

Standard Six: Students

Consistent with its mission, the institution defines the characteristics of the students it seeks to serve and provides an environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students. It recruits, admits, enrolls, and endeavors to ensure the success of its students, offering the resources and services that provide them the opportunity to achieve the goals of their program as specified in institutional publications. The institution's interactions with students and prospective students are characterized by integrity.

DESCRIPTION

Consistent with its mission, Washington County Community College (WCCC) "is to serve the State of Maine and the region" and its "programs and services prepare and sustain" students from first contact to graduation. The College maintains an "open admissions" policy which results in an academically diverse campus supported by personnel, policies and practices with the goal of enhancing student success. The students are supported by Admissions and Enrollment Services staff, various professional student services and Student Life staff, Academic Support Services staff and a wide range of program faculty. WCCC has specialized academic support programs and student service programs to promote retention and to help students meet their goals.

Admissions

WCCC's Admissions Office admits applicants under an "open admissions" policy. The College clearly states, both in print and electronic materials, the admissions process and requirements for entry into a degree, diploma, and certificate programs. Students who obtain a high school diploma or a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) are eligible to enroll in a program. Admission to the College is on a rolling, first come first serve basis for most programs. Admissions counselors recruit students from all over New England; however the College focuses largely on the State of Maine. As part of a comprehensive recruitment plan to target traditional and non-traditional students, WCCC admissions counselors visit local high schools, participate in college fairs, regional festivals, conduct campus test and tour days, meet individually with prospective students, and work closely with State agencies and third party organizations. The Maine Community College System (MCCS) has an international agreement with the New Brunswick

Community College (NBCC) system and WCCC has extended that agreement with NBCC in St. Andrews, New Brunswick allowing the College to recruit and enroll Canadian students in specifically identified programs. The office of Admissions is staffed with a full-time Assistant Dean of Enrollment/Registrar, one full-time and one part-time Admission Counselor, and one full-time administrative support staff.

Assessment

By MCCS mandate the College assesses all incoming matriculated students in the area of reading comprehension, courses. WCCC uses the College Board's Accuplacer Assessment Placement instrument. Developmental courses in math and English are available for students who place accordingly. In addition to offering developmental courses, the College requires students to attend First Year Experience seminars that present students with information to be successful at WCCC. Students with previous successful college level English and mathematics courses may have the assessment waived. Students may be tested during scheduled Test and Tour days or during Admitted Student Day, which takes place twice in the summer before First Year Experience. Students who self-identify with academic, physical or emotional needs are directed to the appropriate support services in TRIO or the Assistant Dean of Students Office. In addition to the assessment placement testing, the College provides General Equivalency Diploma (GED) testing, assessment testing for high schools and regional technical centers, and also organizes admissions testing for the Nursing program.

Enrollment Management

The College is progressively evolving toward an enrollment management model of providing a full range of services to students under a single management structure. Enrollment services focuses on providing administrative support to students, from their first contact with the College to their graduation. Test and Tour days and Admitted Student Days provide enrollment staff and faculty the first opportunities to work with new students who will be entering the College. WCCC is able to use these early enrollment management programs to directly assist students with their transition into the College. Services include assessment, registration, financial aid, advising, residential life, academic support services and student accounts. Each matriculated student is assigned an academic advisor through Enrollment Services. Students are matched with advisors in their

respective programs. While advisees are encouraged to make contact with their advisors throughout the semester, the College schedules fall and spring registration periods as formal times for the students to meet with their advisors. Advisees review their academic progress with their assigned advisors and select schedules to register for the appropriate classes and ensure graduation requirements are being met.

The College has a clear definition of what constitutes academic dismissal, academic standing, attendance, and satisfactory academic progress. These definitions can be found in the College catalog, student handbook and College website. Students on academic probation or facing academic dismissal receive a letter from Enrollment Services explaining the details of the academic issue and how to address it. WCCC focuses a lot of effort on the tracking of students through the early part of each semester to support effective enrollment management and student retention.

Enrollment Services does degree audits each semester for students anticipating meeting graduation requirements at the completion of the semester or academic year. Follow up with students who have not fully met graduation requirements is conducted on an ongoing basis. The Enrollment Services Office is staffed by a full-time Assistant Dean of Enrollment Management/Registrar, and two part-time enrollment services staff.

Retention and Graduation

WCCC is committed to improving and supporting student success. The College annually measures the retention, persistence, transfer and graduation rates of its students. Through clearly defined programs and initiatives, the College positively impacts student success. Over the past five years the WCCC fall to spring persistence rate has averaged 79%. The College's advancement/retention rate for the 2005 full-time cohort measured in 2008 (150% timeframe) is 60%. This advancement/retention rate exceeds the MCCC rate of 54%. The WCCC full and part-time advancement/retention rate for the 2005 full-time cohort measured in 2008 is 55%. This rate exceeds the 49% MCCC rate and is 2% less than the highest Maine community college rate of 57%.

Assistant Dean of Enrollment/Registrar's Office provides leadership and direction on retention and student success, and is directly involved in collaborating with

other departments and faculty on retention programs and initiatives. This office is loosely structured on a strategic enrollment management model where marketing, recruitment, retention initiatives work closely with financial aid and student accounts. The Assistant Dean of Enrollment Management/Registrar's Office is the primary institutional research office for the College and is responsible for most retention and student advancement data research.

Assistant Dean of Students Office which includes Residential and Student Life is central to all activities and initiatives related to student success, student retention, and to helping students meet their goal of graduation. This office is critical in coordinating communication among students, various departments, and faculty to address wide ranging student issues and concerns, high risk student behaviors, and barriers to student success. The Assistant Dean's office coordinates the Student Success Team, mentoring program, early warning attendance policy, and counseling referral. On a daily basis the team of the Assistant Dean and the Residential and Student Life staff play an integral role in fulfilling the College's mission of retaining students. Residential Life Staff including a Director, Assistant Director and Residential Assistants are proactively involved with students through residential and student life activities and directed retention initiatives.

TRIO – Student Support Services and the Study Center is a drop-in academic support services center open to all students. The offices are staffed by a Director, Learning Specialist/Transfer Counselor, Disabilities Specialist, and Office Assistant. All staff members participate in providing tutoring services to students in addition to a professional tutoring staff. TRIO – SSS is a federally-funded comprehensive academic support service program providing assistance to approximately 160 students per year who are low-income individuals, first generation college students, or students with disabilities. The primary goals of the program includes: retention, graduation, and transfer to a four-year baccalaureate institution. Students enrolled in the program are provided with a full range of support services to help them stay in school and successfully meet their educational goals.

The TRIO - SSS and Study Center also offer personal assistance with study skills, money and time management, inventories of learning styles, academic advising, and peer tutoring in technology courses. Accommodations and advising are available for students who are identified with learning disabilities.

The Mentor Program is a volunteer program for at-risk students. Faculty and Staff volunteer their time beyond their normal job functions to provide added support for identified at-risk students throughout the academic year. Mentors are paired with students to serve as a guide for students as they navigate the College experience. Students are selected based on identified academic, financial, social or developmental needs. The program to date has served over 200 students.

Early Warning Attendance Policy is a productive retention policy to alert students of their academic progress during a semester, and to alert staff so they can intervene with students. This procedure policy is an effective communication tool that involves the student, faculty, support counselors and TRIO staff, if necessary. A faculty member will document a student's absence(s) and submit a form. In turn, the Support Counselors follow up with the student to ensure the student has full intentions to maintain good standing or is provided with appropriate support and resources if needed. Additionally, at the completion of each semester's add/drop period Enrollment Services along with faculty identify final rosters and conduct follow up with roster discrepancies and missing students.

Counseling Referral System offers a variety of resources both on and off campus to help students achieve success in and outside of the classroom. When a student self identifies or is identified by a college official to have an issue in the classroom, resident halls or of a personal nature that is creating a barrier to their educational goals, then they are referred to the Assistant Dean of Students office or appropriate College staff. When students have an issue that College staff are unable to resolve or feel is beyond their reasonable capacity, they refer the student to off campus resources. The College has a comprehensive list of local resources from which to refer students.

The Student Success Team is a team of staff and faculty who formally meet with students as an intervention and retention strategy. The team works with referred students to identify relevant issues and concerns, and devise strategies to best meet the needs of the students. The Student Success Team is referred students by the faculty or staff members, and also meets with academically dismissed students who appeal the College's decision. The Student Success Team usually consists of Student Services staff, TRIO staff, and faculty.

Student Services

In addition to support for academics, the College provides a wide range of support services to help students fulfill their personal and educational goals. In doing so, the Student Services Office is open from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Friday to support day and evening students. All Student Service administrative offices are located in two office suites at the front of the main building entrance. Services include Admissions, Enrollment Services, Financial Aid, Student and Residential Life, Assistant Dean of Students Office, Assistant Dean of Enrollment/Registrar and Business Services/Student Accounts.

Registration and Enrollment Services are provided to students with a team of three staff members: Assistant Dean of Enrollment/Registrar, Assistant Financial Aid/Registrar Counselor, and Enrollment Services Representative. This staff supports students, faculty and staff on all registration and enrollment related activities including course registrations, student management system set-up, enrollment records requests, student tracking, student and faculty enrollment problem resolution, schedule development and maintenance, and student record maintenance.

Financial Aid offers a comprehensive financial aid program that provides scholarships, grants, and loans to students. In 2008, the College processed 472 student applications for financial aid resulting in 265 students receiving aid packages totaling \$1.75 million. The Financial Aid Office oversees the awarding of all Title IV funds including Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, College Work Study, Stafford Loans and PLUS Loan programs. The Financial Aid Office also works with State of Maine financial aid programs and internal and external scholarship programs. Typically, more than 80% of the student population participates in and receives financial aid.

The College's financial aid programs and policies include ability to benefit, eligibility requirements, application procedures, required forms, cost of attendance, confidentiality, and award process and notification. All policies and procedures are clearly outlined in the College catalog and on the College website. The student handbook provides pertinent financial aid information such as deadlines and eligibility rules, and directs students to where more detailed information can be obtained.

The Financial Aid Office publishes student financial aid information in various brochures which are annually updated, and they also make available relevant federal and state financial aid publications. College financial aid staff provides workshops on campus for students and parents, as well as travel to high schools to support greater financial aid awareness and understanding. The Financial Aid Office has open office hours for students and communicates with students through mail, email and student financial aid portal. The Financial Aid Office is staffed by a full-time Director, a half-time Assistant Financial Aid Counselor and a 20% support staff position.

Business Office provides a Student Accounts staff person in the Student Services office suite. This position works closely with students, families, Financial Aid, and Enrollment Services to provide complete student financial services. The Student Accounts position also plays an important role in student retention, high risk student identification and inter-office communication regarding student success.

Residential Life/ Student Life oversees campus living and student life activities with supportive programs and activities for healthy living. A staff of Assistant Dean, Director, Assistant Director, and Resident Assistants coordinate programs, services, and activities aimed to support students' campus living and to further the students' development outside the classroom. The College's Outdoor Adventure Center is increasingly helping to support the development of student life programming with free access to recreational equipment and by conducting outdoor instructional workshops. Residential and Student Life programming and activities include outdoors activities, climbing wall, basketball, gaming, exercise and workout room, cooking instruction, health and safety, shopping, and cookouts. Students have access to leadership opportunities through the Student Senate, Phi Theta Kappa, and Skills USA.

Transfer Services are provided by the TRIO Learning Specialist/Transfer Counselor through the TRIO project and Study Center. All students have access to one-on-one and group services. In addition, the Counselor coordinates college and university representatives visiting WCCC campus, college fairs, and group visits to college and university campuses. The Counselor also reviews and monitors articulation agreements with four-year institutions, and advises students, staff and faculty on course to course and program articulation issues.

Disability Services are provided to students who inform the College that they have a disability. Self-identified students can meet with an Accessibility Specialist to review documentation and evaluations, and to discuss appropriate accommodations that will help ensure their success at WCCC. The Accessibility Specialist communicates with faculty and staff regarding accommodations, sets up meetings with third party and off campus agencies, makes appropriate referrals, and ensure students have access to services.

Student Records are confidentially maintained by staff supervision or stored in locked areas at all times, and are only accessed by designated staff. WCCC protects the rights and privacy of students with regard to access of student records. WCCC complies fully with the Family Rights and Privacy Act. Information maintained in student records is used from the admissions process throughout a student's attendance at WCCC to assist in evaluating their status and progress. All computerized student management system records are backed up on tape.

APPRAISAL

WCCC is proud of the comprehensive services offered to its students. In a 2006/2008 Noel- Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory comparison, WCCC improved or maintained at low levels its performance gaps (difference between measurement of importance and measurement of satisfaction) in Admissions and Financial Aid, Campus Climate, Student Centeredness and Academic Services. The 2008 Inventory identified Registration Services and Financial Aid as clear strengths for the College. The College scores a .13 performance gap on "most students feel(ing) a sense of belonging here". Campus Support Services category also produce a small performance gap (.29) between student importance and student satisfaction. Satisfaction exceeded importance for the areas of support services for displace homemakers, childcare and Veterans. Areas identified as concerns included campus safety and aspects of student advising. Campus safety has improved since the 2006 Noel-Levitz survey and one of the College's projections is to review its advising model.

Admissions and Enrollment

In a faculty survey of Student Services meeting the criteria of Standard 6, the strength of Admissions was identified as being friendly and accessible to students, maintaining strong relationships with high schools and technical centers, and that

Student Services was consistently open to the improvement of its services. One of the recent challenges for admissions and enrollment services was the low conversion rate (33%) of admitted students to enrolled students, exemplified by a large percentage of students “no shows” at the beginning of the semester. This created unpredictability in student enrollment and less than effective services to students and faculty at the beginning of the academic year and during First Year Experience. The College implemented a new initiative, Admitted Student Days, to have admitted students come to campus four months prior to the semester start. This initiative gives faculty and staff a chance to meet with students on advising, schedules, assessment, financial aid and residential life. Students are able to leave campus secure in their readiness to start their educational career at WCCC. Admissions and Enrollment Services is then able to focus greater attention, at an earlier point prior to the semester start, on those admitted students who did not show for the Admitted Student Days. These “no show” students exhibit the first signs of having barriers to enrolling or future persistence. Other residual effects of this initiative include more efficient start-up for the College as a whole, higher and earlier enrollment levels for TRIO services, and less student scheduling problems at the start of the semester.

In an effort to provide more comprehensive enrollment/registration services to students and to increase personnel flexibility for future enrollment service planning, an enrollment position was upgraded from a support level to administrative level. This position change has had a direct improvement on the enrollment/registration service and efficiency.

Financial Aid

The Financial Aid Office is subject to internal and external evaluations by the U. S. Department of Education and Maine Community College System. The Office evaluates itself by tracking the number of student applications, number of students receiving aid, and timeliness of awards and vouchers. Financial aid data are audited yearly by an outside independent auditing firm and the Office submits a copy of the federally mandated A-133 Single Audit Report, and the College has the Eligibility and Certification approval from the U.S. Department of Education to participate in all federal programs.

From cohorts 2003 to 2006 WCCC loan default rate has been maintained at about 7.5%, except for a spike to 15.2% in the 2006 cohort. There was a decrease of 63

loans from FY 05 (122) to FY 06 (59), but the number of defaults has remained approximately the same. Washington County Community College (WCCC) has a small student population and a small number of total loans, which makes the default rate very sensitive to small changes. Historically over the last 14 years, WCCC's default rate had fluctuated from 5.9% to 16.1% with the average being 11.5%. The current decrease in loans is due in part to our financial aid office counseling more students into responsible financial aid packages that may not include loans. WCCC and the financial aid office have a philosophy to assist students to leave school with limited debt; therefore we encourage and counsel students to apply for the maximum of scholarships and grants. An additional factor which may have impacted the default rate was the closure of two manufacturing operations in the service delivery area resulting in some 300 dislocated workers who were earning well above the state average income. In a small isolated rural community this magnitude of job loss is devastating. Many of these individuals or their extended families found it extremely difficult to meet their individual financial needs. This might have contributed to some of the defaulter's ability to pay for their extended families student loans.

WCCC takes concerted steps to minimize loan defaults. Monthly, the financial aid office receives from the Finance Authority of Maine its "Delinquent Borrowers by School Report" which notifies the college of borrowers who are in default status or in jeopardy of entering default. Recently the college initiated a series of three letters for the individuals listed on this report. These letters notify potential defaulters that WCCC is aware of their default and offers lender contact information for resolution. By sending this series of letters, WCCC is providing the students with options for preventing or resolving their default.

One of the options suggested to the borrower is to contact the Lender about qualifying for an economic hardship deferment. This type of deferment allows the student to postpone payment for up to one year while searching for employment. There are a variety of deferments that a borrower can apply for to prevent them from going into default. Another preventive measure WCCC institutes is to put our borrowers through an extensive online entrance interview process. This is a federal requirement for borrowers who choose to borrow federal funds to pay for their education. This online procedure requires borrowers to review borrower's rights and responsibilities pertaining to Stafford loans. At the end of this online session students are required to take a 27 question quiz and must get 25 of the questions correct to successfully complete. This is required of borrowers before

loan funds can be ordered and disbursed to their account. Federal regulations also require WCCC borrowers to complete an exit interview upon conclusion of their school enrollment. The exit interview is a reminder of the borrower's rights and responsibilities. To ensure that borrowers complete this process, the college gives them a deadline and places a hold on release of their grades until it is completed. WCCC's financial aid staff also provides individual counseling sessions to borrowing students regarding their potential debt to potential earnings ratio. The goal is to demonstrate to them how a loan payment would fit into a household budget.

Disability Services

For the 2007/2008 academic year Disability Services had 122 registrants for service and for the fall and spring semester served 82 students. All student had plans for accommodations in place. Of the students 11 graduated with associate degrees, 12 with a diploma/certificate, 2 transferred to a four year institution. The highest enrolled category of disabilities were learning disability, physical, emotional, and speech/language. Most access accommodations included extended test time, distraction free environment, reader, and word processor.

Academic Support Services

Over 80% of incoming student assess into at least one developmental course or are recognized as being academically underprepared. Academic support services of TRIO-SSS and the Study Center are essential to helping students be successful at WCCC. The Noel-Levitz Inventory indicate a low performance gap of .29 for adequacy and access to tutoring services. In a survey of students regarding academic support services on campus the great number of referrals came from faculty, advisors, student orientation, and financial aid. Services most access were tutoring, workshops, scholarships, and personal support. Of the students surveyed 80% were very satisfied with the services provided and the greatest percentage of students received assistance more than 20 times in an academic year. Of the faculty surveyed, over 75% rated academic support services as excellent in the areas of benefiting students, helpfulness, and being available to faculty.

PROJECTIONS

1. Student Services will develop a plan for the measurement of success in serving students.
2. Student Services and Administration will review individual student services programs and initiatives for effectiveness. Programs and initiatives without standards of measure for effectiveness will have them developed.
3. Develop a feasibility study and proposal for a one-stop model of enrollment services to be presented to administration, faculty and the College community.
4. Continue to expand and improve web-based services and information to students. All areas of Student Services will identify the direction they would like to advance their web based services and information.
5. Dean of Academic and Student Affairs, Assistant Dean of Student, Assistant Dean of Enrollment, Department Chairs and Faculty review current advising model and make recommendations for any necessary changes.
6. Identify strategies for the College to increase the percentage of the student population accessing academic support services.
7. Student Services, Student and Residential Life, Student Senate, the Outdoor Adventure Center, and Administration develop a long range plan for the "The WCCC Experience" initiative.