

# Completion Task Force Recommendations

Chancellor's Ad Hoc Committee  
on Student Success

*Proposed Final Edition April 11, 2011*



**Office of Completion**

## **I. Measuring Achievement of Students' Particular Goals**

Since students attend Lone Star College for an array of reasons that may or may not include goals that are typically measured (like graduation with a degree or certificate), we believe it is important to develop effective ways to track those reasons and measure their attainment.

We recommend an independent as well as integrated approach to documenting student goals. By the end the first semester, initial goals could be established, to be revisited at different points in the student's academic career with Lone Star College. A relationship with an advisor, faculty member or mentor would be valuable as a contact who would assist in modifying, measuring and reporting on the progress of the student towards the established goals.

To gather the data to both form and monitor this process we recommend the following specifically:

### **A. Student Focus Groups to Document Student Goals**

Although we feel that we have some sense of why students enroll in our college, we suggest it would be wise to conduct some focus groups of students of various ages and ethnicities, both full time and part time, day, night, weekend and online, at all five colleges to ask, specifically what short term and long term goals they have. We expect that we will find some goals that are realistic and some that are not but it would help us in designing instruments that can be used more widely. Five groups would probably be sufficient and this step could be finished fairly quickly – certainly by the end of Fall, 2011 semester if not sooner.

### **B. Advisor, Counselor and Faculty Focus Groups to Document Student Goals**

Advisors, counselors and faculty members have important insight into the goals students set, the barriers to those goals, and the qualities that help students to achieve those goals. Conducting focus groups from these populations would complement the information gathered from student focus groups and would provide ideas for interventions that could be implemented. Among faculty members, instructors who focus on "at risk" students, such as developmental faculty, instructors of EDUC 1300 and faculty who serve as student mentors would be



particularly valuable. These groups could also be formed rather quickly.

### **C. Track Students Taking EDUC 1300 As a Cohort**

Goal setting is already a built-in unit in the curriculum for this course. Students do considerable self examination in this course and learn how to plan goals that are realistic but challenging and to set a reasonable timeline for achieving that goal. Although students' goals upon entering the course may not be well developed, by the end of the semester we should have a good sample of students with well articulated goals who we can track over several semesters. The results of student and advisor/counselor/faculty focus groups can assist in creating a suitable instrument for documenting the information that is needed. Fall, 2011 EDUC 1300 students could serve as a cohort, and the instructor or First Time in College advisor could manage the data.

We can track them at the end of the next several long semesters to see if they are achieving their long and short term goals or whether those goals have evolved. Although this would only be a sample, some of our most at risk students would be included. It would be valuable to be able to measure what percentage of students achieve their stated goals within the timeline they have identified and instructive to find out what obstacles may get in their way. This task would include the need to explore a mechanism to track students after they leave the college.

# Completion Task Force Recommendations

Chancellor's Ad Hoc Committee  
on Student Success

*Proposed Final Edition April 11, 2011*



**Office of Completion**

## ***D. Track a Random Sample of Other Students***

Doing a very similar tracking of a random sample of other students using the same instruments and follow up process as the EDUC 1300 students would allow us to track broader categories of students albeit ones who didn't have the benefit of the same goals training. A significant difference could indicate that the training we do in EDUC 1300 is important. This could, again, begin in Fall 2011, and the responsible personnel would include advisors and a random sampling specialist from the Office of Research and Institutional Effectiveness (ORIE) or other resource.

## ***E. Using Surveys in iStar to Track All Students***

Working through the logistics of this proposal could begin while steps C and D are underway with the ultimate goal of well documenting the goals of all students and the level of attainment of those goals over time. Online questionnaires will need to be developed. We recommend that these questionnaires not be included in the first semester registration process. Student goals are less likely to be clarified at this point and trying to gather this data while students navigate the registration process the first time will be frustrating to students and staff and probably not very effective.

A possible solution is to include a mechanism (borrowed from the world of marketing) within iStar to require students to give feedback on their progress on their goals and/or register any changes when they log in to check grades at the end of the semester. Ultimately, a wide spread survey of this type might be the only way to capture students who are here to only take a class or two for personal reasons. Even so, advisors could monitor the surveys, document emerging patterns, and contact students to clarify any questions.

## ***F. Using Electronic or Phone Sampling to Track Achievement of Goals***

As a backup and supplement to the proposed automated study in iStar, collect a calling list of students who have filed goals in iStar or with an advisor and check with them three times a year to ask whether they had achieved the short term goals they had set for the previous semester and whether they are on track to

achieve their long term goals. Devise a separate call list sampling students who did not reenroll to try to identify their reason for not returning. Although keeping good contact data is difficult, perhaps a scientifically significant sample could be found. Responsible personnel would include part-time employees for calling banks to operate during the three calling periods, and a random sampling specialist from ORIE or other resource, whose function would be to insure that statistically significant numbers are represented in the sampling.

## **II. Use Data We Already Collect to Measure Aspects of Student Success**

Some elements of student success are already measured using data we have readily available now. This is good data and we affirm that we should continue to use it and emphasize it. Particular attention should be placed on data that can be correlated to national benchmarks as that lends an extra degree of confidence. We already know that Lone Star College performs well on this data and it can be used immediately for reporting purposes. Although none of these measures capture all aspects of student success for all students, we get something of a composite picture if we consider all of the measures.

### ***A. The following data is already available through the National Community College Benchmark Program:***

- Course Completion (all courses, credit level courses and developmental)
- Course Success (all courses, credit level courses and developmental)
- Retention (aka persistence) for one semester and for one year
- Success rates for Developmental Math, Reading and Writing
- Success in Math 1314 and English 1301

### ***B. National Student Clearing House Data (Department of Education)***

This data base has data on success rates and graduation rates in colleges nationwide in which we'd be able to track specific students. Although not all students intend to transfer to a four year institution this would give us a

# Completion Task Force Recommendations

Chancellor's Ad Hoc Committee  
on Student Success

*Proposed Final Edition April 11, 2011*



**Office of Completion**

way to track students who do. The premise we would hope to explore is whether students from Lone Star College perform at least on par with students who had attended four year institutions from the beginning of their college career. We recommend exploring the logistics of, eventually, running a search for all former students as a goal. For a sample, we could follow the cohorts of EDUC 1300 students and the random selection of other students listed in Part I for a period of six years.

### **C. Workforce Placement Data**

Our workforce programs are required by advisory boards to track student placement into employment. We recommend that this data be centrally reported for easy access and reported on aggregately as well as by discipline.

### **III. Monitor Student Success in Pre-Requisite/Subsequent Courses**

We already monitor data about pass rates among students in Math 1314 and English 1301 who have come through developmental programs. We recommend examining other sequences of courses especially those in other disciplines.

#### **A. Identify Sequences of Courses that Can Be Examined For Success (Tracking Forward)**

Not all courses exist in clearly identified sequences but, we recommend identifying those sequences (example Trigonometry, Precalculus, Calculus I) to track whether success in lower level courses correlates to success in higher level classes. Examining sequences in disciplines other than Math and English is important.

#### **B. Identify Courses that Can Be Reflected Back to Prerequisite Courses (Tracking Backward)**

Identify a sample of courses, especially "Gate Keeper" courses that have prerequisite courses. Students will have had to place into these courses by passing the prerequisite or by some form of placement mechanism. Success can be compared between those who entered the class through the prerequisite and those who did not.

### **IV. Correlating Student Engagement Data to Student Success**

It is generally believed that students who are more engaged with their classes and the college in general succeed

at higher rates. A study of this connection is already underway at CyFair. We recommend that this study should be monitored and supported and, once they reach some conclusions, we recommend that the study be expanded study system-wide.

### **V. Tracking Documented Achievement of Course Learning Outcomes**

Taking advantage of the ongoing SACS mandated process to develop assessments of learning outcomes, we recommend using that data as a measure of success in addition to grade distributions. Perhaps the Gate Keeper courses would be the place to begin here—it would be necessary to confirm the standardization of learning outcomes and then manage the consistent application of the outcomes system-wide. In some disciplines, a valuable method of learning outcome assessment is to use a common final. This method could be reinstated in Developmental Writing (where it was recently discontinued) Individual curriculum teams will outline the assessment methodology most appropriate for their discipline.

Interface Student Success Initiatives with Emerging Projects and Programs

#### **A. Completion by Design.**

In the event that the Texas five-community-college cadre is awarded the five-year Gates Completion by Design Grant, Lone Star College will lead the four other colleges in developing common student success initiatives. We would hope that the this arrangement would involve pooling resources to develop assessing and reporting methods not yet occurring on a state-wide basis.

#### **B. Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for SACS.**

LSC's theme for the QEP is the First Year Experience. The program will involve a goals assessment for each new student, the identification of a barrier to the goals, development of a plan to address the barrier, and a re-definition of goals as needed. Dubbed Best Start Advising, this three-element exercise may be incorporated into orientation, EDUC 1300 classes, and even syllabi for other courses. Such an exercise, if adopted widely throughout the system, could be incorporated into several of our initiative proposals.

# Completion Task Force Recommendations

Chancellor's Ad Hoc Committee  
on Student Success

*Proposed Final Edition April 11, 2011*



**Office of Completion**

## **C. Revision of System Strategic Goals.**

Currently LSC is in the process of revising strategic goals originally put into place for 2009-2011. Goal 4 in the series is devoted to student success, and the revision could be modified to interface with student success proposals from our committee.

## **VII. Planning for Future Studies**

The measures we have outlined so far either utilize data that is already available or can be reasonably obtained or involve data the gathering of which can be planned in-house. For long term planning, there are other measures that would involve additional research and/or the cooperation of entities outside of the college.

### **A. Measuring Growth in Behavioral Patterns of Success and/or Measuring Unforeseen Barriers to Learning from Socio-Economic Factors**

We recommend a search on research mechanisms for measuring student improvement in study skills, time management and other behavioral patterns of success as an additional measure of student growth towards success.

We also believe that, because of the wide diversity of work and family-related issues that appear without warning for many community college students, that a similar research mechanism be instituted for measuring the trends and occurrences of such learning-inhibiting events and their negative effect on student success.

### **B. Explore Using the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) Exam**

The CLA is a nationally recognized measure of progress in analytic reasoning, critical thinking and written communication skills. Whether administering this exam to some sample of students would be meaningful or cost effective is something that would have to be studied. But we believe it is worth looking into.

### **C. Accessing Additional Data from the National Community College Benchmark Program**

This program tracks additional information and makes it available to colleges who participate in gathering this data. Some of this data is included in what we've

recommended in this document. We recommend tracking and reporting this additional data in a manner consistent with their standards so that we may receive benchmark data. Other relevant data items available from this program include:

- Performance in transfer universities
- Student satisfaction and engagement ratings
- Student goal attainment
- Career program completers' employment status and employer ratings
- Minority participation rates
- Distance learning outcomes

### **D. Advocating for a Statewide Transcript**

This would require THECB or legislative initiative. We believe that a single combined transcript (or ePortfolio) showing student records from all state supported community colleges and universities they attend would make the tracking of students through their entire college career much simpler. In a state where higher education is so diversified, access to this data would be beneficial to all schools and would make life simpler for students as well. As a first step, this transcript could be developed and tested within the Completion by Design cadre (if our proposal is accepted, see section VI A above), then proposed for the whole state.

## **VIII. Keeping All Data Related to Student Success Centrally Located and Organized**

We believe that an array of measures, as we have proposed above, is the best way to gauge student success in all of its aspects. It is likely that a collection of different individuals and committees might need to be involved to gather and analyze data about the different measures. As study continues, other measures might be proposed. To keep the data coherent and useful for planning future student success interventions, it is essential that all of this data be gathered and maintained centrally within ORIE for easy access. This is also important because we hope that, over time, some of the measures we have identified will become of interest to the broader community college community. So we want the information to be easily reportable.