Program Title: Academic Literacies Center (ALC)
Institution: Ferris State University
Innovation Category: Student Academic Improvement
Retention/Completion

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FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Project Description: The intent of the Academic Literacies Center is to provide students with greater opportunities to realize success in specific courses and targeted content areas. Access services and resources to understand and overcome barriers are a focus as well. The project centralizes existing student support services under one Dean while greatly enhancing their capabilities.

Project Objectives: The mission of the ALC is to adopt a holistic approach to addressing academic services, positively assist students in their learning, and contribute to improved rates of retention and a campus culture of support.

Target Population: The ALC is an inclusive center designed to assist all Ferris students with short-term and long-term barriers in specific academic contexts, as well as students with diagnosed barriers and those that require accommodations.

Quantifiable/Qualifiable Outcomes:
- Students are assessed for visual and reading challenges.
- Students are able to articulate campus services/resources supporting academic success.
- Students are able to put services and resources to use in their academic success.

Challenges/Problems Encountered: The most significant challenges included the creation of a physical space and a larger conceptual understanding of academic literacy. First, there was need to create a physical location to engage students with services including visual assessment, pharmaceutical evaluation, tutoring, writing support and structured learning assistance. Second, and more important, was the creation of dialogue about learning barriers that are often undiagnosed and hidden and how the university can better think about, plan for, and accommodate these conditions. Renovated, accessible space in the Ferris Library for Information, Technology and Education allowed for a physical home for the new center that now houses tutoring, writing, a communications lab, assessment services, specialized accommodation software, optometric and pharmaceutical evaluation and disability counseling. To further the larger issue of conceptualizing academic literacy and how to create a campus culture supportive of students with undiagnosed or hidden conditions, a campus-wide advisory committee will help inform and guide future thinking and new innovations as the center adapts to best support current and future students.

Evaluation Approach: All initiatives within the ALC focus on the overarching goals of the center. Activity data, process data and overall outcome data all appear in mid-year and end-of-year reporting. Activity data includes the number or students engaged in or through various services of the center. Process data includes information about how the center engages with students, faculty and staff, and where efficiencies or efficacy may suggest opportunities for improvement. Finally, overall data among students engaged through the center appears within calculations of student academic pass rates, persistence and retention/graduation rates.

Value Proposition, Financing Strategy and Return-On-Investment Indicators:
Resourcing for the ALC was made possible through one-time renovation funding from the Division of Academic Affairs and operational funds through the Dean of Retention and Student Success. Because of the ALC, the university expects to see increased engagement with students through in-person and online meetings. As a result of these engagements, there are anticipated gains in retention and persistence as well as a decline in the number of students withdrawing from courses. The fiscal investment in the center, including ongoing operational expenditures, is moderate, with the greatest financial increase expected during the 2020-2021 academic year when online tutoring services begin through a partnership with NetTutor.

Potential for Replication: This initiative has replication potential at other colleges and universities. Because institutionally-based optometry and pharmacy resources may not be readily available at other institutions, there is likely a need to consider partnerships with external providers including community agencies or private, local health providers. Departments to engage with during the organization of such an ongoing effort include writing and mathematics/statistics consulting services, tutoring, advising, disability and accommodation services, counseling, health services and faculty training and development professionals who are able to help facilitate workshops and learning modules across academic disciplines and through online learning management systems.

Vendor Involvement: No. Ferris State is in the process of completing a partnership agreement with NetTutor. NetTutor is the preferred provider of Michigan Colleges Online and the Michigan Community College Association for high-quality academic tutoring. NetTutor provides live, on-demand tutoring, question drop-off,and writing feedback. Tutors are subject matter experts trained in how to translate tutoring best practices and learning strategies to support students in over 150 subjects 24-hours a day, every day of the year.

Requisite Program Manager Competencies: Knowledge of academic support services, literacy and general program management and evaluation principles are necessary to aid successful design, implementation and continued advancement of this, or a similar initiative.

Additional Resources: The ALC includes an adaptive technology lab, writing assistance, a communication lab, Structured learning Assistance (SLA) and study skills assistance, including memory training, note-taking, textbook reading, time management and test taking. The Center will soon be adding services that focus on accessibility, auditory assessment, visual assessment, autism, cultural and linguistic barriers, reading assessment, visual assessment, medical consultation, light and migraine obstacles, and oral presentation anxiety.

Article from FSU's News Archive, *Academic Literacies Center a Fresh Approach to Creating a Culture of Student Success*. August 2018.

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