

**UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS REPORT
2014**

Sauk Valley Community College

District 506

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INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Topic 1: Increasing Student Retention and College Credential Attainment, *Mandatory orientation and First Year Experience class for all new degree seeking students*

A. Purpose, Goal, or Objective

In order to increase the retention of all degree seeking students, Sauk Valley Community College instituted a mandatory orientation and First Year Experience class for all new degree seeking students in 2013. The educational literature on this subject suggests that as retention rates increase so will graduation rates. Of course, these programs are designed to also help minority, disabled, and female students succeed in college and graduate at higher rates as well. With 60% of Sauk's current students being female, 12% being Hispanic or African American, and 3.1% of our students reporting disabilities, these programs will dramatically affect those underrepresented groups.

As the FYE program was not fully implemented until August, 2013, the data collected from those sessions will not be included in this report. This report will focus on the development of the Orientation and the FYE class and on the data that was collected in the summer of 2013 from the Orientation sessions.

B. Date of Implementation

Discussions on this new mandatory orientation and FYE class were first held in January, 2013. The first orientation session was held on June 24, 2013. The first FYE class were taught in August, 2013.

C. Description of Program Elements or Strategies that Make the Program Successful

Contemporary education literature indicates that college orientation sessions and First Year Experience classes are strongly correlated to retention and graduation rates. Sauk Valley Community College has, since 1966, offered a class that was part "orientation" and part "first year experience." In order to update the course, a committee of SVCC employees was formed. This committee included representatives from Student Services, Academics, Instructional Technology and faculty. It was recommended by the committee that SVCC divide the current course into two distinct components: mandated orientation and First Year Experience course required in the students' first semester.

- For students entering during the fall semester, the orientation sessions would be held during the summer before fall classes began. These sessions would, within a four hour timeframe, orient students to the campus and to key College personnel. It would also allow students to verify their electronic student account, log in to email and other web resources (including their classroom management system), and be able to ask questions of College personnel. Parents and loved ones were also encouraged to attend. Further, parents and loved ones had their own short "break-out" session that allowed them to ask questions of SVCC employees.
- The First Year Experience course was designed to expose students, in their first semester at SVCC, to a number of important topics that would help them persist at the College. Some of the topics included academic and career planning, study skills, appreciating diversity, time management, and note taking skills. The classes run the entire length of a semester. This provides students with valuable "people" resources throughout the semester. A diverse group of instructors were recruited and selected to represent diverse backgrounds across the campus. However, a strong emphasis was placed on the recruitment of instructional faculty to purposely strengthen relationships between students and faculty.

Retention experts have indicated that orientation and FYE would only be effective if it were made mandatory. As one retention expert indicated, "students don't do optional" and the College must have the "courage" to carry out these changes. Therefore, despite some skepticism, the College has adopted a policy of making these two components mandatory.

D. Evidence of Success

In order to continuously improve the orientation sessions, a short evaluation is given to each student and parent at the end of each session. This evaluation has provided valuable information that has been used to make the orientation sessions more efficient and productive. Generally, evaluations of orientation have been very positive. Also, the FYE/Orientation Committee regularly met over the summer to discuss and improve the orientation sessions.

The first FYE class was not held until August, 2013. However, it was important to develop a mechanism to continuously improve the class. An online “instructor discussion area” was created for faculty to exchange ideas and discuss what went well and what didn’t in each lesson. Also, round tables would be held at the end of the semester in order for the FYE Committee and faculty to discuss changes and improvements to the model.

Topic 2: Institutional Effective Practice That Increases Educational Attainment, Student Support Services (SSS)

A. Purpose, Goal, or Objective

Through a grant competition, funds are awarded to institutions of higher education to provide opportunities for academic development, assist students with basic college requirements, and to motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education. Student Support Services (SSS) projects also may provide grant aid to current SSS participants who are receiving Federal Pell Grants. The goal of SSS is to increase student retention and graduation rates of first-generation, low-income, and/or college students with documented disabilities. The majority of these students are also female.

B. Date of Implementation

Initially SSS was implemented in 1984. This particular grant cycle started September, 2010.

C. Description of Program Elements or Strategies that Make the Program Successful

SSS students receive a number of benefits that have been shown to increase their academic success, retention rates, and graduation rates of first-generation, low income, and/or college students with documented disabilities. All services are provided free to the SSS students.

SSS students are supported in a number of ways, but most importantly they have access to personalized academic, career, and personal advising performed by designated SSS advisors. This is valuable service that keeps SSS students “on track” to academic success by helping students address the many issues (academic and nonacademic) that they will encounter in their lives while at SVCC. SSS students also receive other forms of academic support throughout their time at SVCC including:

- free tutoring
- access to free success skills workshops
- free use of laptops, textbooks, and other resource materials

If SSS student wish to transfer to a 4-year institution, they will receive additional transfer advisement from the SSS designated advisors. If there is sufficient student interest, students will also be provided the resources for a campus visit to a 4-year academic institution.

D. Evidence of Success

In fiscal year 2013, there is ample evidence that SSS students outperform the general population of SVCC students in retention and graduation rates while serving a higher proportion of female and students with disabilities than the College as a whole (reference the table directly below). Fall to spring and fall to fall retention rates were excellent for SSS students and are substantially higher than the general population at SVCC. Of particular importance to this report are graduation rates. SSS advisors continually reinforce to their students the need to graduate with a degree or a certificate while at SVCC. In fiscal year 2013, graduation percentage for SSS students were 34.2% or 14.3% higher than the general population of students at SVCC.

Area of comparison	SVCC student population*	SSS Student population*
% of minority students	12.1%	10.4%
% of student with documented disabilities	2.5%	9.4%
% of female students	57.7%	65.3%
Fall 2012 to Spring 2013	75.6%	92.3%

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Retention rate		
Fall 2012 to Fall 2013 Retention Rate	59.3%	97.3%
Graduation %	19.9%	34.2%

*Degree seeking students only.