Rutgers (State University of New Jersey) has offered what they call “Gateway courses” for nearly twenty years. Gateway courses are alternative versions of some of the basic, introductory courses freshmen take in areas such as chemistry, history, psychology, and sociology. The Rutgers’ Web site describes these courses as standard credit courses which have been supplemented with small group sessions and instructional practices (recitation hour, group projects, explicit assistance with mastering assigned readings) which encourage the development of college-level skills. Placement test scores and department advisors identify students who should be enrolled in Gateway courses—students who will probably need assistance as they transition to the rigor of college-level coursework.

Some departments at Rutgers offer only one Gateway course; others offer alternate versions of two or three courses. The Gateway courses have different names and different course numbers, but they use the same textbook and are considered alternative routes for students to take to meet the same course objectives. The description of Physics 201-202, for instance, states that “Physics 201-202 (5, 5 credits) is equivalent to Physics 203-204 (3, 3 credits) and Physics 205-206 (1, 1 credit) and satisfies the requirements for admission to professional schools.”

Physics instructors advise students who fail the first unit test in the introductory course to drop the course (and associated lab) and take the Gateway course the following semester. They also offer a Gateway course for students who pass the introductory course with a grade of D. The Gateway version of the second course in a required sequence hones the learning skills that students failed to develop in the first course.

Neat, huh? And fraught with issues related to teaching load, transferability, etc. However, recognizing that many of our introductory courses are high risk—in terms of students’ successful completion rates—and knowing that students who earn a D in a course have little chance of success in a higher level course, we might want to take a closer look at this positive approach to student under-preparedness (http://catalogs.rutgers.edu).

Kathleen E. Quirk, associate dean for instructional support services and retention (kquirk@hvcc.edu)

CASP and Counseling and Transfer sponsor new women’s group

The Center for Counseling and Transfer and the Collegiate Academic Support Program are coordinating efforts to sponsor a new group for female students. The group is a psycho-educational initiative that provides support for women while they pursue their academic goals. The plan is for the group to be structured by the participants so that their self-identified needs are being met. This means the women will name the group, decide how the group will be facilitated, what topics/concerns are addressed and how they will be addressed (i.e. guest speaker, counselor directed discussion, structured socialization, etc.).

The goal is to provide a safe and productive space for women to come together and form positive relationships, learn essential skills for achievement, and be able to discuss concerns and challenges they might be experiencing and need help to overcome. This initiative should improve retention rates because students will have an established point of contact and opportunity to receive support while facing obstacles, whether they be academic or personal in nature, that could stand in the way of achieving their goals.

Karen Segal, counselor, Center for Counseling and Transfer. For more information, please contact Ms. Segal at (518) 629-7167 or k.segal@hvcc.edu.
Retention Updates

CASP Resource Specialist

Aaron Nooney, the new resource specialist in the Collegiate Academic Support Program (CASP) office, assists students seeking support services. Given the diverse needs of CASP participants, his work involves building relationships with campus and external offices, departments or agencies. Along with CASP coordinator Roy Pompey, various tutors, and peer mentors, Mr. Nooney works to support students and create a friendly and inviting presence inside CASP. Through the relationships students create in the CASP office, and working in conjunction with other campus staff, students have access to holistic support services.

Aaron’s primary focus is to provide students with information about, and assist them with access to, on campus resources and community agencies and services. He is also working to help students with an exciting new software application, Premier Literacy. The software reads text aloud to students and downloads sound files for listening with an iPod or other mobile device. An additional aspect of the software is the opportunity for students to listen to their writing projects read aloud as they move through the editing process. Students build increased confidence and independence as they work to refine their writing skills.

Aaron Nooney may be contacted by telephone at 629-7856 or by e-mail at a.nooney@hvcc.edu.

Banner Supports Retention

Retention Services has been working with Bette Frisino, director of student services information technology, to update Banner reports that provide retention data. The keystone report—SARZRCHT—provides retention information on new and transfer students for each semester. The cohort is broken down into subgroups, including high school credential, ethnic/racial identity, participation in various campus programs (Athletics, CASP, Disability Services, etc.), and attrition risk factors such as part-time status, first term midterm GPA below 2.00, and receipt of an early warning letter.

A significant problem with the original programming was that the cohorts were not “set in stone” for each term. As time passed and student information in Banner changed, the original cohorts would gain and lose members and attrition continued without end, making the retention data unusable. As a result of programming changes, Retention Services can now fix the entering student cohorts in Banner immediately after the county list date (census).

Since programming changes were necessary, Retention Services also requested that two new student characteristics be added to the subgroups: sex and the undecided Individual Studies attribute. The former allows Retention Services to monitor attrition among male students, which has been noted as an issue nationally, and students in programs not traditional for their gender, which Retention Services has investigated in the past (see article on first page). The latter attribute allows Retention Services to keep an eye on that population, which has been the subject of two retention work groups in the last six years.

Ms. Frisino also drafted Banner population selections (pop sels) to pull data for most of the Student Outreach and Support Call Center call lists. Computer Services created a new Banner report—SARZINFO— that generates the actual call list in MS Excel format from the pop sels. As a result, Retention Services can better anticipate how many students will be called, therefore how many callers are needed, and update lists after calls begin to remove students who no longer need to be called.

Upcoming Student Outreach and Support Call Center Sessions:

Fall 2009 Applicants Who Didn’t Enroll, Non-returning Students and TAP Decertified Students: Monday, Nov. 16 to Thursday, Nov. 19

Continuing Students without Schedules for Spring 2010: Monday, Nov. 30 and Tuesday, Dec. 1

Students with Incomplete Applications and New Students Who Haven’t Tested for Spring 2010: Wednesday, Dec. 2

New Students without Schedules and Conditionally Accepted Students for Spring 2010: Monday, Dec. 7 and Tuesday, Dec. 8

Encouraging Students to Complete the Registration/Billing Process for Spring 2010: Monday, Jan. 4 to Thursday, Jan. 7
Retention Work Groups: GED Recipients and Veterans

Earlier this year, Retention Services formed a work group to study the academic success of and support services available to GED recipients that enroll at the college. The work group included academic department chairpersons, full and part-time faculty members, staff members from support offices and academic advisors. The group focused its data analysis on the 240 new and transfer students with GEDs who first enrolled at Hudson Valley in Fall 2005.

While GED recipients are similar to the overall student population in age, they are more likely to enroll part-time initially and work while in college, less likely to be retained, and much less likely to graduate, attributes that are certainly interrelated. The group was unable to find any office on campus that targeted GED recipients for support. The group’s review of studies done at other institutions indicates that it is important for academic and student support personnel to discuss the reasons the student left high school, the student’s experiences since high school and the student’s goals in attending college.

The group also noted that GED recipients make up a small percentage of the incoming student population each term, only eight percent in the fall. Given the college’s involvement in GED preparation programs, the work group recommended initiatives that lay the foundation for increasing not only the collegiate success of this population, but also enhance recruitment of GED students to the college’s programs.

At present, Retention Services is doing preliminary work to review the academic outcomes of and services provided for military veterans who enroll at the college. If veteran status appears to be an attrition risk characteristic, a retention work group will be formed.

Work group recommendations are posted to the Retention Services Web page: www.hvcc.edu/retention.

Interested in retention work groups? Please contact Kevin McNeelge, retention specialist, at (518) 629-7638 or h.mcneelge@hvcc.edu for additional information.
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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT THE LEARNING CENTERS ON THE LOWER LEVEL OF MARVIN LIBRARY OR ONLINE AT WWW.HVCC.EDU/LAC

What are your best practices for retaining students? Contact Kevin McNeelege at (518) 629-7638 or by e-mail at h.mcneelege@hvcc.edu to discuss writing or being interviewed for an article for a future issue of Retention PIECES.

Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises.  
— Demosthenes