

Assessing and Addressing Student Barriers: the Impact of Success on Retention

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Many students entering college today face a variety of challenges that can impact their learning potential. What are these barriers to academic success? Naming and understanding, then addressing these becomes a critical tool for teachers, especially for the at-risk population in their classrooms. Once understood, these barriers can be connected to four domains of learning, which can become the framework for designing inclusive classroom activities which support complex thinking processes. By addressing each domain, as embedded within course content, faculty can create equity among students which will lead to greater success and retention.

First one must consider the question: who are my "at-risk" students? In presenting this topic at the recent LAANE conference in the fall, participants brainstormed a comprehensive list which included those students who are: first generation to go to college, socio-economically disadvantaged, veterans returning to college, diagnosed and undiagnosed learning-disabled, raising families, dealing with complex psychological challenges, and English as a second language learners. Once established that we all, in fact, experience at-risk learners in our classes it becomes incumbent upon us to understand and address the varying needs of all of our students. In order to do just this, we began by conducting research in our First-Year Studies classes at Landmark College in an effort to better understand what the core barriers might be among those students new to college.

Beginning in 2008, our initial research project looking at social pragmat-

ics helped us to identify specific developmental profiles- as presented by Osterholt and Barratt in "A Case for a Collaborative Classroom" featured in the *About Campus* journal in 2011. This evolved into an in-depth examination of the students' own perceptions of the social-emotional skills required at the college level. Using pre-term and post-term- surveys as well as midterm and final grade-tracking in our freshman seminar classes, we came to some conclusions. Throughout the semester, deficits were particularly observed when students were asked to initiate and maintain topic discussion, when confronted with differing points of view, speak in turn, clarify others' comments and maintain verbal engagement and eye contact. Thus, we observed the communication skills necessary for classroom engagement were minimally demonstrated. On the surface these deficits may be interpreted as simple communication challenges; further examination led us to realize that the difficulties we were observing harbored more complexity. In addition, our classroom observations were in direct contrast to student self-reporting on the pre-term survey, in which through their responses indicated an inflated sense of their ability to carry out precisely those critical classroom behaviors that we were noticing were presenting barriers self-reporting. There was a clear disconnect between students' own perception of college skill readiness and subsequent academic behavior.

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Closer examination of students' pre-term and post-term survey responses exposed patterns, which we developed into *four key domains of learning*. These are areas which all students must have adequate control over in order to be successful in college: Academic Skill Attainment, Social-emotional Influences, Motivation, and Self-regulation. These concepts were drawn from the research within the fields of psychology, sociology and education, and we defined each as follows. Academic skill attainment is the ability to apply appropriate thinking, reading and writing skills to complete academic tasks. Social-emotional Influences comprises the awareness and management of emotional triggers and the ability to manage stress. Motivation is the ability to comprehend the meaning of concepts by understanding their relevance within a larger context, and the ability to set realistic personal and academic goals. Self-regulation is the awareness, understanding and monitoring of executive functioning skills.

"...we developed ... four key domains of learning - those areas which all students must have adequate control over in order to be successful in college: Academic Skill Attainment, Social-emotional Influences, Motivation, and Self-regulation."

With the domains identified and explicated, the 2008 research turned back to the students themselves for more in-depth answers. Using a post-term questionnaire naming the newly identified four domains, we asked students to identify the primary barriers to academic success that they felt were inhibiting their academic success. Interestingly for an academic environment, students did not rank "academic skill attainment" as the chief obstacle to learning. Instead, students identified "motivation" and "self-regulation" as the most pervasive barriers, with "social-emotional influences" third. This was a wake-up call for us as classroom teachers, because it clearly places the onus on us to understand that there are three important domains in addition to skill attainment that need to be addressed if we are to truly teach to the whole student, and therefore ultimately address retention concerns. But, how to do it?

Again we turned to the students. We began by observing their behaviors and language. In time we developed a more complete sense of how each of the four domains represents both positive attributes as well as possible barriers to learning. In filling out more fully the definitions of each domain, we could begin to identify those behaviors which represent competency within each. Within the domain of *motivation*, for example, meaning and relevance is established by the student, and appropriate long and short range goals are set. Also, students can persevere, be flexible and are able to activate. Within the *social-emotional* realm, students are aware of their emotional triggers toward a learning situation, understand their strengths and challenges, and display resilience. Positive attributes in the *self-regulation* area include establishing routines for keeping organized, completing tasks on-time, and maintaining willpower to complete those tasks as well as maintaining physical and emotional well-being. *Academic skill attainment* competencies include use of learning strategies for thinking, reading, and writing, and use of critical thinking and problem-solving strategies. However, turn each of these on its head, and students may instead experience a barrier to learning.



In considering the domains as obstacles for students, we began to understand that common student language could now exist within a schema. For example, "I don't see the point of this assignment" and "I can't seem to get

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President's Column

.Regina McCarthy, UNH Manchester

Partnerships and Pairings for Student Success and Retention was the theme of the 2013 LAANE conference held on a mild autumn day in western Massachusetts at Greenfield Community College in Greenfield, Massachusetts.

Approximately 120 LAANE members attended this year's 30th anniversary conference of the Learning Assistance Association of New England and chose from a wide variety of professional workshops.

Throughout our conference day we identified strategies to create the architecture to prepare our underprepared students for the rigors of college work through scaffolding and bridging, including sessions on mentoring programs to support academically at risk students, summer bridge programs, and an exploration of student barriers to academic success.

We have brought back to our campuses information to advance our prepared students, such as sessions on library and learning center collaborations to address writing and research concerns, changing the way composition students look at writing, academic support services for the ESL writer, and metacognitive math.

All our students can be elevated because we learned more about training and supporting our student leaders to increase retention, increasing writing engagement, supplementing on campus tutoring services with online tutoring, and inviting online career focused curricula into the English classroom.

George Kuh et al (2011) report that in "institutions employing multiple partnerships in support of student learning and offering a comprehensive system of complementary initiatives based on effective educational practices, students

are more likely to perform better academically, to be more satisfied, and to persist and graduate". Dr. Vincent Tinto tells us that "Retention is the result of effective education, which means that the focus is student education rather than retention itself." LAANE's 2013 conference keynote speaker, Dr. Joe Cuseo, noted, "To effectively address the full range of issues that affect students' academic success during the first year of college, collaboration among different organizational units and members of the college community is critical." Dr. Cuseo offers the following four forms of collaboration--- peer collaboration, collaboration between classroom instructors and academic support services, collaboration between academic and student affairs divisions, and collaborations between colleges and elementary and secondary schools, and these collaborations, states Dr Cuseo, "appear to be indispensable elements of a comprehensive academic-support program for first-year students." On October 18, 2013 we learned more about these indispensable elements from Dr. Cuseo and from each other.

In your writing centers, math centers, comprehensive learning centers, advising offices, ESL departments, English and mathematics departments, departments of First Year Experience and Students in Transition, through your support to students with learning disabilities, as teachers, and academic support and enrichment professionals, you help students situate themselves in your academic communities. You support students as they wrestle with the language and culture of higher education. You bridge their prior learning communities to your



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George Kuh et. Al. (2011)

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communities of higher education. You aid students in the acquisition of essential academic skills for success and you help liberate them to be independent learners, transformed by education and in turn armed with knowledge and skills to transform their worlds of community, of campus, of work and of higher education. You employ multiple partnerships to create Kuh's conditions that matter for student engagement and success. You have a steadfast commitment to and focus on student learning. As Plutarch said in *On Listening to Lectures*, "For the mind does not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood, it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently and an ardent desire for the truth." You are kindling in the first year and beyond.

In recognition of its 30th anniversary, LAANE was presented a letter by Past-President of the College Reading and Learning Association, Dr. Patricia Mulcahy-Ernt. The letter recognized LAANE stating, "Your commitment to collegial exchange, networking, and professional growth with practitioners and scholars in learning assistance programs, tutoring, and developmental education throughout New England is a flagship for our field."

It is the commitment of each LAANE member to ongoing professional development and to reigniting their own and their students' fires of learning that makes our organization a flagship. Please continue to commit to LAANE through conference attendance, service on the executive board, or by hosting a regional workshop.



The LAANE Executive Board celebrates LAANE's 30th Annual Conference with a cake that was shared by all!

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started” can be understood to be motivational in nature. And, “I’m not very good at...” and “I hate this stupid assignment” indicate an emotional response to the work. “I’ve lost my assignment and then I missed my office hour appointment” clearly represents a difficulty within the self-regulation domain, and “how do I write a thesis?” or even “I don’t understand...are skill attainment issues (always nice and neat for teachers.) Within a large classroom, it would be impossible to address each student’s individual concerns one-on-one each day, so how to begin to support all students, wherever they are within the four domains, without sacrificing time and course content? Further diving into the literature led us to the collaborative learning method as an additional strategy for the classroom.

A well-developed collaborative learning activity has the potential to address all four domains of learning while building content knowledge and creating equity in the classroom. By creating opportunities for students to work together meaningfully on class concepts, they are encouraged to engage in critical thinking that goes beyond surface learning. They do this together as they learn to express complex ideas, make connections to background knowledge, and incorporate others’ thinking into their own thought process. In addition, other important skills are practiced in collaborative groups which cannot occur in a passive classroom environment, such as tolerance for ideas that may be foreign or distasteful, the ability to negotiate with peers, respectful listening and talking, the ability to be an “expert” at something within the group, and the opportunity for “non-academic” strengths (such as art or music) to have a role; for example an activity may be designed in which groups work to transform written concepts into a visual representation-or visa-versa. Equity is built as students with certain barriers to learning and those with fewer academic challenges work together and learn to value and respect one another’s contributions.

Teachers can thus address all four domains of learning throughout the semester with well-placed and planned collaborative learning activities. Motivation, for example, increases as relevance is established through discussion and students are responsible to one another. Also, students can practice self-regulation skills as they learn to work together patiently and have the necessary materials. Social-emotional concerns are addressed as students are asked to step outside their comfort zone to work with others and actively share their own ideas. Finally, academic skill attainment, the goal of all classroom teachers, has certainly not been compromised in

any way, as it becomes clear that through the collaborative learning groups, students have moved into a deeper level of internalizing course concepts. We recommend starting slowly, with pairs first. Follow this with triads, and finally larger groupings as students become comfortable with the practice.

Classroom teachers today face a large variety of types of learners. In presenting our work throughout the country, and abroad, we have noticed that participants in our workshops- from community colleges to the Ivy league- are hungry for practical strategies to support their “at-risk” students. Understanding The Four Domains of Learning and developing collaborative learning opportunities for our students in conjunction with more traditional classroom teaching methods is the best way we have found to provide all students with the initial positive learning experiences they deserve and which can lead to greater success throughout their college careers and ultimately to greater retention for the institution as they persist to graduation.



Dr. Joe Cuseo, keynote speaker at this year’s LAANE Conference



Save the Date!

LAANE Regional Workshop at Southern Vermont College, Bennington, VT

Digital Tools: Keeping Teachers and Learners Connected

Wednesday, May 21, 2014

8:30—Registration; 9:00—12:00—Workshop

Topics include:

Assistive Technologies available to ALL students

Using technology for formative assessments, e.g., clickers, demo sites and more

Using technology to increase effectiveness of the tutoring/learning experience

Cost: \$20.00 for LAANE members and students; \$35.00 for non-members, 6 month membership included

Registration form available at www.LAANEchapter.org Registration and payment due by May 9, 2014

31st Annual LAANE Conference

Seeking Award Nominations

A highlight of our Annual Conference is the opportunity to recognize programs and colleagues who have done significant work in the field of Developmental Education. A number of awards will be given at this year's fall conference, and we would like honorees to represent as much of our region as possible. We invite all LAANE members to read about this year's winners on page 7 of this newsletter.

Award Categories

Outstanding Service to Developmental Students

Outstanding Developmental Education Program

Outstanding Student in a Developmental Program

Outstanding Contribution to LAANE

Outstanding Research Publication Award

Outstanding Support to Developmental Education by a College Administrator and/or Public Servant

Please go to our web site at www.LAANEchapter.org to read the criteria for each award.

34th Kellogg Institute for the Training and Certification of Developmental Educators

When: June 28 – July 25, 2014

Where: Appalachian State University in Boone, NC.

What: The Kellogg Institute is a summer professional development program for developmental educators and other professionals dedicated to promoting the success of underprepared and disadvantaged postsecondary learners. The Institute seeks to improve and support the delivery of Developmental Education courses and services via implementation of research-based best practices and design.

Faculty 2013: Dr. Ed Morante, Dr. Barbara Bonham, Dr. David Arendale, Dr. Geri Miller, Dr. Daniel Byrd and Dr. Hunter Boylan. Additional details and the application form are available on the National Center for Developmental Education web site: <http://ncde.appstate.edu/kellogg-institute>

Enrollment is limited to 45 participants; applications are currently being accepted.

Contact: Denise de Ribert, Director, Kellogg Institute
(828) 262-3057 email: kellogg@appstate.edu

LAANE Awards—2013

LAANE Scholarship Recipient

The 2013 winner of the LAANE Scholarship is Ms. Lindsay Scholl who is earning a BS in Health Psychology with a minor in Public Health at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Studies, Boston, MA. Lindsay is a peer tutor for a number of behavioral science courses and co-taught as a peer mentor in First Year Seminar classes for first year Health Psych students. She was also an Orientation leader last summer, and is an officer for two campus clubs - Co-President of Good Health Keeping and Secretary to the Philosophy Society Volunteer. She was also an intern at Boston Children's Hospital helping with group therapy for adolescents who abuse alcohol and marijuana. Carl Oliveri, Assistant Dean, Campus Life and Leadership at MCPHS said this, "Lindsay is dedicated to her studies and is focused on the importance of obtaining knowledge, experience, a degree, and soon, a job after graduation. ...Lindsay not only cares about the work that she does, but more importantly, she cares about the people she interacts with."

In her essay, Lindsay wrote, "During my first year of college, I struggled in my studies and lacked the skills, passion, support, and drive that I wanted to have. I was able to change my major just in time for my second year of undergraduate schooling. From the first day of classes, I could already tell that the new major was right for me; I actually wanted to do work, I no longer struggled with studying or drive. I am looking forward to furthering my education and experiences by applying to graduate schools for a PhD in psychology. ... it is a goal of mine to become a researcher and professor who can use developmental education to help provide a quality, hands-on education to students in the future and to become a part of the educational system that has shaped me into the individual I am today."

Outstanding Service to LAANE

This year's recipient of the Outstanding Service to LAANE award is Ms. Sarah Bedingfield, from Great Bay Community College, Portsmouth, NH. In large measure, what members experience at a LAANE Conference is due to Sarah. Sarah has done incredible site management work

for our conferences for a number of years now. Her remarkable attention to detail, thoughtful consideration of presenters' and attendees' needs, and ability to balance multiple concurrent conference tasks have made her an invaluable asset to our organization. She is always thinking about the professional development of members. She has secured keynote speakers for us. She moved us to using Constant Contact. She led the way for the logo change. She helped us become a greener organization. She dared us to take on the networking reception last year, and she does all this work with a delightful sense of humor. If there were an award for best laugh, she would get that, too.

Outstanding Service to Developmental Students

Ms. Lynn Zlotkowski from Curry College, Milton, MA has been recognized as a true change agent at Curry College in Milton, Massachusetts where she has served as the Academic Success Coordinator and Assistant to the Academic Dean since 2011. She has been recognized for her work on the college's Early Alert System and her impact on students who need academic support, receiving the Credit to Curry award in 2013. Her work has directly affected the number of students contacted through the Early Alert System, which has doubled in two years. She has coordinated support for students on academic probation and academic warning, using best practices and current research. Her work has contributed to a decrease in the number of students placed on Probation and an increase of the number of Probation students who return to Good Standing. Lynn's professional work exemplifies today's conference theme because she partners with multiple offices on her campus for student success and institutional retention, including Academic Advising, Athletics, Dean of Students, Student Conduct, Res Life, the Academic Enrichment Center and other campus constituents. She creates a culture of proactive support for students on campus and can be found everywhere on campus, advocating for and supporting students.

Outstanding support to Developmental Education by a College Administrator

The winner of this year's award is Dr. Ron Weisberger, Coordinator of the

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Tutoring and Academic Support Center at Bristol Community College, Fall River, MA. Ron's greatest strength is his interest in and belief in students. According to one of his BCC colleagues, Ron has inspired BCC students for more than 30 years. He has built a cadre of bright and committed tutors, and inspired them to become true scholars. These tutors provide the highest level support to other students, and create an atmosphere of intellectual excitement and success. Under his leadership, the BCC Tutoring and Academic Support Center has served thousands of students, enabling most to reach their goals, to graduate and move on to four year schools.

Ron is a strong believer in becoming an activist for developmental education, and he has urged LAANE and NADE members to become politically active. He champions causes that favor the marginalized populations. In addition, Ron is active in CRLA. He nurtures the development of tutors by bringing them to conferences whenever he can. He has been active in NEPTA, as well.

Outstanding Student (tutor or student) in Developmental Education

Jamie Cousineau was nominated by several members of the faculty and staff at Southern Vermont College in Bennington, VT. Jamie moved from tutee to tutor at Southern Vermont College and is now a CRLA-certified tutor supporting students in Anatomy and Physiology and in math courses. She has been selected for the outstanding tutor in a developmental education program because of her exemplary work and commitment to helping her peers succeed.

In addition to tutoring, Jamie has been an academic leader in another important way. She serves as a Course Apprentice for the A&P stretch courses. One of her nominators said, "In her work with students Jamie is attuned to various learning styles and learning strategies. She is equally expert working with individuals or groups and has an affinity working with struggling, challenging, or underprepared students". Another nominator commented that Jamie is a true asset for students. "She grew in her confidence and ability to understand and meet the needs of students. She developed into a peer leader who led labs and proposed alternate ideas that would best help students learn difficult concepts. She has proven herself indispensable to the Course Apprentice Pro-

gram."

Award for Outstanding Research Publication

This year LAANE presented the outstanding research award to the conference keynote, Dr. Joe Cuseo, Professor Emeritus, Marymount College, California. He is a 14-time recipient of the "faculty member of the year award"—a student-driven award based on effective teaching and academic advising, the "Outstanding First-Year Student Advocate Award" from the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, and the "Diamond Honoree Award" from the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) for contributions made to student development and the Student Affairs profession. Currently, Joe serves as an educational advisor and consultant for AVID—a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the college access and success of underserved student populations.

Dr. Cuseo has published books, book chapters, monographs, and scholarly articles and he has presented extensively on a wide array of topics including : First-Year Experience, First-Year Seminars, Mentoring First-Year Students, Recruitment and Retention, Engaging Students, Schools and Colleges Collaborations, Academic Advising, Career Life Planning, Assessment/Program Evaluation, and Classroom Management. He has been a guru and guide for those of us involved with First Year Experience Programs, First Year Seminars, and those using best practices in student retention to guide their campus work. He has been a frequently recurring citation in so many of our literature reviews and a hero to developmental educators as we use his scholarship to defend the work we do when annual budget reviews occur.



Jamie Cousineau, Outstanding Tutor Award

Upcoming Professional Conferences

Professional conferences, workshops, symposiums, and in-service meetings are of considerable importance to our development as teachers, administrators, professors -- to all professionals. They introduce us to ideas and revive our interests in our career. We network, share experiences, gain insight, and often return to our respective institutions more enlightened and feeling less alone in our work. If you know of a conference you would like to see your colleagues attend, please send that information to Katherine Conlon, LAANE Editor, at 978-934-4463 or at Katherine_Conlon@uml.edu or UMass Lowell, Weed Hall, Room 102 Lowell, MA 01854.

New England Faculty Development Consortium (NEFDC) Spring 2014 Conference

The New England Faculty Development Consortium Spring 2014 Conference will be held Friday, June 16, 2014 at Roger Williams University, Bristol, RI. The theme of the Conference is ***“From STEM to STEAM: What Really Works.”*** The keynote speaker is Tom Pilecki. For more information about the program and registration, visit the NEFDC web site at <http://www.nefdc.org/spring2014conf.html>

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Region 1 Annual Conference

The NACADA Region 1 Conference will be held in Newport, RI, March 19—21, 2014. Theme of the Conference is “Advising Goes Electric.” For more information about the program and registration, visit the web site at <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Events-Programs/Events/Region-Conferences/Region-1.aspx>

New England Peer Tutor Association Forum

The 20th Annual Peer Tutor Forum will be held at UMass Dartmouth on Saturday, April 5, 2014, 8am-3pm.. The theme of the Forum is “Harry Potter: Muggles Making Magic.” Email NEPTA94@gmail.com for registration forms and more information.

Visit LAANE’s web site at



www.LAANEchapter.org

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