

PRACTICES EXCHANGE

NEWSLETTER

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Institutional Resources/Practices

First Year Experience Programs

In the fall of 2012, **Clafin University** (SC) implemented its Quality Enhancement Plan, “Panther STEPS” (Students in Transition Engaged and Preparing for Success). The mission of Panther STEPS is to engage incoming students, who are largely low-income, first generation college students, and assist them in their transition to college. Through a process of student assessment and placement, curriculum development, technology and laboratory enhancement, and academic and social support, our aim was to improve student higher order thinking skills and thus their rate of persistence and graduation. Five years later, the University has increased its retention rate by eight percentage points, while student satisfaction and levels of engagement are at their highest.

One of the most successful components of Panther STEPS is the Clafin University First Year Experience sequence, UNIV 101 and 102. First year students complete three credit hours each of their first two semesters in a class with peers from the same academic discipline. The courses are team taught by a faculty member from the discipline and a student development staff member. Each class is also staffed with a peer mentor. As part of the curriculum, students are required to engage in reflective writing, work with other students on group projects, make oral presentations, meet regularly with their advisor, attend regular class assemblies, and participate in peer mentor led activities. Each of these activities is designed to strengthen students’ connection to the academic process and influence more active learning and higher order thinking.

Based on results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), administered at Clafin every three years, the First Year Experience two-course sequence appears to have had a positive impact on student engagement. The last survey administered before the implementation of the Panther STEPS was in 2009. At that time, 55% of first year students said that their courses included community based learning projects. The most recent (2015) survey indicated the percentage had increased to 74%. Another significant change between 2009 and the current results was the level of interaction between faculty and students. In 2009, 44% of the first year students who took the NSSE said that their faculty members were accessible and supportive. This percentage has increased to 62%. Our success with Panther STEPS has been a great marketing tool for the University. In the fall of 2017, Clafin enrolled its largest incoming class in the 148-year history of the university. For further information, contact: Mary Williams, Assoc. Professor of Sociology and Director, Panther STEPS. marywilliams@clafin.edu.

Peer Mentoring Programs

The Brother4Brother program at **Ferrum College** (VA) is a success-focused peer-mentoring initiative that helps young men learn how to conduct themselves in a mature manner, discover ways to engage themselves in the Ferrum community and beyond, and develop the skills and attitude required to be successful at the college and in their career path. The idea for this program came from the students in Professor John Kitterman's English class, in which they were studying the success rate of African American males at Ferrum College. The result was the launching of the Brother4Brother program in the fall of 2012 in which upper classmen provide freshman males with personal, academic, and social mentoring.

Meetings are held for the 50 mentors and mentees every other week, as well as regularly scheduled social activities. The Brother4Brother program expects all of its mentees to be successful in the classroom as well as outside the classroom. The mentors must exhibit positive leadership roles in and outside the classroom, demonstrate integrity, and be committed to serving others. When mentees need help, their mentors are to be there to help guide them and point them in the direction of possible resources that will benefit them. As a testament to the efforts of the program, academic and graduation rates have greatly improved since the inception of the program. In addition, all of the program members who graduated in May 2017 were either employed or accepted into graduate school. For further information, contact: Kim Gaiters-Fields, Dean of Academic Affairs. Kgaiters-fields@ferrum.edu.

Submissions for Future Issues

YWM members are encouraged to submit examples of practices and/or resources to share with your YWM colleagues. We are particularly interested in examples of teaching and learning strategies you have found to be effective in promoting student success. Send brief descriptions and any accompanying materials to Nia Chester, YWM Program Manager. niachester@gmail.com.