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Positively Impacting the Retention Rates and Performance for Students-of-Color

Abstract

This session reports on a first-year program designed to assist students-of-color in adjusting to higher education. Session participants will have the opportunity to view the overall structure of the program, including training components, academic tracking methodology, assessment and technology, enhancement programs, and additional services that S.T.A.R.S. provides.

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DePaul University is an institution rooted in a Catholic, Vincentian, and Urban tradition. Increasing global interaction and interdependence, as well as Chicago's own demographic diversity, challenges DePaul to a new awareness and new patterns of inclusivity. One area in which DePaul is addressing these challenges is in developing new strategies and paradigm that specifically address the needs of students-of-color.

Many students have found that the student-of-color experience in higher education can be a stressful one. Students-of-color are faced with a number of cognitive and behavioral barriers that negatively impact their retention rates and impede their path to educational attainment. Studies have also shown that the overall quality of the first year experience often serves as a predictor of retention for all college students. With this in mind, S.T.A.R.S. (Students Together Are Reaching Success), was developed as a voluntary retention program targeting first year and transfer students-of-color. Literature indicated that students were more likely to share problems/concerns with another peer, rather than a university administrator or faculty. Literature also indicated that peer interaction assisted in increasing retention rates. Linking evidence from these studies creates a difficult task for DePaul and many other universities. However, DePaul University has accepted this arduous task and S. T .A.R.S. is one of the vehicles used to circumvent the negative pattern of matriculation through the institution. S.T.A.R.S. represents DePaul's commitment to provide a quality education to all students.

S. T .A.R.S. began as a consortium between three Chicago area universities: Loyola University, DePaul University and Mundelein College. Each institution was responsible for the individual implementation of this program. In 1996, each University received the last phase of the grant funding and each individual institution assumed financial

responsibility for the program. The S. T .A.R.S. program at DePaul University is housed in the Office of Multicultural Affairs, a department within the Division of Student Affairs.

Currently, there are five components of S. T .A.R.S. at DePaul University: academic enhancement, transitional adjustment, cultural exploration, community service, and leadership development. First year participants are recruited prior to the commencement of their studies at DePaul University. Upon acceptance to the program, participants are paired with an upper-class student who serves as their peer mentor during the entire first academic year at the University. Peer mentors receive training prior to the arrival of S. T .A.R.S. participants in the fall and again at the beginning of the winter quarter. Educational and professional in-service opportunities are scheduled once a month during the entire academic year. In addition to peer mentoring, Multicultural Student Affairs staff members provide the following services to participants in the program: academic tracking, programs and services assessment, resource referral and advocacy.

Participants involved in this program will have the opportunity to see various components of S. T .A.R.S. This program has increased the retention rates and academic performances of students-of-color that participate in the project. Participants who choose to attend this model program presentation will also have the opportunity to see the role of assessment and technology in the further development of this program.

Presenters

Ana Vazquez is currently the Director of the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs at DePaul University. She is also a doctoral student at Loyola University, pursuing her Ph.D. in Higher Education. Ms. Vazquez earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and a Masters in College Student Personnel from Loyola University. During her ten plus years in higher education, she has devoted herself to assisting elementary, secondary and college age students in accessing higher education and developing their leadership skills. She also has worked at community-based organizations in Chicago that promote education and leadership opportunities for high school students.

Gayle Ward is currently serving as the Associate Director for the Office OF Multicultural Student Affairs at DePaul University. Mr. Ward received his Bachelor of Science degree from Western Illinois University and his Masters degree from the University of Illinois-Chicago (UIC). He has worked at DePaul University for four and a half years and worked for the University of Illinois-Chicago for three years.

Sandesh Bilgi is currently the Coordinator of Educational Activities for the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs at DePaul University. Mr. Bilgi earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Bradley University. In addition, he earned his Masters of Arts degree in Psychology from John F. Kennedy University.

