

## Strategic Focus

# Improve Preparation for Success at College

## Purpose of the Strategic Focus

North Central State College has been involved in the national Achieving the Dream student success initiative since 2006 and is designated as a Leader College. Achieving the Dream seeks to help more students earn postsecondary credentials, including occupational certificates and degrees. Recognizing that community college students often take a long time to earn certificates or degrees, Achieving the Dream works with institutions to improve student progression through intermediate milestones.

Student success at college can be significantly improved by taking three important steps. The first step is assuring students are academically prepared for attending college. The second step is having students explore career options and develop career and education goals and a plan to achieve those goals. The third is assuring students have a financial plan for completing college. These steps comprise the improved preparation for success and college strategic focus.

## Intended Impact on Ends Policies

The focuses' three strategic initiatives directly affect the global ENDS policy as well as ENDS policies 1.1 through 1.5 by increasing the likelihood of student success. Further, career planning and goal development assures students have the knowledge of occupational choices necessary for economic self-sufficiency as required for Job Readiness. Overcoming financial barriers will have a positive impact on Equal Opportunity/Diversity.

## Strategic Initiatives (MEANS) - Descriptions

### *Academic Preparation for College*

Increasing the number of students that are college ready is important because college readiness increases the likelihood of successful completion of college. Initiatives are currently being piloted and those that are successful should be taken to scale. Additionally, the college can engage K12, parents, adult learners and community organizations to gain further support and cooperation in increasing college readiness.

### *Career Planning and Goal Development*

Student understanding and exploration of career choices are important. Students can then develop a career plan and establish short and long term goals in support of the plan. The understanding, exploration and development of a plan and goals, increases the likelihood that students will successfully complete college.

### *Overcoming Financial Barriers*

Students often face financial barriers that can significantly impede the likelihood that they will successfully complete college. Therefore, it is important to assure that both students and the college cooperatively develop an individual financial plan for the student to help remove financial barriers.

## **Specific Objectives and Background, Planning and Policy Considerations**

Academic Preparation for College - ***Increase the number of students coming to NC State that are college ready***

### **Background, Planning and Policy Considerations**

Two thirds of students coming to NC State place into developmental education courses thereby increasing the cost and time required to complete college and reducing the likelihood of successful completion.

This initiative should assure that pilots and other efforts that are successful in increasing college readiness of students attending NC State are taken to scale. Boot camps, both during high school and post high school, are being piloted and/or routinely used to increase college readiness. A transitional program designed around college readiness for adults (Solutions) has shown very promising results and is expected to be scaled up in our region.

A communications strategy and plan to insure that students, parents, high school counselors, and adult learners know and understand the time, cost and success consequences of not being college ready should be developed and implemented. As part of the plan, the college should find ways to take advantage of collaboration with SPARC and other community organizations and businesses to carry out the plan.

Students with valid assessment results do not need to take COMPASS. For others, better preparation by students *before* the COMPASS assessment can increase the numbers of students who test as college ready. Opportunities exist both through the Success Center and the Tutoring Center to facilitate better student preparedness for the COMPASS. The assessment and placement process should ensure that potential students cannot take the compass test until:

- The student understands the high stakes nature of the test including the time and cost consequences,
- The student has practiced taking the test on appropriate software to understand how the testing process works, and
- The student has brushed-up on the subjects upon which he or she will be tested.

Career Planning and Goal Development - ***Assure students understand career choices and set goals accordingly***

### **Background, Planning and Policy Considerations**

The Job Readiness Ends Policy expects students to know about and explore occupational choices. Furthermore, career goals can be translated into education goals and course plans.

It is important that all students explore career options and develop a career and education plan during the first term in college. Some students use DISCOVER or Career Coach during pre-enrollment. Exploration and plan development are part of FYE course and must be continued with new FYE success skills course. Advisors in the student success center, FYE and Strategies for Success instructors, and the career development coordinator will need to be

involved in assuring that students explore career options and develop career and education goals and plans. A coordinated process and curriculum refinements (in conjunction with the new success course) are required to assure that the specific objective of this initiative is achieved including the development of education goals and plans to support those goals.

Consideration of career options and development of career and educational goals is not part of the culture of the region, but is critical to college readiness and success. SPARC is working to change that. Through SPARC's efforts, students in our region are taking EXPLORE in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and PLAN in the 10<sup>th</sup>. On both EXPLORE and PLAN, students indicate their educational and career plans and get feedback as part of their results. This presents an opportunity for the College to work with SPARC to change the region's culture.

Some additional issues have to be addressed. Students are not currently required to take FYE during the first term. While developmental students will likely be expected to take the success skills course (new version of FYE), if the course is not part of the core curriculum in the transition to semesters, college ready students will lose this opportunity for exploring career options and developing plans. From a policy perspective, this issue needs to be addressed to assure all students explore career options and develop plans early in their college experience.

Overcoming Financial Barriers - ***Assure finances are not a barrier to student success.***

### **Background, Planning and Policy Considerations**

Achieving the Equal Opportunity/Diversity Ends Policy requires that all groups of students achieve success at NC State. Research for the TRIO grant and AtD indicates that financial concerns are inhibitors of success among many groups of students.

Many students are not financially literate, do not understand their financial options and do not have a financial plan to support their education and career goals. The college has many financial options in place but these are not always well advertised or understood by staff and students. The College needs to engage students, K12, parents, adult learners and community organizations to heighten the awareness of financial opportunities that can eliminate financial barriers for attending college.

Financial aid advisors and the FYE coordinator should develop and carry out a plan to assure that every student is more financially literate, understands their financial options and has a financial plan to support their education and career goals. The development of the student's financial plan can be part of the FYE course. TRIO grant personnel should also be involved in this effort.

Financial aid should collect quantitative and qualitative data to find out more about the financial barriers that exist for students, and the best ways to address these barriers. It will be important to "hear the student voice" in identifying barriers and generating ideas on how to address them.

Some important policy issues must be addressed as well:

- The college may unknowingly create financial barriers for working students and parents by preventing them from being able to plan ahead more than one term at a time. Course information is released on a term by term basis. Students do not know what their class schedule will look like with much advance warning. Work and child care schedules typically

cannot be changed every 11 weeks. AtD student focus groups consistently noted “course scheduling and availability” as a barrier to their success.

- The effectiveness of the current scholarship structure may be a concern because of historically under spent scholarship dollars. Consideration should be given to the possibility of reinvesting some of these dollars in alternative means to support students.
- Attendance patterns following the refund check date may need to be addressed.
- All students should have a financial plan and the financial planning process is part of FYE. The issue of requiring all students to take the FYE course, or developing an alternative to assure all students have a financial plan, is a policy question for this initiative just as it is for career planning and goal development.

## **Learning and Growth Strategic Objectives**

Human Capital Specific Objective - ***Prepare faculty and staff to carry out the strategic initiatives***

Informational Capital Specific Objective - ***Assure data and information necessary to inform, monitor and evaluate the strategic initiatives is available***

Organizational Capital Specific Objective - ***Assure alignment of all units of the college with the strategic initiatives***

Community Capital Specific Objective - ***Obtain active involvement from individuals, employers, and organizations to help carry out the strategic initiatives***

## **Background and Planning Considerations for Learning and Growth Strategic Objectives**

### **Human Capital**

Admission staff, other staff and/or faculty advisors may need to be trained in career development principles and techniques.

In order to better understand generational and situational poverty, admissions staff, financial aid staff, advisors (staff and faculty), TRIO staff and interested faculty and staff will benefit from training in this area.

It is possible that certain staff and faculty will benefit from training in basic financial budgeting and planning in order to assist students through this process.

### **Informational Capital**

The support of IR and IT will be necessary to assure that the data and analysis required to plan, monitor and evaluate efforts to improve student preparation for college are conveniently available.

## **Organizational Capital**

College leadership should ask the Enrollment Management (EM) Committee (which is comprised of faculty and staff) to determine how career planning and goal development as well as the development of a financial plan for each student will be fully incorporated into the NC State student experience. The EM committee should:

- Work closely with the committee developing the new success course.
- Work with financial aid on collecting and analyzing data and implementing improved financial support for students.

## **Community Capital**

In regard to the EXPLORE and PLAN data, assistance from SPARC and/or ACT may be needed to maximize the effective use of results. The SPARC Council should be aware of the work of the Enrollment Management Committee and should have an opportunity to participate in this initiative as appropriate.

Local financial institutions and foundations should be aware of or involved in the work of the Enrollment Management Committee as appropriate.