Strategy Teams Organize For Higher Student Achievement, Retention and Service Learning

A year of planning and coaching for Achieving the Dream turned into action during the Fall 2006 semester. Faculty, staff and students began the implementation phase of a campus-wide, four-year effort to reduce achievement gaps confronting first-time degree seekers and to test new practices in developmental education and student engagement.

A review of an action plan, submitted for approval of the first-year $120,000 grant, led to a restructuring of the Core Team by introducing a new committee of Team Leaders to enhance productivity, refine priorities and strategies and monitor the budget to ensure funds are applied to desired outcomes. Based on regular meetings with the President, Core and Strategy Team Leaders and consultations with coaches, original strategies were amended.

The changes stemmed from further analysis of student data, and on recommendations from our coaches, Dr. Jacquie Belcher and Dr. Terri Manning.

At the core of Capital’s plan are three strategies that evolved from the high percentage of first generation students at the College who require developmental course work and additional support before they can begin college-level study:

**Priority 1:** Increase success rates in development mathematics, English, and ESL courses for all students and reduce the achievement gap impacting Latino/a and African American Students.

**Priority 2:** Improve the term to term retention rates of students participating in service learning activities.

The team leader for each of these strategies met with the Core Team Leader individually and with the joint strategy team committee during the summer of 2006 to refine and clarify the strategies.

(Continued on page 4)

Professor Lilliam Martinez Leads Core Team

Lilliam Martinez, an associate professor of psychology, is the new Core Team leader for the Achieving the Dream Initiative. The Core Team is coordinating overall activities for Achieving the Dream, including oversight of the strategy teams and engagement with the community that the College serves as the implementation phase begins.

Lilliam Martinez has worked with strategy team leaders to identify activities that will facilitate implementation of objectives sought during the four-year initiative. She is an alumna of Capital Community College who went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts Degree at Smith College, and a Master’s Degree from the University of Connecticut.

INSIDE

- Increasing Success in ESL, Math and English
- New Resources For Black, Latino Males
- New Tutoring Software Benefits Students
- “Degrees Matter” Campaign
- Assessment of Service Learning Underway
- Capital Is Part of a National Movement
- Capital Students Join “Conversations on Race”

3 Priorities For Student Success

- Increase success rates in developmental ESL, mathematics & English
- Improve retention rates with a focus on Black and Latino males
- Improve retention rate of students involved in service learning
Priority 1

Increasing Success in ESL, Math and English

ESL
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Prior to the fall semester, the ESL Strategy Team facilitated a professional development activity that introduced ESL adjunct faculty to the Achieving the Dream ESL work plan. The team reviewed plans for tracking student cohorts and considered future workshop topics to enhance instructional delivery and curriculum. On October 27, consultant Betsy Parrish from Hamline University, Minnesota led a faculty training session entitled Keeping ESL Learners at the Center. Subsequently, the ESL Strategy Team selected three of Prof. Parrish’s nine learner-centered principles on which to focus professional development for the upcoming 2007 semesters. As a result, a range of learner-centered approaches will be implemented which will include strategies-based instructional techniques, the learning/teaching styles connection and alternative assessment practices.

Math
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Math faculty designed a grading schema during the spring and summer of 2006, which was used to gauge overall student comprehension of mathematical concepts. This data was used to design classroom-level interventions, and faculty development workshops, to assist student comprehension of mathematics. Math faculty created a series of workshops entitled, Math Teachers Count. The workshops are focused on math concepts that previous assessment tools indicated were of concern to students and are open to all students.

English
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The Developmental English Strategy Team met with the Director of the Learning Center to discuss creating writing conferences for English 101 courses to enhance students’ productivity during tutorial sessions.

Priority 2

New Campus Resources For Black, Latino Males

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Led by Capital’s Dean of Administration, Lester Primus, the Black and Latino Male Strategy Team’s months of effort culminated in the opening of the Black and Latino Men’s Resource Center this fall. Open three days a week, the center aims to connect Capital Community College men with resources that will help them thrive in college. One of the first principles the team established was that all actions must involve direct contact with students, with regular follow up.

The Team is providing professional development workshops for English faculty. A workshop entitled Student-Centered Teaching Strategies was held in September for adjunct faculty teaching developmental English courses. This workshop focused on best teaching practices for developmental English and learner-centered teaching strategies.

In November, two nationally known consultants from Portland Community College in Oregon presented participatory workshops on learner-centered teaching. Frieda Campbell-Peltier presented It’s a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood – Creating the Community Classroom to Improve Student Success and Persistence. Kurt Simonds, Dean of Student Support Services at Portland and a former Capital faculty member, presented Writing the Way In: In Class, In College, In Context, which focused on critical reading and writing activities.

Brewington and the rest of the Center’s dedicated workers hope that over time the men at Capital will realize the value of the Men’s Resource Center: To help students become more comfortable in the classroom, and ultimately, to succeed in College and in life.
Communication Team Develops “Degrees Matter” Campaign

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The Communication Team is building awareness of Achieving the Dream goals and activities on campus and in the larger community. Each member of the “Comm Team” is paired with a strategy team (ESL, Developmental Math, Developmental English, Service Learning, Black and Latino Men) and the Data Team to offer assistance when public dissemination of team activities is required.

The Comm Team created the first in a series of posters highlighting national Achieving the Dream themes. This year’s campaign, Degrees Matter: Get Yours, features three successful alumni who stand as role models to encourage current students to continue toward earning their degrees at Capital. A total of 18 posters were printed, framed, and displayed throughout the campus. These posters were based on student success stories, found on the college’s website (also a Communication Team project) and were reformatted for use on the new flat-screen monitors located on campus.

The poster project will continue each year with additional alums and students added. The Communication Team participates in regular conference calls which link participating colleges from across the country. The calls are moderated by KSA Plus Communications, the national media consulting partner of Achieving the Dream. The focus of the conference calls is to examine implementation efforts, particularly those which engage the wider community with college Achieving the Dream activities.

Jeffery Holmes was featured in the first series of Achieving the Dream posters produced by the Communication Team.

New Software To Enhance Data, Help Students

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Achieving the Dream colleges are seeking ways to enhance data collection because of the initiative’s focus on measurable outcomes. At Capital, the search is on for an appropriate survey software system that will help to collect and tabulate data.

The Institutional Research Director (Data Team Leader) is meeting with each strategy team to assist in the construction of evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of activities connected to each strategy. Data team members are also collecting and analyzing baseline data that include cohort and term files for review by the Community College system and JBL Associates, the organization coordinating data collection for Achieving the Dream.

Results of the data collection will guide the Core Team in adopting and refining effective practices to improve the achievement of students. In a related development, strategy teams are reviewing software that will help students in ESL, English and math. Of particular interest is PLATO, a skills enhancement software program. In an effort to integrate Achieving the Dream strategies to the College’s Learning Center, the strategy teams and the Learning Center director teamed up to acquire Tutor ‘Fac, a software system that will track students’ use of tutorial services and maintain data that can be utilized to assess the effectiveness of Achieving the Dream strategies.

Assessment Of Service Learning Is Underway

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First-year implementation of Achieving the Dream at Capital includes the formation of a committee to assess current activities and partnerships across the campus and in the community on service learning.

In the process of planning the implementation, service learning emerged as a new priority for engaging students in the learning process. The Service Learning committee is reaching out to deans, division directors and department chairs to identify the scope and content of current service learning opportunities that exist at Capital.

Data collection will be followed by meetings convened by the service learning team leader with faculty members and personnel who have established service learning within their programs and/or curriculum.

The resulting inventory of service learning opportunities and links to the community will assist Achieving the Dream core team in integrating service learning data and produce a document that outlines the current service learning community connections. This data will then be used to work with the established partnerships to assess community needs and expand on service learning opportunities in gateway courses within the four-year implementation phase.
Achieving The Dream: Capital Is Part Of A National Movement

Achieving the Dream (www.achievingthedream.org) is a multi-year national initiative to help more community college students succeed. The initiative is particularly concerned about students who traditionally have faced the most significant barriers to success, including low-income students and students of color. Achieving the Dream emphasizes the use of data to drive change and focuses on measurable outcomes, especially closing achievement gaps.

The initiative includes 10 national partner organizations and 55 community colleges that have joined the initiative since 2004.

Lumina Foundation for Education (www.luminafoundation.org) provided funding for the initiative’s startup and is providing ongoing funding for many of the participating colleges as well as other elements of the work. KnowledgeWorks Foundation (www.kwfdn.org) and Nellie Mae Education Foundation (www.nmefdn.org) are providing additional funding to help support colleges that joined the initiative in 2005. In Connecticut, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation is providing funds for the initiative at Capital, Housatonic, and Norwalk Community Colleges.

Students Join “Community Conversations on Race”

Capital students Jessica Rodriguez and Ashlei Johnson joined a group of students from Hartford’s Trinity College to participate in the National Conference for Community and Justice’s (NCCJ) “Community Conversations on Race” program during the fall semester. Students shared their personal experiences and issues within their campuses and in the community on racism.

Facilitators Judith Barlow-Roberts, Kelly Benkert and Jenny Carrasco led discussions among students to raise awareness, reduce racial misunderstanding and devise an action plan that will impact social justice.

The plan calls for organizing an International Hip Hop Festival in April on the nearby Trinity College campus. “We are proud that Capital Community College students took part in the program and are involved in planning the April event,” said Achieving the Dream Core Team Leader Lilliam Martinez.

Strategy Teams Organize for Higher Achievement

(Continued from page 1)

The Core and Strategy Team leaders consulted with the Communication and Data Team leaders to provide the support for implementing activities.

Strategy team leaders are keeping the initiative on track overseeing implementation in their area of expertise, reporting out to the Core Team, and maintaining budgets by creatively accessing additional funding resources to augment funding when necessary.

To document progress and activities the Core Team Leader distributed a template that requires a time line for each activity planned during the four-year implementation phase. Team Leaders agreed to complete this time line by the end of the Fall semester. The four-year time tables will be submitted by the Core Team Leader who will submit them to the President and Coaches for review.