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

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- 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

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- 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
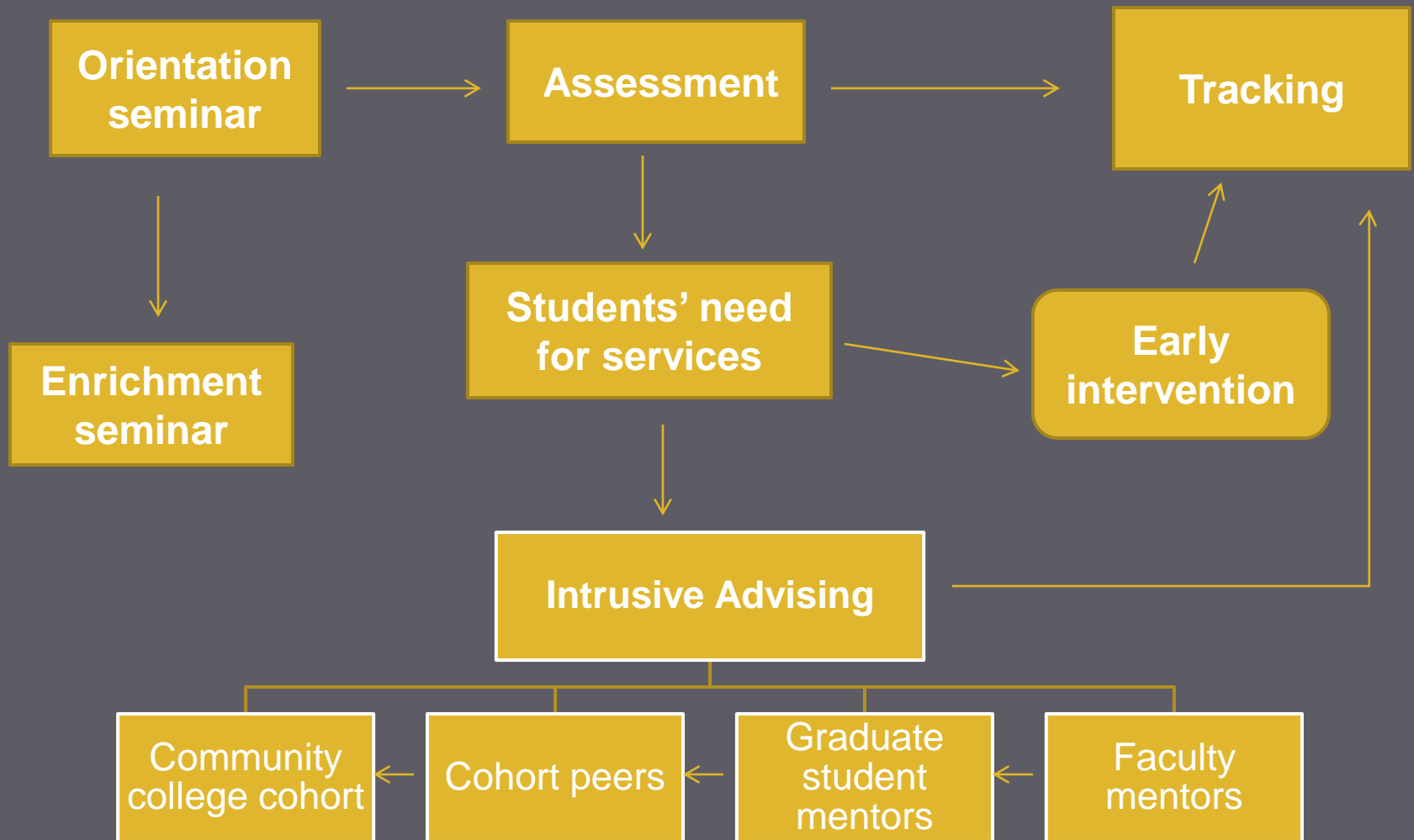
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- Strategies
  - Early intervention
    - At the beginning and end of each academic period, professors who had cohort students in classes were asked to submit feedback on student's academic progress
      - Noted areas of difficulty for student
      - 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 → Assessment → Tracking

Orientation seminar → Enrichment seminar

Assessment → Students' need for services

Students' need for services → Early intervention

Early intervention → Tracking

Students' need for services → Intrusive Advising

Intrusive Advising → Tracking

Intrusive Advising → Community college cohort, Cohort peers, Graduate student mentors, Faculty mentors

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

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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