

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Columbus State Community College

Project Details		
Title	Implement Career Assistance Process to Help Undecided Students Declare Major	Status COMPLETED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated 09-14-2010
Timeline		Reviewed 10-04-2010
	Planned Project Kickoff 03-30-2009	Created 11-24-2009
	Actual Completion 10-12-2010	Version 2

1: Project Goal

A: This project is submitted as part of Columbus State's Student Success initiatives. The process focus is to increase the number and percentage new and continuing students who declare a major. As the process progresses, it is expected that fewer students will remain undecided, and the focus of the intervention will focus primarily on new, first quarter students. The process change will be to place a restriction on undecided students in their first quarter at the college and all those who have already completed their first quarter, requiring them to seek assistance with career decision-making and selecting a major. The primary service provider will be Counseling Services (career counseling). An on-line web-based tool to assist students with career exploration and major selection will be developed. The college will also take advantage of existing career websites and resources at other 2-year and 4-year institutions and in the community, for assisting undecided students. Based on research regarding student retention, this project is expected to positively impact student success as measured by: course completion, academic progress, and retention (quarter-to-quarter and first-to-second year).

2: Reasons For Project

A: Approximately 10% of each autumn quarter new student cohort is undecided (e.g. 572 for AU 2008), and approximately 2,500 students total are undecided at the college (e.g. AU 2007 there were 2,503 undecided students). National research shows that students who are undecided in their major are less likely to be retained from quarter to quarter, progress academically, and persist to course completion and graduation. For example, from AU07 to W108, of 2,503 undecided students, 59.3% or 1,500 were retained. Of new students who are undecided, approximately half are lost from the first to the second quarter.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: Admissions, Advising Services, and academic departments.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: The process by which first quarter students choose then declare a major.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: Up to 12 months are needed for this project. To determine the impact of this newly implemented process, measures must be taken over a time period to determine its effectiveness.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: One metric will be monitoring the number of undecided new and continuing students who declare majors as a result of the intervention. Other success measures are listed under I.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: Metrics will include quarter-to-quarter retention of students, first-to-second year retention, course completion rates, academic progress and graduation.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Demographic data was collected on three “cohort” groups of new undeclared students who began either Autumn 2009 (n=309), Winter 2010 (n= 292) or Spring 2010 (n= 285). Information included gender, ethnicity age and educational goal. An intervention strategy was developed and initiated in March 2010. The strategy involved an e-mail to all new undeclared students informing them of a choosing a major workshop, and to update their records if they had in fact declared a major. A second communication was sent in April to all new undeclared students who were still undecided during either the Autumn 2009 or Winter 2010 quarters informing them of a new restriction for undeclared students, and to update their record if they had declared a major. The third communication informed new undeclared students that a restriction had been placed on their record. Students were required to meet with a counselor to have the restriction lifted. A similar process began in July for undecided students registered Spring 2010.

The workshop for undeclared students was developed and offered three times beginning in the autumn quarter. A total of about 20 students attended these workshops.

The following projects are in progress and part of the overall intervention strategy for undecided students:

Development of a career web site with resources to assist students in deciding on a major

Development of a Career Pathways document that shows students over 130 different combinations of certificates, associate degrees and related bachelor's degrees paths

Collection and analysis of quarter to quarter retention, grade point average, numbers of students declaring a major, and numbers of restrictions applied and lifted.

Development of program sheets on each Columbus State program that highlights key information students need in order to make good career decisions and major choices.

2: Institution Involvement

A: In addition to the team members developing the intervention strategies and resources, staff from Information Technology and Knowledge Resources and Planning assisted in writing queries and gathering data for the project. Counseling Services staff are involved in meeting with students and lifting restrictions. The Telephone Information Center staff are involved in updating student's major records. Team members have also worked with chairpersons in the Career/Technical and Arts and Sciences Divisions and Academic Advising staff on developing resources for career pathways and information sheets for CSCC programs. Staff from the Institutional Advancement Office are assisting with development of content and layout for the career web site.

3: Next Steps

A: Continue to identify a cohort of students quarterly who are new and undeclared and apply the intervention strategy. Continue to gather demographic information on each cohort group. Monitor the retention and student success patterns of all cohorts through one year from their initial quarter, as well as whether or not they declared a major. Finalize, post and distribute career web site, career pathway resources, and program information sheets.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Most students do not take action on either declaring a major or seeing a counselor until after they have received a restriction. Initial mailings have not seemed to motivate students to see a counselor or update their records. Through the use of a customer relations management system, the college has been able to track the number and percentage of students opening the correspondence sent via e-mail. Involving the Telephone Information Center to assist in lifting restrictions and updating records has helped the college be responsive to students when they seek help.

5: Project Challenges

A: Since each quarter is a new “cohort” group, tracking multiple cohorts over a year can be problematic if accurate records are not kept. Attendance at workshops, while about average for the college, could be increased to improve efficiency. Students who are 65 and older taking classes for personal interest at the college, have often had a restriction placed on their schedules. Refinement of the data query is needed in order to keep this group of students from receiving a restriction.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The results shown here demonstrate that the College is serious about working with students to establish a program both to require and assist undecided students in declaring a major. This strategy should be effective as it allows the students to make a decision on their own, and if they are unable, offering professional assistance through the workshop or direct counseling to assist students in establishing focus. It incorporates the Focus, Learning, and Information aspects of high performing Institutions. The actions taken here show that Columbus State Community College has laid the foundation for a process to help their students succeed. It is always a tough decision when the College implements restrictions on students, even when appropriate. The College should be commended for taking these steps to help insure student success.

2: Institution Involvement

A: All appropriate areas of Columbus State Community College, including the academic divisions, have been involved in producing and executing this process.

3: Next Steps

A: The next steps presented here are logical and within the scope of the original action project. They also lend themselves to establishing concrete milestones and measures in order to gauge the success and effectiveness of the project. The project seems well rounded in terms of appropriate internal activities and the production of appropriate literature for sharing the ideas and responsibilities with students.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The College has developed a policy, instituted a process to actualize the policy, developed appropriate literature to support and advertise the policy/process, and used data to recognize shortcomings and improvements to the process. You may want to submit a proposal to a Higher Learning Commission Annual Conference to share your process development and ideas with other institutions.

5: Project Challenges

A: Based on the information supplied here, the College has identified a number of challenges to this action project. Based on the dates supplied for the project (ending June 2010), it appears that Columbus State Community College will continue to refine this process and incorporate it as a permanent college process. This process should help add to student retention and as it is refined, become more efficient and user friendly for the students. Good job!

Project Outcome

1: Reason for completion

A: This project was a multi-year, multi-phase project. During 2009-2010, initial baseline data was collected, along with the establishment and tracking of cohort groups. An intervention strategy was designed, implemented and evaluated to determine its impact on course completion, grade point average and persistence. Evaluation of the intervention strategy and cohort tracking has given insights into the implementation of Phase II of the project, which will involve increasing web services available to undecided students, expanding

workshop offerings, and refinement of the career pathways concept that was identified in the initial project description.

2: Success Factors

A: The intervention strategy requiring students to see an advisor was effective in getting students to access services available to assist them with declaring a major. It appears from preliminary data, this strategy did in fact, help students declare majors. Expanding the web resources available to assist students with declaring a major also appears to have been an effective tool in combination with the restriction requiring students to see an advisor.

3: Unsuccessful Factors

A: We are hoping to increase attendance at workshops designed for students receiving this restriction. Additional offerings of the same topic, as well as new topics such as decision making, motivation, and goal setting are being considered. Another challenge was clarifying the intention of establishing "career pathways". The project team had a narrow definition of pathway, looking at developing materials to help students understand paths to certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor degrees, and what the implications of stopping at any stage meant. Career pathways is a much broader concept, involving institutional involvement and commitment from the president on down, and development of close partnerships with community leaders and organizations. A final challenge was tracking of cohort groups. In tracking new and undecided students each quarter, the complexity of analyzing completion and persistence patterns was at times problematic. Each of the above challenges will be addressed in Phase II of this project.