Special Program Collaboration, Inquiry, and Reporting

Fall 2011 Summary

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Background –

In May of 2010, a group of Learning Community/Special Program leaders met to discuss collaboration and areas where the Title V Grant might support such programs. One of the themes that emerged was around assessment and shared outcomes for programs. The Title V EXITO Grant has provided us with the opportunity to explore further options for coordinating cohort and learning communities, and to modify institutional practices as a whole in order to promote a culture of research at LMC. Given the grant goals and Los Medanos' strategic focus on long-term student outcomes and the assessment of these outcomes, Rosa Armendáriz, in her role as the Title V Grant Project Director, and Ryan Pedersen, in his role as Research and Planning Coordinator were tasked to begin this work in September of 2011.

Although the initial conversations concerning this work were centered on developing a common method of inquiry and reporting, it was important to first assess the individual needs and desires of each of the special programs surrounding data collection and dissemination. In order to achieve this, Rosa and Ryan met with 8 "special program" (cohort program) coordinators with the stated goals of the conversations being to:

- Learn what support the special programs need in regards to a method of inquiry to support program improvement
- Gather input on a joint research and best practices collaboration process for special programs
- Gain insights on areas where programs would want to improve their collaboration and learn from each other
- Get the program coordinators' commitment to participate in a shared meeting/process beginning in Spring 2012

Over the course of the Fall 2011 semester, interviews with the following leaders was conducted:

Program	Leader(s)
American Experience	David and JoAnn Hobbs
AVID	Karl Debro
ACE	Tue Rust
Puente	Marco Godinez
Umoja	A'kilah Moore
MESA	Carol Hernandez
Honors	Jennifer Saito
Transfer Academy	Dave Belman

Common questions were written for these interviews and detailed notes were taken.

Interview Phase Summary –

Although feedback from the 8 program leaders varied greatly, some general themes emerged consistently. Here we group much of the common feedback into broader thematic areas.

General Assessment –

Several programs struggle with having a clear understanding and plan for assessing their PSLOs. Related to this, many expressed difficulty in developing an assessment plan to measure the effectiveness of their various programmatic components. There was also interest in assessing not just the effects of a program on the students it serves, but also measuring the professional development that occurs for the employees who are involved and connected to the program.

Most programs also have issues with tracking students in a useful, but efficient way especially as the programs get larger. The issue of tracking students has directly affected many programs' ability to effectively collect appropriate data measuring the success of the students in these programs. The tracking of students was not seen as just a local problem. Program leads identified that the inability to know what happens to students when they transfer, or when they "just disappear" as a major hurdle to assessing program success.

Reporting –

Programs expressed the need to develop a more official reporting and communication strategy to both management and the campus community as a whole. There was a general lack of clear expectations regarding what reports should contain, who should see them and when, and what would be done with them in response. In particular, there is a need for stronger connection to be made between program interventions and student outcome data, such as degrees, certificates, transfers, and employment. In addition to reporting on outcomes regularly, the reports or streamlined communications could serve as an effective tool to communicate program purpose, which is often misunderstood.

There was also concern that any reporting process that emerged should overlap with the various statewide requirements that are placed on many of the special programs.

Collaboration and Coordination –

General issues such as sharing resources and strategies also emerged. In particular, multiple programs suggested the development of a shared calendar of events in which special programs shared speakers, field trips, and so forth.

Even more prevalent, however, was the idea of increased coordination, specifically around creating a special program or learning community pipeline. Programs are concerned that they are "cannibalizing" each other by targeting the same students. There was a desire to obtain a better understanding of the target population for each program, and how they fit into the institutional community as a whole. The concept of a coordinated recruiting and orientation process was also discussed.

Administrative Support –

Finally, a strong theme surrounding administrative support emerged. Most programs have a desire for administrators to be more involved and knowledgeable about the various special programs. It was commonly expressed that administrators should begin supporting special programs early by helping them remove many of the initial roadblocks to success that occur rather than waiting for results and reactively supporting the most successful programs. While this was not necessarily a criticism of administration, the theme emerged as a question of vision and commitment for such programs. What role does administration see these program playing in LMC's ultimate goal to improve outcomes?

In particular, programs expressed their need for administrative help in scheduling and blocking classes, as well as help with many of the coordination efforts listed above. In summary, there is a need for a clear picture of the roles of the special programs individually and collectively, and a clear direction for each of them in the big picture of the institution's future.

Prioritized Needs –

In listening to the many needs expressed by the special program leaders, and keeping in mind that improved reporting and assessment was at the heart of starting this work, we have prioritized our institutional needs in this area as follows:

1) **A special program student database**

Programs cannot begin to effectively and efficiently collect data in a useful and meaningful way without a clear, systematic, and sustainable way of tracking their students for immediate program needs and longitudinal tracking.

2) **Coordinated programmatic definitions of student populations used for recruiting**

Coordination of target populations will help programs with recruiting, providing more focused interventions, and developing a clearer understanding of their role in the campus community as a whole. Additionally, it will provide a way for programs to easily obtain comparison data in order to measure the effectiveness of their programs.

3) **A clarified reporting/communication strategy**

A clear and consistent reporting/communication strategy will motivate the programs to perform assessment more regularly, provide a higher level of program accountability to achieving student outcomes, and provide validation to the programs of administrative support through a well defined feedback mechanism.

4) **Administrative support for programs through increased coordination in scheduling, blocking classes, and encouraging wider employee support.**

Increased coordination and support for the technical aspects of program implementation will provide programs with the ability to deliver and ramp up programs without having to negotiate individually with departments, other programs or Student Service areas. This will also provide confidence and support for program leads to focus on program effectiveness rather than on the day-to-day struggles of keeping the program alive.

Proposed Plan of Action –

While all special program leaders expressed an interest in convening, there was an extremely broad range of feedback on the frequency, duration and purpose of the meetings that will begin this semester. However, in response to the prioritized needs above, we propose the following plan of action to begin this Spring 2012.

Proposed Meeting Plan:

- Meeting in April 2012 to begin work, followed by monthly meetings in Fall 2012 as necessary.

Proposed Phase Structure:

- Phase I – Common Quantitative Analysis and Reporting (to be completed in Spring 2012)
    - Develop a common list of quantitative data that will be collected for each program.
    - Outline the process for submitting our requests for this data to the District.
    - Create an outcome reporting template and well defined feedback process.
- Phase II – Program Specific Intervention Analysis (to begin in Fall 2012)
    - Develop a "tip-sheet" on how to perform pre- and post-assessment of intervention strategies.
    - Provide samples of such tools.
    - Individually develop custom tools and create an implementation plan.
    - Develop a process for integrating program specific intervention reporting into existing reporting structure.
- Phase III – Mapping our Student Body
    - Identify each program's target student population.
    - Use this to develop a comparative student population for each program.
    - Combine program targets to create a comprehensive student map that can be used for coordinated recruiting.

Facilitation of Group:

- Recommendation - Ruth Goodin facilitate with collaboration from Ryan and Rosa

Funding:

- The Title V *ÉXITO* Grant can support lunch or other project needs (e.g. substitutes for courses).

- The Title V *ÉXITO* Grant will support the development of database tools, survey or assessment instruments, and other development expenses.