

Bronx Community College - Freshman Year Analysis and Recommendations

Executive Summary – July, 2011

The vast majority of Bronx Community College incoming students express intentions of earning a degree. However, only one in five first time-full-time freshmen actually earn a BCC degree within six years. In an effort to increase the rates of student success and completion at BCC, the College engaged with the John Gardner Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year guided self-study process. This is a summary of the reports generated as part of this process.

Our analyses demonstrated four major factors contributing to the lack of student success in the freshman year (and beyond) at Bronx Community College. These include:

1. **Student Disposition** - lack of academic preparation (including basic and study skills) for college; unfamiliarity with college expectations and organization; multiple and competing social roles; and socio-affective factors (such as motivation, sense of self-worth, etc)
2. **Curricular Organization**— sequencing and scheduling of courses is not designed to facilitate student progress and success; clearly defined academic pathways are available for special programs only;
3. **Pedagogy & Academic Supports** – considerable variation in faculty use of effective pedagogy, student performance by instructor, faculty participation in faculty development as well as in student use of academic supports (which are available, but are not structured to assure student utilization)
4. **Institutional Organization**— not all areas of the College engage in practices associated with high performing organizations (such as functional alignment, process improvement, and systematic use of measurement); and freshman programs and services are not systematically coordinated

Consistent with our own institutional research and analysis as well as a thorough review of the literature (including the recently completed Gates Foundation-funded research conducted by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University), the following are recommended:

1. **Facilitate student success in (and progress through) basic skills requirements and first year courses** – with pre-college assessments, orientations, & workshops; track and monitor student progress through remedial requirements; utilize strategies demonstrated as effective in developmental courses along with effective assessment practice; and utilize structured and targeted academic supports.
2. **Facilitate efficient and effective course taking (towards meeting graduation requirements)** – with effective assessment tools, counseling and academic advisement; provision of clearly defined course taking pathways; engage all students in development of academic plan; and evaluate/revise course sequencing and prerequisites.
3. **Promote Student Engagement and Knowledge of College Expectations** – by simplifying pre-enrollment and orientation activities and processes; using e-portfolios; communicating clear expectations of students; encouraging academic/social integration with study groups, co-curricular activities; and promoting career connections with work study, internships, career fairs.
4. **Promote Faculty Use of Engaged and Effective Pedagogies** - by providing effective faculty development activities; providing college incentives for professional development; encouraging teaching innovation; seriously consider teaching excellence in promotion/tenure decisions.
5. **Provide for a cohesive first year experience with clear pathways, organized experiences, consistent communications with clear oversight and accountabilities in place** – with a redesigned freshman seminar course; establish effective organizational structure for freshman activities; provide clearly articulated academic pathways; incorporate meaningful assessment in all freshman year efforts; and systematically embed analytics in academic and business processes.