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MUSSAB: An Indispensable Link Between Faculty and Multicultural Students' Academic Success

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MUSSAB: An Indispensable Link Between Faculty and Multicultural Students' Academic Success

Abstract .

The panel will discuss how the faculty and SUNY Rockland Community College identifies difficulties faced by multicultural underrepresented students through a faculty advisory board and pragmatic activities. Serving as a bridge that connects faculty from various disciplines, the Multicultural Underrepresented Student Success Advisory Board was able to institute a campus-wide climate survey to assess the needs of multicultural students and to help them find ways to effectively deal with the challenges.

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This presentation showcases innovative ways to retain and promote the academic success of multicultural students attending SUNY Rockland Community College by a faculty advisory board. The three presenters, who are full-time faculty members and who have served on the board for three years, will discuss the function of the advisory board and its impact on both students and faculty.

The Multicultural Underrepresented Student Success Advisory Board (MUSSAB) was initiated in 1998 as a result of the rapid demographic changes of student population at SUNY Rockland Community College in recent years. The goal of this advisory board was to create an academic climate on campus that supports and encourages the success of multicultural/underrepresented students, who are defined as African/Haitian/Caribbean American, Latinos/Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans. While some of these students speak English as their first language, others are new immigrants who studied English as a second language.

The presentation consists of three sections. The discussion will first focus on the mission of the advisory board and the strategies the board instituted to create a positive campus climate for this emerging student population. The first project undertaken by the advisory board entailed a pilot survey to assess the needs of these students. The survey revealed that students of color have unique academic, social and career concerns.

Based on the results of the survey and the recommendations of MUSSAB, the counselor of Multicultural Student Development Programs organized activities conducive to the retention and academic success of students of color. Specifically, the counselor of Multicultural Services offered Academic Success Workshops, held Multicultural Student Success Forum and panel discussions, founded a Multicultural Center on campus, hosted a Career Mosaic, initiated Diversity Dialogues and sponsored a trip to historically black colleges and Universities.

In addition to the pragmatic measures mentioned above, programs and events were also

coordinated collaboratively with the Counseling Center for the multicultural student population. The activities were conceptualized and carried out in such a way as to expose students to positive role models. In some situations, these role models entered into an ongoing mentoring relationship with students. Specifics regarding the organization of these events and student response will be discussed by the second presenter.

MUSAAB members not only dealt with the concerns of multicultural students through innovative activities outside class, they also tried to find ways to meet the diverse needs of students in class. For instance, the third presenter carried out an effective experiment in her English Composition course. English writing and literature courses pose one of the biggest challenges to multicultural underrepresented students. In comparison with traditional white students, students of color at RCC have shown a lower caliber of basic skills in both reading and writing either because of their recent immigration experience or because of the lack of academic and emotional support. As a result, their failure rate in English Composition I is much higher than that of white students. The third presenter will focus on the impact of collaborative learning on multicultural students. Collaborative learning has proven to be an extraordinary potential for active learning since it provides a higher level of student engagement with the material, with each other and with the process of learning. In traditional English Composition classes, the teacher stands in front of the class lecturing and students sit in rows listening and taking notes. Collaborative learning offers another way; it breaks the walls of color. Together students and instructor collaboratively create the substance of the course through reading assignments, discussion questions, required contributions and responses. This is learning by searching, finding, explaining, analyzing, summarizing and reflecting. There are disappointments and trade-offs. Do the advantages of collaborative learning make up for some of its disadvantages? Who are the students that benefit most and least from this form of learning? She will invite discussion of these and other questions from the audience following her presentation.

The panelists will conclude their presentation by reflecting on the successes and challenges they experienced in carrying out the missions of this advisory board and by inviting the audience to join them for a constructive discussion of the subject.

Presenters

Nilda Aragones received her Master's degree in Education from Fordham University and has worked as an Assistant Professor in the Counseling Center of Rockland Community College for eight years. Prior to this, she served as a Counselor in the Higher Educational Opportunity Program at Manhattan College.

Kathy Carroll received her Master's degree in Counseling from Long Island University and has ten years experience as a Career Counselor and Assistant Professor.

Liya Li joined the English faculty at SUNY Rockland Community College in 1995. She received her Ph.D. in Education from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. She teaches English Composition and Literature courses.