The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
4. The institution’s processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

Argument

The 2012 – 2016 strategic plan for Mohave Community College explicitly defined 19 goals for student retention, persistence, and completion. The college strategic plan metrics reflect those created by the Arizona Community College Presidents Council (ACCPC) for the broader Arizona Community College: Long-Term Strategic Vision, and the Voluntary Framework of Accountability created by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) for measuring retention, persistence, and completion. The metrics are organized by access, retention, and completion and divided into instructional/academic led goals, and student services led goals. Goals are defined as target percentages. The 2012 baseline is listed as well as the 2016 goal. Each metric is presented in comparison to the Arizona state-wide level. Progress toward these goals is included in the Strategic Vision Student Progress and Outcomes Report presented annually to MCC’s Board of Governors.

Some highlights of the 2016 report include:

Access

At Mohave Community College, the percentages of Pell recipients and adults over the age of 24 both exceed statewide and national averages.

Retention

More than four-fifths of all student credit hours attempted in college-level courses by Mohave’s 2013 New Student Cohort were successfully completed.

At 73%, Mohave’s fall-to-fall retention rate is substantially higher than the national comparison (53%).

Completion

The number of students transferring from Mohave to an in-state university has increased by nearly 6%
over the past 5 years.

At 33%, Mohave’s six-year graduation rate is substantially higher than both statewide (29%) and national (25%) averages.

Graduation rates, transfer rates, and retention rates are posted on MCC’s Institutional Information web page.

Mohave Community College analyzes the annual Strategic Vision and Student Progress and Outcomes Report and the IPEDS Feedback Report with a view to continuously improving student success across the institution. Each October the Dean of Student Services presents a Student Success Initiatives Report to MCC’s Board of Governors that provides an overview of current institutional efforts and initiatives to improve student success and therefore retention, persistence, and completion rates. Each of the initiatives described in the report are a result of careful data analysis. Mohave Community College requires STU 103 (Survive and Thrive in College) for all first time students, and the course is now being offered to dual- and concurrent-enrollment students. Each campus professional advisor visits STU 103 classes each semester. The advisor visits the class three or more times per semester to provide information on support and other services at the college. In addition, intrusive advising is used when it becomes necessary to contact a student for whom an early alert has been filed and intervention is needed to help the student succeed. Milestone Advising is another way advisors support and encourage students to complete their educational goals. Students who have completed 50-75% of their declared degree or certificate(s) must meet with a professional advisor to help them reach their academic potential. A student assistance program is available to all students who are in need of assistance in addressing personal issues that affect their wellbeing. The program’s provider, Deer Oaks, offers 24-hour, seven days a week access with services that include face-to-face, telephonic, and online counseling. In addition, students can also login to a dedicated website with access to live chat, in-the-moment counseling via an online counseling portal, and thousands of articles and resources to support work/college/life balance.

As described in the article Decreasing your student loan cohort default rate: Leading a college-wide change initiative at Mohave Community College, in the Community College Journal of Research and Practice (CCJRP), 02 March, 2016, the college faced a crisis with rising Cohort Default Rates (CDR’s) that threatened its ability to offer Title IV funding. The transformational process used to overcome this crisis is indicative of how the institution uses data to make improvements.

The Cohort Default Rate is a metric that describes the percentage of borrowers who default (more than 270 days delinquent) on their student loans within three years of entering repayment. The CDR is regarded as a completion indicator because it is a measure of an institution’s ability to prepare students for jobs that would allow students to pay off their loans. If an institution’s three-year CDR remains above 30% for three consecutive years, the institution will lose its eligibility to provide federal loan funds and Pell Grant funding. In 2013, MCC was in jeopardy of losing Title IV funding due to the unintended consequences of an earlier college culture of “enrollment at any cost.” In 2005 college personnel did not have a full understanding of the administrative requirements for disbursing student loans and the subsequent consequences became evident as the cohort default rates skyrocketed without a plan in place to rectify. Additionally, the college did not have appropriate human resources to responsibly administer the student loan program, particularly with regard to student education programs for financial literacy, when it re-entered the program, and furthermore did not address the issue of inadequate financial aid policies and processes until key positions were refilled. In 2007, the FY2005 cohort two-year CDR was 5.5%. Two years later, the rate was 20.2%. By 2011, the FY2009 two-year rate was 25.3%, and the newly reported three-year rate was 36.7%. In 2012 the FY2010 three-year rate was 32.7%, and in 2013 the published FY2011 three-year rate was
just under 30% at 29.3%, thus avoiding the loss of Title IV funds.

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two-year CDR</strong></td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three-year CDR</strong></td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>28.6%*</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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*The published rate of 29.3% was reduced to 28.6% after successful challenges.

The CDR is necessarily a lagging indicator because the final default rate is not available until three years after students enter repayment. Unfortunately, many institutions do not address default rates until they are at critical levels, and then they address the problem reactively. When Mohave Community College saw a dramatic increase in the CDR from 2007 to 2009, the institution took a proactive, long-term, transformational approach to the problem. This required a cultural shift away from “enrollment at any cost” toward student success; obtaining a degree is the strongest single factor in preventing default. As Charles describes in the CCJRP article:

> The process included various initiatives, including ensuring accurate enrollment reporting, CDR challenges and appeals, early intervention and counseling, default prevention and outreach efforts, financial literacy, and student success and retention efforts (p.4).

The institution analyzed all of its financial aid practices and made significant changes. Enrollment reporting to the National Student Loan Data System was flawed so that some students were not given their full grace period before being placed into repayment. This reporting process was changed in the spring of 2009. The college challenged and appealed individual cases to lower the CDR. MCC continues to work with service providers to catch these cases before draft rates are released. The institution also created processes to prevent the disbursement of student loans to students who were not attending classes. The Participation Verification Form requires faculty to verify that students are actually attending classes before loans are disbursed. The Loan Request Form asks students to look up their current student loan balances, calculate their monthly payments on the amount requested, and to provide three references. First-time borrowers and students who do not meet satisfactory academic progress are required to complete an online financial literacy curriculum called “Life Skills” by USA Funds. Additionally, a learning objective specific to budgeting and financial management was added to the required Survive and Thrive in College STU 103 course, and financial literacy components were added to transitional math and English courses.

Mohave Community College also committed financial resources to the default management plan. In 2010 MCC hired a default prevention manager, and used a program that provided financial literacy resources to current students and students in their grace period. However, by 2012 the college already had two consecutive CDR’s above 30% so, after an extensive cost/benefit analysis, the Board of Governors approved a maximum expenditure of $60,000 to Education Credit Management Corporation (ECMC) which averaged 400 calls per week to cohort members. This brought the rate down to an estimated 33%. Just before the challenge window closed, the Department of Education placed MCC in a pilot program that shared access to government databases that allowed MCC to
successfully challenge several more defaulters and bring the final rate down to 28.6%.

MCC’s director of financial aid credits the invitation to the pilot program to strong leadership in the college. As reported in the CCJRP article, in September of 2013 some of the college leadership met with US Congressman Paul Gosar to explain MCC’s position and the economic impact the loss of Title IV funds would have on Mohave County. This led to a phone call with senior Department of Education officials who provided direct contacts with the Department and with servicers, and eventually to MCC’s participation in the pilot program that resulted in successful challenges. Strong leadership was also evident when the president empowered the Enrollment Management Committee’s Default Prevention Subcommittee which included representatives from faculty, student services, the business office, the registrar’s office, and institutional research. This subcommittee evaluated the default management plan each year and they established a CDR goal of 15% at which time the college will move to a maintenance plan.

Open communication was essential to the success of the default management plan. Each of the initiatives were initially met with resistance from faculty and students. But after the president communicated to staff and students the gravity of the default situation, resistance was put aside and the entire college community worked together. Updates on the CDR were presented at every board meeting, at president’s council, and campus communication councils, and at all-staff day. Focus groups were conducted with students in October 2013 to learn the student’s perspective of the financial aid process, and new software, NetPartner, was purchased so that students can access the state of their financial aid application online.

All of these elements together; new processes, the cultural change in the college, strong leadership, and open communication, mirror Kotter’s Eight Steps to Transforming Your Organization: 1) establish a sense of urgency, 2) form a powerful guiding coalition, 3) create a vision, 4) communicate the vision, 5) empower others to act on the vision, 6) plan for and create short-term wins, 7) consolidate improvements and produce more change, and 8) institutionalize new approaches. This process is used in all instances of institutional improvement.

Another example of institutional change driven by data is the development of a call center (MCC Connect). The formation of the call center originated with anecdotal evidence. Student services personnel reported incidents where students had been given inconsistent information dependent upon the personnel to which they spoke. The levels of training and experience of front line staff varied widely across the college. In 2012, MCC determined that a centralized call center was the best approach to giving consistent, accurate facts. The call center was established to handle the IT helpdesk and to give general college information. The data soon showed that only a small percentage of student calls were for IT matters. In response to this data, the call center petitioned to be allowed to address student questions more thoroughly rather than to transfer them to various departments. Departments such as the Bursar, Human Resources, Community Outreach and campus general inquiries directly trained call center representatives. Soon the call center became the primary front line contact for students. The information provided students was consistent and continuously updated. Because MCC Connect interacted with students across departments, they were able to observe which issues were of greatest concern to students. MCC Connect collects data on customer service, the frequency of calls, the number of unique callers, the number of repeat callers including how many times they repeated, and the top reasons for repeat calls. This data has been continuously analyzed and that analysis has been influential in improving student services across the college. For example, in September 2013, call center personnel were trained in prescriptive advising. Additionally, student services specialists were scheduled in phone advising shifts so that developmental advising was to all students regardless of location or campus. Other improvements include the use of screen sharing software, Skype, and Click-to-Chat software that allows students to communicate with MCC Connect.
via a pop-up chat box. MCC Connect continues to provide data about the student experience. Careful analysis of that data provides important information about potential threats to student access, retention, and completion.

A final example of institutional improvement based on data is MCC’s “Grow Your Own” initiative. An environmental scan conducted as part of the college’s 2016 through 2020 strategic plan development revealed the level of educational attainment in Mohave County is decidedly lower than both the state and the national levels. The first of three goals in the 2016 strategic plan is that MCC will drive educational attainment and student success. MCC has designed a strategic initiative informally referred to as “Grow Your Own” to help address the teacher shortage in area schools. Leaders from school districts throughout Mohave County attended a Grow Your Own education summit hosted by MCC. MCC met with community stakeholders in the early childhood and k-12 education fields to explore ways to direct resources and tailor programs to assist with “growing” students in our school systems to positions of teachers in our communities. Topics included:

- What do we see as challenges or concerns?
- How do we tailor programs to accomplish our goals?
- How can we help our educators have the tools and resources to make it happen?
- What funding is available e.g., scholarships and financial aid that can be purposefully tailored for and directed to MCC students in early childhood and education programs?

Pivoting off MCC’s Strategic Plan, instruction and student services designed the forum to institute a dialog to define what can be done to assist in community schools and aid students in the transition from pre-school and K-12 levels through secondary education and college completion. Education department faculty will continue the dialogue in each community, with their respective partners, to purposefully design and implement appropriate programming and actions. College and school leaders throughout Mohave County will continue to move forward together to help Mohave County grow its own future educators.

As part of its larger strategic goal of improving the educational attainment in Mohave County, MCC has joined the Achieve60AZ community-based alliance to support a completion goal of 60 percent of adults ages 25-64 with a professional certificate or college degree by 2030. Currently, more than 60 community, business, philanthropic and education organizations in Arizona have formed this alliance to make Arizona more competitive through the power of education. The key focus areas of this goal are:

- Strengthening the K-12 Pipeline – Increase college readiness and high-school graduation rates
- Completing Credentials – Implement policies to make it easier for Arizonans to finish their certificates or college degrees.
- Increasing Access – Raise awareness about options beyond high school and make them more affordable.
- Aligning Workforce Needs – Engage businesses, governments and educators to identify and close the skills gap.

The Office of Institutional Research’s commitment to educational improvement is reflected in its Mission, Vision, and Goals statements. The Office of Institutional Research collects, analyzes and disseminates internal and external data/information to assist the college in making informed decisions that improve institutional performance, accountability and student success.

Retention, persistence and completion review are tools we utilize to achieve educational improvement. We do this when we evaluate retention and completion trends and its correlation with
Mohave Community College (MCC) uses IPEDS methodology and data collection and accountability strategies employed by the Arizona Community College: Long-Term Strategic Vision, and the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) to calculate retention and graduation rates. MCC tracks a cohort of first-time, first year students enrolled as credit earning students.

Another method of retention and persistence data analysis is based on what is called the fall cohort in which we review all students, new and return, with a degree declaration who are enrolled in a fall term and count the students who graduate or return the following fall. This method assists in determining which programs attract, keep, and graduate students which can then help us to initiate effective actions that will lead to educational improvement.

Sources

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