

SEMINOLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Avenue to Success

**TITLE III STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS GRANT
PROJECT**

**EXTERNAL EVALUATOR'S YEAR-END REPORT
YEAR 2 (2004-2005)**

September 28, 2005

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Avenue to Success

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thumbnail Report

At the end of Year Two of its five-year Title III grant project, the College has in place the major components included in the grant application:

- Designated sections of college-preparatory or introductory college-credit courses assisted by peer mentors
- Supplemental Instruction sessions scheduled for college algebra, intermediate algebra, microbiology, organic chemistry, trigonometry, and accounting
- A re-vitalized Academic Success Center staffed with a senior mentor and tutors, as well as peer mentors
- A Faculty Institute informed by plans of an advisory committee that is truly representative of the college community, and that directly supports faculty teaching students targeted by the grant application.
- A vendor's proposal currently under consideration to furnish a user-friendly interface to the PeopleSoft student information system.

The accomplishments noted above are the result of a commendable effort by the Title III *Avenue to Success* Program Director, Dr. Stephen Wright, and the Title III Grant Director, Dr. Annye Refoe, as well as the Title III *Avenue to Success* leadership team and staff. The work of Dr. Wright and Dr. Refoe is supported by Dr. James Henningsen, who is their advocate to the president and the executive staff.

In short, the grant leadership and support staff have done their job well. They have put into place the interventions specified in the grant, with appropriate modifications made necessary by the realities of the culture of the College's students and the community from which they come. During the next year, the college and the grant staff should concentrate on learning how to deliver the major services most effectively. To that end, the following recommendations are offered for Year 3.

Recommendations for Year 3

- Conduct a briefing session for the benefit of the college business office and the foundation staff to outline constraints and opportunities for the endowment fund. The foundation staff could, with guidance from the Avenue to Success leadership, consider raising matching funds for future development.
- Conduct a detailed feasibility study to determine the requirements of staff, personnel, space and budget before presenting the proposal to require SLS 1101C for all students requiring college preparatory courses. The college should also consider the impact of requiring this course on enrollment of other courses. This study should be done well in advance of the catalog deadline for new requirements. If the next catalog sets requirements for students entering the college for the first time in Fall 2006, the proposed requirement should not take effect until that time.
- Conduct a survey for needed space and furniture for supporting project initiatives. Because the project is competing for space with other entities, it would be advisable to present space needs as soon as possible, and as a unified request.
- Dr. Wright's successor should be identified and appointed so as to minimize disruption to the project.
- Peer mentors and their Peer Mentor Supervisor should collaborate with faculty teaching Avenue to Success sections to tailor the presentations more closely to the needs of the class to which the peer mentor is assigned.
- Professors experiencing positive gains from the SI program should be given an opportunity to share their successes with their colleagues in the hope of encouraging more professors to make this valuable service available to their students.
- A set of easily understood, readily assessed outcome measures should be identified and published each year. They would at first pertain to the specific student groups treated by grant project activities. *Avenue to Success* aims at developing and pilot-testing practices and interventions, assessing them, revising, re-assessing, and recommending as college-wide practice. Implementation occurs following the conclusion of that phase of the grant project. This process should be planned and begun immediately. Again, comments from many of the college's stakeholders represented in the site visit report bear witness to the college's readiness to begin this effort.
- Avenue to Success staff and Student Success Services staff should collaborate on a plan to achieve cooperation in training peer mentors, tutors, and SI leaders so that a system of effective referrals becomes a reality, and so that both areas jointly support the students.

Recommendations for Years 4 and 5

The college has determined that in Year 3 it is committed to further developing and refining the interventions that make up the thrust of the grant project: the Faculty

Institute, peer mentors assisting in designated Avenue to Success courses, tutoring support in the Academic Success Center, and Supplemental Instruction. If the college intends to leverage the assets of the grant project to make substantive change in availability and coherence of college services, a curriculum for developmental advising and a structure for a first-year experience should be considered. These are not specific projects that the Title III-funded program should undertake single-handedly, but are college initiatives that could be legitimately supported by Title III resources. Supporting these two initiatives would enable the college to begin moving strategically rather than just operationally.

Report of Site Visit on September 23 and 26, 2005

Summary of Interviews Conducted During Site Visit, September 23 and 26, 2005

Note: Points raised during the interviews are recorded below. Many were raised in response to questions posed by the evaluator. None of the statements should be attributed to the persons interviewed. They are, instead, the evaluator's attempt to identify issues at the college that must be addressed before the Title III grant project can be used to effect the change desired by the institution and stated in its Strategic Development Plan. They are usually the evaluator's words, not those of the interviewees.

Ms. Mila Ecle—Sr. Accountant, Grants, Business Office

- The Title III staff assistant meets monthly with Ms. Ecle to reconcile the Title III balances and to review projected expenditures. The result of this practice has been to build a constructive relationship between the two offices and to ensure a thorough understanding of procedures.
- The question arose as to whether the business office should continue to track the amount of funds transferred to the endowment (\$67,000 for a total of \$335,000) after year 5 of the grant project. The foundation's method of accounting for the contributions appears to meet standards for Title III. To improve the understanding of the business office and the foundation office, it is recommended that Dr. Refoe meet with Mr. Matt Hodge and Ms. Ecle to review the constraints under which the endowment must operate, as well as opportunities it presents.

Dr. Mark Morgan, Ms. Patricia Elliott, and Dr. Stephen Wright (Institutional Research)

- Dr. Morgan and Ms. Elliott shared the latest survey results for students enrolled in Avenue to Success course sections. There are 231 enrollments in the designated sections, with an unduplicated count of 207. Average class size for fall is 21, up over 12 and 14 for spring and summer, respectively.

- Survey results show a tempering of student expectation of success. This is a predictable result stemming from the students' developing a more realistic understanding what is required to succeed at the college level.
- A survey form has been designed to elicit information from students who drop out of the courses before completing them.
- Plans are under development to study core indicators of students completing the Avenue to Success course sections compared to similar groups of students not participating.
- All told, the IR department has furnished superb support to the project.

Division Chairs for Social Science, English, and Mathematics (Ms. Minnie Phillips, Mr. Bill Schmidt, and Dr. Annye Refoe, Dean, Arts and Sciences)

- Avenue to Success course sections include mathematics (4), writing (4), reading (2), college success (1), and three recommended electives with one section each: HUM 2930 (Selected Studies in Humanities), SLS 1533 (Mathematics Thinking Skills), and OST 1191C (Keyboarding)
- Departments are aware of the contributions of the additional support in the Avenue to Success course sections.
- The Arts and Sciences Division is proceeding in gathering support for adding a new college success course (SLS 1101C) with a required lab, which will be the setting for expanded support services furnished by the Avenue to Success program. The division seeks to require the new course for all students required to take one or more college preparatory courses. There is precedent in Florida for such a requirement, the most recent being Florida Community College at Jacksonville.
- Preliminary projections for enrollment and the number of required seats in SLS 1101C are being prepared. First-time-in-college students entering the college in summer 2006 and in subsequent terms will be subject to the requirements.
- Because all students with college preparatory mandates will be required to take SLS 1101C, it is being considered to let these sections become the designated forum for *Avenue to Success* Peer Mentors activities.
- Recent figures released at the college show that 4-year success rate for FTIC students has increased from 11% to 32%. Success, as defined by the State, includes students who have graduated, who are currently enrolled and in good standing, and who have transferred to another institution.

College Title III Leadership (Dr. Jim Henningsen, VP for Student Success Services; Dr. Annye Refoe, Dean of Arts and Sciences; Dr. Stephen Wright, Title III Program Director.)

- Despite a slow start in Year 1, the program is improving and becoming stronger continuously. The support services provided through the grant project are all designed to engage students early and often. The program is designed to change lives, and no lesser outcome is acceptable.

- Upon adoption of the required SLS 1101C course for all college preparatory students, more change is expected. Peer mentors, under this plan, will be available for all entering College Prep students.
- At the same time that a plan for expansion of the *Avenue to Success* program is created, a parallel plan for obtaining needed space for all Title III activities is required.
- The Faculty Institute's program of development for 2005/2006 emphasizes methods for helping students engage early and often. One of the eminent programs is an application of CCSSE findings to classroom practice. The institute also plans workshops dealing with issues of academic freedom.
- The Title III grant project has offered the college many opportunities for learning how to think about the student's early engagement into and progress through the institution.
- A decision regarding Dr. Wright's successor needs to be reached to avoid disruption of the project upon his retirement.
- The project has followed the recommendations offered by the external evaluator in the following instances:
 - Project was assigned to the Vice President for Student Success Services for oversight and advocacy to the President the executive council.
 - The project has shaped its identity and image from its funding source (Title III) to its mission (*Avenue to Success*). The most recent evidence of this change is the excellent edition of *News Flash*, the newsletter of the *Avenue to Success* project to the college.
 - The project is beginning to integrate with the Division of Student Success Services in looking at the student's engagement with the college and her progress through her program of studies, from recruitment through graduation or transfer.
- The evaluator is pleased to pass along the leadership team's commendations of the project staff for a job well done. The staff members have worked extremely hard, often with limited resources and institutional guidance, to achieve a working, coherent program with a recognizable scope of services valuable to students targeted by the project.

Professors Teaching *Avenue to Success* Course Sections (Ms. Karen Feldman, Ms. Barbara Lott, Ms. Helen McLane, Ms. Johanna Windmueller and Dr. Wright)

- Assigning the peer mentors to the course sections has afforded an opportunity to engage beginning students with experienced students to create personal bonds.
- Professors expressed a desire that students could be given some useful information before classes begin, such as the fact that homework will be required, and time should be allotted before final course schedules are set.
- An interview with peer mentors would help faculty direct efforts for maximum effect.
- Some peer mentors' presentation resulted in information overload.
- Peer mentors and professors could refer students to sources of help, such as financial aid.

- Continue efforts to improve communication among professors, mentors, the Academic Success Center and students would benefit all concerned.
- Presentation for math students should be tailored to math; math professors would be willing to support peer mentors in doing so.
- Faculty teaching *Avenue to Success* sections need an orientation with the Peer Mentor Supervisor to learn what to expect and to request services relevant to discipline.
- Encourage Peer Mentors to seek ways to strengthen the relationship with students as early as possible.
- Peer mentors and their Peer Mentor Supervisor need to work with faculty to adapt their presentations to the demands of the content and learning requirements specific to each course. This is especially true with mathematics.

Title III Staff (Dr. Stephen Wright, Ms. Marylen Jennings, Ms. Laura Ross, Mr. Paul Phelps, Mr. Jean-Paul Swiatkowski, Ms. Verna Legg, Ms. Yeok Eng Wendt) with Dr. Jim Henningsen (V.P. for Student Success Services) and Dr. Ann McGee, President.

Faculty Institute (Ms. Laura Ross)

- The Faculty Institute is much more focused on supporting college prep instructors. A recent activity was a reception at which Frank Albritton, James Henningsen, Mark Morgan, Marcia Roman and Dr. Wright shared their insights from analysis of CCSSE and led discussion highlighting how those results could shape the instruction in college preparatory courses.
- The Faculty Institute conducted a workshop presenting best practices in college preparatory programs.
- The Faculty Institute will use Title III funds to send all the college preparatory professors to the Florida Developmental Education Association conference in late October.
- The Faculty Institute will present its Teaching Success Series on six Tuesdays (5:00-6:15 pm) with optional credit:
 - Legal Issues
 - Classroom Management
 - The 21st Century Community College Student
 - Successful Teaching Strategies
 - Teaching with Technology
 - Self-evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness.
- New faculty members meet monthly to learn concepts, practices, and policies relevant to successful teaching.
- On Professional Development Day, five workshops will be presented for interested faculty:
 - Teaching Critical Thinking
 - Self-evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness
 - Round tables on Student Motivation and Classroom Ethics
 - Detecting Plagiarism
 - Electronic Research

- In considering further topics, it was suggested that the Institute consider adding sessions to enhance awareness of social and cultural diversity in a global perspective. FSU's 28 international campuses were noted as a possible model/resource for this undertaking.
- It was suggested that the Institute explore opportunities to inform administrators of teaching and learning issues.
- Consideration is being given to offering a version of the Phi Theta Kappa leadership course to the faculty and staff through the Institute.

Academic Success Center (Ms. Marylen Jennings)

- Ms. Jennings attended the Appalachian State University 2005 Kellogg Institute Seminar for Training and Certification of Developmental Educators in Boone, N.C. and found the experience rewarding and invigorating.
- The new Tutor Training Manual, comprising six modules and three quizzes, emphasizes teaching tutors the essentials of the tutoring process, awareness of student characteristics, tutor methodology, and ethical considerations.
- Awareness of the services offered by the ASC had increased among faculty and students.
- Tutoring is available for English, mathematics, science, and accounting.
- The Senior Mentor, Dr. Nancy Epifano, has made a significant contribution both for her ability to tutor students in difficult courses, and for her ability to train and encourage tutors with less education and experience than she has.
- Interviews are scheduled for additional tutors. Math and science tutors are in high demand.
- Training is provided for Tutors who serve the three campuses.
- The ASC staff is asking college preparatory instructors to bring their students to the Center for a get-acquainted session in the hope that once familiar with the resource, the students will return for needed tutoring.

Peer Mentors (Mr. Jean-Paul Swiatkowski)

- Five peer mentors are on duty, assigned to the Avenue to Success courses and spending assigned time in the ASC to be available to the students in the designated courses to which they are assigned. They have made presentations in class on campus resources, student life, and learning strategies. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students come to the ASC to benefit from conversations with the peer mentors.
- Students are surveyed as to their experience with peer mentors, and the survey results are collected for the Annual Performance Reports.

Supplemental Instruction (Mr. Paul Phelps)

- Supplemental Instruction is now available for college algebra, trigonometry, and organic chemistry.
- The professors' motivation and support are crucial for effective SI sessions.

- It was suggested to ask the professors with positive SI experience to share their results with their colleagues.
- Space in the ACS limits the amount of tutoring and Supplemental Instruction that can be offered.

Avenue to Success Program Visibility (Ms. Yeok Eng Wendt)

- Members of the project staff have developed informative and attractive newsletters and a user-friendly website.
- Bulletin boards near the project offices offer timely information.
- Literature racks in the ASC, the Faculty Institute resource room, and the *Avenue to Success* Office display project materials.
- The staff members have developed flow charts showing students, faculty and staff how students should progress through the college preparatory program.

Student Success Services Staff (Ms. Patry English, Ms. Marcia Roman, Dr. Travis Spaulding, Dr. Stephen Wright)

- Rather than make entry into college painful and frustrating, the college should do all it can to make the student's entry into the institution as pleasant and attractive as possible. Use student testimonials, incentives, and means for motivation.
- Counseling and Advising should develop strong linkages with the Academic Success Center. Because it comprises elements of both divisions, the Avenue to Success program should strive to build bridges between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. It is hoped that the Avenue to Success program can take the initiative to encourage cooperative practices between the two divisions.
- Counseling and Advising should be more intimately involved with the instructional program in general and with Avenue to Success in particular. As the ASC and peer mentors continue to develop, personnel from both groups should be very clear on whom to send for advising, what to ask to be done, and how to become more aware of services that are available
- Although the College is not sufficiently staffed to assign counselors and advisors to every department and program, the division of Student Success Services is capable of supporting the ongoing efforts of Avenue to Success. Specifically, Avenue to Success and Student Success Services should endeavor to
 - Inform the Student Success Services staff of planning and training of Peer Mentors
 - Provide the Student Success Services staff information on how Peer Mentors represent the Student Success Services department to the students
 - Keep the two counselors assigned to the Avenue to Success program involved
 - Keep tutors in the ASC and peer mentors apprised of what happens in the counseling centers so that they can make useful referrals.
 - In the first two weeks, Student Success Services staff members visit not only designated Avenue to Success sections, but also all college preparatory sections. Avenue to Success sections get two visits.

- The two offices (Avenue to Success and Student Success Services) should endeavor to establish strong communication. This would include meeting with the Title III program director and key people in charge of planning student success services.
- Work with faculty to determine when and how to refer students to various support offices. Similarly, both Avenue to Success and Student Success Services personnel should endeavor to create cross-functional offices, so that the ASC, peer mentor coordinator and tutor/SI coordinator use a common set of information to refer students.
- One way to lay a foundation of intentional, intrusive interventions for students involved in the Avenue to Success program is to use CCSSE to analyze areas of need, and to be intentional with strategies to improve both services and student access.
- If peer mentors are the conduits to direct students to Student Success Services, the Student Success Services staff needs knowledge of what Peer Mentors include and present to students.
- The Counseling and Educational Planning office supports the *Avenue to Success* program, and wishes for active collaboration and opportunities to assist when and where they are needed.