

Impact of First Year Counseling Services

In 2013-2014, the Office of Institutional Research assessed the relationship between the number of counseling contacts and student persistence. The majority of the College's student support services are comprised of counseling programs or feature counseling as a key component of the program. Counseling services are woven throughout the campus and exist within 22 different student support programs, including, but not limited to, the Welcome Center, Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), the Latino Center, and the Career Services Center. Counseling is also a key component of many programs such as Summer Jams (a summer bridge program) and the First Year Experience Program. This study, which examined the persistence rates of new students, including both first-time college students and reverse transfer students, who received counseling during the Fall 2013 term, provided affirming data that demonstrates the efficacy of counseling, regardless of where or how the counseling service is provided. Key findings include the following:

- Of the 5,843 first-time students who enrolled, 87.1% received counseling services within their first term of attendance.
- Of the 1,870 reverse transfer students who enrolled, 76% received counseling services within their first term of attendance.
- First-time college students who received counseling services persisted to the following fall at a rate 215% greater than those first-time attendees who did not avail themselves of counseling services.
- New students in the reverse transfer category who received counseling services persisted to the following fall at a rate 250% greater than new reverse transfers who did not visit a counselor during their first term.
- Counseling contact rates did not vary more than 4 to 7% by student ethnicity/race or basic skills status, thus suggesting that there was no disproportionate impact.

Impact of the Enhanced "Back to Success" Program (BTS)

In Spring 2014, the Counseling Department, responding to the mandates of the Student Success Act of 2012, refocused its two hour "reorientations" for students who have been placed on academic and/or progress probation to include the development (or revision) of the student's educational plan. Several follow-up outreach efforts were also added to the program to bring these students into Counseling in the middle of the subsequent term to review their progress and assist them in adhering to planning recommendations. The goal of the "Back to Success" effort has been to reintegrate students into the learning environment, provide them with the tools and support they need to be successful, and ultimately improve student success, thus achieving the Mission of the College. Assessment results indicate that these efforts are having a significant impact:

- Probationary students who received follow-up support during their first year of attendance were more likely to be removed from probation as a result of this intervention than students who received the support after the first year, thus supporting this program as a good first year intervention (53% of BTS attendees who completed 0-11.5 units versus 33% of BTS attendees who completed 30 units or more).

- Those who attended a BTS session in Winter 2014 were more likely to schedule a follow-up appointment with a counselor in Spring 2014 than those who did not attend a BTS session (51% BTS attendees versus 26% non-BTS attendees).
- Student attendance at a winter 2014 BTS session significantly increased the likelihood of the student being removed from probation in the near future (38% of BTS attendees were removed from probation after Winter 2014 versus 20% of non-BTS attendees).
- Student attendance at a BTS session significantly increased the likelihood of students subsequently having a successful semester, as defined as a semester GPA of 2.0 or higher (67% of Winter 2014 BTS attendees earned a 2.0 GPA or higher in Spring 2014 versus 54% of non-BTS attendees).
- Student attendance at a BTS session significantly increased the likelihood of students being in good academic standing in the next semester.
- Likewise, student attendance at a BTS session significantly increased the likelihood of students being in good academic standing two semesters later.

Effectiveness of VIP Welcome Day

The Santa Monica College VIP Welcome Day includes a concentrated focus on the introduction of counseling services and programs to new students before the fall term as a means of helping them transition to college, improve first-year success, and enhance accomplishment of the Mission. Virtually all counselors participate in this effort to educate students about counseling services and programs and to encourage their usage. Results from the study examining five years of data demonstrated that first-time freshmen who participated in VIP day did the following:

- Persisted to the next spring and fall terms at statistically significantly greater rates than those who did not participate (85.3% versus 74.1% and 57.5% versus 49.8%).
- Were retained in a significantly larger proportion of their attempted courses than non-attendees (88% versus 82%).
- Successfully completed a significantly larger proportion of their attempted courses than non-attendees (69% versus 61%).

Student Equity Projects

Responding to the governor's increased funding for Equity in the 2014-2015 budget and following guidelines set forth in Senate Bill 860, the Santa Monica College Student Equity Plan Task Force began its work in Spring 2014 to address gaps in student success. The development of this plan served as a means for engaging the broader College community in meaningful dialogue to improve the success rates of the College's Black and Hispanic students and resulted in two distinct pathways of activity: 1) Research and inquiry and 2) Intervention and student support. These two pathways include an evaluation process to determine the most successful practices and how they can be brought to scale in order to have a broad and significant impact on closing the achievement gap. Many of the selected equity projects provide new or enhanced support services to students to improve course, degree, certificate, and transfer achievement and minimize the equity gaps experienced by target group students. As these projects are reviewed and assessed, the College community will consider plans for scaling up and sustaining the most effective strategies.