewed the 4 goals and 5 principles of Achieving the Dream, as posted at the AtD web site (http://www.achievingthedream.org/) There was some discussion about how the AtD effort to improve student outcomes differs from previous such efforts.
2. *Role of Data Team – Review/Revise Planning Year Work Plan*. The over-all plan for the year with the AtD project was discussed, with special focus on the role of the Data Team. The draft Work Plan was reviewed along with the dates for the items related to the Data Team. The Data Team will present a report to the Student Success Committee/AtD Core Team in November. In order to meet this deadline, the Data Team will need to meet weekly for the next several weeks.
3. *Data Sources*. Rebecca reviewed the types of data that the group potentially will have at its disposal. There is data about West's students, programs, service area, survey data and more available on the college web site (http://www.wlac.edu/orp/).

    A second source of data is the Readiness Assessment that was completed by the Student Success Committee on behalf of the college to support the application to join AtD. Rebecca described the idea of creating a SurveyMonkey survey of the Readiness Assessment questions to send to the whole college community to obtain more data; then the results could be discussed at the Leadership Retreat, which will focus on Achieving the Dream. Elizabeth suggested using a Scantron version of the survey to be completed in division meetings as a way to get a higher response rate. Kell expressed concern that some of the questions were so specific that most people would not know about the issue, for example "IT capacity is adequate to meet the demand for data and institutional research." Asking such questions could obtain uninformed responses that would muddy the data. The group did not feel clear about using the Readiness Assessment as an information collection tool, though we can return to the question again later.

    A third source of data could be focus groups. This can be an especially effective way of gathering insights into what students are thinking about and what difficulties stand in the way of reaching their goals.

    Yet another approach to data is the use of tracking cohorts of students with a focus on 'exit points.' This approach is based on following a group of new students through their experience at West to find out at which points they are likely to drop out of the educational process.

4. *Discussion of Currently-available data*. We began our discussion of data with the College Profile, which is published online (http://www.wlac.edu/orp/research/college_profile.html), answering the question "who are West's students?" Some highlights include:

- Ethnicity
  - Change in ethnicity question has changed the distribution of the various ethnic groups
  - The largest group is African American (40.5%) followed by Hispanic (33.5%)
  - The percent Multi-Ethnic was smaller than might be expected (2.3%)
- Primary Language
  - English is reported as the primary language of 85.6% of students. It was a surprise that the % is so large.
  - Spanish is reported as the primary language of just 7.3% of students.
- Age
  - Average age is 28 years
  - Largest age group of students is 20-24 years old, with nearly 30% of students.
- Gender – nearly 61% of students are female
- Full Time/ Part Time – only 21% of students are full time
- Placement Levels – there is an extremely large need for instruction at the basic skills and pre-college levels in both English and Math
  - Math – 52% place at Basic Skills level; 46 % place at Pre-College level
  - English – 33% place at Basic Skills level; 37.6% place at Pre-College Level
- Course Completion – To facilitate the discussion about course completion, the group used a query software, BrioQuery, to drill down into grade distribution data. We were able to answer 'what if' questions as they arose while we considered the implications of the data. We examined and reflected on course completion data at the division, discipline and instructor levels.

  We discovered that the division with the lowest rate of successful course completion is Mathematics, with a successful completion rate in Spring 2011 of 42%. College wide the successful completion rate is 63%. The division with the highest rate of successful completion is Allied Health with 96%. We had extensive discussion about the issues students face and the causes of low success rates, focusing especially on:
  - Lack of prerequisites
  - Broad acceptance of late adds
  - Textbooks not used from beginning of class

  As we discussed each of these areas, we noted layers of complexity that contribute to each general problem. For example, many students do not have textbooks at the beginning of class. We discussed the availability of financial aid, and of emergency loans provided especially so that students can purchase texts. Many students are 'class shopping' and don't purchase the text until they decide on the class. One reason students can shop for classes is that late adds are permitted and the add deadline is not enforced. Related issues are that Add Cards are valid for too long a period of time, and students can still add online during the first week of class resulting in 'double adds' if the instructor gives add cards to students who are attending class.

This discussion illustrates the inter-relatedness of various policies and procedures at West. The AtD Core Group will do a systematic review of policies and procedures that may hinder student success.

We discussed the question: are we here to help students reach their goals, or are we here to create a high-quality college? Although we feel that our ultimate purpose is to support students in reaching their goals by providing a high-quality education, students may feel that we are blocking them when we enforce policies such as late adds and prerequisites.

We clarified that the faculty at West can establish prerequisites, and that it is not a District function. In order to establish a math or English prerequisite for a different discipline, for example, math for a physics course, the division must request a validation study from the Office of Research and Planning.

5. *Next steps / next meeting*. The next meeting will be Wednesday, October 12 at 2:30 in HLRC 4th floor. We will continue our reflections on data, and compile a list of the additional data and analyses that we need.