

## Foundations of Excellence

### Campus Culture Dimension Report

#### Pulaski Technical College

Foundations Institutions make new students a high priority for faculty and staff. A culture of responsibility for the experiences of new students characterizes these institutions. This culture is realized through high-quality instruction, services, and support as well as substantial interaction with students both inside and outside the classroom. Campus leaders nurture this culture and support it by appropriate institutional recognition and rewards.

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#### **Current Situation:**

At the present time, there are no printed resources at Pulaski Technical College that support and outline solid expectations for faculty and staff involvement with new students outside the classroom. Although there are many ways in which faculty and staff could interact, the administration does not clearly define how that interaction should occur.

Pulaski Technical College is currently understaffed in both the classroom and the administrative offices. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to expect faculty and staff to initiate interactions with students due to their current workload of teaching classes, serving on committees, holding office hours, and attending division and department meetings. Many full-time faculty members are teaching a number of overload classes as well. Some faculty members are teaching overloads by choice while others are teaching overloads because part-time faculty members cannot be found to teach classes during certain hours of the day. For example, every full-time faculty member in the mathematics department teaches a total of 21 hours of classes each week while holding other responsibilities to the college. Finding part-time instructors during the late morning and early afternoon hours is very difficult so full-time faculty must step in and teach these courses. Other departments have similar issues. Teaching overload classes is helping the college by hiring fewer instructors and providing more of a "standard" for the classes; that is, the material in a certain course is taught in a similar way with common goals and objectives. It is also focusing on quantity rather than quality; this is the case in many different aspects of the college that will be discussed later in this report. Teaching extra classes and serving the college in other ways mentioned above takes away from each instructor's time to initiate contact and interact with students. The office hours that each instructor is required to maintain is not effective in fostering meaningful interactions with students. Most instructors see less than three different students, if any at all, each week during their office hours. Students at the two-year community college need and deserve more attention outside of the classroom. However, most of our students have many other responsibilities outside of school such as working full-time and caring for children that they have little time outside of the classroom to interact with faculty and staff even if they were more available. In addition, there is no evidence of the expectations of faculty or staff in a document outside of a contract regarding office hours or interactions with new students. The committee is not recommending that contracts be changed to include a specific job description or duties, however.

There are numerous adjunct faculty teaching classes on campus as well. According to college statistics as of November 27, 2006, there are 356 (76%) part-time faculty compared to 115 (24%) full-time faculty. Some of these adjunct faculty only teach one class while others teach as many as seven classes. The expectation of involvement outside the classroom for adjunct faculty is basically non-existent in any documentation across campus. The adjunct faculty are on campus for only a limited time during the week and most are not vested in the long-term with Pulaski Technical College. It would be nearly impossible to have a faculty member vested simply by having them teach three hours per week. The committee recommends more involvement and availability of adjunct faculty on campus because they make up the bulk of the college's employees. With an estimated enrollment of 10,000 by the year 2010, the college must create more full-time faculty positions each year than at the current pace.

A large portion of the student body at Pulaski Technical College is high-risk students. Many students work full-time and have other obligations. These responsibilities, in addition to attending class, make it difficult for them to be truly vested and enhance the culture on campus. Most students simply come to class and then leave without any influential interactions on campus. Our goal must be to keep these students on campus longer to experience college life and bring a sense of community and campus culture to the college. Currently, the college does offer support in the form of free tutoring, advising, and counseling, but many of our students simply do

not take advantage of the services offered or do not know these services exist. According to the CPI, 52% of new students are served by the Learning Assistance Center. Some students feel they should take advantage of the college's services, but there is often no time for them to take full advantage of it. Additional data indicates that the courses with the largest new student enrollment have some of the highest failure rates on campus. The top five new student enrollment courses, followed by their DWFI failure rates, are: Composition I (44%), Elementary Algebra (55%), Speech Communication (41%), College Seminar (35%), and English Composition Fundamentals (38%). Additional resources must be offered and mandated for students who are failing these courses. Data indicates that 21% of developmental math courses are taught by full-time faculty, 13% of developmental reading courses are taught by full-time faculty, and 14% of developmental writing courses are taught by full-time faculty. As stated earlier, the trend of fewer full-time faculty must change to provide the best educational experience possible for our students.

Currently, there are students who need to be reached and given extra help for their classes and advice on their future college experience. However, there are few or no policies in place that mandate or even recommend these students to get the extra attention needed. The word mandate often evokes negative connotations, but many changes are needed to improve student success rates. After a student's first semester, they are able to register without the advice and direction of an advisor. As a result, there are students currently enrolled in classes for which they are not academically prepared. This practice is one that sets students up for failure and produces a negative college experience. Student's ability to enroll in classes without being advised is a convenience that often times is the reason for their failure. Changes in advising is one of the greatest challenges our college faces, but it is also the most important to foster a change in campus culture. The committee recommends better advising by requiring all students to have the same advisor from the first day of their college experience to the last. Each student will be required to see their advisor at least one time each semester to acquire a PIN number. This PIN number would allow students to register for their classes the next semester. A new PIN number would be issued each semester.

At Pulaski Technical College, faculty and staff are often bombarded with the enrollment figures. The college is constantly working to raise the enrollment numbers, sometimes at the expense of our current students. The college fails to understand the ramifications of rapidly increasing enrollment. The push for greater enrollment numbers at Pulaski Technical College takes the focus away from quality and stresses quantity instead. Many services the college offers such as advising are currently stretched beyond capacity. There are not enough staff/faculty members and building space to accommodate the number of students at the present time and in the future. There are many ramifications of increased enrollment in a short period of time. As the student to teacher ratio grows, less focus is placed on the individual student and more on the class as a whole. This is leading to an atmosphere of a four-year university rather than a two-year college. However, four-year universities devote more resources into advising than the current trend at Pulaski Technical College. Administrative staff are also affected as they struggle to serve the increasing number of students with questions or concerns. High enrollment numbers are great for the college, but only if we have the resources to effectively serve and promote student matriculation. Currently, the focus on enrollment numbers is taking away from the fact that our college is struggling in other areas.

Our short and long-term goal must be to raise the number of full-time faculty and staff. There is a committee that has been formed to examine ways in which we can increase enrollment numbers for the fall semester. The obsession with enrollment figures is self-defeating, and is probably leading to enrollment being less than it could be because of high levels of attrition. The focus must change from increasing enrollment to serving our current students, making them successful, and providing them the ultimate college experience. Then, enrollment will increase as the quality of education increases. In addition, the funding for our college is very low, and tuition is extremely low compared to other colleges in the state. An increase in tuition would benefit the college in a number of ways from hiring more full-time faculty members to providing more support services, which in turn, creates successful students.

Lastly, the students and employees at PTC should have pride in our college. However, it seems many may not be so proud. We believe this is because of the problems discussed in the paragraphs above. Students, faculty, and staff should see the promotion of our college and the success stories of our college everywhere on campus and in the community. As the issues included in our findings are addressed, more pride should appear on campus. An honors program should be formed to increase student pride on campus. Banners, signs, rituals, and ceremonies which are reinforced by symbols, publications, and common messages repeated by college authority figures should be a common sight. We believe as more action items are acted upon through the Foundations of Excellence, pride will naturally increase but other ways (outlined above) should be addressed. Pride motivates individuals, and it should always be encouraged in the workplace. A proud faculty, staff, and student body will produce a more positive campus culture. Not only is pride a motivator, but it is often contagious.

#### **Areas of Concern:**

Ø Training for advisors is not always consistent and students who do seek advising may be told different information.

Ø College Seminar is required of students who have developmental education courses. The course should be altered to focus on these students that need special attention.

Ø The current attendance policy is not used consistently. Students are often told if they stop attending class, they will be dropped with a WX. However, this is not always accurate. Faculty may choose to not drop a student from the class and issue an F at the end of the semester instead. There is some confusion among students regarding the attendance policy.

Ø There is not enough full-time faculty and staff to meet our current needs. As a result, the faculty and staff are not able to devote enough time and energy to each student.

Ø There are no orientation programs for new students. An orientation program often helps foster a sense of pride by welcoming them to the college. An orientation program would also help to promote a certain level of comfort for our students regarding the approachability of our faculty and staff.

Ø There are no required orientation programs for students wishing to enroll in online courses. Many students who enroll in online courses do not have the study skills and computer knowledge necessary to complete the class assignments and projects.

Ø The Faculty/Staff Handbook and faculty/staff documents do not outline expectations for involvement with students outside the classroom.

Ø Currently, our catalog does not clearly define campus-wide goals, objectives, and policies for new and at-risk students.

Ø The Academic Alert Form that currently exists is not used consistently or systematically and often creates a hostile and confrontational situation for both the student and faculty member.

Ø The push for higher enrollment focuses only on quantity and not quality.

Ø There are no campus wide learning goals for classes involving new students.

Ø Late registration results in students who are advised quickly and placed in courses based on availability rather than need.

### **Summary of Evidence:**

Currently, there are only four full-time employees in the Counseling and Advisement Services Office at Pulaski Technical College. With enrollment over 8,000 students, drastic changes in advising is highly recommended and is critical to the future success of the college. During late registration, most faculty members also advise to assist in the demand. Faculty members are not properly trained in advisement; training is accomplished quickly or is nonexistent. Our current advising situation is not enough to truly advise the student population successfully. The advisors are not able to give each student the attention to which they are entitled as a PTC student. This evidence is a direct result of quantity versus quality. Our college works very hard increasing student enrollment but is not providing the resources needed for student success. If student success is the primary focus, then enrollment will naturally increase. Our evidence suggests that students are enrolled in classes in which they may not be prepared. Many times this happens because a student wants to be full-time but is taking a number of developmental classes. There are few options left for this type of student and many are placed in courses for which they are not adequately prepared. Ideally, if a student is taking three or more developmental courses, they should not be allowed to take any other class on campus until those basic skills are mastered. Unfortunately, Pulaski Technical College does not stress the importance of the one-on-one advising.

Additional evidence comes in the form of the Foundations of Excellence Faculty-Staff Survey. The grades are fairly low, and the data shows just how much improvement is needed in this area. The grades are listed below:

- The degree to which institutional leaders think faculty involvement with new students is important: C
- The degree to which department/unit leaders think faculty involvement with new students is important: C
- The degree to which colleagues think faculty involvement with new students is important: C
- The degree to which faculty members think that excellence in teaching is recognized, acknowledged, and/or rewarded: D
- The degree to which department/unit leaders think that excellence in teaching is recognized, acknowledged, and/or rewarded: D
- The degree to which institution leaders think that excellence in teaching is recognized, acknowledged, and/or rewarded: D
- The degree to which position descriptions address faculty responsibilities related to new students: D
- The degree to which candidate interviews address faculty responsibilities related to new students: D
- The degree to which faculty orientation addresses faculty responsibilities related to new students: D

The Faculty-Staff Handbook does not mention expectations regarding involvement with students outside the classroom. All evidence indicates there is no emphasis placed on the importance of truly connecting with our new students. We do not publish common learning goals for our faculty and staff, and there is not a consistent purpose on which we should focus.

The number of full-time faculty and staff is too low. The ratio of part-time faculty to full-time faculty is 76% to 24%. This has been mentioned numerous times; however it is a significant piece of evidence. Our faculty members are overloaded and thus have little motivation or time to be involved with students outside the classroom. The full-time staff is also overwhelmed in their daily activities and service to the college.

Finally, the college is operating like a technical college even though the majority of our students are not acquiring technical degrees. Two-thirds of our students are transferring to other colleges. As a result, our college must function as though we are preparing students to transfer to other colleges and universities. The college currently does not have an orientation that transitions students to the college level. Instead, we are operating in a way that only prepares them to obtain technical degrees, and a change in policies and in administrative thinking is needed. Our college must start acting like a comprehensive college which assigns high priority, but not exclusive function to the two-year transfer college rather than strictly a technical college. The line of thinking must change now. Otherwise, our college will never move forward in the way that is needed. In addition, faculty and staff interactions must help to transition our students to a true college environment because that is what we have become.

## Recommended Grade: D

### Recommended Action Items:

- Critical Items (*High priority*)
  1. Hire more full-time faculty and staff
  2. All advisors are trained the same way with consistent information
  3. All first-year students are given an advisor who will remain their advisor throughout their academic career at PTC
  4. Establish a mandatory orientation program for all first-year students using student leaders
  5. Require an orientation for all students enrolling in online courses.
  6. Enforce board policy regarding the enrollment of students after the first class day
  7. All students must speak with an advisor and obtain a PIN number before registering for classes each semester
  8. Require each student to have a Student I.D., and include names and photos of each student on faculty rosters
  9. Offer an Honors Program and specialty courses to attract different types of learners
  10. Use the college catalog consistently to ensure that new students are fully aware of all PTC policies and the expectations of becoming a student
  
- Important Items (*Medium priority*)
  - o First year students should meet with advisor one hour per semester for advisement and counseling
  - o Enforce a limit on the number of times a student can take a developmental education class without achieving a C or better
  - o Create a campus-wide attendance policy that consistently uses the WX or F assignment among all departments
  - o If students do not succeed in online courses, they may not take another online course unless they have or until they achieve a GPA of 2.0 or better
  - o Promote interactions between all academic divisions to bridge the gap between technical programs and transfer education
  - o Create a campus using landscaping and signage that fosters community
  - o Create new Faculty/Staff and adjunct handbooks to include expectations for involvement with new students
  
- Suggested Items (*Low priority*)
  - o Be intentional about advisors assigned to developmental first year students
  - o Establish a comprehensive organizational structure for coordinating first year curriculum, policies, and service
  - o Look closely at developmental courses and define clear objectives to make the transition from class to class smoother
  - o Require DISCOVERY be part of all College Seminar syllabi
  - o Use the Academic Alert form consistently and systematically and require that faculty communicate midterm grades to their students
  - o Publish a resource, both online and in print, that includes office phone numbers and contact information for all faculty (full-time and part-time) and staff
  - o Recruit presenters and educators that are outside the PTC community to come to campus and speak on best practices and professional development in the area of new student success
  - o Include a statement concerning involvement with new students in job advertisements and job interviews
  
- Committee Discussions (*Low priority*)
  - ? Require College Seminar of all new students
  - ? Require Computer skills class for all new students
  - ? Cap the number of students per class so more one-on-one time may be given to each student
  - ? Create and promote new classes for first year students...especially students needing two or more developmental courses
  - ? Create classes to reflect campus culture
  - ? Create a better sense of communication regarding first year students using newsletters and other publications
  - ? Culture regarding technical certificates v. transfer programs
  - ? Promote greater faculty/staff involvement at campus events
  - ? Give points in the FEP for attendance of campus events
  - ? Campus administrative leaders should make it possible for departments to sponsor or volunteer for campus events
  - ? Promote a culture of commitment and accountability that fosters a sense of pride and mutual respect
  - ? Need for residential communities
  - ? Better information regarding faculty/staff expectations for involvement with first year students
  - ? Stress the importance of mentoring students...not just classroom involvement or involvement in the administrative offices