

U.S. Department of Education Title III – Improving Student Retention through Improved Student Services

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Four Key Components to Reaching Overall Institutional Goal of Improved Student Retention

1. Transform the freshman **orientation** course into a mandatory course and insure that all newly enrolled students have access on campus and online; expand orientation to include comprehensive career counseling.
2. Upgrade services offered in the **Learning Center** including expanded developmental assessment systems, tutoring, and facilities; create full-service Writing Center and Math Lab.
3. Centralize, upgrade career services staff and resources into a full-service **Career Center**.
4. Implement a comprehensive **developmental education** program, including specialized learning communities, tutoring, counseling, and other support systems.

KEY COMPONENT 1: Orientation

Goal & Comprehensive Analysis: PVCC will transform the freshman **orientation** course into a mandatory course and insure that all newly enrolled students, regardless of scheduling or mobility issues, have access through extended offerings both online and on campus; the college will expand orientation programs to include comprehensive career, academic, and other specialized counseling. Students who take a freshman orientation course in their first semester of college tend to commit to college, connect to support services, and persist at greater rates than those who don't take the course. In 1997, driven by faculty concerns with unprepared students, PVCC developed a new STD ("student development") 100 topic called The Freshman Experience: Creating College Success. The Freshman Experience, co-designed and co-taught by faculty and counselors, is offered on an all-day Saturday format each August and accommodates 100 students in each of the two sessions before the start of the semester. Though strikingly successful—85% of fall 2003 Freshman Experience students returned in spring 2004 versus 64% of other freshmen—the course's potential for promoting retention remains largely untapped. The most recent course was accessible to less than half of the recent high school graduates who entered PVCC in fall 2003. This group of students symbolizes PVCC's commitment to open access, opportunity and diversity, yet more than half of them arrive on campus unprepared for college and are then not finding adequate systems in place to support their persistence.

Both academic and cognitive deficiencies contribute to their dysfunction, but in the absence of intensive and early counseling to help them connect to the college, new students suffer isolation and attrition, and show low motivation, poor study skills, passivity, and negative self-esteem—all of which leads to failure (2003 PVCC IRP&IE data; LASSI 2000). These students arrive at PVCC indecisive about college, have taken few college-prep courses, and know few study skills, and as a result are not equipped to make a successful transition to college. Many recent high school graduates in PVCC's service region also have unrealistic or unfocused academic and career goals, which further affects their commitment to learning: they don't understand that they need to stay in school to be educated in order to get a good job. These students graduate from high school with only a vague idea of their skills and preferences, haven't undergone any type of career testing and have unrealistic career expectations. Of the students who took the orientation course in fall 2000, 40% chose General Studies as their curriculum because they "couldn't identify" what they wanted to study or a "career that interested" them. And current PVCC IRP&IE data confirm that when these students have not declared a program of study in their first semester, they're twice as likely to drop out: only 32% of unclassified recent high school graduates returned, while nearly 60% of their classified cohorts did. Yet an orientation course must be accessible and convenient for all students juggling work, family, disability, and other issues, and PVCC remains committed to providing the technological and human resources necessary to meet their needs.

KEY COMPONENT 2: Learning Center

Goal & Comprehensive Analysis: PVCC will upgrade services offered in the **Learning Center**, including expanded developmental/assessment systems, space, and staffing into a Testing Lab; increased tutoring options and facilities; the college will create a full-service Writing Center and Math Lab, and increase faculty involvement in tutoring and other programs available to students. Weaknesses in the Learning Center directly affect retention. In 1993, PVCC recognized the changing mission of the Learning Center and its newly acquired responsibilities by renovating an adjacent classroom, thereby doubling the center's space and providing a quiet testing room. In response to faculty requests and students' needs, PVCC subsequently added computers, software, and printers so that students, tutors, and staff could more effectively use the center's services. Data indicate that the use of the center increased 100% immediately after each expansion; patron use increased while the same staff coped with significantly increased responsibilities. Clearly, the Learning Center isn't adequately supported in order to best meet demands; the college community has recognized the need for a long-range reassessment of how to most efficiently expand the Learning Center so that it will foster student success.

KEY COMPONENT 3: Career Center

Goal & Comprehensive Analysis: PVCC will create a full-service Career Center, hire a full-time Career Counselor, and expand the career-based counseling, programs, and services available to students. PVCC doesn't have a full service Career Center or Career Counselor, and is one of very few VCCS colleges to offer its students such limited resources. The few services that do exist are fragmented and underutilized. Without an organized program to encourage student use of career evaluation and counseling, to provide visible and regular career programs, and to monitor the career-related needs of students, PVCC fails to meet an important obligation to its students and community.

KEY COMPONENT 4: Developmental Education Program

Goal & Comprehensive Analysis: PVCC will implement a **developmental education** program including new learning communities, specialized tutoring and workshops, and counseling support systems to insure that those students who need an extra advantage will receive it. Increasing numbers of recent high school graduates are arriving at PVCC in need of remediation, and PVCC data shows developmental students to be at the highest risk for attrition. However, PVCC doesn't have a developmental education program in place to monitor or support these students, instead offering only select courses in developmental writing, reading, and math. Faculty teaching regular developmental courses have little extra time and no organization in which to provide the extra academic, counseling, or other encouragement remedial students need. Learning Communities—a team-taught cluster of low-enrollment developmental courses such as a math, science, and developmental STD grouping—paired with complementary trips, workshops, mentoring groups, or other activities, provide the close, intense support at-risk students require to succeed. National studies (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, among others) have shown a direct correlation between the rate of academic success and the degree of early and ongoing academic, counseling, and career support that developmental students receive. Those institutions providing a coordinated program of learning communities and complementary support services report dramatically increased retention rates (per DE team research: Evergreen, Fayetteville Tech, Temple, Appalachian State).

C. MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES FOR THE INSTITUTION

Selection Criteria: To what extent are the objectives in the plan measurable and related to the institution's goals? And, to what extent will the objectives, if the institution achieves them, contribute to the growth and self-sufficiency of the institution? Maximum Points: 5 points

PVCC's inclusive planning process clearly identified college strengths and weaknesses, and proposed realistic solutions in key problem areas. Based on the thorough analysis of those problems and institutional goals, the following are measurable objectives related to meeting PVCC's established key goal to improve retention:

Objectives to meet Goal Component 1, Orientation:

Each year, expand the orientation program to offer more sections of Freshman Experience on campus and online in the first semester so that all freshmen, regardless of schedule or mobility issues, will have greater access to the course; add additional modules addressing career counseling and developmental education needs; begin a routine of regular counseling in order to increase the percentage of freshman who commit to a program of study in their first semester.

Each year, upgrade existing Freshman Experience materials and include more useful tools for students, such as adding new daily and semester planners, so that orientation handouts remain an active resource for students.

By fall 2009, increase to 95% the percentage of recent high school graduates who complete the known retention tool, The Freshman Experience: Creating College Success, during their first semester attending PVCC.

Objectives to meet Goal Component 2, Learning Center:

By fall 2004, hire an Assistant Learning Center Coordinator (ALCC) to manage testing/assessment functions and reporting; steadily shift from the LCC to the ALCC all proctoring duties to enable the LCC more time each year dedicated to tutoring and serving an increasing number of at-risk students, and to increase each year the number of students who receive consistent LC follow-up and encouragement to persist.

By spring 2005, open a Math Lab, managed by a coordinator who will both oversee the lab and coordinate with teaching faculty to insure the lab meets current class needs and reaches high-risk students, and each year staff the Math Lab with more fully-trained math tutors available to offer face-to-face tutoring and assist students with technological learning resources, and to initiate other specialized programs—ie, graphing calculator workshops—as required by PVCC faculty in order to improve student success rates.

Each year, reassess technological needs and equip/update the Learning Center with recommended software and hardware, eventually providing at least 20 dedicated Math Lab stations, 10 Writing Center stations, and 10 Testing Lab stations to increase student access to essential learning tools.

By spring 2005, open a Writing Center, managed by a coordinator who will both oversee the center and coordinate with teaching faculty to insure the center meets current class needs and offers full writing support, and each year staff the Writing Center with more dedicated writing tutors available to offer face-to-face tutoring and initiate other programs with PVCC faculty as recommended by the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA.org), the Conference on College Composition and Communication (NCTE.org), and the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPAcouncil.org) to improve student success rates and eventual retention.

By fall 2009, increase to 15,000 the number of students that utilize face-to-face and online tutoring services in the Learning Center; students who receive tutoring show markedly higher success rates (PVCC IRP&IE; faculty).

Objectives to meet Goal Component 3, Career Center:

By fall 2004, hire a full-time Career Counselor to manage a newly opened Career Center so that students will have ever-expanding access to a broad range of the necessary career advising, assessment, and placement resources they will need to succeed, and increase each year the number of Career Center work stations loaded with assessment and job placement software to provide students with improved career services access.

Each year increase the percentage of students who use Career Center resources in their first semester so that they will make a strong initial connection to available support and be more inclined to persist.

By fall 2009, increase to at least 15 per semester the career information activities offered each semester to maximize student access to—and knowledge of—the Career Center resources that will help them succeed.

Objectives to meet Goal Component 4, Developmental Education:

By fall 2004, hire a Developmental Education Program Coordinator (DEPC) to promote and administer a support program specifically designed to offer services—such as tailored learning communities—that will improve the success rate of developmental students.

By fall 2004, DEPC and PVCC faculty will initiate the first three cross-discipline learning communities with complementary activities, regular at-risk student counseling sessions on learning, careers, and financial aid, student learning-styles assessments and guidance, and extra-curricular programs to increase academic support for and among developmental students and help them persist.

Establish institutional membership in national and state developmental education organizations (NADE/VADE) and support the active participation of more PVCC faculty and staff each year in professional development so they may be certified to provide an increasing number of developmental students with full-service support.

By fall 2009, increase to at least 18 the number of developmental students enrolled in each of six learning communities so that a growing number of high-risk students will have access to comprehensive support.

By fall 2009, increase to 95% the percentage of developmental students who receive monthly counseling from a Developmental Education Program counselor so that they remain firmly supported and monitored.