

Bridge to Success: Sophomore Mentoring Program

The dynamics of student retention are changing rapidly and outpacing college and university resources. Institutions have become increasingly dependent upon enrolling individuals who may be unprepared academically, financially, and socially for higher education (Fowles, 2014). These students often are met by faculty and staff who struggle to meet the needs of those at risk of dropping out. While a myriad of support services are offered, such as academic advising, tutoring, targeted first-year programming, and wellness co-curricula (DeAngelo, 2014; Perzmadian & Credé, 2016; Tinto, 2012), perhaps it is the institutions and those within them that require support in building the capacity to effectively retain students to graduation. As students begin their college career, they enter a period of transition and while some thrive in this new environment and find excitement in it, others can feel overwhelmed and lost if they do not experience appropriate campus academic and social integration (Tinto, 2012). Issues of marginality (a sense of not belonging) can plague students and result in their departure from college (Schlossberg, 1989). Thus, in Fall 2020 a new program, the Bridge to Success: Sophomore Mentoring Program, will be piloted for first-generation sophomores with a focus on building faculty and staff knowledge on student identity development theory, as well as their mentoring capacity.

Bridge to Success is grounded in a theory of change model with the mission to increase the sense of belonging among first-generation sophomores. The program is intended to reinforce the benefits of campus involvement and provide relationships with caring faculty and staff who strive to help them achieve their full potential at UCCS and beyond. Short-term expected outcomes include bolstering students' campus connectedness and mattering, as well as an orientation for faculty and staff in mentoring best practices. The training will include a program introduction regarding the need for the program, the mission, and expected outcomes; the roles and responsibilities of mentoring; a discussion on student wellness and self-care; cultural competency and implicit bias training; a presentation on Schlossberg's Theory of Marginality and Mattering and Chickering's 7 Vectors of Identity Development; and a concluding student panel focused on their mentoring needs. The long-term expected outcome is increasing the retention rate among student participants. The program will cluster small groups of three to five students with faculty and staff mentors in which they will be exposed to a variety of campus co-curricular activities. Activities will include monthly email/WebEx exchanges, quarterly coffee/lunch check-ins, campus and local cultural events each semester, and an annual program orientation and closing. Freshmen who may not have found their niche at UCCS and who would benefit from mentorship will be identified by GPS Leadership faculty. The program formally commences Spring 2020 and operates through the following academic year.

The Bridge to Success program is being designed by Dr. Sylvia Mendez (EDI Diversity Assembly faculty fellow overseeing student mentoring); co-constructed with student participants; and developed in collaboration with Professor Andrea Herrera (Associate Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusiveness) and Omar Montoya (Director of Gateway Program Seminar).

References

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