Win, Win, Win: Smart Start and EOP Team Up

Anticipation can be fraught with anxiety. This is true for many first year students. They fill out an application, take the placement test, submit financial aid forms and meet with an academic advisor to make a schedule for their first semester at Hudson Valley Community College. There are so many steps to enrollment, but the end is in sight. A sigh of relief, everything is in order and the enjoyment of the last weeks of summer can begin. But after another look at the class schedule, panic sets in: “Will I be able to find my classes?” “I’m not a math person.” How will I pass this English comp class?” Fortunately, Hudson Valley’s Smart Start program offers anxious students a means to tackle some of these fears before starting classes. Students attending the program learn to navigate the campus and prepare for success in college level courses.

Some students face additional anxieties due to socioeconomic circumstances; these students may be at risk of not attaining their educational goals. They may be eligible for admission into the college’s Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). EOP offers academically and financially disadvantaged students support services, including mentoring, tutoring and a small stipend.

In the summer of 2007 Smart Start and EOP joined in a collaborative effort to target these students for participation in one of the two-week summer Smart Start sessions. David Clickner, director of the college learning centers, says “the cooperative efforts with EOP increased recruitment and participation” in Smart Start.

Louis Coplin, director of student life, whose office administers the state-funded EOP program on campus, considers Smart Start “our institution’s orientation program and it attracts high risk students, just as EOP does.” This made the cooperative effort a natural fit. Direct recruitment began after EOP’s pre-term orientation sessions. Approximately 15 EOP students participated in Smart Start, with EOP paying the $10.00 registration fee for eligible students. In addition to writing and math classes, the participants were introduced to key people and services on campus, as well as college policies and procedures. Coplin remarked “just that effort carries, sometimes, two years.”

Coplin calls it a “win, win, win” situation. The Smart Start program may keep some of the “at risk” students from dropping out during their first semester because they know where to find help. Those are successful accomplishments for the student and the institution. This effort also shows the EOP program, which is a SUNY-wide program, and the college in a good light to the State of New York.

Registration information for Smart Start 2008 has been distributed to all academic advisors. Students may request a registration form by completing the information at www hvcc edu/ smart or by visiting the LAC on the lower level of the Marvin Library. For additional information regarding Hudson Valley’s EOP, visit www hvcc edu/ eop.

Kathleen “Kit” Haynes, secretary in the office of instructional support services and retention, contributed this article.
Early Warning System Update: Faculty Survey Results

In September 2007, the Early Warning Web Application was activated in WIReD for faculty members to identify students for Alert letters in the Early Warning System (EWS). This replaced paper rosters that were delivered to instructors in the third week of classes and returned to Retention Services by the fifth week. Toward the end of the Fall 2007 term, Retention Services developed a Zoomerang survey for faculty to assess the new process.

Who responded: 109 faculty responded to the survey; all but 16 had used either the old process or the new one.

New vs. Old: Faculty respondents stated that they did not participate in Fall 2007 for many of the same reasons as in the past. Listed in alphabetical order, the reasons are: forget; no need; poor response from students; prefer to talk with or email students personally; students should be responsible enough not to need warnings; too busy. In addition, the new system was not used by some instructors because they prefer the paper roster method or the system seemed too difficult or time-consuming. However, 97 percent who used the new process agreed that the instructions were easy to follow and 95 percent agreed that the Early Warning Web Application was easy to navigate.

Does it work?: While Early Warning Systems at other colleges direct students to student affairs offices, 93 percent of the survey respondents at Hudson Valley agreed that “this intervention should direct students to you, their instructor.” Some faculty members noted that the letters do not prompt every student to act, and students who do respond often revert to poor behaviors. However, others see the letters as one of many ways to initiate a dialogue; the Alert letters reinforce other communications and demonstrate the college’s concern for student success.

A big change: Three-quarters of the instructors who used the system this semester agreed that extending the window to identify students to the fourteenth week of the semester was helpful. The individuals who disapproved of extending the time for letters believe students are even less likely to respond late in the term and are in a better position to know where they stand in a class.

The task ahead: The survey responses demonstrate that no system will meet with universal approval, but there is room for increasing faculty participation. Comments that students are responsible for knowing how well they are doing or that the letters begin too early in the term indicate that there is still some misunderstanding regarding the program’s rationale. Most students do not know what it takes to be an active learner in the classroom. If they attend class and take some notes, they feel they are doing what is expected. Hudson Valley’s EWS is designed to help initiate a discussion about class attendance, participation, note-taking and homework assignments—the behaviors that indicate whether a student is engaged in learning the material that will be assessed through quizzes, tests and other methods.

Colleagues’ survey responses indicate that the Web-based Early Warning System is user-friendly. If you haven’t tried it, consider using it next fall to connect with your students. Instructions and a sample Alert letter are available at www.hvcc.edu/issr/ews.

Hudson Valley’s Early Warning System includes Welcome, Alert, and Midterm letters, as well as Welcome and Distance Learning calls from the SOS Call Center. Please contact Kevin McNeelege, retention specialist, at (518) 629-7638 or mcneehke@hvcc.edu if you have questions or suggestions.

Upcoming Student Outreach and Support Call Center Sessions:

Continuing Students without Fall 2008 Schedules: Monday, April 28 to Thursday, May 1

Students with Incomplete Applications, New Students without Fall 2008 Schedules and New Students Who Haven’t Tested for Fall 2008: Monday, May 5 to Thursday, May 8 (These calls sessions are repeated in July)

Distance Learning Students: Wednesday, May 28 and Monday, July 7

Spring 2008 Applicants Who Did Not Enroll, Fall 2007 Enrollees Who Did Not Return for Spring 2008 and TAP Decertified Students: Monday, June 9 to Thursday, June 12

Continuing Students Who Haven’t Completed Registration and Conditionally Accepted Students: Monday, August 4 to Thursday, August 7
Retention Services at Hudson Valley Community College monitors data relating to the academic outcomes of students that may be at risk. Periodically, retention work groups are formed to dig deeper into the numbers, assess how students with specific at-risk characteristics are progressing, and recommend changes to academic support initiatives and interventions. In Spring 2008, several retention work groups are meeting.

The Undecided Students Retention Work Group was reconstituted in February 2008. Representatives from Admissions, the Center for Careers and Employment, the Center for Counseling and Transfer, Individual Studies, and the Office of Instructional Support Services and Retention are included. The group reviewed the implementation and impact of ten initiatives recommended by the first retention work group in July 2004 to support students in the Individual Studies program who are undecided about their academic and career goals when they enroll at Hudson Valley.

The group found that some of the recommendations have been implemented and others need to be put in place. Consideration is being given to offering a workshop at New Student Orientation; creating communications to accepted, undecided students; and encouraging students to register for a new credit-bearing course, developed by Individual Studies, that focuses on student goal-setting.

The Weak-in-Three Retention Work Group first convened in Spring 2006 to discuss how students who test weak in three skill areas on the placement test fare at the college. The members include faculty, advisors and staff who frequently work with these students. The work group collected and analyzed data on student placement and academic outcomes, and a draft report was written.

Now that the Education Policies and Standards Committee of the Academic Senate and the President’s Task Force on Placement Policies and Remediation have completed their broader inquiries, this work group is meeting again. The members are deciding what, if any, recommendations to make to further promote the academic success of students who test weak in three skills.

Last, a Hybrid Schedule Retention Work Group has been created in consultation with Susan Gallagher, director of distance learning. The program review completed by the Distance Learning office in 2007 noted that students who take a mix of in-person and online courses tend to have poorer outcomes in their online courses than students who are only taking online courses. A review of the literature did not turn up any research regarding students who have these hybrid schedules; studies focus on retention of students who only enroll in online classes compared to their peers in on-campus courses. Members of this work group represent a variety of academic and support services offices, including faculty members who regularly teach online courses. The group has begun to collect data on student characteristics and outcomes, as well as communications to students that explain support services for online courses.

**Preferred Pathways to Success**

Two Hudson Valley students with Smart Start connections, **Steve Whitney** and **Tina Robinson**, were nominated for Who’s Who Among Students in American Junior Colleges this year. Both found a path to success by becoming engaged on campus.

A freelance photographer, Steve decided in 2004 to take a course at Hudson Valley to enable him to design a Web site for his business. Having enjoyed the experience, he decided to try another class. Remembering his love for the subject in high school, Steve took a math course. That math course, along with his experiences in the Learning Assistance Center (LAC), changed Steve’s future.

Although still at his photography business, Steve’s aim is to teach mathematics at the college level—hopefully at Hudson Valley. Steve spends, on average, 11 hours a week in the LAC. His initial exposure to the LAC was as a pupil; now he’s a peer tutor. Last summer, he was tapped by the mathematics faculty in the LAC to tutor for Smart Start.

Tina lost her Albany-based daycare business to fire. She knew how important it was to continue to provide support to young mothers and their children. While exploring her options, Tina discovered the Human Services program at Hudson Valley.

Before enrolling at Hudson Valley in 2006, Tina had been out of high school for 30 years. She completed Smart Start to help her feel more comfortable. Although the students are comparatively younger, she has found everyone at the college—students and instructors alike—to be friendly and supportive. Tina joined the Human Services Club, which has helped her to become more involved and taken her to several regional conferences.

**Interested in learning more about these retention work groups? Please contact Kevin McNeelege, retention specialist, at mcneehke@hvcc.edu or (518) 629-7638.**

**Jennifer Turner Wells assisted with this article. She is a service learning student working with Retention Services.**
### Learning Assistance Center ~ Workshops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/21 - 4/25</td>
<td>9 a.m. Trigonometry</td>
<td>9 a.m. APA Format</td>
<td>9 a.m. Trigonometry</td>
<td>10 a.m. Trigonometry</td>
<td>9 a.m. Trigonometry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10 a.m. CMS—Chicago Manual Style</td>
<td>10 a.m. Trigonometry</td>
<td>2 p.m. Trigonometry</td>
<td>2 p.m. Trigonometry</td>
<td>10 a.m. Trigonometry</td>
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<td>12 p.m. End of Semester Time Management</td>
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<td>2 p.m. Trigonometry</td>
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<td>4/28 - 5/2</td>
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<td>2 p.m. Trigonometry</td>
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### Spring 2008 Final Math Exam Review Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Date 1</th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Date 2</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MATH 099 Essentials of Math I</td>
<td>5/9</td>
<td>8:00 – 9:30 a.m.</td>
<td>5/12</td>
<td>11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MATH 100 Essentials of Math II</td>
<td>5/9</td>
<td>9:30 – 11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>5/12</td>
<td>12:30 – 2:00 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MATH 110 Intermediate Algebra</td>
<td>5/9</td>
<td>11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.</td>
<td>5/12</td>
<td>2:00 – 3:30 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math 150 College Algebra &amp; Trig</td>
<td>5/9</td>
<td>12:30 – 2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>5/12</td>
<td>8:00 – 9:30 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MATH 160 Precalculus</td>
<td>5/13</td>
<td>8:00 – 9:30 a.m.</td>
<td>5/13</td>
<td>12:30 – 2:00 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MATH 165 Basic Calculus with Analytic Geometry</td>
<td>5/9</td>
<td>2:00 – 3:30 p.m.</td>
<td>5/13</td>
<td>9:30 – 11:00 a.m.</td>
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<td>MATH 180 Calculus I</td>
<td>5/13</td>
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<td>9:30 – 11:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>MATH 190 Calculus II</td>
<td>5/13</td>
<td>9:30 – 11:00</td>
<td>5/13</td>
<td>2:00 – 3:30</td>
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Visit [www.hvcc.edu/retention](http://www.hvcc.edu/retention) to read past issues of *Retention PIECES*.

What are your best student retention practices?
Contact Kevin McNeelge at (518) 629-7638 or by e-mail at mcneehke@hvcc.edu to discuss writing or being interviewed for an article for the Fall 2008 issue of *Retention PIECES*.

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An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.
— Benjamin Franklin