Welcome Back to Retention PIECES

By Kathleen Quirk, Associate Dean of Instructional Support Services and Retention

Welcome back to Retention PIECES, a newsletter from the office of Instructional Support Services and Retention. This edition features contributions from staff members on campus who shared some of their ideas and projects aimed at student success with Ryan Stadler, our Retention Specialist. Ryan has left us this semester to pursue his own educational goals, having faithfully worked to advance those of others, especially those of our most at-risk students, over the past three years. We wish him every success and thank him for his work in community building here at Hudson Valley Community College. Ryan was the major inspiration and planner behind this edition of PIECES.

This issue also provides an opportunity to introduce the new Associate Director of Instruction Support Services, Mary-Teresa Heath. Dr. Heath will oversee the institutional placement testing program and work with Learning Center faculty and staff to enhance and expand programming initiatives.

If you have Practices, Ideas, Evidence, Connections, Events, or Successes that you want to share with us, please visit our office in the Guenther Enrollment Services Center, 227 Suite, or call Mary-Teresa Heath at x8068 or Kathy Quirk at x7234.

Safety and Civility on Campus: A Community Concern

COMPUTER LAB. CENTER SPECIALIST: “Hushhhhh.”
STUDENT: (No response. Continues loud conversation with friends)
CLC STAFF MEMBER: “Please lower your voice. You are disturbing others.”
STUDENT: “What do you mean? This is a library.”
CLC STAFF: “Precisely. This IS a library.”

John Dyson, staff member of the Instructional Support Services computer lab on the lower level of Marvin Library, vividly remembers the gist of a conversation he had with a student last summer. In many ways, the rather comic -- and perhaps generational -- difference in perception as to what constitutes a collegial study environ-

ment ties into a larger institutional debate about the nature and tone of our academic community. Clearly, this is not a new issue on campus as our college catalog links “rights and responsibilities” in the same heading and devotes considerable space to details on the subject; nevertheless, it does appear as if there is increasing concern on campus with issues of discipline, safety, and good, old-fashioned common courtesy.

In short, many faculty and administrators fear that a visible degeneration in civility prevails in certain public areas.

On the February 22, Peter Sanzen, Professor of Criminal Justice, raised the issue for discussion at the Academic Senate “Tea at Three” gathering, attended by at least one interested student and a strikingly large representation of faculty and professional employees. He questioned whether many faculty, administrators, and other authority or respected figures on campus have become isolated in their offices to the detriment of community involvement.

The gathered group offered reasons for less faculty visibility in public spaces, most notably the reconstruction of the Siek Campus Center, which encourages many busy people to simply brown-bag or picnic in their offices. The increasing reliance on adjuncts, who by the very nature of their part-time status do not possess the same ties to the community and probably are less comfortable confronting disruptive students who do not directly impact their classrooms, was

(Continued on page 2)
Community Building, Cohort Learning, and Verizon’s ‘Next Step’ Experience with Collaborative Learning

As colleges conceive ways to construct civil and cooperative communities, it is hardly surprising that Cohort-Learning -- characterized by intense group identification and interaction and class collaboration -- should seem particularly promising to new program developers and, especially, job-training program administrators. Authors I.M. Saltiel and C.S. Russo, long-time scholars of alternative teaching, discuss the clear advantages and dangers of cohort grouping as a structural educational tool in their 2001 publication Cohort Programming and Learning. Most cohorts consist of some 12 to 25 students who move in tandem through common classes, share the same faculty and assignments, and use social and communal camaraderie and support to assist learning. While the motivational, directional, and social benefits of Cohort-Learning are self-evident, Saltiel and Russo also caution that cohort groups are subject to inwardsness, exclusivity, and even narrowness of vision. Clearly cohorts are not suitable for every educational situation, and they work best for courses that have overt ties to an occupation, the workplace and/or specific job training. Many Health Science programs are conducive to cohort formations.

In the Verizon Next Step Telecommunications Technology A.A.S. program at Hudson Valley Community College, the students, all Verizon employees who attend on a part time basis, begin the program as a group and progress together through the eight semesters of the curriculum up to the time of graduation. According to Linanne Sackett -- a member of the Next Step administrative staff and one of the co-founders of the Verizon program now offered in 26 community colleges across New York State and New England -- the cohort idea “happened more or less by accident.” Nevertheless, she claims that the benefits are definitely discernible. She points out, “If a student is known by name and as a person among the cohort,” then “self confidence and perseverance will soar.” Carol Ivery, a sixth-semester Hudson Valley Community College Next Step student, concurs. “I think it’s good,” she said, “because we get to know each other, and we learn each others’ weaknesses and strengths, which helps us get through the courses as a team.” Ivery, who works with graduates of the Verizon Next Step program, claims that these former students are equally enthusiastic about the benefits of cohort groupings. “Basically, they worked together as a team, and this is how they got through,” she said, crediting the team work for ultimate program success.


Margaret Geehan, Academic Affairs
Mary-Teresa Heath, Office of Instructional

Safety and Civility on Campus: A Community Concern

(continued from front page)

also mentioned. However, even long-term staff members reported not liking to confront loud, rude, or otherwise offensive students for fear of personal insult or other reprisal.

The reconstruction of the campus center was also mentioned in reference to a displaced student population that is now more inclined to congregate in the computer labs and library for social purposes; this further muddies the distinction between the quiet academic places on campus and areas specifically designed for gregarious student interaction. That a confusion of private/public or social/academic has taken place is probably not surprising given a certain cultural acceptance of a cell-phone culture where private conversations are publicly, and all too frequently, aired for public consumption. Marvin Library has banned the usage of cell phones within its confines, and a part-time security guard is posted to discourage potentially disruptive behavior. This signals Hudson Valley’s commitment to ensuring that no one individual has the license to trespass on the rights of others. It is everyone’s business to preserve a collegial, comfortable environment where learning can take place.

Louis Coplin, Vice President for Academic Support Services, invited all students to a meeting on March 21 to address key elements pertaining to student retention. One of the main topics for discussion was the student code of conduct and a review of campus regulations.

Joan Shack, Chair of the Academic Senate, has asked the Student Life Committee to suggest strategies for building a collegial campus environment.
A Study of Dematriculated Students

This spring, the Office of Continuing Education commenced a data-gathering project aimed at studying our dematriculated students who are willing to work with Continuing Education counselors to regain good academic standing.

Initially, each incoming student in Continuing Education meets with an advisor and completes an intake form. These forms are coded according to the student’s background, academic status, and stated intention to complete a degree at Hudson Valley Community College. Code typing also takes into account such variables as non-traditional college age, home schooling, plans to pursue a degree outside Hudson Valley Community College, and dematriculation status.

At the start of the project, approximately 52% of the non-matriculated students planned to pursue a degree at Hudson Valley Community College. Roughly 12% of these were de-matriculated; this was the group targeted for study. Of particular concern here is the need to identify factors mitigating against good academic standing. These de-matriculated students who are in academic jeopardy are encouraged to participate in individual advisement sessions, where they are asked to estimate the relative weight a given list of conditions might have had on their academic performance. These include such factors as academic difficulty, job responsibilities, disability, undecided major, and personal reasons. Specifically, the Continuing Education staff in this situation seeks to pinpoint, insofar as possible, what factors, or combination of factors, led to initial de-matriculation. It is hoped that this data will help build a better profile of the at-risk student and inform advisors whose task it is to build a customized plan for success with individual students.

Linda Pelosi-Dunn, Office of Continuing Education
Alicia J. Harlow, Office of Continuing Education

Early Warning System Maintains Faculty Participation and Hope for Students

One hundred and sixty five faculty (30.2%) participated in the spring 2005 Early Alert process, which aims to identify students who are at risk of completing the term with success. Early warning letters were mailed to 1,227 students between the 4th and the 5th week in the term. Students who receive the early warning are encouraged to speak with their instructors to talk about a plan to get back on track. Some faculty report the letter is a useful tool; other faculty do not wait for a letter to intervene. The end result remains the same. Some students are receptive to early overtures of assistance.

John Kennedy, (INS) Academic Advisor, states “the early warning letters look like they are doing just what we had hoped: an opportunity to contact and talk with the students before they continue to make less than prudent choices, and while they still may have time to amend their beginnings. Three students have called for an appointment to discuss a plan.”

Diana Hawkins, business Adjunct instructor, doesn’t wait for an Early Alert letter to reach her high risk students.

Diana engages in conversation with students at the first sign of trouble. Diana makes an assessment of a student’s receptivity to seeking guidance and then follows through with those students who truly desire to turn things around for the better.

As expected, not all students respond as Prof. Hawkins described above; for some, the institutional letter Early Warning letter serves as the official wake-up call: time to modify your learning behavior.

If you believe that the third-week Early Alert letter has been a wake-up call for any of your students, please take a minute to say so. E-mail Mary-Teresa Heath @heathmar or Kathy Quirk @quirkkat.

Professor John F. Kennedy advising student Courtney Nicpon.
The consulting team of Lee Noel and Randi Levitz, in their article “The Earth-Shaking But Quiet Revolution in Retention Management,” emphasizes the patently simple, but often forgotten, belief that student satisfaction will lead to both student and institutional success. A college’s reputation, Noel and Levitz argue, is built on sustaining and supporting individual students to a state of academic independence, and in this process, the first year is crucial for student confidence. All employees, beginning with the enrollment/admissions staff, have to be aware of their roles as retention ambassadors. Noel and Levitz describe six myths which beset proactive retention efforts at post-secondary institutions:

1. “Retention Will Improve Without Changing Our Behavior.” Noel-Levitz advocate getting students ‘stuck’ like velcro to the campus and making sure that they have a host of connections and contacts to anchor them to the institution.

2. “Students Bring a Cogent Map of College Success to Campus.” Noel-Levitz contend that although students carry a whole bag of dreams and expectations with them to college, these students still do not know where or indeed how to go looking for their personal treasures. Many students will say that there is nothing to do on campus when the fact is that there are truly thousands of opportunities for involvement. Clearly, students do not know how to interact, participate, or simply ask for help.

3. “Academic Preparation Equates to Persistence.” Noel-Levitz find that the principal myth concerning retention is that college dropouts are failing or flunking out of their classes. In fact, a “national study conducted several years ago revealed that 37% of the students who did not return the second year” had earned “GPAs of 2.50 or greater.” There is not a direct correlation between possession of high academic credentials, either in high school or during that all-important first year in college, and persistence to degree completion. The consulting team at Noel-Levitz recommends “front-loading” a student’s schedule with many built-in motivations and encouragements.

4. “Retention Means Lowering Standards.” Retention, Noel-Levitz find, is not about making things easier but, rather, about dangling the right-flavored carrots on the stick to motivate and support students to higher levels of attainment.

5. “Students Drop Out Because of Finances, Work, and/or Family Reasons—Reasons Out of Our Control.”

Enrollment Services Counselors: “How Can We Help You?”

Many of you within the Hudson Valley Community College environment have heard of the Enrollment Services Counselors; however, you may not be sure how to utilize us as a resource. This article will help to explain some of the services we provide as well as make you aware of our presence in the continuing effort of retaining students at the college.

As Enrollment Services Counselors, we have trained and continually work with all of the student services offices (Admissions, Continuing Ed., Community Ed., Instructional Support Services and Retention, Financial Aid, Cashier, and Registrar’s office). We work very closely with these offices to ensure that Hudson Valley Community College students are receiving not only the correct information, but also the most current information. Some of our other responsibilities include VA Certification for Montgomery GI Bill Benefits, maintaining the WIReD Helpline (through e-mail and over the phone for students and faculty), and counseling students through the Total Withdrawal process.

When entering and leaving the Guenther Enrollment Services Center, we are the first and last people you see. That is why we provide a friendly “one-stop-shop” atmosphere. We want to help set the tone of the college from the most basic information to the most complex. By establishing a rapport with the students, we have formed an “informative relationship” in which the students are happy to come back to the desk and feel comfortable asking questions. This allows us to keep an open communicative flow between the college and the students. If we do not have an answer, we will find the correct answer by utilizing the college’s resources.

We are happy to assist students with any questions or inquiries. If after reading this article, you would like to utilize our services, our hours of operation are: Monday-Thursday 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Friday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.. Contact Information Enrollment Services: 629-7700.

- Jaime Miller, Registrar’s Office
Keeping Mailers Simple and Serious May Improve Chances That Students Will Read Them!

Statistics from a direct mail company have shown that audiences are often more likely to read a piece of mail that is in a plain, white envelope than an attention-grabbing piece of mail. Some readers may even make certain decisions depending on the use of words and phrases in a mailer, insert, or flyer. Make sure to check with the office of Community Relations and with the Graphics department to ensure that you are keeping up with the latest trends to make your mailer the most effective!

- John Heiser, Graphics Department

Update On Tutoring Program for Radiographic Exposure Physics (I & II)

The Learning Assistance Center, in collaboration with faculty in the Radiologic Technology Program, recruited four senior Radiologic Technology students to meet with students who were having difficulties with the Radiographic Exposure Physics I course. In the fall of 2004, five freshmen attended the tutoring sessions that took place in the Radiologic Technology Laboratory. Four of the five students were successful in passing the class. Four students are currently enrolled in the spring 2005 tutoring sessions for Radiographic Exposure Physics II. Department Chairs and Faculty are encouraged to work with Don Frament, Coordinator of the Peer Tutor Program (Learning Assistance Center) to recruit tutors for high-risk students.

- Jeanne Kelleher, Department Chair of Medical Imaging

New Advisor Training 2005:

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Contact Amber Moser 629-8069

Call Center Identifies Current Students Who Plan to Stop Attending College

A procedure for early identification of students who plan to stop attending college has been built into Hudson Valley Community College’s regular late-spring calling sessions designed to remind students to schedule their fall 2005 term classes. The Enrollment-Retention Technical Assistants will encourage any students who say they will not be returning to reveal their reasons and then offer the appropriate referrals to various academic support areas. The caller will also fill out a form to notify departments that certain students of theirs have decided not to return. The purpose of this procedure is to capture information about why some students leave school, and to allow advisors an opportunity to make a last effort to reach out to students who may be amenable to retention intervention. The Call Center staff also reminds students of the consequences of early departure and the need to follow through with the formal withdrawal process.

Call Center Schedule:

Encouraging Students to Schedule for Fall 2005: Monday May 2nd through Thursday, May 5th

Encouraging Students to Pay Their Bill for Fall 2005: Monday August 8th through Thursday, August 11th

Did You Know?

The Planning and Research Office website offers a wealth of data pertaining to Hudson Valley Community College’s individual schools, divisions, departments, and courses and classes within those departments. The office’s website can help administrators, department chairs, and steering and assessment committees find most of the information they need to review the past five years. It will also furnish statistics for grades and enrollment for each course offered within the various programs for that same time period. Summary reports from recent college-wide surveys are also available. Check it out online at www.hvcc.edu/planning.
Velcro, Carrots, Maps and Handshakes: Tools and Attitudes to Achieve Student and Institutional Success

(Continued from page 4)

Levitz claim that for every student lost to life and family situations, there is another in the very same circumstances managing to stay the course. Their consulting team argues that the exploration of the variables related to the latter student’s decision to remain in school frequently yields mention of a proactive staff member, instructor, or advisor who reached out to the student at a critical juncture to supply the needed incentives.

6. “Exit Interviews Will Shape a Retention Improvement Effort.” It is this myth which above all levitates Noel-Levitz’s joint dander. The pair suggests two alternatives to the tardy, and relatively futile, exit conversation. The first is to seek out and identify the potential “dropout-prone” student and formulate a loss prevention plan before the student even has a chance to feel overwhelmed. The second recommendation challenges institutions to know what is important to students, so that administrators and teachers can fill in what Noel and Levitz call “performance gaps” for students. In short, Noel-Levitz say that above all, we need to know our students as individuals, not as types or categories. We need to talk and listen to students while they are on campus. Though rich in data, theory, and knowledge of learning practices, colleges still have difficulty transforming a wealth of information into sound retention practices.


Eric Bryant, Community Relations
Mary-Teresa Heath, Office of Instructional Support Services and Retention

A Fond Goodbye to Ms. Wilhilmina Abraham

Ms. Wilhilmina Abraham retired recently after serving 13 years as the Educational Specialist for the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at Hudson Valley Community college. Ms. Abraham’s retirement represents a huge loss for the college, the Student Services Division, but most importantly for the students that she helped over the years.

Ms. Abraham was an exceptional counselor. She always took the time to provide key ingredients to help our students. She was kind, caring, and patient. She offered an unique blend of maternal, professional, and personal flavor to each student who entered her office. She possessed a special quality where she appeared to already have the answer or solution to a problem, even before the problem was completely expressed.

Ms. Abraham, who earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the City University of New York and a Masters of Science Degree from Brooklyn College, will be sorely missed by the student services staff with whom she developed strong personal ties over the years. However, Ms. Abraham will now have more time to do other things that she enjoys such as working in her garden, painting, traveling, and spending quality time with her family.

Farewell Wilhilmina!
We love ya!
Vice-President Louis Coplin

LEARNING ASSISTANCE CENTER WORKSHOPS:
♦ Preparing for Finals: April 14, April 15, April 19
♦ Time Management Strategies: April 21, May 3

Smart Start is a three-week summer program that helps incoming students prepare for the semester ahead with a math and writing review and campus orientation activities.

The 2005 program is scheduled for:
Monday - Thursday, August 8-11 and 15-18
Monday - Wednesday, August 22-24
8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Cost: $10