HLC Conference Report

Professor Dennis Given

Olive-Harvey College

English, Reading, and Literature

Presented to Dr. Follins, President

* Making Retention the Linchpin around which the University Organizes its Activities: Working to bring Tinto’s Vision to Reality

The session described a process for thinking through how a university uses data to identify factors that contribute to student attrition in order to design a comprehensive retention plan that promotes broad faculty and staff participation and ownership and improves the quality of student experience at the institution. The speakers detailed an effective case study.

Ernest I. Nolan, Provost and Vice President for Academic Administration, and James O’Neill, Associate Vice President for University Accreditation and Title III Project Director, Madonna University

Monday, April 8, 2013. (3:15 – 4 p.m.) Location: Regency A, West Tower, Gold Level

Although the process of thinking through how to use data to identify causal factors for student attrition was interesting, I believe the main outcome for this session had to do with five suggested strategies:

1. Bonding with College Students
2. Major and Career Exploration
3. Focus on Students of Color – especially African American males
4. Advising
5. Classroom Experience
6. Racial Diversity in Composition of Faculty
7. Professional Development for Adjuncts

In my own view the most important points had to do with bonding with students and educating students about the process of career development. I say that because I am currently contextualizing career development into all my English classes (English 98, 100, 101, and 102), and although I have lost some students (mostly in English 98), for those that remain, this focus has resulted in more engagement – and hopefully, more retention and completion. Bonding, of course, is a strategy I have always believed in. One area of great concern is the retention of African American males.

These five suggested strategies also relate to teaching, learning, and assessment. Certainly, major and career exploration is taking place in the classroom (via regular instruction and attempts like my own which are undertaken to varying degrees) and the efforts of our career advisors. We also have such programs as Men of Distinction to address the issue of retention of African American males. More needs to be done, however. The presenters also discussed the role of learning communities in teaching, learning, and assessment, as well as testing to identify students at risk, and the use of mentors (Student Success Coaches) to encourage these students. They also suggested an early alert program, such as Grades First. We are actively pursuing each of these endeavors.

As for the racial composition of our faculty, I believe that given our current student demographic, the diversity we have is sufficient. As the TDL program evolves and a more diverse campus becomes evident, this issue may need to be addressed.

In my view, we are doing well in relation to each of the aforementioned five strategies; however, although we are certainly making efforts to encourage adjunct participation in professional development, there is still work to be done in relation to attracting more adjunct interest. My own role here has been more of a “divide and conquer” approach, as I have entered into a mentor relationship with one of our adjuncts, Alicia Parker. Through this relationship, she has become more interested in professional development and has even applied for a full-time position here at Olive-Harvey. Perhaps this type of relationship could be encouraged amongst other faculty and the adjuncts in their departments.

As for the tracking of numbers related to attrition and retention, one interesting suggestion on how to use data was noted by the presenter and may be something we should consider: use swipe cards (perhaps student ID cards) to record student use of support services. Although I am sure efforts are being made to keep track of these numbers, the use of a swipe card might be much more efficient and time sensitive.

Finally, I believe that my main role in relation to application of the content of this HLC session has to do with my tenure project. As stated earlier, I am contextualizing career development into my English classes. I believe I will be doing the same in an African American Studies and English learning community in the fall, and tentatively, I’m planning to do the same in the spring of 2014 with a TDL course and English. As I develop expertise in relation to the process of contextualization, the plan is to be able to present the findings of my study, to develop a “clearing-house” of ideas, and to be available for consultation to all faculty who would choose to use this method of teaching and learning in order to improve retention and graduation rates.

* An At-Risk Student Immersion Project: College and Career Preparation

This session focused on an innovative, mission-driven approach to addressing at-risk student needs in relation to contextualizing and improving developmental skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. The speaker provided an overview of the cross-disciplinary collaboration, the curriculum development, the implementation, and the initial comparative success data for this career-focused, end-in-mind approach.

Sandy W. Valensky, System Director for General and Developmental Education, Baker College

Monday, April 8, 2013. (4:15 – 5 p.m.) Location: Columbus KL, East Tower, Gold Level

The main outcome of this session had to do with the illustrative value of the program instituted by Baker College. Their program differs from our own in that they use an intensive, immersion strategy. In other words, their developmental students have the option of taking a 10-week course (explanation to follow) that prepares them for college credit courses. It is mission-driven, career-focused, student-centered, and project-based.

Here is the course description: Provides career exploration with a focus on essential skills in reading, writing, and math. Students are immersed in specific, real world college and career learning experiences, which incorporate various technologies. This course is intended for students who place in all three developmental courses (English, Reading, and Math). Successful completion of this course requires passing a portfolio review and exit exams.

This course is worth 12 credit hours, and of necessity, meets longer hours and more days than a normal three hour course would meet. Time-wise, it would be the equivalent of taking four classes. Baker College is also one among the few that still runs on a quarter-system. This, therefore, is indeed an intensive, immersion experience for students. This is also why students are given the option of taking regular developmental courses that do not combine writing, reading, and math into one course. It is understood that not all students’ schedules would allow them to take such an intensive and immersive course. Students who do not pass this class must take the regular developmental courses that focus only on one required subject (English, Reading, or Math).

To understand how combining all three courses is even possible, the presenter shared her experience at Baker College, but more importantly, the focus of the course and the student learning outcomes:

Five essential questions are the focus of the course:

1. How are reading, writing, math, and technology essential to all careers?
2. How does continuous learning contribute to a profession?
3. Why do I need to think critically?
4. How do real world experiences contribute to college preparation?
5. How does professionalism impact my role as a student and an employee?

Student Learning Outcomes and Enabling Objectives

1. Using the writing process to clearly and concisely convey ideas
2. Construct meaning from written material
3. Apply research skills
4. Solve problems using critical thinking skills
5. Explore the importance of professionalism
6. Evaluate the real world situations through mathematical operations
7. Apply various mathematical formulas to solve problems
8. Evaluate graphical information
9. Investigate tools and resources to support student learning

These, of course, speak to how the content of this session relates to teaching, learning, and assessment.

Finally, it should be noted that this course is taught by three different instructors, each responsible for the content related to his or her discipline. The course was also designed by professional instructional designers along with the course instructors – who must work as a team. However, if Olive-Harvey were to attempt to institute a course like this, we would definitely need to communicate with this presenter and Baker College in a more in-depth manner. We might also need to hire an instructional designer. As for my own role in such an endeavor, if it were to be attempted, I would definitely want to be involved in any pilot program that would be developed. Plus, any expertise I may develop in the meantime could be an asset to the program’s success.

A handout that was provided by the presenter will be provided.