Retention and Graduation Council
November 18, 2010

MEETING MINUTES


C. Lovitt announced that today’s meeting will be devoted to setting priorities for the proposed A2S initiatives and establishing membership for the four A2S subcommittees. He circulated a sign-up sheet and asked Council members to volunteer, as well as to identify any individuals who should be invited to serve on these subcommittees.

A2S Subcommittee Membership:

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<tr>
<th>Commuter:</th>
<th>Residential:</th>
<th>Transfer:</th>
<th>Minority:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K. Poppe</td>
<td>C. Marquette</td>
<td>J. Mulrooney (or</td>
<td>M. Bigley (or Transfer)</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Chasse</td>
<td>L. Washko</td>
<td>Minority)</td>
<td>R. Hernandez (or Transfer)</td>
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<td>L. Glaser</td>
<td>J. Alicandro</td>
<td>S. Petrosino</td>
<td>N. Hoffman</td>
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<td>M. Garcia-Bowen</td>
<td>T. Corbitt</td>
<td>M. Garcia-Bowen</td>
<td>A. Reasco</td>
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<td>S. Hazan</td>
<td>M. Fallon</td>
<td>M. Horan</td>
<td>L. Hall</td>
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<td>M. McLaughlin</td>
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<td>O. Odesina</td>
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A2S Steering Committee Meeting Overview – C. Lovitt

C. Lovitt provided a brief summary of the A2S Steering Committee’s first meeting. The Committee discussed various institutional processes that currently impede student success, and course scheduling was the primary focus of this discussion. C. Lovitt explained that although the schedule blocks were instituted to eliminate overlap and double the amount of courses offered, not everyone takes advantage of the time blocks that are available. For example, 78% of CCSU’s evening classes are scheduled in the first evening time block. In addition, many courses are only scheduled on a Tuesday/Thursday time block. As a result, many courses within the same discipline are scheduled at the same time, making it difficult for students to take more than one class in their major. C. Lovitt also reported that not everyone has been respecting the schedule blocks, and steps will be taken to ensure that everyone abides by this system.

The Committee also discussed the need for more systematic feedback from students about their experiences at the institution. Based on recommendations made in the Action Plan, Committee members discussed the following items:

- Conducting exit interviews: The Committee discussed creating an instrument for advisors to conduct routine exit interviews for graduating seniors. C. Lovitt will follow up with deans/department chairs to determine if this is feasible.
• Following up with students who haven’t registered: The Committee suggested various ways in which to reach out to students who have not registered and do not plan to return to CCSU. S. Petrosino can provide a report of current students who have not registered for the spring semester.

• Following up with transcript requests: Committee members discussed attaching an automatic follow-up questionnaire to transcript requests to obtain feedback regarding why the request was made.

• The Committee discussed appending a brief survey to the end of the online registration process in order to assess students' experiences with registration.

C. Lovitt announced that M. McLaughlin has developed a website for the A2S initiative, and decisions need to be made regarding the content of and accessibility to this site. M. Garcia-Bowen suggested adding a blog to the website for the campus community to post comments.

Prioritizing A2S Goals – C. Lovitt

C. Lovitt asked the Council to provide feedback regarding the prioritization of A2S goals. He asked members to consider the action items on pages 7-10 of the Action Plan and identify the initiatives that will have the most significant impact on student success. Council members discussed various facets of A2S implementation, and the following comments/suggestions were made:

Ways of Approaching A2S Goals:
• C. Lovitt stated that the A2S initiative focuses specifically on underrepresented minorities and low-income students; however, with the graduation rate at 50%, our focus should be to implement changes that will promote the success of all students. M. Garcia-Bowen expressed concern regarding looking at student success as a whole. She noted that there are cultural implications that affect the success of minority students, and using a "cookie cutter" formula to promote student success would not be effective. C. Lovitt agreed and provided an example of an initiative that the School of Business is currently developing. The Edge Program has goals similar to A2S, but it focuses primarily on minorities entering the insurance and financial services sectors. C. Lovitt suggested that this initiative could become a model for many similar industry-based collaborations that work toward achieving the overarching goals of A2S.

Financial Resources:
• C. Lovitt announced that budget managers will be receiving a memo including information about one-time funding that will be available at the end of this year. He stated that due to anticipated budget reductions, this funding will need to be used to support the highest institutional priorities. Initiatives will need to address the following goals to receive funding:
  1) Improve students’ readiness for college
  2) Improve students’ academic performance
  3) Improve the quality and scope of academic support services, especially those involving advising, tutoring and mentoring
  4) Increase student retention
  5) Increase graduation rates

Grant Funding: R. Waterman suggested that the Council look into possible grant funding opportunities, such as those provided by The National Science Foundation (NSF). He gave a brief explanation of the grant proposal process and required criteria. C. Lovitt asked R. Waterman to identify some possible funding sources and share them at one of the spring meetings.
• J. Mulrooney stated that although financial resources warrant an important discussion, there are many initiatives within the Action Plan that would be fairly inexpensive to implement. He suggested focusing on initiatives that involve a cultural change, rather than ones that require extensive funding (e.g. midterm grades).

Advising:
• L. Zidani-Eroglu suggested designating a group of faculty who are willing to assume mentoring roles, in addition to having peer mentoring among students. She added that this is not meant to replace academic advisors, but rather to foster a sense of community among the student population.
• Council members discussed the importance of one-on-one advising, and several members agreed that establishing individual relationships with students is vital to student success.
• S. Hazan raised a few questions regarding the roles, requirements, and responsibilities of an advisor, including what kinds of training advisors receive for dealing with students of various cultures. He suggested building upon training practices in the current advising model in order to encourage a one-on-one mentoring style. C. Lovitt stated that this is a very important and serious suggestion that requires professional development. He added that advising should assume a much higher profile within the institution, and it should be something that is recognized, valued and rewarded.
• C. Lovitt stated that a tool will be developed to assess faculty advising. Council members made the following suggestions regarding advising assessment:
  → Create an online assessment form that can be filled out, stored in a database and retrieved at any point in the student’s career.
  → Develop a set of standard, university-wide assessment questions, and then allow the schools to adapt the assessment to their individual needs.
• K. Poppe stated that students deserve a certain level of service from their advisors. When CACE advisors spend the time to ask about goals, encourage full course loads, and promote a four-year graduation rate, the students come to expect that level of service from all subsequent advisors. Insisting that faculty advisors perform at that same level of service is vital to student success.
• N. Hoffman announced that the Advising Committee will distribute a survey in December, asking undergraduate students to provide feedback regarding how well they feel they are being advised. M. McLaughlin asked N. Hoffman to send him the details so he can begin marketing.
• M. Garcia-Bowen suggested the encouragement of a holistic approach to advising, rather than focusing specifically on academics.
• C. Lovitt stated that he hopes to elevate the profile of advising by recognizing and rewarding advising excellence. M. Horan noted that not every faculty member will have a knack for advising. One option could be to place faculty who have a knack for advising in extensive training, and allow those who do not wish to advise to serve the institution in other ways (e.g. committees). L. Zidani-Eroglu noted that advising is not rewarded to the same extent as other duties when it comes to promotion and tenure.

Encouraging Student Participation in On-Campus Activities:
• N. Hoffman stated that NSSE data shows that first year students who report involvement in an extracurricular activity are more likely to stay at the institution, and we should be encouraging this kind of behavior.
• L. Tordenti stated that it is surprising to see how many students are unaware of some of the programs and services offered on campus, and she asked the Council for feedback regarding ways in which Student Affairs can more effectively market these programs.
• M. Garcia-Bowen stated that there is a need for more proactive programming that is specifically geared toward commuter/transfer students.

Promoting Cultural Change:
• L. Zidani-Eroglu noted that while cultural change is important for faculty and staff, it is equally as important for students. Students need to feel like they are part of the institution, and we need to find a way of reaching them as individuals. People tend to think of minorities as a group; however, within this group are individuals with various issues. Rather than focusing on the overarching goals of A2S, we should identify smaller steps for success that are more specific to this target population and that will ultimately feed into our overall A2S goals. C. Lovitt agreed, and noted that there are some broad institutional adjustments regarding policy and cultural change that need to be addressed; however, issues specific to certain student populations should be addressed individually.
• M. McLaughlin raised a question regarding how well we know our student population. He noted that about 80% of our students are commuters, who are more likely to take a transactional approach to their education. He then asked if institutions with similar commuter populations have the same issues with retention and graduation. N. Hoffman stated that our retention and graduation rates are lower than that of peer institutions with similar commuter populations. Data shows that there is a common misconception regarding who our students really are. For example, minority transfer students finish at a much higher rate than non-transfer minorities—despite a false perception that minority transfer students don’t do as well.

Scholarships/Financial Need of Students:
• A. Reasco noted that many minority students with high GPA’s struggle to obtain financial assistance, and scholarships would be an important source of funding for these students.
• O. Odesina asked if it would be possible to extend merit scholarships for students who maintain a certain GPA. These scholarships are only offered for one year, and students seem to need a steadier source of financial assistance.

Action Items
• C. Lovitt asked Council members to volunteer to serve on the four A2S subcommittees, as well as to identify any individuals who should be invited to serve.
• C. Lovitt asked R. Waterman to identify some possible funding sources and share them at one of the spring meetings.
• L. Tordenti asked the Council for feedback regarding ways in which Student Affairs can more effectively market campus programs.
• M. McLaughlin asked N. Hoffman to send him details so he can begin marketing the Advising Committee survey.

The next Retention and Graduation Council meeting will be held on Thursday, December 2, 2010 at 1:00 p.m. in Bellin A/B, Student Center.