Enacted Values Stimulate Student Success

The AASCU Graduation Rate Outcomes Study

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Retention at State Colleges and Universities: Critical Problem, Long History

- ■ Thirty-Year History of Concern and Examination

- ■ The Mission Imperative: "Educate the Students You Have"

- ■ Changing Student Populations

- ■ Growing Experience with Benchmarking

Background to the AASCU Graduation Rate Outcomes Study

- The "Politics" of Graduation Rates (and its Negative Impact on AASCU-type Institutions)

- Availability of Comparative Graduation Rate Statistics from the Education Trust

- Opportunity to Look More Deeply into What is Happening at Successful Campuses

Conduct of the AASCU Graduation Rate Outcomes Study

- Funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education

- Involved Multi-Day Site Visits by 8-Member Study Teams to 12 State Colleges and Universities in March 2005

- Protocols Based on Lessons Learned in Similar Projects (e.g. NSSE/DEEP Project)

- Results of Visits Documented in Written Site Visit Reports

The Study Institutions

- CSU Stanislaus

- Clemson University

- CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice

- Elizabeth City State University

- Louisiana Technical University

- Montclair State University

The Study Institutions (continued)

- Murray State University

- Northwest Missouri State University

- Truman State University

- University of Northern Iowa

- University of Wisconsin, La Crosse

- Virginia State University

An Initial Irony

- Study Campuses were Remarkably Diverse, though All Were High Performers with Respect to Graduation Rates

- Many Study Campuses were Unaware of the Fact that they were Unusual with Respect to Graduation Rate Performance

- So What Did they Think They Were Doing?

The Major Drivers of Success

- Focus on Student Success and Student Learning, not "Improving Graduation Rates"

- A Particular Shared Culture About Student Success

- A Particular Approach to [Academic] Leadership

- Diverse Programming Driven by a Few Core Features and Values

Unpacking Culture

- A Culture of High Expectations

- A Culture of "Belonging"

- A Culture that Emphasizes Purpose and Place

High Expectations

- For Students and Student Performance

- Scaffolding and Support to Ensure that High Expectations Can be Met

- High Expectations for the Institution Itself and a Continuous Drive to Improve

"Belonging"

■ Values and Rituals of "Family"

■ The Importance of Continuity (in leaders, in faculty, in staff, in traditions...)

■ The Importance of Deliberate Recruitment (faculty and staff as cultural "assets")

Purpose and Place

- The "Mission" is Less a Document but a Belief System (Enacted in language, in behaviors…)

- Reinforced through Recruitment and Socialization of Key Faculty and Staff

- Reinforced by Resource Allocations that Follow and Support Core Values

Unpacking Leadership

- Debunking the "Heroic Myth" of Presidential Leadership

- Leadership is Shared and Pervasive

- Leadership is Empowering

- Leadership is Modeling Core Values

Organizational Leadership: "No Silos"

- Structures as Much Lateral as Hierarchical (Work Teams and Cross-Functional Working Styles)

- Strong and Regular Cooperation between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs

- Talented and Empowered Groups of "Middle Managers"

- All of the Above Demand Unusual Levels of Trust and Willingness to Take Risks

The Key Role of Faculty

- Contributing to Student Success is "Part of My Job Description"

- Ready Identification with Students' Individual Backgrounds, Challenges, and Problems

- Proactive Contact with Students Both In and Outside the Classroom

- Key Role of Faculty as Modelers and Mentors

Presidents and Chief Academic Officers

- Empowerment and Joint Ownership of Processes and Implementation

- But...No Doubts Whatever About Where We are Going

- Resource Allocation Visibly Follows Core Values and Priorities

- Leaders Themselves Visibly "Walk the Talk"

Typical Programs and Practices

- First-Year Experience Programs

- "Intentional" [Intrusive] Advising

- Integrated Services (e.g. "One-Stop Shopping")

- Curricular Features

Common Program Characteristics

- Intentional

- Integrated

- Collaborative

- Academic

Some Lessons for Institutions

■ The First Big Choice: *Maintain the Mission*

■ Recognize the Preeminent Importance of a Student-Centered Culture

■ Simply Putting "Best Practice" Programming into Place is Unlikely to Work

■ While Cultures Appear Timeless and Seamless, They Can be *Built*

What Institutional Leaders Can Do

- Articulate a Common Vision

- Take Stock of Current Conditions

- Act Strategically to Integrate Programming and Reinforce the Culture

- Invest in the Culture

- "Walk the Talk"

Some Questions to Ponder

- **Are We Sending a Consistent Message About Student Success?**

- **Are Resources Directed Visibly and Effectively Toward Student Success?**

- **How are We Using Faculty/Staff Recruitment Processes to Reinforce a Student-Centered Culture?**

- **Are We Investing in Appropriate Academic Management Information?**

- **What am I Doing Every Day that Can Further this Vision?**

The Bottom Line…

There is No "Magic Bullet" to Improve Graduation Rates. Success is Instead a Product of Many ***Little Things***, Done ***Consistently*** by Diverse Individuals, Who Share a Common ***Vision*** of Student Success and a Constantly Reinforced ***Commitment*** to Make it Happen…