ACCESS Project

**ACCESS** addresses the issue of low retention rates among institutions of higher education and the need for improved access to higher education for increasingly diverse student populations.

### ACCESS Project Initiatives

- Educational success occurs at the intersection of good teaching (UDL) and students’ ownership of and responsibility for their learning (self-advocacy).
- Self-advocacy: a key predictor of success among diverse student populations.
- ACCESS Project: Development of self-advocacy web-based materials and handbook to guide students in taking initiative with their educational pursuits and connect with needed resources.
  
  http://accessproject.colostate.edu/sa/index.cfm
Presentation Goals

- To gain an understanding and appreciation for the challenges students face in college, particularly during freshman year.
- To learn how self-advocacy can assist students academically and beyond.
- To learn and discuss classroom strategies for promoting student self-advocacy skill development.

Self-Advocacy: definition of

- Self-Advocacy: building blocks
  - Know how to get what you need and want
  - Know what you need and want
  - Know yourself (self appraisal)

Self-Advocacy: application of

- Macro application
  - E.g. Deciding on a good career choice
    - Appraise interests, skills, aptitudes, job market, values, etc.
    - Identify tools, strategies, resources, etc. needed to conduct in-depth self-appraisal.
    - Make a step-by-step plan (incorporating tools, strategies, resources) with a timeline that will pave the way toward reaching the intended goal.
    - Take action by completing steps in the plan.
    - Review options and gather more information as necessary to make a meaningful and feasible decision.
    - Decision is made; start planning what you need to do to make your choice a reality.
Self-Advocacy: application of

Micro application
- E.g. Completing a class assignment

Assess
- Evaluate what the assignment entails, when it is due, and what the desired outcome/goal (desired grade) is.

Plan
- Plan (backwards) and schedule the steps for completion.

Act
- Work according to the plan to achieve the desired outcome.

Academic Persistence and Self-Advocacy: Why Promote Self-Advocacy?

Studies indicate that self-advocacy is a key predictor of student success. Good self-advocates (self-responsible learners) tend to experience greater academic satisfaction, higher grades, and have an increased level of ability to succeed in college and in life.

A campus environment of receptivity and support toward the development and strengthening of student self-advocacy leads to improved student satisfaction and success.

Academic Persistence and Retention

- CSU’s six year graduation rate (2003) is approximately 63%.

- According to CSU’s Retention Working Group Report, the greatest rate of those leaving the university occurs during the first year, “especially during the first ten weeks when the transition to college is not yet complete …”

Differences Between High School and College

**High School:** high degree of support and structure provided
- Classes meet 6 hours a day/5 days per week or approximately 30 hours a week
- Class sizes are usually small (20-30 students)
- Frequent small homework assignments with 1-2 hours of study time per day
- Schedule is structured by teachers, staff and parents
- Educational support services are built-in
- Adhering to a given schedule is important
- Teachers are available for assistance and questions during and after class
- Teachers often take attendance, monitor assignments, teach from the textbook and often use worksheets.

**College:** high degree of self-direction and autonomy required
- Classes meet 1-3 times per week with limited instructor contact for 28 weeks for total of 336 hours of in-class time
- Class sizes may be large (20-300 students)
- Large long-term projects with 3-4 hours per day of study time per 1 hour of class
- Schedule is planned by student.
- Student must take initiative to seek out needed academic support or accommodations
- Time management skills, motivation and self-discipline are required
- Professors are available during office hours and for appointments
- Professors rarely take attendance, challenge students to integrate knowledge from a variety of sources.

**Higher order thinking skills**

- Graduate School
- Synthesis
- Analysis
- Application
- Comprehension
- Knowledge

Each level builds on the foundation that precedes it. When a gap exists, students struggle.

**Contributing Student Characteristics**

- Inadequate preparation for college
- Poor study skills
- Lack of direction
- Low motivation
- Lack of life skills
- Attrition

Bridging the Gap
Strategies for Promoting Student Self-Advocacy

Classroom Culture
• Set a tone that is conducive to learning and practicing self-advocacy.

Class Format
• Provide structure and infuse teaching of self-advocacy skills into class format, e.g. critical thinking, time management, goal setting, building supports, problem solving, decision making.

Communication Style
• Communicate in a way that empowers and promotes student responsibility.

Self-Advocacy Strategies
Classroom Culture

What’s in the atmosphere?
• Intrinsic motivation and the development of self-advocacy skills thrive in an environment of security and (positive) relatedness.¹
  1. Setting the Stage
  2. Building Community


Classroom Culture
Setting the stage

• Create a nonjudgmental, respectful and trusting environment.
• Provide transparency and a true desire to help student’s learn.

….The most important part of that semester was not so much the curriculum, but the way you taught that class. From the first day, you treated students as peers, not as subjects. Further, your class was about learning to think independently and critically. In short, it was about learning to learn about yourself and the world around you.

Classroom Culture

Setting the Stage: building trust

- Create a sense of security (for self expression) and connectedness.
  - Introduction activity (ice breaker)
  - Introduce self and other support staff
  - Encourage self expression, communication of concerns, clarification questions, etc.

Classroom Culture

Setting the Stage: building ownership and trust

- Define Expectations
  - Instructor expectations (of students): Build student ownership, (e.g., brainstorm with students what they think Instructor expectations should be, for larger classes use 3-clickers to get feedback). Generate a list and post it in the classroom, visible to all (keep in mind fairness and respect to all).
  - What students can expect (from Instructor): Generate a list and ask students if they have anything to add, (e.g. be on time, be available for concerns and questions during office hours and by email, be respectful and non-judgmental, to be objective and fair in grading assignments, to listen to concerns and welcome questions). Post your list in the classroom.

Classroom Culture

Building Community

- Encourage student/instructor communication
- Encourage forming peer connections
- Use interactive activities
Classroom Culture
Building Community: student/instructor communication

- Be approachable
  - The student may need to be reassured that your focus is student-centered and therefore reflects wanting the best for students in their academic and life goals.
  - Show an interest in students, get to know them as individuals.
  - Tell students you are impressed by those that come forward to express concerns or ask for clarification.

- Provide options for communication
  - Students may be intimidated by instructors and often lack the confidence to approach instructors. Therefore, a variety of communication options may encourage greater interaction and, hence, improve understanding of class content, assignments, test focus, etc., (e.g., email, in-person office hours, phone, TA contact information, peer groups).

Classroom Culture
Building Community: peer connections

- Peer support/study group sign-up
- Plan interactive learning activities: small group activities, partner activities, group projects (assign roles for each group member), group discussions, etc.

Study Group sign-up example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Monday 12noon-1:00pm</td>
<td>LSC, 2nd floor lobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1.   | Wednesday 5-6pm |          |
| 2.   |      |          |
| 3.   |      |          |
| 4.   |      |          |
| 5.   |      |          |

| 1.   | Thursday 12noon-1pm |          |
| 2.   |      |          |
| 3.   |      |          |
| 4.   |      |          |
| 5.   |      |          |
Self-Advocacy Strategies

class format

- Syllabus: a user-friendly tool that clearly delineates what can be expected.
- Assignments: include a framework/structure (e.g., rubric) that will assist students in successful assignment completion.
- Test Prep: review, relate, refer.
- Reinforce the power of interdependency.

Class Format: Syllabus

- Provide structure that empowers students.
  - Provide course details that allow the student to plan and take control of their learning outcomes, (e.g., grading protocol (rubrics), a visual timeline of all class test and assignment due dates).
  - Increase motivation for learning: along with course goals and objectives include an exciting statement of the practical relevancy of course content.

Class Format: assignments

- Provide structure that empowers students.
  - Provide detailed descriptions of what you are asking of students.
  - Give examples (tools for success) and have them readily available.
  - Refer to resources: on campus, websites, people, books, articles, etc.
    - E.g. student’s writing is difficult to comprehend. Instead of handing out one poor grade after the next, refer them to a resource such as a relevant book, a campus resource office, a helpful workshop, an on-line site, etc.
  - Offer options for demonstration of learning (grading rubrics for each option).
Assignment with structure (example)

Assignment:
- Please read and assess the following scenario. Write a one to two page paper detailing who you feel is responsible for the situation and why.

Assignment (increased structure):
- Read the scenario once through.
- Reread & highlight the key points.
- Identify each person’s part in the situation.
- Determine the level of responsibility you feel each person had and justify your decisions.
- Organize and write your paper.

Additionally, an example of a completed paper based on a different scenario could be provided.

Expected Outcomes of Providing Increased Assignment Structure

- Provides clarification of assignment expectations.
- Improves student rate of successful assignment completion.
- Demonstrates and teaches the valuable self-advocacy skill of how to break tasks into smaller, manageable pieces (planning and organization) – leads to increased academic confidence.

While the assignment expectation remains the same, the probability for success increases. Additionally, students learn, through demonstration, how to organize and plan by breaking tasks into smaller, step-by-step pieces.

Class Format: test prep

- Provide structure that empowers:
  - Reduce anxiety and build confidence - review key points to be covered.
  - Teach and encourage students how to get what they need and want by referring them to (or suggesting how to find) resources when appropriate, (e.g., campus and website resources for learning test taking and/or study skills).
  - Teach students to use the self-advocacy model to prepare for tests.
Test Prep
Using the Self-Advocacy Model

Know Yourself
• ASSESS: Assess current knowledge, strengths and weaknesses in relation to the testing focus areas.

Know what you need & want
• PLAN: Determine test goal (grade desired). Identify what is needed to reach that goal (e.g., study timeline by topic, help from peers or others, clarification, test taking strategies training).

Know how to get what you need & want
• ACT: Develop and follow a plan.

Class Format: feedback loops

- Mini surveys: How are things going? What would you like to learn more about? What is confusing? Do you feel that the test was fair and why or why not? For next class, submit one question about today’s class session.
- I>clickers
  - Clarification
  - Determine student knowledge base
  - Collaborative learning use: think, pair, share
  - Increase information processing

I>Clickers: information processing

- Teaching self-advocacy style involves:
  A. Creating a secure and relational classroom environment.
  B. Providing structure and clarification within the class format.
  C. Using a communication style that empowers others.
  D. All of the above.
  E. I have no frikin idea.
Class Format

- foster interdependency

- Demonstrate the value of collaborative learning (when content is conducive to a collaborative learning style) – encourages higher order thinking skills particularly among diverse student groups where perspectives differ.

- Encourage asking questions, being a part of a class study group, using campus resources.

- Include networking as part of class assignments, (e.g., interview a member of the community, develop a survey based on the input of relevant professionals, assess the pros and cons of a community-based program or initiative).

Communication Style

- promoting student responsibility

- Model assertive communication and active listening skills.

- Ask leading questions.

- Redirect complaints and concerns.

Communication Style

- promoting student responsibility: ask questions

- Use leading questions when a student is stuck.
  - Identify the real issue or problem, address, review/clarify, refer to a resource.

- E.g. Scenario #1
  - Student: I don’t understand this assignment.
  - Instructor: What is it that you don’t understand?
  - Student: I don’t understand what you are asking me to do.
  - Instructor: What part don’t you understand? (I.D. issue)
  - Student: The whole thing.
  - Instructor: Okay; so let’s go over it. You are to write a 2-3 page essay conveying the implications of your earlier evaluation of the topic in question. Do you understand how to do this? (I.D. issue)
Communication Style
ask leading questions continued

- Student: No.
- Instructor: To convey the related implications of an evaluation means to make a hypothesis based on your earlier assessment of the issues. So, for example, etc. ... (Address) Does this make sense? (Clarify understanding) To learn more about understanding this go to www. or visit ---- to set an appointment, etc. (Refer to a resource)

Scenario #2
- Student: I don’t understand this assignment.
- Instructor: What is it that you don’t understand?
- Student: Why do we have to do this when we already covered practically the same thing in an earlier assignment?
- Instructor: Why do you think the two assignments are so alike?

Communication Style
ask leading questions continued

- Student: Both assignments are asking to write about the same topic.
- Instructor: That is true, but one is asking that you evaluate the topic in question and one is asking that you relate the implications of your earlier evaluation. Do you understand the difference?
- Student: Oh, I’m sorry. I misunderstood the instructions. I guess I didn’t read them very well.
- Instructor: Hum, does that explain why you failed the last test?

Communication Style
promoting student responsibility: redirect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim (struggling student)</th>
<th>Creator (successful self-advocate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I hate group projects; I always end up doing most of the work.</td>
<td>In my last group project I ended up doing most of the work. This time I will suggest that we establish our individual roles and responsibilities from the very start.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communication Style
promoting student responsibility: redirect

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<tr>
<th>Victim (struggling student)</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My roommate played loud music all night so I couldn't concentrate and get the assignment done.</td>
<td>Since my roommate will not agree to lower the stereo volume, I am going to the library to finish the last part of my assignment. Tomorrow I will purchase a sound proof headset.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Self-Advocate Attributes

Self-advocates:
- Accept responsibility for their situation.
- See obstacles as opportunities for learning.
- Plan and take action to improve their situation. They flex and easily adapt.
- Accomplish their goals despite adversity.

Discussion

- Other strategies?
- Common challenges?
- Solutions?
In Summary

- Self-advocacy is a critical component to academic success and life success.
- As educators we can encourage SA through:
  - Creating a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to practicing and developing self-advocacy.
  - Creating a format that provides structure and purpose.
  - Communicating in ways that empower students to take responsibility for their own learning and life in general.

References and Resources