



Within Our Sights: Toward National Leadership in Higher Education | October 18, 2013

Morning Panel Presentation

Peer Power: Effective Utilization of Student Mentors

Presenter Contact Information

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Campus Project

Massasoit Community College Writing Fellows Pilot Project

In October 2011, the Bank of America/Charles H. Pearson Foundation awarded the Massasoit Community College Writing Center a two-year, \$13,410 grant to pilot a Writing Fellows Program. Writing fellows are peer writing tutors who pair with faculty members teaching writing-intensive courses. Writing fellows act as tutors, mentors, readers, and workshop leaders for students, offering writing support to students in a non-evaluative, peer-to-peer context. As found in collected data, including feedback from faculty members, tutors, and students, the program was a positive addition to writing support services at Massasoit. The goals of Massasoit's Writing Fellows Program included:

- Increasing the number of students who benefit from and utilize student support services
- Improving student writing skills in composition courses and across the curriculum
- Creating a culture of writing on campus and increase disciplinary writing-to-learn activities in coursework across the curriculum
- Offering fellows a valuable career development and character building opportunity
- Increasing course completion and G.P.A. for students in fellow-linked courses

In the 2011-2012 academic year, the program included four fellows who supported one or two sections of one or two courses each and reached 257 students in seven separate courses within writing, criminal justice, sociology, psychology, and speech courses. In the 2012-2013 academic year, the program included 4 fellows who supported between one to three sections of a course and reached 472 students in six separate courses within writing, literature, criminal justice, and sociology courses. Fellows typically spent time in their linked class either observing or assisting with writing activities and presentations. They additionally encouraged student visits to the Writing Center. Regular faculty-fellow meetings and monthly all-participant meetings offered opportunities for communication, planning, and collaboration. For each course, the specific duties of the writing fellow were determined by the instructor and fellow.

Vision Project Outcome Areas

- ✓ **College Completion**
- ✓ **Student Learning**
- ✓ **Closing Achievement Gaps**

Research and Data

Project Duration: *Fall 2011 - Spring 2013*

- The Writing Center administered paper and online surveys to faculty, fellows, and students to assess the effectiveness of the Program; about 40% of the participants responded, and the results were analyzed in SPSS via the College's Office of Institutional Research. 2012-2013 surveys indicated that students found in-class activities to be the most helpful part of the Fellows Program. These activities included: peer review sessions, model assignments, brainstorming workshops, citation workshops, research/integrating sources workshops, revision strategies workshops, flash writing activities, small-group discussions, and journaling projects.
- Anecdotally, the fellows emphasized throughout the year in conversations with the Writing Center Program Coordinator that developing familiarity, trust, inclusion, and community within the class was the most their most important tool of success as fellows. With that in mind, fellows and faculty suggested that in the future, fellows should increase their in-class presence to every class, rather than once, or less than once, a week.
- As would be expected, it appeared that the courses where fellows were most successfully integrated were those that had the most frequent and demanding writing tasks. Students tended to respond more to working with a fellow when writing was perceived to be a significant element of the course.
- One of the Program's goals was to encourage student use of the Writing Center, and about half of the students in fellow-paired courses met with their fellow at the Writing Center. Our data also shows that students who did visit the Writing Center were more likely to pass their class than those who did not, and further, that Writing Center visits had a positive impact on "borderline" students in the D or B range. Although the data is not conclusive, it warrants additional research into the impact of in-class and out-of-class tutoring on student success.
- The survey data indicates that the Fellows Program was mutually beneficial. Students and fellows both gained important transferrable skills. For students, these included knowledge of the Writing Center and stronger writing process skills. For fellows, these included teaching and communication skills. In addition, faculty members and fellows supported each other. Faculty members appreciated an extra support in the classroom, and Fellows gained from collaborating with faculty members in planning and teaching.



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Campus Project

The Students Serving Our Students (SOS) Office

The Students Serving Our Students (SOS) Office arose from the mind of MWCC student Bryan Sanderson, a military veteran, who was struck by a statement made by President Dan Asquino that over half of the students in the room that day would not make it to graduation. After some research, he came to realize that more than half the time, students who drop out do so because of non-academic reasons. Today, we have the student-run and student-staffed Students SOS Office, an information and referral office, which in its first semester served nearly 500 students in helping them to address challenges with housing, transportation, child care, transitional assistance and other matters. Student mentors take part in a minimum of 12 hours of training, inclusive of at least one self-care workshop, and commit at least three hours/week to staffing the office. Coordinated by a student intern and overseen by the Center for Civic Learning and Community Engagement, the Students SOS office has in its second semester already seen over 100 students in the first month. The student mentors have their time volunteered tracked and included on their transcript, and can request letters of recommendation for employment or transfer. The student mentors meet as a group at least 2x/semester to make policy and programming decisions and recommend strategies for the following semester.

Vision Project Outcome Areas

- ✓ College Completion
- ✓ Workforce Alignment
- ✓ Preparing Citizens

Research and Data

Project Duration: *January 2013 Start - No End*

- In spring 2013, the first official semester of the SOS Office, we had 157 students who voluntarily provided their student ID # for tracking against retention; it is estimated that these students represent 375 interactions with the SOS Mentors. Of these students, 19% graduated; 67% re-enrolled for Fall 2013; and, only 14% did not re-enroll.
- 100% of the Spring 2013 Student Mentors (14) report an increased understanding in how their community works, what their role as a citizen of the community is, and how to address a social issue at a community level.
- 86% (12) of the Student Mentors report that they have a more clear understanding of the multitude of challenges students face and the societal factors that contribute to these challenges.
- In the fall of 2013, one month into the semester, the office has served 43 students, 24% of whom were in search of assistance with child care; 19% in need of housing or housing support; 19% who had transportation struggles; 19% in search of financial assistance; 14% in need of employment. 100% of these students received both internal and external referrals.
- "We helped a student get a job today. Now he will be able to afford a place to live." -MWCC Students SOS Intern
- "The SOS Office helped me apply for work study, now I can afford the gas to get to school." -MWCC Visions Student



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Campus Project

Supplemental Instruction

The Supplemental Instruction program targets traditionally challenging courses that have a high rate of D,F, and W, and provides regularly scheduled peer assisted study sessions. SI sessions integrate how-to-learn with what-to-learn. Students who attend the SI sessions discover appropriate applications of study strategies such as note taking, questioning techniques, vocabulary acquisition and test preparation, as they review content material. The ideal SI leader is a student who has recently taken the course and has been identified by the faculty member as demonstrating strong content competency as well as strong communication and interpersonal skills. The primary function of the SI leader is to facilitate discussion among SI participants and model successful learning strategies at key moments in the sessions. Collaborative learning strategies are used in SI sessions as a means of creating a more active learning environment for student participants. Salem State University has offered SI for over 25 years in such disciplines as Math, Biology, Chemistry, Geology, Psychology, Geography, English Literature.

Vision Project Outcome Areas

✓ **Student Learning**

Research and Data

Project Duration: *SI has been an ongoing academic support. It is not a project based program.*

- Outcome: Retention is operationalized as the D, F, W rates. The D,F, W rates for SI groups should be significantly lower than for the non-SI groups. When students learn and achieve higher course grades for their learning, we know that they tend to stay in higher education at a higher rate, thus affecting retention.
- Outcome: Learning is measured by the mean final course grades; the SI group should be higher than the non-SI group and the more SI's students attend, the higher the mean course grade should be.
- Outcome: At the end of each semester the students complete an evaluation to determine how helpful the students perceived the sessions to be as well as comments regarding the SI leader.



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Campus Project

Supplemental Instruction

Supplemental Instruction (SI) has been shown to improve student success. Students who have successfully completed a course attend every session of a particularly section of a specific course and then holds regularly scheduled review sessions. At the University of Massachusetts Amherst the SI program is especially attentive to the needs of students in barrier courses - those courses that make it challenging for students to persist in their chosen major. The growth of the program reflects the benefits of SI.

Vision Project Outcome Areas

- ✓ **College Participation**
- ✓ **College Completion**
- ✓ **Student Learning**
- ✓ **Closing Achievement Gaps**

Research and Data

Project Duration: *n/a*

- Focus on barrier courses - faculty and students surveyed
- Faculty support is fundamental to SI attendance
- Growth of courses with SI - 1 semester in 2002 = SI was in 8 course sections; 4 courses:
 - 1 semester in 2012 = SI ws in 31 course sections; 20 courses
- Growth of student participation: 2005-06, 2536 students; 6491 visits
- 2011-12, 4772 students; 11,762 visits