Increasing Student Persistence and Degree Completion: Successful Strategies from a Title V Cooperative Grant Project

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GSU Latino Center for Excellence: Title V Cooperative Grant Project

- **Purpose of Title V Grants**
  - Awarded to HSIs to build the capacity of the institution to better serve the needs of its Latino student population

- **Cooperative Title V Grant**
  - HSI community college in suburban Chicago in partnership with upper division university were granted a cooperative grant
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- Upper division cohort population characteristics
- 67% female, 33% male,
- Average age was 28 years old
- 87% married
- 35% received financial aid; 75% relied on loans or savings
- 48% part time students
- Academic majors included speech pathology, social work, interdisciplinary studies, accounting, business, and psychology
Goal of cooperative grant was to increase Latino student persistence and degree completion:

- Increase persistence rates by 25% from baseline
- Increase graduation rates by 20%
- Increase student engagement by 20%
- Increase Latino student enrollment by 15% from baseline of 5%
- Reduce time to graduation to 6 terms
- Transfer community college students to upper division university
Grant outcomes

- Student persistence increased by 95%
- Degree completion rate was 82%
- Average time to degree completion decreased from 2-7 years to 2-3 years
- 67% of graduates enrolled in graduate school
- Student engagement increased by 68%
- High level of satisfaction and student involvement, based on student surveys, focus groups, and structured interview techniques
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- Components of grant project
- Cohort model
- Strategies
  - Early intervention
  - Intrusive advising
    - Peer and faculty mentoring/Integration strategies
  - Tracking system
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- Cohort model: 5 cohorts in 5 years; 142 students total
- First year of grant all undergraduate students were contacted; subsequent years students with less than 12 cr. hrs. at GSU
- Registered for first time at GSU within previous 3 years
- Invited to an orientation seminar at the beginning of each academic year to learn about the program
  - Learn about GSU and its student support services
- After orientation selected students completed assessment of skills, academic interests, and career paths
  - Included Myers Briggs, Noel Levitz Student Inventory, College Student Inventory
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- Priority for selection was given to students at academic risk
  - Lower GPAs
  - First in family to attend college
  - Identified needs in English, math, or sciences
  - Students transferring from partnering community colleges

- Selected students participated in enrichment program
  - 6 weekend sessions that assisted participants in developing academic, social, psychological skills to cope with academic challenges
  - Individualized student plan developed in collaboration with student
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- Strategies
  - Intrusive Advising
    - Cohort advisor met with each student to review academic plan and needs
    - Faculty mentor assigned to each peer mentor
      - Guided peer mentors in their role
      - Provided information on college, program, and university guidelines
      - Provided information on resources, learning or research, and network opportunities for specific careers
    - Served as mentors for Honors Program
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- Strategies
  - Intrusive Advising
    - Peer mentor assigned to each cohort student
    - Graduate students who were recommended by faculty
    - Underwent training session
    - Met with students face-to-face; maintained contact through e-mail and phone calls
    - Provided support for academic progress and social integration at GSU, not tutoring
  - Strongest cohort members served as peer mentors to community college cohort members
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- Strategies
  - Early intervention
    - At the beginning and end of each academic period, professors who had cohort students in classes were asked to submit feedback on student’s academic progress
    - Noted areas of difficulty for student
    - Provided recommendations to help student
    - Provided feedback in online questionnaire, by phone, or face-to-face meetings with cohort advisor or activity director
    - Recommended best students to be peer tutors
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- Strategies
- Tracking System
  - Demographic and academic progress data used to identify at-risk students
  - Provided evidence that interventions met grant goals
  - Database developed to collect all data for the program
  - Data included demographic data, survey/questionnaire data, cohort advisor reports, peer and faculty mentor reports, early intervention data, tutor reports
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Orientation seminar

Enrichment seminar

Assessment

Students’ need for services

Intrusive Advising

- Community college cohort
- Cohort peers
- Graduate student mentors
- Faculty mentors

Tracking

Early intervention
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- Unique qualities of grant project
- LCE developed direct relationships with each College, its administrators and faculty members, and all stakeholders that were involved with the students
- A core group of 14 faculty members provided input into the program
- Early intervention and peer mentoring focused on improving students’ academic progress, not on tutoring students
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- Lessons Learned: Barriers to Academic Progress
  - Delayed enrollment each academic term
  - Part-time enrollment
  - Student and family lack of planning
  - Lack of information about student services and institution’s academic opportunities
  - Limited opportunities for faculty-student interactions
  - Full-time work
  - Having dependents other than spouse
  - Single parenthood
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- Recommendations
  - Tracking database is critical for assessment, developing individualized interventions, accountability
  - Work with faculty members to develop early intervention
  - Early intervention goes way beyond tutoring
  - Use peer mentoring as part of intrusive advising to support academic progress and social integration, not just for tutoring