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Promoting first-generation college student success : establish a connection, eliminate confusion and build confidence

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**Promoting First-Generation College Student Success:
Establish a Connection, Eliminate Confusion and Build
Confidence**

Written By J. David Levyssohn

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Education
California State University, Monterey Bay
May 2005**

I dedicate this work to the first-generation college students attending, have attended, or ever will attend California State University, Monterey Bay and to the staff, faculty, and administration that recognize the importance of serving students.

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I would like to thank my mother, my father, my grandparents and the rest of my family for always believing in me. I would like to thank Dr. Christine Sleeter, she has been the friend, the mentor, and the professional I needed to pursue my educational goals. I would like to thank Dr. Patricia Whang for her intensity and coursework rigor. I would also like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Meador, my peers, and the MAE department for their constant support and encouragement.

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I would like to thank Jeff “Rocky” La Jeunesse, Sara Rosenkilde, and the entire Guidance and Counseling Office located at San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton, California. I would like to thank Steve Brown for being the one that truly believed in my professional abilities. I would like to thank the College Assistance Migrant Program, the Educational Opportunity Program, Summer Bridge students, the Student Support Services program and the TRiO community. Last but not least, I would like to thank the California State University, Monterey Bay for giving me the opportunity to pursue my educational and professional goals.

Promoting First-Generation College Student Success: Establish a Connection, Eliminate Confusion and Build Confidence

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“My out of class experience has gotten pretty good once I got involved. Not being involved on campus made me very depressed.” – Karen (CSUMB Student)

“Like I said, my number one struggle was doing the run around thing. Not knowing where everything was exactly and people telling me one thing and another person telling me another thing about, you know, where to go to get certain information.” – Jay Vaughn Johnson (CSUMB Student)

Abstract

This project is intended to improve the retention rates and the graduation rates of the large population of first-generation students attending California State University, Monterey Bay. This project discusses the implementation of student development theory to create supplementary programming for the first-generation students. Interviews with 14 first-generation college students document the need for California State University, Monterey Bay to offer a supplementary course them.

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Statement of Purpose

Introduction

When a student can establish a connection to the college or university that she or he attends the confusion of college life can be eliminated and confidence can be built. The following Master's Thesis is intended to improve the success rates of the high population of first-generation college students that attend California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). There are several supplemental programs at CSUMB that are targeted to assist first-generation college students in their pursuit of higher education. These services are to be in addition to the services already provided by the primary advising unit on campus. The Office of Student Affairs currently manages all of the supplemental programs and the Office of Academic Affairs manages the primary advising unit on campus, currently Lower-Division Advising (LDA). The action plan I propose will be submitted to the Provost, Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Vice President Student Affairs, the Director of Early Outreach and Support Programs (EOSP) and the Dean of each of CSUMB's colleges.

The action plan is a model that addresses the success rates of the first-generation college students attending CSUMB. It is a model for supplementary programs at CSUMB to consider. CSUMB has the resources to execute the plan and with campus wide support the plan is very low cost, possibly requiring no additional costs to the university. This plan begins with a small group of the first-generations students attending CSUMB and then it should be implemented to serve the entire first-generation student population. The plan is directed to the Vice President of Student Affairs and more specifically the Director of EOSP, Jose Martinez-Saldana, to be executed through one or

more of the Support Programs in his unit, more specifically it is designed to start with The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and the Student Support Services program (SSS) and then it will be expanded to serve a greater population.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

There is currently no plan or agenda that directly addresses the success rates of the first-generation college students attending CSUMB. More specifically there is no basic structure, or common theory or theories shared among the many different entities that provide academic advising and/or assistance to the students attending CSUMB. As the university continues to research and explore the policies and procedures regarding the advising of the students that attend CSUMB it is still clear that more specific and extensive advising services should be provided. The only thing clear on campus at this point is that there are many different entities that interact with the students that attend CSUMB. Professionals in each of these different entities assumes the role of a “college counselor” or “academic advisor” when working with the student. But many of the entities on campus that serve students are providing the same services to a select group of students, creating a very disconnected and inconsistent system for the students to attempt to navigate through. All of these entities need to collaborate on a regular basis and should all be familiar with student development theories.

This thesis directly addresses the success among the first-generation students attending CSUMB. This Master’s Thesis, including the action plan, will define both primary and supplementary advising and how it relates to the current resources available at CSUMB. It will also provide a basic structure and an executable model for supplemental advising programs. This model works in collaboration with the primary

advising unit (Lower-Division Advising) to specifically address the success rates of the first-generation college students attending CSUMB, to create a theory based plan and to make advising procedures on campus clear to all students attending CSUMB.

Established in 1994, California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) is dedicated to its vision statement including the following:

“The campus will be distinctive in serving the diverse people of California, especially the working class and historically undereducated and low-income populations. It will feature an enriched living and learning environment and year-round operation. The identity of the university will be framed by substantive commitment to multilingual, multicultural, gender-equitable learning.”

(Campus Strategic Planning Committee, 1994)

This vision statement alone indirectly embraces first-generation college students, resulting in an average of 45% of the student population to be first-generation college students during any academic school year (Institutional Assessment and Research, 2002b).

The following table illustrates the current retention rates for first-generation that began as freshman at CSUMB from 1995 – 2002. Table 1.1 illustrates the percentage of students that continued enrolling at CSUMB throughout a six-year period. Each group of students is illustrated by year. For example, in 1995, 82% of the original 100% of students enrolled again after the first year (Institutional Assessment and Research, 2002a).

First Time Freshman						
Matriculated	1 Year	2 Year	3 Year	4 Year	5 Year	6 Year
Fall 1995 (N=72)	82%	68%	61%	52%	53%	50%
Fall 1996 (N=100)	79%	65%	61%	56%	43%	43%
Fall 1997 (N=81)	78%	59%	51%	50%	45%	50%
Fall 1998 (N=118)	76%	58%	56%	52%	54%	
Fall 1999 (N=137)	75%	58%	50%	41%		
Fall 2000 (N=199)	77%	62%	55%			
Fall 2001 (N=250)	73%	59%				
Fall 2002 (N=256)	77%					
Historical Averages	77%	61%	56%	50%	49%	48%

Table 1.1 – Percentage of Students Continuing at CSUMB

Notice that according to this table, the rates during these years are actually pretty close to the “Historical Averages,” which means that the retention rates at CSUMB are about the same as the retention rates of all colleges throughout the United States throughout history. It is unclear exactly how these numbers were acquired or exactly what these percentages mean as far as establishing how many first-generation college students complete their bachelor’s degree within a reasonable amount of time. Note that the percentages decrease as time goes by, the longer it takes the harder it gets to complete.

A “reasonable amount of time” to degree completion will be dependant on the degree that is being pursued, but we must critically examine what is meant by this. To put this more into perspective one can refer to what Financial Aid considers to be a “reasonable amount of time.” The Financial Aid Office at CSUMB will grant qualified students with financial aid for up to 150 units before disqualifying them from receiving aid. CSUMB encourages 15 units per semester for each fulltime student, and because most classes are four units students usually end up with an average of 16 units per semester. In addition, students graduating with a bachelor’s degree from CSUMB only need 120-132 units (depending on degree) to graduate. If a student adds a minor to

her/his major, then add another 16 units to be safe, this makes a total of 136-152 units. If a student attends CSUMB taking 15 units per semester then at the end of the student's 10th semester (5th year) the student has attempted those 150 units and had the opportunity to graduate in a "reasonable amount of time." If 150 units is considered a reasonable amount of time, the table above shows that only an average of 49% of students are retained after five years, which is the equivalent of 150 units if fulltime, 15 units per semester is attempted.

During the summer of 2001, I lived in the dorms for six weeks with the EOP, Summer Bridge class of 2001. Summer Bridge at CSUMB is a summer program that allows students that may not have had the minimum requirements for college to enter the university under special admissions, by completing the Summer Bridge Program. Over the past 5 years Summer Bridge was a six-week, intensive program. Students' days were scheduled with academics, community building and study time from 7am-11pm, Monday through Friday. Some of the weekends the students were allowed to go home, other weekends they were required to stay in the dorms for other planned academic and social activities. I have worked as an advisor, instructor and as an extra professional for Summer Bridge since 2001.

During Summer Bridge 2001, I worked with 36 Summer Bridge students as the lead academic, live-in advisor and I have continued to work with them ever since. Only 7 students will be graduating with a bachelor's degree after attending CSUMB for 4 years. At the end of the Spring 2005 semester, exactly 4 years (8 semesters) after they began attending CSUMB, less than 20% of the 36 students will be graduating. There are 9 students, 25% that are going to graduate either Fall 2005 or Spring 2006. Additionally,

another 27% (10 students) of the 36 students seem to have no chance to graduate by Spring 2006, 5 years (10 semesters) after they began, because there is currently no record of them returning to college. Approximately 8%, 3 students, are still attending, and are not on probation, but do not have a specific graduation date. There are 7 students, another 20%, that are currently on academic probation and 5 of these students have not started their major as of Spring 2005. All of these students may be disqualified from financial aid and they will have to petition and/or pay the rest of their tuition without any federal financial aid. Using this sample of first-generation college students attending CSUMB, the percentage of students graduating with a bachelor's degree in a reasonable amount of time is approximately 20% of the 36 students graduate in 4 years. Approximately 35% of the remaining 29 will possibly graduate 5 years after they began; leaving 45% of the 36 students that began attending CSUMB may or may not ever graduate. This percentage is still consistent with Table 1.1. But, if approximately 47% of the student population is first-generation and only 45% of that 47% are graduating, I personally do not feel that is good enough.

College student retention is very important to the existence of any college or university. In fact, it is vital to the ongoing existence of the institution. However, just making sure the students return to assure institutional financial obligations is not enough. Van T Bui (2002) compared background characteristics of first-generation college with traditional students, and found that students who begin their college career at a four-year university rather than a two-year college are more likely to complete their bachelor degree. This supports the fact that when a first-generation student enrolls at CSUMB it is even more imperative that she or he continues enrollment and completes their degree in a

reasonable amount of time. As a responsible institution our goal should not be to simply “retain” our students. I attended a workshop in San Antonio, Texas on September 17, 2004 facilitated by Vincent Tinto, a leader in the research of college student success or retention. He explained that “we do not retain students, we retain water, what we want to do is to promote students’ success.” I strongly agree with that statement. It is important for a first-generation college student to continue or persist towards their degree no matter what barriers they face. But this does not mean we want students to attend college aimlessly and unproductively. As Table 1.1 illustrates, the longer students take to complete their degrees the less chances they have to complete it. Promoting student success among first-generation college students means more than just “retaining” them. Personally, I prefer to take Tinto’s advice and I prefer “student success.”

Background

I attended college and graduated with my bachelor’s degree as a first-generation college student. My past experiences attending college, both good and bad, have shaped my educational and professional goals. My past experiences have motivated me to give back to the world of higher education and to make an attempt to reduce the chances of other first-generation students leaving college and never returning.

When I was in high school my counselor, whoever she/he was at the time, never spoke to me about college, although I always knew I would attend and graduate college. When I was 15 years old I joined a rock and roll band in southern California and I became more distant from the world of education. When I completed high school I went to a local community college and I met with a college counselor. Since I was in a rock in roll band my dress and appearance did not resemble a “traditional” college student’s in

many people's eyes. The fact was that I was not a "traditional" college student. I was not prepared and I knew nothing about college. Before even listening to questions I had or things I had to say, this counselor looked me up and down and said, "You do not look like you belong in college." I will never forget that and needless to say I never heard another word he said, I just left as soon as I could and did not return to that college. I tried another local city college and I never even had a chance to talk to a counselor and I did not complete the semester. I decided to leave college to return another day. When I was about 24 years old I realized I needed to get back to college, so I quit the band and I went on my pursuit of higher education.

In 1997, I decided to attend San Joaquin Delta College, in Stockton, California after a short time at another community college near Sacramento, California. I was having a really hard time adjusting to college life, understanding college procedures, study skills, financial problems and staying focused. I decided to try meeting with a counselor again. I was very lucky to meet with a counselor by the name of Jeff "Rocky" La Jeunesse. I was amazed, I finally found a real counselor. He did not care about what I looked like, if he agreed with my way of thinking, how much money or education my family had, or my academic record, all he wanted to do was help me navigate through the maze and confusion of higher education. I will never forget him, how he impacted my life and what he did for me. Rocky connected me to the Educational Opportunity Program Services (EOPS) department. I qualified for the program, but in order to officially be in the program I had to take a 2-unit class in study skills for success. At the time, I did not understand the importance of the class. I just wanted to get in the program so I could get some help and as it turned out, that study skills class helped me a lot as a

first-generation college student. A few weeks later Rocky urged me to apply for a position as a front desk, student assistant in the Guidance and Counseling Office. I was offered the job and worked there for 2 years until I was ready to transfer.

As a result of this experience, I have been researching theories and methods that address issues that first-generation students may face and I have been working for a program specifically targeted to promote the success among first-generation college students for over 5 years. As a graduate student and an employee of the CSUMB, I have focused my studies on student development theories, first-generation student success, traditional academic advising procedures, and strategies for retaining first-generation students for over 3 years. With a combination of the literature I have collected and my own experiences as a first-generation college student I have my own theory about promoting success among first-generation college students attending CSUMB that will be developed in this thesis. I believe students need to establish a connection to the university, they need to have any confusion about college eliminated and they need to build confidence to have a fair chance to successfully move through Chickering's (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) seven core vectors of human development, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Interviews from first-generation college students that are currently attending or have attended CSUMB are discussed and analyzed to support my theory of connection. An even number of students will represent two different groups, first-generation college students that are currently participating in a support program such as CAMP, SSS, EOP or MSS and first-generation college students that are not participants in any support program. I will be synthesizing results of the interviews with professional literature and

my own experiences in order to propose a plan that would address the needs of first-generation students.

Definition of Terms

The Definition of Terms section is intended to provide readers with information that may be necessary to understand any terms and acronyms that may be used throughout this thesis.

Acronyms

CAMP - College Assistance Migrant Program, a supplementary program under the Office of Student Affairs that is federally funded, targeted to assist students of migrant farm workers through their first year and in some cases continues through their second year.

CSUMB – California State University, Monterey Bay, part of the CSU System, established in 1994.

EOP – Educational Opportunity Program, a supplementary program under the Office of Student Affairs that is state funded, targeted to assist first-generation/low-income college students throughout the completion of their undergraduate degree.

GPA – Grade Point Average

ILP – Individualized Learning Plan, a 2 to 4 year academic learning plan, a list of the when and what of classes to take for graduation.

LDA – Lower-Division Advising, the primary advising office under the Office of Academic Affairs, for all students regarding lower-division advising and any other advising issues unrelated to the student’s major.

MSS – Migrant Student Support, a supplementary program under the Office of Student Affairs that is state funded, targeted to assist students of migrant farm workers after CAMP can no longer serve them throughout the completion of their undergraduate degree.

SDR – The Office of Student Disability Resources, a supplementary program under the Office of Student Affairs that is state funded, targeted to assist first-generation, low-income and/or disabled college students throughout the completion of their undergraduate degree.

SSS – Student Support Services, , a supplementary program under the Office of Student Affairs that is a federal TRIO program funded by the Department of Education, targeted to assist first-generation, low-income and/or disabled college students throughout the completion of their undergraduate degree.

TRIO – A division of the Department of Education TRIO began formation as a result of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, by the late 1960's the term TRIO came from the 3 original programs that were created in response to the administration's War on Poverty, Upward Bound, Talent Search and Special Services for Disadvantaged Students, now known as Student Support Services (SSS). CSUMB has all three programs on its campus.

ULR – University Learning Requirements, general education classes per state requirements mandated by the CSU Chancellor's Office in Long Beach, California.

Terms

At-Risk Students – At-risk students are students that are at-risk of not completing their educational goals. First-generation college students are considered at-risk before they ever attempt a college level class.

Primary Advising Unit – The main office responsible for general student advising, at CSUMB this is the Office of Lower-Division Advising (LDA).

Retention Plan - An action plan created to address the needs of promoting student success

Student Retention - “Student Retention” is used when referring to the number or percentage of students continuing to enroll in their college to produce enrollment numbers. Rates are usually acquired using 2-year, 3-year, 4-year, 5-year and 6-year data. If a student does not attend an institution for one or two consecutive semesters, the university or college’s retention rates go down.

Student Success – When a student successfully accomplishes her/his educational goals within a “reasonable amount of time.” The term Student Success replaces the term “Student Retention” in agreement with Educator Dr. Vincent Tinto.

Success Rates – The number or percentage of students that complete their undergraduate degree and/or their goals with in a reasonable amount of time.

Supplementary Advising - an office or program, often federally funded that targets a specific population of college students to give supplementary programs and activities in addition to the primary advising unit on campus. Not intended to replace the primary unit. Supplementary programs should offer services in addition to the services already provided.

Parameters Around Thesis

This project directly addresses the large population of first-generation college students attending CSUMB and the professionals that serve them. The intended readers are the management, the professionals and the student staff working for any of the supplemental advising programs at CSUMB or with the primary advising unit (LDA).

Other professionals at any institution working with college students can refer to this project and it may even work as a model for other schools. However, this project is specifically targeted at first-generation college students attending CSUMB. Students that are not first-generation may also benefit from some or all of this thesis, as well as the action plan itself. The whole CSUMB community of staff, faculty and management has an opportunity to benefit from this thesis.

Summary and Overview of Action Thesis

In summary there is more to promoting student success than just “retaining” students. First-generation college students need more extensive services than the primary advising unit alone can provide. Supplementary programs have been established at CSUMB to provide additional services to targeted groups of students, including first-generation college students. If the supplementary programs at CSUMB work with primary advising unit as intended, the targeted groups of students will get additional services, rather than the same services from a different office. It will also provide a basic, campus-wide structure that will specifically address the success of the first-generation college students attending CSUMB. As a bonus result, students in general will not be as confused because advising procedures on campus will be more clear to all students attending CSUMB.

An average of 45% of the population of the student body at CSUMB are first-generation college students. Campus data illustrates that only 41% of first-generation college students graduate in 4 years, compared to the historical average of 50% (which still isn't very good). The longer a student takes to complete her or his bachelor's degree the less likely she or he is to complete it at all, especially if she or he has been disqualified from any federal financial aid. There is no current plan or agenda to increase the success of

the first-generation students attending CSUMB. This thesis project will directly address the success of first-generation students attending CSUMB.

Throughout my research and my professional career I have been collecting “best practices” for addressing the needs of first-generation college students. I have been evaluating theories used as I look for key elements such as connection, confusion, confidence and student development theory. I have interviewed a small group of first-generation college students, half of which are participants in a supplementary support program and half of which are not a participant in a support program. I have analyzed this data and I have narrowed the resources that I will refer to. I will use these resources with my own experiences and with the results from interviews from first-generation college students to create an action plan to address student success among the first-generation college students attending CSUMB.

With such a large population of first-generation students attending CSUMB (45%) there needs to be a theory or theories, a common practice and/or a retention plan to give them the type of support they need while attending CSUMB. This thesis is an attempt to give back to the community that gave me a chance as a professional and as a student. The intent of this thesis is to provide a better understanding of the way primary and secondary advising programs are currently operating at CSUMB, to provide a better understanding of student development theories and practices and to provide a basic plan to create better use of the time and professional efforts across campus.

Literature Review

Introduction

Educators have been considering developmental advising approaches to be more effective than traditional advising approaches. Traditional advising approaches historically consisted of simply advising students on which classes to take and then possibly helping them schedule their classes. Even in Great Britain traditional advisors only provide information about courses and explaining registration procedures (Broadbridge, 1996). Developmental advising approaches enhance the growth of a student by providing them with resources and information to facilitate their social and intellectual integration into higher education and college life. Developmental advisors are not simply just staff members on campus. They are educators, they are instructors and as Chickering stated, they are “student services professionals” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Developmental advisors challenge students to become part of the university and to become all they can be. Developmental advising “is a process not a paper-endorsing activity” (Broadbridge, 1996). Advisors build a teacher-student and a mentor-mentee relationship with their advisees assisting the student with social and academic integration into the university or college they attend. Developmental advisors also teach students how to manage the college system. Developmental advising approaches incorporate the three main theories of student developmental theory, psychosocial, cognitive-structural and typological developmental theories to develop students both intellectually and socially (Kadar, 2001). Parents of first-generation college students have no experience with the social and academic integration into college life. Support programs for first-generation college students should be based on student

development theories and should provide the support that first-generation students cannot receive from their immediate families.

It was first necessary to collect literature regarding the way college students think, feel and behave throughout their college careers as well as the many obstacles first-generation college students faced when pursuing their college degree. I needed to learn about student development theories and their history. The next step I took was to collect literature regarding college student retention for both traditional and non-traditional college students. Next I collected literature regarding academic advising techniques currently being used to retain college students. This literature is mainly focused on developmental advising theories and practices, complimented by some comparisons between developmental advising and traditional advising practices. The last category of literature I collected focused on study skills for student success.

Brief History

There are many different variations of theories that have been presented to address the way college students think, feel and behave throughout their college careers. Although each person is unique and individual, educators have constantly been trying to find a common way to address student success. Prior to the 1960's, there was little research specifically on the development of college students, other than the work of Sanford and Erickson. Following in their footsteps, in 1969, Arthur Chickering wrote a book called, Education and Identity. This book breaks human development down to seven core vectors developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature, interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose and developing integrity. Many researchers

may agree with the basic structure of Chickering's seven core vectors, but throughout the past 20 years it has been recognized that his theory cannot be applied to all students, because all students are individual and unique. After over 20 years of educators both challenging and applying his theories, Arthur Chickering worked with Linda Reisser to create the second edition in 1993 and discussed the impact of gender, race and national origin in the second edition of Education and Identity. The second edition is a much more up to date version, using the same student development theory and the same seven core vectors, adding practices and policy for college student development and student success to a more diverse population (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

As advising started to become a recognized profession, efforts to legitimize the profession became more serious. In 1979, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was created and within a year there were over 500 members. NACADA was formed to increase interest, add organization, a common interest and a common goal and a network of professionals to help to improve the overall profession. NACADA offers an annual conference, information seminars, advising related research and a journal to help to train, inform and refresh professionals in academic advising. I am using the book Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook as one of my references. (Gordon, Habley, 2000)

With the increased interest in academic advising and the retention of college students many educators began taking student success more seriously. In the mid 1970's educators began to suggest that students who are involved with the university or college they attend are more successful than students that are not involved (Gordon, Habley, 2000). Vincent Tinto was one of these educators. In his book, Leaving College:

Rethinking the Causes and Cures for Student Attrition, (Tinto, 1993) he explains his theories and research. Tinto himself claims this book provides extensive research on the departure of students from college and higher education. He also focuses on the role institutions play in the social and intellectual development of their students by providing educators with advice about how to increase student success. In this book Tinto avoids the word “dropout” because of the word’s negative connotations. It should also be noted that Vincent Tinto is the same educator that announced in an Education Council workshop that he would no longer use the word “retention” and he would replace it with “student success,” because of the negative connotations of the latter word. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) support this same idea in their comprehensive research they provide in the book, How College Affects Students. All three of these educators’ research and writing have influenced the way educators have been learning about and implementing “Retention Models” or “Advising Models” across college campuses in the United States of America and Canada. Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser used Pascarella and Terenzini as references several times for the second edition of Education and Identity.

Student development theories give educators and researchers the means to be able to research, learn and discuss the way students develop throughout their years as a college student. Because every individual is unique there is no one theory that can apply to every individual. Evan, Forney and Guido-DiBrito (1998) provide an overview of most all of these theories in their book, Student Development in College: Theory Research and Practice. Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito refer to many student development theories such as Chickering's seven core vectors of development, Josselson's theory of identity, Schlossburg's transition theory, Perry's theory of intellectual and ethical

development, Kohlberg's theory of moral development, Cass's theory of gay, lesbian and bisexual identity development, Gilligan's theory of women's moral development, and Kolb's theory of experimental learning. The book is summarized by discussing the use of theories in combination, depending on the specific situation (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

I also used two books specifically about culture, minority students and the way they experience college. Barbara Shade collaborated with a few other educators to write a book called, Culture, Style and the Educative Process: Making Schools work for Racially Diverse Students in 1997. This book explores culture and its effects and influences in the learning process and examines how cognitive styles develop to fit the life of situations with which the individual or group must cope. It also discusses the culture and learning style of the Mexican American, Native American, Afro-American and Asian American communities. The other book is How Minority Students Experience College, written by Watson, Terrell, Wright, Bonner, Cuyjet, Gold, et al in 2002. The purpose of this book is to discuss how a minority student experiences college. This book has seven chapters defining terms, outlining rationale for study, and posing research questions to minority college students to identify their college experiences.

Student Development Theory

Student development theories provide a way for educators to make sense out of the development of adolescence through adulthood. Student development theories can be applied to most any age student and any theory may be interpreted to suit most any student developmental situation. However, the theory used must be applicable to the student or population of students that theory is being applied to. Many different theories

exist that can be applied to a specific group of people and no one theory can be applied exclusively to all people.

The characteristics of a freshman college student cannot be generalized into one specific group. Ages, genders, ethnicities, religious beliefs, and many other characteristics make each freshman college student unique and individual. Trying to cover every student development theory would be outside of the scope of this project. There are many similarities among all of the many development theories. Student development theories facilitate the growth and development of a student both socially and intellectually. Developmental advising is an example of applying student development theory in higher education. Developmental advising empowers the student to be able to manage the college system and their education by giving her or him ownership. Students do not feel that they are blindly being pushed through the system; they guide themselves through higher education as they develop as a student. Developmental advising takes classroom knowledge and teaching methods and adjusts them to make them applicable to college student retention. Academic advisors are no longer just a resource for students to get advise on which class to take. Academic advisors are teachers, counselors, mentors, cheerleaders, tutors, resources and friends for students. “Developmental theories and models seek to identify the dimensions and structure of growth in college students and to explain the dynamics by which that growth occurs” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991 p. 18).

There are currently four main clusters of theories or models of student development: psychosocial, cognitive-structural, typological, and person-environment interaction. The first two theories are truly development theories. The last two theories, typological and person-environment interaction theories are not technically development

theories, because “they do not describe the hallmarks of development, the means of measuring it, or the ways to foster it” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 3). However, they are very important factors to consider when discussing student development.

Psychosocial Theory

“Psychosocial theories view development as a series of developmental tasks or stages, including qualitative changes in thinking, feeling, behaving, valuing and relating to others and to one’s self” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 2). Psychosocial theories integrate a student’s intellectual growth with her or his psychosocial development. Psychosocial theories address the important issues that arise throughout one’s life, such as how to define one’s self, how to deal with personal issues/relationships and what to do with one’s life. An example as related to first-generation college student retention is the adjustments and struggles a student encounters when moving away to college. Leaving home for the first time in a student’s life can cause a variety of stressors. Students feel pressured to succeed both socially and academically while becoming independent. Students are learning how to form their own opinions and ideals. In many cases students move hundreds of miles away from home and then they are forced to live with 1-3 roommates that are people they have never met before. Even the best roommate questionnaires do not always work out for every student. Habits and manners can be opposite, schedules can conflict, cultural traditions may not align well with each other and then to top it all off the student is miles from anything or anybody that is familiar. This can be a very stressful time for many students when they are trying to define themselves. For many students this is enough stress to make them give up, drop out and go back home (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

There are many theories about the psychosocial development of college students, but from my observation, Arthur Chickering seems to have had the most influence. Although many theorists have suggested that women and men of ethnic backgrounds do not move through his seven core vectors in the same order, they have all still used this as the basis for their research. As a result, many other theories such as Josselson's pathways to women's identity, Cross's model of African American identity, Phinney's model of ethnic identity and Cass's homosexual identity have been created (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). For the purpose of this project Arthur Chickering will be used as the main reference for psychosocial development.

Cognitive-Structural Development Theory

“Cognitive-structural theories describe changes in thinking and the evolving frames of reference that structure values, beliefs and assumptions” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 2). Cognitive-structural theories focus on how one thinks, interprets, reasons and makes meaning of life and their experiences. Students can perceive their level of achievement, their careers, their major, and/or any problem that arises in their college career differently depending on their level of development. The different levels of development regarding these issues are discussed in cognitive-structural development theories. “Cognitive structural theorists seek to describe the process of change, concentration on the cognitive structures individuals construct in order to give meaning to their worlds” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 27).

In higher education students are expected to think at a different level. Students are expected to go beyond the traditional regurgitation of information. Students are

expected to critically think about a topic and take a stance towards their beliefs.

However, depending on a student's level of development, the student may or may not be ready or willing to take a stance on anything.

First-generation students often come from families that are first or second-generation families that are often still very close to the culture, beliefs and traditions of the native countries. Many times these beliefs and traditions can confuse students. A student's first reaction to a topic of controversy may only be because of the culture they were raised in and not because it is what they truly believe after processing the information available to them. This can cause a conflict within the student's family, which can also result in a significant amount of stress on the student. Students have often dropped out of college because of the conflicts of family beliefs. On the other side, a student's relationship with their family can become very distant.

Typological Theory

“Typological theories describe distinctive but stable differences in learning style, personality type, temperament or socioeconomic background as contexts for development” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 3). Typological theories focus more on personality differences and the way students approach the world, more specifically the way students approach their learning experiences. Culture influences the way we learn the things we learn. First-generation students often come from families that are first or second-generation Americans that are often still very close to the culture of their native country. Although cultures influence the way we learn, a specific culture does not influence all of its members in the same way(s). For example, three random chosen

people from the same part of the same culture may learn things in a totally different way. Making a student aware of her or his learning or cognitive style empowers the student and promotes her or his intellectual growth. Students that are aware of their learning style can possibly make the necessary adjustments to ensure their education and understanding. Students are able to choose instructors more effectively when they understand the way they learn and can compare it to the way one teaches. There is no way to accurately generalize and classify every person in the world into a narrow group of specific types of learners, but typological models can still be very helpful to educators working with first-generation students. “Typological models can be useful in understanding differences among college students and illuminating why students respond differently to their college experiences” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 37).

Person-Environment Interaction Theory

Person-environment interaction theories focus on how the environment influences behavior through its interactions with characteristics of the individual (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 3). Person-environment interaction theories recognize that each person may experience the same environment differently. Two students entering the university during the same semester may not start to feel comfortable or “at home” at the same time as the other student. Both students could be taking the same classes, with the same instructors, live in the same dorm building, and participate in all of the same activities. But one student may find the environment easier to adjust to than the other student. Person-environment interaction theories are useful for helping to understand how an individual’s environment impacts their college experience. Person-environment

interaction theories “attempt to explain human behavior and provide frameworks for thinking about student change and college effects” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 38).

Arthur Chickering

This section provides a basic understanding of Chickering’s seven core vectors of human development. I am using Chickering’s seven core vectors as the basic understanding of psychosocial development in this project. Other educators such as Evan, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, Tinto, Pascarella, Terenzini have expanded on Chickering’s theory and have made it more applicable to college populations in the current era. All of these educators may not agree with the specific details of how a student moves through development, but they all agree that there are stages, phases, or vectors that a student moves through in developing their identity. Nevitt Sanford, Erik Erickson, followed by the work of Arthur Chickering, may have influenced more other developmental theorists than anyone else. Each of these theories view individual development as “a process that involves the accomplishment of a series of developmental tasks” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991 p. 19). Although Chickering’s theory is based on a typical white male, it is still used as the basis for many other theories. Chickering’s research is based on the following seven core vectors of human development.

- 1. Developing Competency.** This vector is based on three different types of competence intellectual competence, physical and manual skills and interpersonal competence. “Intellectual competence is skill in using one’s mind” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 45). Students begin to take in information, analyze it and then form their own opinions. Intellectual knowledge and information are retained to provide the tools to

be able to make sense out of observations and experiences (Chickering & Reisser 1993).

- 2. Managing Emotions.** Most all students are faced with a variety of emotions such as fear, anger, happiness, sadness, loneliness, boredom, anxiety, depression, guilt and shame. “Like unruly employees, these emotions need good management” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 46). Rather than trying to eliminate the emotions, students need to learn how to use these emotions as signs. They are all normal, healthy emotions that should not be denied, but they should be properly released and channeled into positive energy (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).
- 3. Moving Through Autonomy Toward Independence.** Chickering suggests this a key development stage for all students. Students learn to become self-sufficient, responsible for their own action with less regard for other people’s opinions. Completing this stage means gaining both emotional and instrumental independence, followed by the recognition and acceptance of interdependence. “Emotional independence means freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection and approval” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This is the beginning of the separation from parents. Instrumental independence is “the ability to organize activities and to solve problems in a self-directed way and the ability to be mobile” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Instrumental independence requires one to think critically and independently. The last part of this stage is where relationships with parents are brought back closer together. Students realize they can be independent and still fit into the big picture of the greater society. Students realize the importance of interdependence as a result of independence (Evans, Forney & Guido, DiBrito, 1998).

4. Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships. Students learn to accept others differences tolerating and appreciating those differences. As the level of tolerance increases the capacity for intimate relationships increases. Choosing healthy relationships and making lasting commitments based on honesty, truth and respect become more necessary.

Chickering believes that the first four stages must all be completed before the next stage can be properly attained. His seven core vectors are a hierarchical and each stage must be completed before the next stage begins. Many other theorists such as Straub and Rogers believe that “women achieve autonomy through the development of interpersonal relationships” (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 46). Other theorists such as James Marcia believe individuals may shift through different stages of his “Model of Ego and Identity” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

5. Establishing Identity. Developing identity requires comfort with body and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, sense of self in social, historical and cultural context, clarification of one’s self-concept through roles and life styles, acceptance of feedback from others, self-acceptance, self-esteem, personal stability and integration (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

6. Developing Purpose. “Developing purpose entails an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify goals, to make plans and to persist despite obstacles” (Chickering and Reisser, 1993, p. 50). Individuals may recognize who they are, socially, historically and culturally but still may not know where they are going or what they are going to be. Students must develop vocation plans and

aspirations, personal interests and interpersonal and family interests (Chickering & Reisser 1993).

- 7. Developing Integrity.** “Closely related to establishing identity and clarifying purpose” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 51) individuals stop automatically believing and start critically thinking about things before they formulate an opinion. Individuals develop their own moral guidelines to live by leading to “the development of congruence – the achievement of behavior consistent with personalized values held” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 52).

There is no one perfect way or any perfect plan to promote student success. But the one thing in common is that all of these educators support the fact that students need to integrate both socially and academically into the university they attend in order to fully benefit from their college experience. First-generation college students need more extensive services than traditional college students.

Literature in Context with Project

Student development theory can be used to promote the growth and development of a student both socially and intellectually by taking classroom knowledge and methods and making them applicable to college student retention. I have focused on three main elements that are essential to the social and intellectual integration of first-generation college students ***establishing a connection, eliminating confusion, and building confidence***. I have used student development theories to structure the action plan provided in this action thesis.

Through my experience and research, I believe student development theories are best suited to promote first-generation college student success. Student development

theory provides strategies for the retention, or preferably the success, of first-generation college students. Developmental advising uses psychosocial, cognitive-structural, typological and person-environment interaction theories to academically and socially integrate students into college life and higher education. Developmental advising approaches empower students to guide and assist themselves in their pursuit through higher education. First-generation students need developmental advising approaches to increase their retention and success rates in higher education. The development of students both socially and academically is critical to a successful college career. First-generation students need additional resources to assist them in their integration into college life. Student development theories provide a basic structure for creating programs to assist first-generation college students.

This project is intended to improve the success among first-generation students attending CSUMB. Through my experience, interviews and research I have determined that first-generation college students need additional support to provide them with assistance to integrate into the university both socially and academically. Once an individual has successfully integrated into the university they can move through other different phases of development. Regardless of the variations of different student development theorists, all theorists are trying to help educators to better understand the development of students as they move through college. It is not necessary to be an expert on every different theory that may exist. Knowing other theories exist and then researching them depending on the specific situation is a responsibility that all educational professionals should take ownership in. However, it is not to say that a different theory should be used for each individual student.

Methodology

Project

My thesis project is an action plan to promote student success among the large population of first-generation college students attending California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). In 2003, CSUMB served 1,501 first-generation college students, which is 45% of the total population. The population in higher education is continuing to become more diverse and now traditional advising approaches are not sufficient enough to promote first-generation student success (Institutional Assessment and Research, 2002b).

I have used Action Research to complete my thesis project. Student development theories and practices have been researched and reviewed to create a plan to promote student success amongst first-generation college students attending CSUMB. As described below, a group of 14 first-generation college students that are currently attending or have attended CSUMB were interviewed to determine the support and services they feel they need to be successful in college.

Research and literature determined best practices for promoting the success of first-generation college students. Research and literature supporting proposed theory was used along with interviews from first-generation college students that are currently attending or have attended CSUMB to create a plan of action to promote the success of first-generation college students attending CSUMB, to be implemented through the Student Support Services program at CSUMB. The action plan targets the social and academic integration of first-generation students. The plan includes strategies to help students to build a connection to the university, to eliminate any confusion students have

about the university and college life, and to help students build confidence in their abilities.

Developmental advising strategies for promoting the success of first-generation college students attending CSUMB focus on the first four of the seven core vectors discussed by Arthur Chickering to assist students on their way to the fifth vector of establishing identity. Workshops, activities and personal assignments assist students through the first four vectors of developing competency, managing emotions, moving through autonomy and developing mature personal relationships, depending on their specific needs. Developmental advising techniques, personal experience working with a program specifically targeted to retain first-generation, low-income and/or disabled students attending CSUMB, personal experience as a first-generation student, and interviews from first-generation college students that are currently attending or have attended CSUMB will set the groundwork for this project.

Participants

There were 14 first-generation college students that were selected for this project. Seven of the students that were selected are first-generation college students that are currently participants in a support program and seven of the students were first-generation college students that are not in any support program on campus. An advertisement for participants was sent through campus email (First Class, Open Forum). Participants were selected at random from the responses to the advertisement for participants. Each student was at least 18 years of age or older. Ethnicities vary and all selected participants were healthy both physically and mentally per their own admission.

Selection criteria was not based on gender, age or ethnicity. Participants were all first-generation college students that are attending or have attended CSUMB.

Data Collection

I asked the students to participate in a one-to-one interview. During these interviews students were asked about their experiences as a first-generation college student. Questions were open-ended and were intended to provide an insight to what additional support and services they feel they need to be successful in college. I created 10 questions to use for each of the two groups. Additional questions may have been prompted by some of the students' answers. All interviews were in person and every participant allowed me to record them. I used a mini cassette recorder and a fresh tape for every two interviews, one side of the tape per interview.

Data Analysis

After all interviews were completed I transcribed the interviews, destroyed all tapes and each participant was given an agreed upon pseudonym. Data was compared and analyzed looking for key elements such as connection, confusion and confidence. Other elements not anticipated were noted and put in their own category. Data from students that are not in a support program was compared to those that are in a support program to find key elements that all first-generation students need, but are not getting. This data will then be compared to the literature regarding theories and "best practices" of promoting first-generation college student success.

After transcription was completed I first compared the answers of each group individually looking for similar responses and then noted them. I then noted other

responses that were not in common, but seemed to be a concern from my experience. I noted comments that could fall under the headings *Connection, Confusion, and Confidence* and collected them together. The next step was to take the notes from each of the two main groups and then again I looked for common notes between the two groups. Finally I summarized the notes and information I received from the interviews and I compared them to my literature reviews. I summarized all information to formulate an action plan to address the needs of the first-generation college students attending CSUMB utilizing the current resources already available on campus.

Biases

This section is intended to give an understanding of the biases I have or may have had when analyzing the data obtained by the interviews. Discussing my own biases makes the reader and myself aware of them. Just discussing them makes me more aware and the chances of these biases affecting my evaluation of the data obtained less likely. Although all possible biases may not be discussed, the most prevalent or foreseeable biases are discussed.

Age

My age results in a bias that is in the favor of the students I am planning for. I am still young enough that I can relate with current issues that 18-25 year old college students face. I am still close enough to the experiences that I had that were similar to the experiences that they currently encounter. At the same time, my maturity and the experiences I have had create a chance for me to give insight to the college students I work with everyday. In fact, that is still one of my flaws in the professional world. I still act and

react as a student, for the student, when I should be acting as a professional of the university.

Gender

A person's gender always plays a role in shaping one's biases. For example, males tend to believe men are better than women and society tends to believe that we live in "a man's world." I like to believe that I treat all students equally regardless of gender. I first started to think that maybe I treat women a bit more gingerly than men, which in general maybe true, but not quite accurate. For example, I first thought about a scenario where I went the extra mile for a female that was so upset she was crying. I felt so bad I did everything I could to help. I thought of another similar scenario and again it was a female. I eventually thought of two occasions when the student was a male and then I realized that I do react to any student regardless of their gender under similar conditions. The only reason I have done that for more females is because the situation arose with more females than males. From day one society has tried to make me believe that gender defines our place within society. Regardless of the strong moral values that my parents taught me, I have to consciously make sure that gender does not influence my actions or reactions.

Ethnicity

A person's ethnicity is never a consideration for me when I am working with students or at all in my life for that matter. I have never understood how race and/or ethnicity can be such a significant consideration when defining one as a person, a human being. I can understand that each race should be proud and should cherish its customs, but I do not understand how or why race segregates us as human beings. I often find ways to

break any stereotypes or classifications when it comes to a person's ethnicity, especially my own. For example, I let people make their assumptions about my own ethnicity and I let them assume that I am everything that I am not. If or when it comes to them actually confronting me about my ethnicity they find out they can never guess what it is. The funniest part is that many times I turn out to be just as American as they are. My parents' families immigrated to the United States to create a better life for their children. I was born in Monterey Park, Los Angeles, California. I have lived in California all of my life. I have a bachelor's degree from a California university and I am completing my master's degree in California. My parents' families came here with nothing and now I am 100% American and I have a college education.

Growing Up

I grew up in a lower-middle class neighborhood in El Monte, California until I was about 10 years old. Then my parents moved to a lower-middle class neighborhood in Rancho Cucamonga, California, near Pomona, California. I was raised an only child and I did not have any cousins until I was 12 years old. I spent most of my childhood as a latch key kid. My parents worked fulltime jobs and had to commute to work, so they were both gone from 6:30am-6:30pm, Monday thru Friday. Many kids thought I was spoiled once they knew I was an only child, because most of my friends had to share everything they had with their siblings. Some may say I am sympathetic to students that grew up in similar situations, but I do not view it that way. I have been there, I understand where they are coming from, and I know that with a little help I overcame many obstacles and I was able to become who I am today. So, I cannot and I hope I never can, understand how people with money can feel their money makes them smarter than people without money.

Political Ideals

My political ideals may very well play in the biases that I have regarding policies that affect the students that I work with. For example, I believe in honesty, unity, clarity, and respect and those beliefs alone can contradict any political situation. Every political campaign, from The President of the United States of America to the president of the 103rd chapter of the Glee Club of America, would have a hard time abiding to a commitment to honesty, unity, clarity and respect. I understand that this is not a feasible scenario and it could not ever happen, but I am very aware of my own biases towards politics in general. I came to the realization a few years ago that I cannot feed the world nor can I save the world. I understand that capitalism will always exist, so now I need to find a way to work with it. Crazy as it may sound, politics are directly connected to money and power in my view. I understand that money and power have become a necessity in our society and in our world, but I will never be content with the negative effects money and power can have on people and society.

Data Analysis and Results

In order to properly address the needs of the first-generation students attending CSUMB it was necessary to find out what they think they need and how they feel about their experiences at the university. As mentioned in the previous chapters I interviewed a total of 14 first-generation students currently attending CSUMB. The interviews consist of two groups of 7 students. Students participating in a support program on campus such as CAMP, EOP or SSS, and those that are not participating in a support program on campus. The following is a brief summary of the interviews broken down by each question. Please see appendix for list of questions. For some of the questions I found it necessary to break up and summarize the responses into two different groups. For the rest of the questions I found it feasible to summarize the responses in one group.

Question #1

Students Participating in a Support Program

This first question asked the students to describe their experiences attending CSUMB. Six out of seven of the students in this group were accepted through EOP/Summer Bridge. The one student that was not accepted through the EOP/Summer Bridge program was accepted into the CAMP program. A support program embraced all of these first-generation students before their first college class ever began.

The students in this group viewed their experiences in a wide range of ways. Words used to describe these experiences include “good,” “great,” “very hard,” “really different from high school,” “interesting,” and “very unique.” Overall this group of students

viewed their experiences in a positive way even though they still recognized the struggles they had. For example, Megan said,

“When I first got to CSUMB I was not ready. I was not as responsible as I thought I was. I wasn’t prepared for like, to be on my own right away, and I was scared. So, my first year here, I did horrible. Cause I wasn’t, I didn’t know how to grow up or, I guess be responsible. But, it’s getting better. Throughout the years it’s been getting better. So far my experience has been good...it’s been great.” - Megan

Megan acknowledges that she was not prepared, scared and not as responsible as she thought she was, but she still ended with stating, “it’s been great.”

Megan began attending CSUMB in the summer of 2001. She was accepted to the university as a special admit through EOP and the Summer Bridge program. Students’ appreciation for the support programs, the importance and the need of the support programs for these students is evident in the following quotes. Andrew and Lilly offer accurate representation of the students in this group.

“Well, when I first got here in Fall 2001, you know, I came to Summer Bridge so my experience was pretty good off the bat. I met a lot of people, learned a lot of information and had friends already here. So far my spirit has been pretty good. Socially it’s been a good experience overall.” – Andrew

“I came in as a CAMP kid, so I had a lot of the systems and a lot of support my first year. Which was very helpful because I’m a first generation college student so I had nobody to tell me any advice. Like, oh, this is what to expect, you know,

to do or not to do, anything like that. So having CAMP program to assist me through this experience was just awesome.” – Lilly

Students Not Participating in a Support Program

This group of students found their experiences to be “frustrating,” “nervous at first,” “didn’t know what to expect,” “hard to find things,” “hectic,” “less challenging than community college,” and “unorganized.” The lack of guidance and accurate information was a concern for this group of students and they seemed confused and unsure.

“Many things about the CSUMB experience seemed unorganized. While I had a ‘major’ advisor in the HCOM major, she always had to ask someone for answers to my questions.” – Wendy

Additionally the lack of involvement with the university was a problem with this group of students, and in combination with the lack of guidance, the feelings and emotions students faced were overwhelming.

“I don’t think there’s anything bad. I switched to the Science Department, which caused me to have to stay here longer than I planned. I wish someone had told me not to change my major, because I’m almost there. And to withdraw from the class instead of just dropping out of the third year sign language classes. My out of class experience has gotten pretty good once I got involved. Not being involved on campus made me very depressed.” – Karen

This group of students found their experiences to be more negative than positive as compared to the first group of students that viewed the experiences in a much more positive way.

Question #2

Students Participating in a Support Program

The question was intended to find out if the students felt that they were part of the university, felt like it was their “home away from home,” and when they first started to feel that way. All the students participating in a support program felt they were part of the university right away. Every Summer Bridge student mentioned that Summer Bridge helped her or him to learn about the university, make friends and become familiar with it before the fall semester ever started. So by the time the fall semester started they already felt pretty comfortable. By the same token every one of the students took at least a year before they would actually call the university their “home away from home.” It was very interesting to find that all of the students in this group needed a summer at their parents’ house and in their hometown before they realized that the university was their new “home away from home.”

Students Not Participating in a Support Program

This group of students did not seem to feel as much a part of the university as the other group. Three of these seven students said they still do not feel like they are part of the university and one even went as far as to say she would probably never feel like she was part of the university. Two of the three students that do feel they are a part of the university said they didn’t feel that way until they connected with a social entity on

campus, more specifically a sorority and a fraternity. The other student that felt like he was a part of the university has been here since 1999 when there were only about 900 students on campus. So he feels like one of the pioneer students. The other three students are starting to feel like they are more part of the university, but are not completely there yet.

Question #3

Question 3 asked the students what types of college life issues they can discuss with their family and what types of college life issues they cannot discuss with their family and why. All of the students in both groups responded to this question in a similar manner. All of the students felt that they could talk to their parents about life in general. All of these students had positive relationships with their parents and they felt that they had their parents support. They mentioned that they could talk to their parents about personal issues, problems with their roommates, class groups, group projects, instructors and most of their personal lives. Similarly every student mentioned that they could not ask their parents for any real academic advice. They could ask their opinions but they could not look to them for any educated advice. They could not ask their parents which classes to take, for help with their classes or about the politics of the university because their parents had not experienced university life and the students were moving to a higher level of education than the parents.

“I learned, because I’m a first generation college student I can’t go to like my siblings or my mom because they can’t help me at the level that I’m at.” – Lilly

“Some of the college issues for academic things a lot of my parents, my aunt and uncles they are not on my level right now of kind of the academic things, so I couldn’t really discuss, oh I’m having problems with this thesis statement or something like that, they could not really help me because they never went to college. So, Math and things like that, so those are kind of the things that I couldn’t discuss, personal issues with my roommates or anything like that or even just academics, like advising or anything like that. They wouldn’t, they never understand what I was talking about.” – Jay Vaughn Johnson

Question #4

The next question asked the students what they feel they need in order to be successful in college. Again both groups of students’ responses were consistent with each other. The number one thing they felt they needed was support from their family, from staff, from faculty and from their peers. All of the students wanted someone they could trust to talk to about anything. They wanted someone to guide them, someone to scold them and someone to praise them. They wanted someone that they could trust to give accurate information and they wanted someone to advocate for them.

“A tutor, advisor, someone to guide you along the way, someone you can rely on. To tell you, no you’re doing this wrong, or you’re doing this right. You know, stay on this track, or take this route. Someone who can work with me, telling me what I’m doing wrong or doing right. You know, if I need help someone who can give me the help I need.” – Andrew

Students also stated that they should be organized and motivated. Time management, study skills, budgeting finances and making good decisions were also mentioned as being a necessity. The only difference between the two groups was that one group was thankful for their support program and the other group was still looking for that person, that guidance or that support.

Question #5

The next question asked the students to discuss some of the struggles they face while attending CSUMB. All of the students in both groups identified finances, being homesick, the academics or lack of academic preparation, and personal or family related issues to be their biggest struggles so far. However, the students that are participants in support programs on campus never mentioned the lack of support or the feeling of confusion. All of the students in the group that are not participants in a support program mentioned getting the run around, not knowing where to go or how to do it, having trouble learning the CSUMB way and the CSUMB language, wishing they had better advising from day 1, having trouble finding help, and also being depressed again.

Question #6

In relation to the last two questions, students were next asked what they felt was the most difficult part of their college experience. Consistent with the previous question students found finances, the navigation of the college system or politics and procedures of college, being so far away from home, learning how to study and the academic work to be the most difficult part of their college career so far. Again the group of students that are not in support programs on campus made it clear that they wanted better guidance, advising

and support while the students that are participants in support programs were thankful for the support they were receiving from these programs.

Question #7

This next question asked the students what additional help or resources they needed to be successful in college. Students in both groups mentioned that they needed support from family, staff and peers, and help learning how to study, how to take notes, how to write better and how to manage their time. Another one of the resources mentioned by both groups was longer tutoring, computer lab and library hours. Students do not feel they have enough opportunity to use the library, ASAP (tutoring), and the computer labs. This was a major concern for students that have to work and go to school. All of the students that are participants in a support program mentioned the support they receive from their program, the workshops they attended regarding study skills and the friends they have made. A couple of the students that are participants in a support program actually mentioned that they did not feel they needed any additional services because of their support program. The students that are not in a support program mentioned that they needed someone to teach or refresh them on how to take notes, how to take tests and how to study in general.

Question # 8

This next question asked the students what they needed or expected from the university as students. All of the students mentioned that they expected to get guidance tutoring and support from the university. A couple of students mentioned that they expect the university to give them accurate knowledge and information about their specific major and the career fields within their major. Students also expect the

university to be cooperative and they expect it to give them as much as they give to the university and their studies. Students want the university to provide a positive learning environment for all students, decent housing and class availability. All of the students from both groups expected the same things from the university.

“I expect the university and its staff to have a concrete understanding of requirements. I expect continuity and respect among departments. I expect a lot. I expect them to provide support for all students. I expect that just as we all have to take CST 101, all students should have to meet with some sort of advisor, who is outside one's major, but has a clear understanding of the CSUMB system. Someone who checks in with each student at least once a semester, or even once a year, to make sure they were doing ok, if they needed resources.” - Wendy

Question # 9

Students Participating in a Support Program

Question #9 asked the students participating in support programs to describe the ways the support programs have assisted them through their college careers. All of the students in this group were very thankful for their support program and the services provided by them. Support programs seem to help students with selecting classes and a major best suited for them. They give students moral and financial support, motivation, encouragement, and confidence. Students mentioned that the support programs helped them to make the adjustment of living so far away from their family. Students were very glad they had a support services advisor available to them at any time. Students also

mentioned the connections and the friends that they made from the support programs during workshops and other support program functions.

“There are many ways - socially, academically. I met most of my peers and friends here through programs. They helped me pick a major, the classes I needed, and told me which classes couldn’t reach ULRs, [lower-division requirements] And in every aspect, academically and socially, they’re good to help you when you come here.” - Andrew

Students Not Participating in a Support Program

This group of students was asked if they were familiar with any of the support programs on campus and then asked why she or he was not a participant in one of these programs. Three of the seven students had never heard of the programs and that is why they are not participants. Two students had heard that programs like that existed on campus but thought they did not qualify for them. The last two students had heard of the programs and were even participants in the Educational Opportunity Program Services (EOPS) which is the equivalent of the EOP program at the university level. Students who are part of EOPS at their community college and who then transfer to a four-year university are usually admitted into the EOP program. Both of these students inquired about and then applied to the EOP program when they arrived at CSUMB but were not accepted or if they were accepted they were never notified and they never received any services. These two students felt abandoned and even more on their own after receiving such extensive services from EOPS and then none from EOP when they began attending a four-year university.

“I have no clue what they are.” – James

“I honestly don’t know anything about any them.” – Julia

“Um, I’m familiar with them. I’ve heard about them from people who are in them, but I myself am not involved with them. I’m not eligible for anything, so I’m not in them.” - Laurie

“I am familiar with EOP. They were a great resource in junior college, in fact the counselor whom I often met with suggested CSUMB...if I could talk to him now. As recipients we were required to meet with our EOP counselors often. He offered referrals, and made many suggestions. My first semester here at CSUMB, I thought it would be the same thing. I applied to be an EOP student, and probably was the whole time, but I was never really contacted, or required to meet with anyone. I never knew anyone's name in the program...couldn't recognize a face.” –Wendy

Question # 10

This final question was a chance for the students to add anything else that they wanted to add about their experiences as a first-generation college student attending college at CSUMB, or anything they else would like to add. Many of the students did not have anything else to add but there were a few students that did have something to say. Some of them looked at this as a chance to give some words of advice to other first-generation college students. The students that did have something to add gave such great responses that I felt they needed to be shared to get the proper affect.

“Well what I can say from my experiences from what I’ve seen around is that you got to be strong you got to be ready because if you’re not ready you might break down and lose confidence and your morale. My biggest thing is just stay strong it’s hard to stay away from the family but if you stay strong and like I said put yourself around good people you will take care of business.” –Mike

“Um yeah, it’s kind of rough you know because you’re used to a different vibe from high school or where ever you’re from. Even though I’m from Santa Cruz County, it’s very different than from Monterey County the vibe is very much different and then having no family who have not been to college yet the pressure is on you just to see because you are the first person in your family to go to college. It’s rough because it’s hard to fit in at times and there’s a lot of kids out there who have had it all like a silver spoon in their mouth so they’re just kind of like whatever and you’re like oh how come they have a BMW and I’m taking the bus to Costco and what not. I’m just glad there are support groups out there for us.” – Jay Vaughn Johnson

“As far as the University itself, my experience here as a student has been a pleasant one so far in terms of my education, I’ve come to find out that in terms of the information itself there are certain things I’m not happy with but, you know, being here has actually helped me kind of get in touch with certain people that maybe shared my feelings about that and we are actually doing something about it. I’m actually connecting on some level that is going to allow me to go

somewhere that I've never gone before which is like to be active in something beyond just my sphere. You know, not just for myself, but it goes beyond that, so I'm actually really happy about that." – James

"Being a first generation student just makes me feel proud. Definitely. My mom was one of six girls and each of them has a ton of kids and even out of all my aunties, I'm the first one to be at a university and it just makes me feel so proud. I'm just like I can do this and hopefully just open up the doors for everybody else like my younger cousin, hopefully they'll see me, cause they're always just like, oh where's Julia? You know, and when I come home I'm like, oh, I'm back from college and so hopefully they'll see me doing that. Because when I was younger, I mean my parents didn't go to school and I never even thought about college at all, never even crossed my mind, so I hope, I mean just, you can do it. If you don't have any money, you can still do it." – Julia

"Well I like my experience here, because it allows me to do so much of what I wanted to do. If I would have stayed home . . . just being away from my family and going into college was a good experience because it helped me mature. Not only as a person, but overall in general. It helps me think in a different way." –

Barbara

"Even if you think you can't do it or whatever, you know, first generation, low income . . . ten years ago you really wouldn't want to be that. But help's always

going to be there especially for low-income first generation students or students with disabilities. That help's always going to be there. They've got . . . I want to say a better chance but they've got a pretty good chance at going to school and graduating than people who aren't low-come first-generation, you know?" - Andrew

"It's different. Through high school, I mean, when people – it's a socialized thing really. It's just like high school but you have a little more free time. It's on your own free will not to do your work. Here it's different socialized thing. In high school you're trying to impress people. You got cliques. People don't want to let you in. As I said people need to be open-minded. If you're open-minded you can get along with everyone and accept them. This is what's nice about this campus. Not a lot of campuses are like this. That was a good experience." – John

"About being a first-generation student, um . . . well, to any other first-generation students, I'd just say, don't give up. You think there are too many barriers, should I work more hours to save money, this is a lot of work. Keep at it, because if you see someone who takes a semester off, they never come back. Don't take that semester off even if you had a bad year in classes. Talk to your counselors; petition to get your Financial Aid back, because you can get it back. I know a lot of people who had a bad first year. They petitioned and got it back because they [the university] recognize that students have a hard time. My only advice to anybody out there who's first-generation is to recognize that you're not one in a

million because there's a lot of us out there. There's what, 25% of high-school graduates in the United States go onto to four-year College or something like that? And beyond that, it's like how many of those people are going to be first-generation students? I'm sure most of them are here in the state of California. So . . . don't give up. Don't let the man get you down." – Laurie

Summary of Results

In summary, students that are participants in a support program described their experiences as being difficult but overall good, while students that are not in support programs described their experiences as being difficult, frustrating, and unorganized. All students in both groups felt they are part of the university now, but not at first, not until after their first year with the exception of the students that went through Summer Bridge. Every single one of them mentioned that Summer Bridge helped them to learn about the university, make friends and become familiar with it before the fall semester ever started. Many of the students that are not in a support program are still becoming part of the university, but do not feel that way completely.

Every student felt she or he could talk about any personal issues with their parents. However, all of the students mentioned that they could not go to their parents about anything to do with helping them with their schoolwork, or career and major advice. They felt they need guidance and support from all their peers, teachers and staff to be successful in college. They simply wanted people there that they know they can go to for help if and whenever they need to. As a group the students felt they needed study skills, budgeting and time management skills. They felt they needed to be organized, focused and determined to be successful in college. All of the students in both groups

identified, finances, being homesick, personal or family related issues, the navigation of the college system or politics and procedures of college, learning how to study and the lack of academic preparation to be the most difficult struggle of their college career so far. Students in both groups identified support from family, staff and peers, how to take notes, how to write better, how to take tests and how to study in general and how to manage their time as the additional resources they need to be successful in college. Another one of the resources mentioned by both groups was longer tutoring, computer lab and library hours. Students do not feel they have enough opportunity to use the library, ASAP (tutoring), especially those who have to work while going to school.

All of the students mentioned that they expected to get guidance, tutoring, support from the university. They expect the university to give them accurate knowledge and information about their specific major, the career fields within their major and university policies and procedures. Students also expect the university to be cooperative and to give them as much as they give to the university and their studies. Students want the university to provide a positive learning environment for all students, decent housing and class availability.

Students identified that support programs help them select classes and a major best suited for them. Those that are in support programs said that they get the moral and financial support, motivation, encouragement, and confidence that they need to be successful. The support programs helped them to make the adjustment of living so far away from their family. Students were very glad they had a support services advisor available to them at any time. Students also mentioned the connections and the friends that they made from the support programs during workshops and other support program

functions. Only four of the seven students that are not in a support program knew that they existed on campus, and two of them did not think they qualified and the other two unsuccessfully tried to become participants. The other three students did not even know support programs for first-generation students existed.

The final chapter will suggest a plan of action to attempt to establish a better connection to eliminate more confusion and to build better confidence in the first generation students attending CSUMB. The plan of action addresses the needs of the students as well as the 20 plus years of research and literature on the topic of college student development and college student retention. The plan of action is not a complete nor is it a perfect solution to the success rates of the first-generation students attending CSUMB. However, it is at the least a catalyst for further research and serious implementation.

Development of Framework and Action Plan

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the literature and research used to create this action plan as detailed in the previous four chapters. It provides the basis and the reason for the research and action plan as well as the importance of its implementation.

There is currently no plan or agenda that directly addresses the success rates of the first-generation college students attending CSUMB. As noted in Chapter 1 the mission of CSUMB is to serve, "...the working class and historically undereducated and low-income populations"(Campus Strategic Planning Committee, 1994). But currently only an average of 49% of students are retained after 5 years, which is the equivalent of 150 units if fulltime, 15 units per semester is attempted.

There is more to promoting student success than just "retaining" students. As previous chapters have argued, first-generation college students need more extensive services than the primary advising unit alone can provide. Supplementary programs have been established at CSUMB to provide additional services to targeted groups of students, including first-generation college students. If the supplementary programs at CSUMB work with the primary advising unit as intended, the targeted groups will get additional services, rather than the same services from a different office. As a bonus result, students in general will not be as confused because advising procedures on campus will be more clear to all students attending CSUMB.

An average of 45% of the population of the student body at CSUMB are first-generation college students. Campus data illustrates that only 41% of first-generation college students graduate in 4 years, compared to the historical average of 50% (which

still isn't very good). The longer a student takes to complete her or his bachelor's degree the less likely she or he is to complete it at all, especially if she or he has been disqualified from any federal financial aid. With such a large population of first-generation students attending CSUMB there needs to be a theory or theories, a common practice and/or a retention plan to give them the type of support they need.

Educators have been considering developmental advising approaches to be more effective than traditional advising approaches. Traditional advising approaches historically consisted of simply advising students on which classes to take and then possibly helping them schedule their classes. Developmental advising approaches enhance the growth of a student by providing them with resources and information to facilitate their social and intellectual integration into higher education and college life.

There are many different variations of theories that have been presented to address the way college students think, feel and behave throughout their college careers. Although each person is unique and individual, educators have constantly been trying to find a common way to address student success. Arthur Chickering (1969) first wrote Education and Identity a book that breaks human development down to seven core vectors developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature, interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose and developing integrity. Many researchers may agree with the basic structure of Chickering's seven core vectors, but argue that his theory cannot be applied to all students, because all students are individual and unique. So, Arthur Chickering worked with Linda Reisser to create the second edition in 1993 and discussed the impact of gender, race and national origin in the second edition of Education and Identity.

Chickering provided the basics and the beginning of a large body of research regarding the development of college students. No matter what variation of the student development theory used all theorists seem to agree that students go through a series of stages, vectors or phases of development as they go through college. Students learn to think for themselves by critically examining and evaluating information. Students learn to become independent and interdependent. Students develop identity, purpose and direction in order to become productive citizens that give back to their society.

In their book, How College Affects Students, appropriately, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) discuss the effects that college has on students both socially and intellectually. Discussing topics from theories and models of development to the development of academic skills, psychosocial changes and moral development to educational attainment and career choice, they provide an insight to the affects of higher education from their 20 plus years of education.

“Students not only make statistically significant gains in factual knowledge and in a range of general cognitive and intellectual skills; they also change on a broad array of value, attitudinal, psychosocial and moral dimensions.” (p. 557)

In their summary they discuss the changes students face during college. Pascarella and Terenzini identify learning and cognitive change, psychosocial change, attitudes and values, and moral development to be the major changes that college students face in a general sense. All of these elements are consistent with ***establishing a connection, eliminating confusion and building confidence.***

Vincent Tinto (1993) discusses “The Dimensions of Institutional Action” in chapter 5 of his book, Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures for Student

Attrition, where he makes it clear that, “There are no quick or easy solutions to the issue of student retention [success].” He also claims that, “...institutional commitment to students that is the foundation of successful retention programs” (p.201). Without assuming that all students have the same needs, he outlines important elements that his 20 plus years of experience and research has provided. Making these two things clear, Tinto continues to provide suggestions for developing programs for student retention.

Tinto (1993) discusses programs for academically at-risk students including (1) intrusive advising, (2) assessment and monitoring of academic progress, (3) enhancement of basic skills, (4) development of study and learning skills, and (5) the development of appropriate learning settings. (Tinto, 1993, p. 182) He also discusses building personal and social support and developing supportive student communities. All of these elements are consistent with ***establishing a connection, eliminating confusion and building confidence***. Tinto identifies institutional commitment to students, educational commitment and social and intellectual commitment to be the “principles of effective retention.” Tinto believes effective retention [success] programs are committed to the students they serve and they put the welfare of the student ahead of the institutional goals. He believes they must be committed to the education of all of their students and he believes effective retention [success] programs are committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities.

Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito (1998) provide a valuable resource in their book, Student Development in College: Theory Research and Practice. They encourage student affairs based practice to be theory-based.

“Student affairs practice without theoretical base is not effective or efficient. A ‘fly by the seat of your pants’ approach may sometimes result in beneficial outcomes, but it is just as likely to become a disaster” (p. 19).

They provide information that links student development theories to everyday situations and they provide information that makes student development theories applicable to practice in real life college situations. Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito provide a link to the theories that guide an understanding of the situations that may arise in college life and development. They discuss when and why providing a workshop on topics like: study skills, single student living, time management, and budgeting will be helpful to provide for students. Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito encourage higher education professionals to be proactive and to use a variety of strategies.

In summary, the literature provides additional support to my research and my own theory of ***establishing a connection, eliminating confusion and building confidence***. Student development theories provide an understanding of student development and the changes that occur in a student’s college life. Student development theory can be used to promote the growth and development of a student both socially and intellectually by taking classroom knowledge and methods and making them applicable to college student retention or success. Developmental advising approaches empower students to guide and assist themselves in their pursuit through higher education. First-generation students need developmental advising approaches to increase their retention and success rates in higher education. The development of students both socially and academically is critical to a healthy and successful college career. It is my belief that students need to ***establishing a connection, eliminating confusion and building confidence*** in order to

socially and academically integrate into the university or college they attend. I have used student development theories to structure an action plan to address these three elements.

Through my experience and research, I believe student development theories are best suited to promote first-generation college student success. Student development theory provides strategies for the retention, or preferably the success, of first-generation college students. Developmental advising approaches empower students to guide and assist themselves in their pursuit through higher education. First-generation students need developmental advising approaches to increase their retention and success rates in higher education. The development of students both socially and academically is critical to a successful college career. First-generation students need additional resources to assist them in their integration into college life. Once an individual has successfully integrated into the university she or he can move through other different phases of development. Regardless of the variations of different student development theorists, all theorists are trying to help educators to better understand the development of students as they move through college. It is not necessary to be an expert on every different theory that may exist. Knowing other theories exist and then researching them depending on the specific situation is a responsibility that all educational professionals should take ownership in. However, it is not to say that a different theory should be used for each individual student.

Development of Framework

As literature and research suggest, students that successfully integrate both socially and academically into the university that they attend have better chances of having a healthy and successful college career. First-generation students at CSUMB are

no different, in fact, from my experience because of the geographical location of the university it is common knowledge on campus that students have a tendency to feel very isolated and even depressed, especially if they have not found any type of “connection(s)” to the campus.

“My out of class experience has gotten pretty good once I got involved. Not being involved on campus made me very depressed.” – Karen

“I often felt overwhelmed and isolated.” – Wendy

Programs targeted to assist first-generation students need to help their students to **establish a connection, eliminate confusion and to build confidence** in order to promote student success. Developmental advising approaches enhance the growth of a student by providing them with resources and information to facilitate their social and intellectual integration into higher education and college life.

Connection

Connection as defined in this research refers to the connections a student makes with the university or college she or he attends. Connections can be social and/or academic and are not considered inclusive or exclusive to each other. Connections can be made with faculty, staff and/or peers. Connections can also be to a program or department.

“My biggest thing is support, you know, having people there that I know that I can go and ask for help if I need to. Just having them there, I guess.” – Megan

“I really like having somebody who I can talk to about anything and somebody who can help me and somebody I can go to ask questions so, it took me a while.

Like my first two semesters here I didn't really have anybody I was just going to class, going home." - Julia

Connections can be to the campus itself and/or with the people associated with the campus. In my opinion first-generation college students like myself need as many of these connections as they can get. First-generation students do not have the luxury of their parents' college experiences to help guide them. First-generation students need a place that they can go without being judged for their lack of experience.

"During this time of the semester I was pledging for a fraternity club and in this time I got to interact with a lot of people on this campus. I had friends so I didn't need to worry about going back home. That was home to me." - John

There are countless, possibly never-ending connections that can be made at a college or university. The connections, number of connections, or combination of connections made depends on the personality and/or needs of each individual. Similarly there are good and bad connections that can be made.

Confusion

Confusion as defined in this research refers to the confusion of college life both socially and academically. In most cases students are moving away from home for the first time in their lives. Students are exposed to a new way of living independently and under new rules. Students are expected to navigate through the new rules, policies and procedures of a foreign environment. Again, first-generation students do not have the luxury of their parents' college experiences to help guide them. Sometimes first-generation students just need a place to go to feel more at home.

“So far it’s been a good experience but it was hard coming from Santa Monica to CSUMB. It was a big transition and I was 6 hours away from home. So it was very hard, but the Students Support Services program helped me learn to adapt and how the classes work and also meet new people. So that transition helped me as a student here.” - Desiree

Confusion as defined in this research can also be used to describe the feelings a student faces when trying to simply navigate through the university or college system causing academic confusion. Understanding policies and procedures can help or hurt a student’s college career. Knowing which classes to take for general education, for one’s major and for graduation can be exhausting when unfamiliar with the system. The list continues with policies regarding registration, housing, financial aid procedures. After all of these things students still have to buy books and supplies. Academic confusion can be very discouraging for first-generation students and it was for me too, especially when I had nowhere to go for help.

“Like I said my number one struggle was doing the run around thing. Not knowing where everything was exactly and people telling me one thing and another person telling me another thing about, you know, where to go to get certain information. And not getting clear answers to certain things and then being told to go to the building, you know, building 47 or something like that, and not getting clear answers about financial aid. And a lot of times, you know, in my situation, it’s like, I’m always sometimes missing some type of paper work for financial aid but they don’t tell you until the last minute, so that was a big struggle here.” – Jay Vaughn Johnson

Confidence

Confidence as defined in this research refers to both academic and social confidence. Once a student feels good or confident about her or his surroundings she or he is more likely to fully utilize all of the resources those surroundings provide. When a student feels out of place or has a lack of confidence when on campus, she or he is more likely to leave campus as soon as possible. Social confidence breeds social integration.

“I used office hours, I started using office hours a whole bunch in my pre-cal class because I feel that I’m not that good in Math and my pre-cal instructor, Duncan Olgilvie, just totally insisted, he’s like, you are good at Math, and you know, you can do it, and we had really good support, he was such good support to me, and I just felt so comfortable telling him, you know I don’t get this and I’m completely lost, and I’m not going to pass this class unless I come in and see you. And he was so accepting to that, he was so excited about me coming in for office hours that it made me feel like it’s a good thing to go to office hours opposed to like, oh, I’m dumb I need all this help.” - Lilly

Academic confidence is obviously a necessity for all successful college students. For some students academic confidence was obtained in pre-college classes taken in middle school and high school, but this is not the case for all students entering college. Some may blame the students’ lack of preparation prior to entering college and others may argue that the students should not even be in college if they are not prepared and academically confident. Neither one of these opinions matter, the fact is that there is a large percentage of students that enter college that are not academically prepared for college.

“Um, academics are tough so far. I don’t think I was as prepared as other students around me. When I, for example, no I wasn’t, I mean even though I came from a good school, I still wasn’t, I felt a lot of the times.” – Megan

“My writing skills, they’re not so great, but I have been getting better.” – Desiree

Even students that are prepared may not even know they are prepared and may have a lack of confidence simply because they have not had anyone at the college level encourage them or tell them that they are prepared. Their parents and family may believe in them 100% but that may not be enough to give them the confidence they need to keep pushing. When a student is both academically and socially confident in their surroundings they are much more likely to excel, more likely to utilize all of the resources available and far more likely to succeed. Again, first-generation students do not have the luxury of their parents’ college experiences to help guide them.

“A lot of my friends don’t even attend this university. They aren’t first-generation people. Their parents attended college, and went to a UC or something. They have their parents helping them out with everything including a paper. Their parents would check their email, correct a paper, and send it back to them. However I don’t have that experience with my parents being mentors. They aren’t able to academically help me in any way.” - Laurie

The Students’ Needs

First-generation college students attending CSUMB have identified what they need through the interviews they voluntarily participated in. As a collective group the

students felt they need guidance and support from all their peers, teachers and staff to be successful in college. They simply wanted people there that they know they can go to for help if and whenever they need to. As a group the students felt they needed study skills, budgeting and time management skills. They felt they needed to be organized, focused and determined to be successful in college. As a collective group students identified finances, the navigation of the college system or politics and procedures of college, being homesick, learning how to study and the lack of academic preparation to be the most difficult part of their college career so far. Students in both groups identified support from family, staff and peers, how to take notes, how to write better, how to take tests and how to study in general and how to manage their time as the additional resources they need to be successful in college. Another one of the resources mentioned by both groups was longer tutoring, computer lab and library hours. Students do not feel they have enough opportunity to use the library, ASAP (tutoring), and the computer labs. This was a major concern for students that have to work and go to school.

All of the students mentioned that they expected to get guidance, tutoring, and support from the university. They expect the university to give them accurate knowledge and information about their specific major, the career fields within their major and university policies and procedures. Students also expect the university to be cooperative and they expect the university to give them as much as they give to the university and their studies. Students want the university to provide a positive learning environment for all students, decent housing and class availability.

Action Plan

The following action plan is intended to improve the success rates of the high population of first-generation college students attending California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). There are several supplemental programs at CSUMB that are targeted to assist first-generation college students in their pursuit of higher education in addition to the services provided by the primary advising unit on campus. The Office of Student Affairs currently manages all of the supplemental programs and the Office of Academic Affairs manages the primary advising unit on campus, currently Lower-Division Advising (LDA).

The action plan is a model for supplementary programs at CSUMB to consider. CSUMB has the resources to execute the plan and with campus wide support the plan is very low cost, possibly requiring no additional costs to the university. The plan is directed to the Vice President of Student Affairs and more specifically the Director of EOSP, Jose Martinez-Saldana, to be executed through one or more of the Support Programs in his unit, more specifically The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and the Student Support Services program (SSS).

Notes to Consider

This entire research and action plan was created from the passion I have for all people to be successful in obtaining their higher educational goals. Along with my attempt to give back to the university I attended and the need for a serious, theory-based retention plan to be implemented at CSUMB, I truly hope this helps future students.

In order to completely implement an effective retention plan based on student development theory it is necessary for the entire campus to understand and embrace the theory. The scope of this project does not provide the proper research and information to involve the entire campus, nor is it feasible for this project. The entire campus must embrace student development theory as a complete unit. As it implies this takes a lot of money, time and resources and with current budget cuts this is near impossible at this time. This specific action plan is meant to be the beginning of serious, ongoing research and discussion regarding student retention or success based on theory. There is not one perfect action plan that can be created for any or all universities. The plan is not perfect and it is not complete with all of the answers. It is meant to provide a proposal to better utilize the resources already available. At the least the project should provide a catalyst for further research and serious consideration to the retention or success of the first-generation students attending the university. “Knefelkamp, Widick and Parker (1978) realized the futility of designing one ‘comprehensive model of student development’” (Knefelkamp, Widick and Parker, 1978 as cited in Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito 1998, p 10).

This action plan does not present anything revolutionary or unexplored. In fact, some aspects of it have already been executed in some form. Some aspects may still be practiced somewhere on campus. This action plan is a combination of research, literature and personal and professional experience that is meant to provide theory and application to the topic of first-generation college student success at CSUMB. It provides definition, structure, theory and direction to the practices of the supplemental programs at CSUMB and the overall retention or success of the first-generation students attending it. The first

component of this action plan is the collaboration between primary and supplementary programs using student development theory as the basis for their programming. The second component is the development of a supplementary course provided to students by the supplementary programs.

Defining Primary Advising and Supplementary Programs

Primary Advising

All educational entities have set graduation requirements, codes of conduct and registration procedures. Although all of these policies and procedures are published by the educational entity the institution is still responsible for providing personal assistance or advising regarding them. The Lower-Division Advising Office provides general advising to all students attending CSUMB regardless of socioeconomic status, age, race, gender, college experience, sexual preferences or area of study. In addition to the Lower-Division Advising Office each major houses faculty advisors to assist students after they enter their major.

Both of these two entities should be recognized as the primary advising entities on campus. Both of these entities provide basic advising regarding course selection, registration, campus policies and procedures and other basic information about the university. These entities provide services to the entire student population. Services may tend to be brief and generally applicable to all students. Although some special attention may be given to some students in some cases, by design, all students will not receive the same attention, nor is it feasible. The Lower-Division Advising Office employs two

fulltime professionals and about six student assistants and serves anywhere between 1500 and 2500 students.

Supplementary Programs

Supplementary programs are meant to provide the services to its population that primary advising cannot provide. Supplementary programs can be state or federally funded programs that provide services to a specific targeted group of students. Examples of supplementary programs at CSUMB are CAMP, EOP, MSS and SSS. Supplementary programs provide the additional services and resources that primary advising cannot provide. Supplementary programs are better equipped to provide much more extensive services than primary advising can provide. For example, the CAMP program currently has four fulltime professionals and about three students to provide services to between 50-100 students. The SSS program has three fulltime professionals and six students to provide services to 160 students. Both of these programs have more resources available to them than the primary advising entities on campus. Advisors that are employed by supplementary programs become student development professionals. Their job is not only to act as an advisor and as a counselor, but it is also to act as an educator, a cheerleader, a coach, a teacher, a motivator, and a mentor.

Current Unofficial Campus Procedures

As mentioned there is currently no defined and/or agreed upon retention plan for the success of the first-generation college students attending CSUMB. In addition there is no set policy and procedures for the retention of the students attending CSUMB in general. Recurring changes in management and leadership have delayed any progress in

the current development of procedures or the lack there of. At one point primary advising and all of the supplementary programs on campus were all housed together and they were under the same management. At this time the primary advising unit and the supplementary programs on campus have been separated in location and management.

Throughout the past three to four years of changes, primary advising and the supplemental programs on campus have never been defined. The services provided by these two different entities have been identical and the students they provided services to defined the two different entities. Students did not know the difference between lower-division advising, EOP, CAMP, MSS and SSS. All students came into the same office and received the same services but different departments provided them. The services provided included class selection, basic information and referrals to other resources. The only real difference is that students in the supplementary programs had progress reports sent out to their instructors.

Students enter the university and they meet with a peer advisor. If they qualified and knew about one of the supplementary programs then they would apply for it. They would meet with that peer advisor unless they connected with one of the few professional advisors until they started their major. Once they started their major they were told to go to their major advisor. Students that transferred in as a junior and/or undeclared students who had completed their general education requirements generally had nowhere to go unless they were in a supplementary program that had professional staff to meet with them. This chaotic and informal procedure appears to get the “job” done but does not seem to be very effective at eliminating the confusion for the students.

Primary Advising in Collaboration with Supplementary Programs

All students should meet regularly with the primary advising entity on campus. The primary advising unit should assist all students with general education requirements, registration, financial aid and general campus procedures. It should suggest classes to fulfill requirements, instructors and campus related advise.

Students that are in a supplementary program should also meet regularly with their supplementary advisor. Supplementary advisors (student development professionals) should build on what the primary advisor has discussed with the student. Student development professionals should evaluate each of their students to find out about their individual needs. One student may need additional help with social integration and another student may need help with academics. Regardless each student should get the extra help she or he needs. The services supplementary programs provide should not be identical for each student and should not be the same as the services she or he receives from their primary advisor. Supplementary programs should provide additional more extensive services to the students it serves. The primary objective for any supplementary program is to provide additional services to its participant's primary services. In other words, supplementary programs should provide their participants with the additional services and resources that they need, but their primary services do not provide.

Both the primary advising units and the supplementary programs should collaborate and be trained together. They should be very familiar with the policies and procedures of each other's office as well as the policies and procedures of the campus itself. Their information should be consistent and accurate. Whenever possible primary

and supplementary programs should collaborate and be trained with all of the departments of the university that directly serve students.

The Plan for Supplementary Programs' Success

Objective

- To establish a connection(s) between the students and the university both socially and academically
- To eliminate as much confusion for the student as possible both socially and academically
- To help the student build confidence both socially and academically
- To assist in the integration of the student into the university both academically and socially

The First Year

Most educators agree that after the decision has been made to attend a specific college or university, the first year of a student's college career is the most critical to the student's success. Vincent Tinto's research states,

“The incidence of withdrawal is highest during this early stage [first year] of the college career. The individual is least integrated into and therefore least committed to the institution and thus most susceptible to the pains and doubts which separation and transition evoke.” (Tinto, 1993, p. 163)

Similarly most of the students interviewed mentioned that they felt they were not part of the university and they did not feel “at home” on campus until after their first year.

Research about first-year experiences influenced many universities to offer a “First-Year Seminar,” a class targeted to address the First-Year Experience. In fact CSUMB requires a class called First-Year Seminar 100 (FYS100). Currently this class has evolved from its original form to suit the general needs of the entire student population. Students have identified the FYS 100 class to be a pre-English class that gives them some information about the university. The negative connotations of study skills classes along with the belief that students should not need study skills classes if they are in college may have influenced the evolution. Regardless, nearly half of the students attending CSUMB are first-generation students and historically not academically prepared for college. Many first-generation supplementary program participants were special admits that did not have the proper requirements for traditional admittance, so they need additional instruction on study skills. In addition, due to the budgetary restraints there are very few fulltime or tenured FYS 100 instructors. Adjunct faculty that are not trained in or familiar with CSUMB policies and procedures teach many of the classes. The FYS 100 class in its current form may very well suit its purpose and may very well serve the general needs of the entire population, but first-generation students need additional services and/or instruction. Supplementary programs can provide this additional service.

Tinto has identified several types of institutional action that have proven to be effective during the first year. All of them fall into one of five main categories: transition assistance, early contact and community building, academic involvement and support, monitoring and early warning, and counseling/advising. All five of these can help with

one or more of the following categories: connection, confusion, and confidence (as defined in this project). For example:

Connection – Transition assistance, early contact and community building, counseling/advising

Confusion – Transition assistance, monitoring and early warning, counseling/advising

Confidence – Academic involvement and support, monitoring and early alert, counseling/advising

The Student Support Services (SSS) program is referred to as an example. The same basic structure can be used for the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) as well because the number of freshman students being served each academic year in relation to the number of professional advisors employed is about the same for both programs.

Supplemental programs are intended to provide services that the primary unit and/or the university do not provide. The current FYS 100 class required by the university serves its purpose for the general freshman population, but first-generation students have identified that they need additional services. As mentioned, SSS employs two professional advisors and serves about 30-40 first-year freshmen students per year. Each one of these professional advisors should be teaching an additional class specifically designed to accommodate 20-25 of the first-year freshman that are participating in their program.

The class should include the following topics, although the time used to cover each topic will depend on the specific group of students.

- Learning Styles
- Time Management
- Reading and Writing and Editing
- Project Planning
- Note Taking
- Goals and Focus
- Memory Tips
- Reading and Comprehension
- Test Taking
- Managing Emotions
- Essential Resources on Campus
- Academic Advising
- How to Work with Faculty
- Major/Career Exploration
- CSUMB Connections
- Multiculturalism and Diversity
- Money, Health and Stress

The professional advisor that teaches the class will have a chance to get to know each of the students in her or his class. Among the other advantages, the instructor can also select a better-suited peer advisor. It will make sense for the professional advisor that teaches the class to have the students in her or his class to be in her or his caseload as well. However, there is always the case where a student will connect with another advisor instead.

Each student should have to attend class two times a week for an hour to an hour and a half for each session. There should be the equivalent of four hours of homework given per week and students should receive two college level units for the class. These units can only be used as elective units but are college level units towards graduation. Professional staff for the supplementary programs should create curriculum addressing the above listed topics to create the equivalent amount of coursework for a two-unit, college level class.

Resources

Instructors and Curriculum

Professionals employed by the supplementary programs (student services professionals) on campus can provide CSUMB with the additional resources necessary to offer this additional class. Currently CAMP, SSS and EOP employ seven professional advisors combined and this includes the coordinators of the programs. These student services professionals should work together to create the curriculum and they should also be the primary instructors for this course. In many cases it may not be necessary for all seven professionals to teach one of the courses and in time it will take all seven of the professionals to teach more than one section. Management can work this out at a later date. Using SSS as an example, the two professionals employed by SSS could each teach one section of 20-25 students. This would only take approximately 6-8 hours a week of their time (2 hours in class, 4-6 outside). Management should simply subtract this time from their 40-hour workweek. As the demand for the class increases more sections can be offered.

Sponsor

Unlike the primary advising units on campus, the supplementary programs on campus are not directly affiliated with any of the colleges on campus. This poses a problem when trying to create and offer a college level course to its participants. However, this is not really a problem with some collaboration from a college on campus, such as College of University Studies and Programs (CUSP). The supplementary programs do not need anything from the sponsor other than their support and collaboration in providing the supplementary programs with a class title and a classroom.

In return, the college would receive all the tuition the university receives for registering into the class as well as the credit for the Fulltime Enrollment (FTE) for their college. The only foreseeable thing at stake for the sponsor would be the risk of damaging the sponsor's reputation, which is always at stake when working with new instructors.

Basic Steps for Implementation

1. Create curriculum for a two-unit course.
2. Present the curriculum to a college on campus requesting their collaboration.
3. Present the curriculum to the Academic Senate for the approval of a two-unit, college-level course to be offered.
4. Identify 20-40 first-time freshmen and offer two sections of this course for the first year.
5. Use evaluations at the end of the semester and analyze effectiveness
6. Update curriculum accordingly
7. Track students' progress throughout graduation.

Benefits

Students

Students will gain a solid, safe and secure connection to the supplementary program that they are participating in. Students will become part of a learning community. Learning communities become a big part of her or his college career. Students will learn from other students with similar backgrounds. Students will learn about the policies and procedures of university life. Students will learn the where, when and how of the university by finding out where to go, when to go, and how to go about it. Students will learn how to manage the college system in general, eliminating much of the

academic confusion of college life. Students will learn and/or be refreshed on study skills for a successful college career. They will be encouraged and their academics will be validated gaining academic confidence.

Instructors/Advisors

Instructors will become better supplementary advisors by staying aware and current on all campus issues that can affect students. Instructors will have a *minimum* of 30 hours of contact with the student over the first 16 weeks of the student's college career. Instructors will get to know more about the students they serve and they will be able to provide the services that she or he may need. Instructors gain a much stronger meaningful relationship with the students they serve.

In summary, creating this course, instructed by the supplementary advisors, for the students they serve, offers a wide range of benefits for both the student and the instructor. It is of little or no cost to the university, the sponsor, and/or the supplementary programs.

Beyond the First Year

This plan is not meant to exclusively target only the freshman students participating in support programs. In the larger scale, upon successful implementation of this project to the students participating in support programs, student development professionals can offer more of these classes making them available to any student that wishes to take the class. It is my hope that any student including junior transfer students, returning sophomores, and non first-generation students can all take the course in the future or one like it developed for second and third-year transfer students. Student services professionals will still make a connection with the students even if they are not

in a supplementary program. Student services professionals will still direct the student to the resources that she or he needs. Student services professionals work fulltime advising students on campus and will be familiar with services and resources available on campus for all students. Many campuses provide a similar type of class that is targeted to the “at-risk” population of students.

Conclusion

This plan does not require any major reconfiguration of existing programs and services. It is recommended that SSS, EOP and the CAMP program continue to provide the same services to the students that they have been providing to their participants. They should continue to meet with their students a minimum of two times per semester. They should continue to use intrusive advising techniques whenever necessary. Supplementary programs should continue to send out progress reports to instructors during the 4th week of classes and they should continue to provide prompt feedback to the students.

Supplementary programs currently provide cultural events and community building workshops and events and they should continue to provide workshops catering to the needs of the participants of their programs.

This action plan provides research, literature review and experience to provide a theory or biases for further research and investigation. Professionals employed by the supplementary programs are encouraged to seriously consider using this action plan to provide services that cater specifically to the needs of the participants of the supplementary programs. At the least this action plan should provide evidence of the necessity to implement a theory-based plan to address the success among the vision students that attend CSUMB. However, there is no substitution for quality, energetic,

educated professionals that truly care and truly hold the students' best interest as their number one priority.

The SSS and the CAMP program already provide services that touch on the five categories that Tinto discusses. However, there is still no theory or specific plan of action to address these specific areas of institutional action. Dr. Manuel Bersamin, the coordinator of the CAMP program at CSUMB is knowledgeable and experienced in using student development theories to provide services for college students. Since he accepted the Coordinator position in late 2004 he has been discussing the development of a theory-based plan of action for the CAMP program. It is my recommendation that the director of the supplementary programs at CSUMB focuses on Tinto's five main categories of institutional action and use Dr. Manuel Bersamin's knowledge and experience to guide this effort. I strongly suggest the Director and the Coordinators of the supplementary programs pursue the implementation of the course specifically designed to meet the needs of the first-generation students they serve recommended in this Action Thesis. In addition I encourage the programs to use the following books as resources for their future practices. Please see References page at the end for a complete resources listing.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Interview Questions

Questions for Interviews

First-generation College Students Participating in a Support Program at CSUMB

1. Please describe your experience attending college at CSUMB.
2. Do you feel you are a part of the university? Do you feel this is your “home away from home” or is it more of a temporary place that you live? If so, when did you first start to feel this way? If not, can you suggest anything that might make you feel more of a part of the university?
3. What types of college life issues can you discuss with your family and what types of college life issues can you not discuss with your family? Why?
4. What do you feel you need in order to be successful in college?
5. Please describe some of the struggles you have faced while attending CSUMB.
6. What do you think is the most difficult part of your college experience? Why?
7. What additional help or resources do you feel you need to be successful in college? Why?
8. What do you expect from the university or what do you need from the university in order to be successful?
9. Please describe the ways the support program (i.e. SSS, CAMP, EOP) has assisted you through your college career.
10. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix A Continued

First-generation College Students *Not* Participating in a Support Program at CSUMB

1. Please describe your experience attending college at CSUMB.
2. Do you feel you are a part of the university? Do you feel this is your “home away from home” or is it more of a temporary place that you live? If so, when did you first start to feel this way? If not, can you suggest anything that might make you feel more of a part of the university?
3. What types of college life issues can you discuss with your family and what types of college life issues can you not discuss with your family?
4. What do you feel you need in order to be successful in college?
5. Please describe some of the struggles you have faced while attending CSUMB.
6. What do you think is the most difficult part of your college experience? Why?
7. What additional help or resources do you feel you need to be successful in college? Why?
8. What do you expect from the university or what do you need from the university in order to be successful?
9. Are you familiar with any of the support programs such as CAMP, SSS and EOP at CSUMB? What do you know about them? Why aren't you involved with one of these programs?
10. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix B – Profiles

First-generation College Students Participating in a Support Program at CSUMB

Name: Megan
Arrived at CSUMB: Summer 2001
Hometown: Santa Monica
Major: Human Communications (HCOM)
Grade Level: Junior

Name: Jay Vaughn Johnson
Arrived at CSUMB: Summer 2001
Hometown: Watsonville
Major: Collaborative Human Health Services (CHHS)
Grade Level: Senior

Name: Mike
Arrived at CSUMB: Summer 2001
Hometown: Vacaville
Major: Business
Grade Level: Senior

Name: Desiree
Arrived at CSUMB: Summer 2003
Hometown: Santa Monica
Major: Social and Behavioral Sciences
Grade Level: Sophomore

Name: Lilly
Arrived at CSUMB: Summer 2000
Hometown: Salinas
Major: Collaborative Human Health Services (CHHS)
Grade Level: Senior

Name: Andrew
Arrived at CSUMB: Summer 2001
Hometown: King City
Major: Telecommunications, Multimedia and Applied Computing
Grade Level: Senior

Name: Barbara
Arrived at CSUMB: Summer 2002
Hometown: Sacramento
Major: Human Communications (HCOM)
Grade Level: Senior

Appendix B Continued

First-generation College Students NOT Participating in a Support Program at CSUMB

Name: James
Arrived at CSUMB: Spring 2004
Hometown: East Coast
Major: Music
Grade Level: Sophomore

Name: Julia
Arrived at CSUMB: Fall 2003
Hometown: Nipomo
Major: Earth Systems Science and Policy (ESSP)
Grade Level: Senior

Name: Karen
Arrived at CSUMB: Spring 2003
Hometown: Stockton
Major: Liberal Studies (LS)
Grade Level: Senior

Name: Mary Jane
Arrived at CSUMB: Fall 2000
Hometown: San Jose
Major: Business
Grade Level: 5th Year Senior

Name: John
Arrived at CSUMB: Fall 2004
Hometown: Bakersfield
Major: Undeclared
Grade Level: Freshman

Name: Wendy
Arrived at CSUMB: Spring 2000
Hometown: Concord
Major: Human Communications
Grade Level: Graduated

Name: Grady
Arrived at CSUMB: Fall 1999
Hometown: San Francisco
Major: Liberal Studies/Teacher Credential
Grade Level: Grad Student

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