Minutes of the Graduation and Retention Council  
December 15, 2009


Meeting convened at 1:04pm.

1. Subcommittee Progress Reports
   a. Focus groups with students who have high-probability and low-probability to graduate (B. Hosch)
      i. Identified high probably and low probability graduation students based on GPA and # of credits earned
      ii. Conducted focus groups with second year, third year, and fourth year students
         1. Participation
            a. 24 high probability students signed up, most showed
            b. 2 low probability students signed up, none showed
         2. Try to rerun focus groups with low-probability students?
            a. The committee supported the idea of trying to run the groups during evenings in February
   3. Preliminary findings – 5 themes for high-probability students
      a. Student motivation and personal responsibility
         i. Many were members of the Honors Program
      b. Valued and sought out relationships with other students
      c. Difficulties with curricular structures
         i. Scheduling and offering of classes
         ii. Information could flow better, particularly through cell phones and web resources
         iii. Students want to know the content, expectations, syllabus, books, etc., before they register for courses.
            1. M. Leake noted that we may not have the resources to devote to this at this time.
      d. University communication and logistics
         i. Information could flow better, particularly through cell phones and web resources
         ii. Students want to know the content, expectations, syllabus, books, etc., before they register for courses.
      e. Advising
         i. Generally liked the connection with their faculty advisor
         ii. Sometimes received mixed messages
      f. Other
         i. B. Hosch - Third-year students noted that transition to higher-level courses in the major a challenge
         ii. D. Adams - Departments should be encouraged to think through scheduling challenges to offer broadest coverage
         iii. J. Paige – Fourth-year students suggested that general education courses be presented in a more positive light. Most students feel that they are courses to “get out of the way”.

   iii. Questions/Concerns
      1. Contacting students
         a. B. Hosch reported that phone call and e-mail follow-ups were ineffective.
         b. M. Leake noted a similar problem with contacting students who were referred for early academic warning.
         c. D. Adams suggested texting, but there were concerns about privacy.
            i. L. Zidani-Eroglu suggested obtaining preferred modes of contact.
ii. L. Glaser noted that students do not tend to use their CCSU e-mails.
d. D. Adams suggested that CCSU use Facebook.
e. O. Petkova suggested making better use of Blackboard Vista as a communication system.
  i. C. Lovitt reported that every faculty member has a Vista shell for each course that they will be teaching in spring 2010.
f. O. Petkova suggested that going through faculty advisors may be effective, although L. Glaser noted that many students do not contact their advisors (despite Herculean attempts to get them to visit).

2. Meeting the course needs of students – S. Petrosino
   a. S. Petrosino reported that she has received projections for fall 2010 course needs from the Ad Astra scheduling software. Department Chairs will be receiving this information to consider when developing their spring 2010 schedules.
   b. D. Sanders raised the issue of transfer students filling seats that might otherwise be filled by first-year or second-year students.
      i. S. Petrosino noted that many students transfer in with “xx” courses, which makes it difficult to use the profile data to determine the number of sections that should be offered.
      ii. L. Hall has been soliciting information from Department Chairs regarding course substitutions to address the “xx” courses and transfer credit.
      iii. S. Petrosino also noted the challenge of timing for nonmatriculated students to register.
   c. S. Petrosino can measure the number of times that students try to get into closed courses. This information might serve as a index for student demand.
   d. C. Lovitt stated that if there is student demand, we will find the funding support to offer that course.

3. Student delays in registration
   a. O. Petkova emphasized advising a semester ahead
   b. C. Lovitt noted that the system gets bogged down during registration and even highly motivated students may not get the courses they need.
   c. C. Lovitt noted that we need to make sure that we can schedule enough sections of key courses (e.g., Soc 211, Comm 140) to accommodate second-semester first-year students with low priority.
   d. S. Petrosino noted that the longer students delay registration, the more likely low-enrolled classes will be canceled that might otherwise have been filled.
   e. M. Leake and O. Petkova inquired about wait listing.
      i. S. Petrosino noted that students might assume that they are enrolled in a course rather than wait-listed. There is a need for education. Also, students may assume that they are going to get a seat in a course for which they are wait-listed. There is no way to “hide” wait-listed numbers.
      ii. S. Petrosino will pursue this option pending resource availability.

4. To what extent do we accommodate students’ evolving technological preferences?
   a. L. Glaser noted that some students are not comfortable with technology
   b. M. Fallon noted that data from the Information Technology Committee can inform this issue
L. Zidani-Eroglu suggested that the solution is not in the technology itself, but understanding the behavior and mindset of students with a low-probability of graduation needs to be changed. We need to understand the habits of these students.

B. Hosch noted that the literature recommends a highly redundant approach (e-mail, snail mail, telephone, texting, etc.).

E. Chasse noted the importance of having all the tools available and students will use those that they feel most comfortable with.

S. Petrosino wondered about the degree of maturity and responsibility of students. How can we help students accept the responsibility?

D. Adams pointed out that new faculty may feel pressured to satisfy students' requests (even those that might be unreasonable) to obtain favorable teaching evaluations.

L. Hall noted that we could do more to keep students informed without technology (e.g., banners announcing registration, applying for graduation, etc.).

Did the focus groups target class-specific issues? – C. Lovitt

B. Hosch reported that we did not ask those types of questions that would be specific to particular classes.

M. Fallon noted that the focus groups did produce some class-specific concerns (e.g., third-year transitions to 300-level courses in the major). This information can be used to develop more class-specific questions for the next round of focus groups.

D. Adams reported that we have 14 class-specific suggestions for follow-up (e.g., 4th-year students brought up the issue of internship experiences).

D. Adams also noted the need to use existing research/programs to inform future focus group questions.

L. Glaser reported that the Dean of Arts & Sciences is trying to formalize the internship process.

What are students' expectations of their experiences at CCSU? - L. Zidani-Eroglu

B. Hosch noted that only 35% of our students expect to be satisfied by their college experience.

M. Leake suggested that students do not realize that academic rigor will increase as they progress through their coursework. By the time they are juniors and seniors about 40% of students are working about 30 hours a week.

L. Hall and B. Hosch noted that students don’t realize that they need to average 16 credits a semester to graduate in four years.

D. Adams suggested that faculty include in their syllabi expectations of what it takes to succeed in a class.

R. Hernandez noted that students are more interested in social priorities during their first year at CCSU and there should be a more prominent emphasis on faculty expectations for student success.

C. Lovitt suggested that we establish a subcommittee to examine communication issues in particular. L. Hall will coordinate this initiative.

D. Sanders pointed out that we have a mandate to help students acculturate to University life.

M. Leake noted that we can help students acculturate through the FYE program. Other challenges may exist for transfer students.
Action Items

1. Schedule focus groups again in February; incorporate more class-specific questions
2. Complete report on focus groups, including recommendations
3. Convene a “communication subcommittee” to study strategies for improving communication with students.
4. S. Petrosino will pursue implementation of wait-listing students during course registration

Meeting adjourned at 2:31pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by M. Fallon