

Organization Dimension Report

Pulaski Technical College

Foundations Institutions provide a comprehensive, coordinated, and flexible approach to the new student experience through effective organizational structures and policies. These structures and policies guide and align all aspects of the new student experience. Through effective partnerships, critical stakeholders such as instructional, administrative, and student services units provide a coherent experience for new students that is enhanced by ongoing faculty and staff development activities and appropriate budgetary arrangements.

Committee Co-Chairs:

Clark Atkins, Director of Admissions
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Committee Members:

Terrill Beckerman, Instructor of Computer Information Systems
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Current Situation:

Pulaski Technical College does a good job of identifying "first-time to institution students" (FTI). For the purposes of this self-study "First-time" students are defined as students with less than 30 credit hours who are new to Pulaski Technical College regardless if they are a first-time entering freshman or transfer student. These students are identified upon application and enrollment at PTC. Further, all first-time entering freshmen are identified on the class roster with an asterisk (*). This is a new development as of the Fall 2006 semester. While this is a welcome development, there are still two areas of concern. First, while first-time entering freshmen are identified on the roster, the other half of the FTI student cohort (i.e. transfer students) is not identified on class rosters. Secondly, at this time no training has been provided to faculty or advisers as to how they might utilize this information in assisting students or in early intervention.

Pulaski Technical College uses targeted communication to prospective new students by providing students with an information packet which includes a view book, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and Steps for Enrollment. Further, information provided after student applies for admission includes a missing document letters generated if all required items are not received, an acceptance letter when file is complete, and additional information regarding SOAR. When students attend SOAR they are provided information regarding their degree plan. There exists no evidence that a consistent communication flow exists once the student enrolls with one notable exceptions. A letter from the Dean of Enrollment Services/Registrar was developed and mailed to FTI students for the first time at the beginning of the Fall 2006 semester. In future semesters this letter should be mailed to all FTI students. The purpose of this letter is to remind students of important dates and deadlines and to welcome them to PTC.

There is currently no consistent early warning system nor is there an early warning system targeted to first time students. There are some instructor/department specific systems in place.

A. Academic Alert form

1. initiated by the instructor
2. can be utilized at any time during the term
3. no incentive to provide this information to students
4. no consistent departmental support for this forms use
5. can we document that providing this form gives a positive result

Mid term grades were provided at one time, but have been discontinued. There was inconsistent participation by instructors in providing mid term grades. Services to help students with poor midterm grades were at best extremely limited. The was question as to whether midterm grades helped the student.

Online grade books would seemingly solve many of the issues related to informing students as to their progress in the class(es).

Students could access their grades at any time. Today's students are accustomed to checking their or their child's progress online as many school districts have gone to online grade books for their schools. The question remains, however, as to whether or not all instructors would maintain an online grade book. The College's administration would have to require every instructor keep an online grade book and should be part of that instructor's performance evaluation. The key to an early alert system whether it be mid term grades or access to an online grade book is the referencing of students to places where they might receive assistance. The awarding of the Title III grant from the federal government should include a component that will provide for some early alert initiatives.

SOAR (Student Orientation Advising & Registration) is geared toward FTI and returning students. FTI students must participate in SOAR. Advising is not required after enrolling the first semester. Increasingly, current PTC students not in their first semester at PTC are choosing to utilize the advisement services provided in the SOAR Center. Unfortunately, at peak times there does not exist a level of staffing to support advisement of all students during the five to eight week period in which SOAR is open each fall and spring. This would seem to suggest that year round advising be made available and properly funded through additional full-time advisement positions.

While some individual academic departments at Pulaski Technical College may be monitoring their student's degree progress and completion, the organization committee sees no current college-wide effort at Pulaski Tech. Further, assessment cannot really provide documentation to prove that there is monitoring toward degree completion as assessment deals more with meeting

particular course objectives, not degree objectives. On a positive note, degree audit will be available soon. It will be available through Campus Connect for students and advisors. Training is currently scheduled during the fall 2006 and spring 2007 semesters.

The availability of student services currently varies from office to office. The Learning Assistance Lab and the Counseling Office is available with limited extended hours, Testing Services is open every Tues. & Wed. from 8 am-8 pm and the first Sat. of each month from 9 am-1 pm.

The Admissions/Registrar and Financial Aid Offices are open Monday-Thursday from 8 am-7 pm and Friday from 8 am-4:30 pm. Except during peak times at the beginning of the semester, the Business Office has no extended hours. Departmental and faculty office hours are currently confined to the regular business hours of 8 am-4:30 pm Monday through Friday.

The 2006-07 Catalog states that "any student who has taken a course may repeat the course in order to change the original grade. A "W", "WF", or "F" received for courses will be considered as courses attempted not earned. All courses attempted (including repeats) will remain on transcript. The last grade earned will be used in computing the grade point average."

Identification of students not meeting academic standards is done immediately following grades posting after each fall/spring semester. Letters are immediately sent notifying the student of their probation/suspension status.

If a student has not attended PTC in 2 years, then they must reapply for admission. They are required to be advised through SOAR and register for classes at that time rather than through Campus Connect.

Although there seemed to be very little by way of internal partnerships that the committee could name, the faculty/staff survey seemed to rank us higher in this area. Why would the general faculty/staff population say positive things about these relationships when we cannot find that they exist?

Finally, there is not someone who specifically manages the funding for first year students. In the budget process there are very few who would have the high level overview of where our resources are allocated. The organization committee questions whether the campus should evaluate how the budget is adopted. The Budget Committee determines who gets funded and for what. The amount of money we have to utilize each year is not determined until later. Is funding information provided too late to make changes in how we do things or what we offer? Ultimately it is the president and the vice president for finance who make the decisions on budget priorities.

Currently there is no management in place of the first year experience, no voice in funding, and no structure by which to determine what is appropriate funding. Also, there is no line item in the budget for "new students".

We have recently added a full time person for student activities. Additionally, we have added the new Dean of Students position and we have grant funding for TRIO and Career Pathways. These are positive additions to the College and they enhance the first year experience for students, however, the College continues to be vastly underfunded in the area of student services. The Learning Assistance Center indicates that funding is inadequate with no budget for full time professional tutors, more tutors on all campus's, new technical equipment (i.e. DVD players), and travel budget for professional development activities. Counseling and Advising manages the advising of all FTI and current PTC students. Advising became a requirement for all FTI students during the summer of 2005, however, no full-time positions were funded and the SOAR Center exists on part-time positions made up primarily of adjunct faculty. Additional faculty (many of which have never advised students) are used during late registration.

Summary of Evidence:

PI 2.1:

First-time Freshmen are coded a "1" and Entering Transfer Students are coded a "3"
Research CPI
Institutional Memory
Student Survey

PI 2.2:

Graduation rate: Per Kellye Mashburn the overall graduation rate is 19%.

Posted office hours for offices on campus
2006-07 Pulaski Technical College Catalog
CPI

Committee Research Findings:

Per our research the following percentage break down of grades was reviewed from spring 2006

27.3%- A
20.2%- B
13.9%- C
4.1%- D
10.6%- F
10.9%- W (Student Initiated Withdrawal from course after 11th Class Date)
9.6%- WX (Instructor Initiated Withdrawal from course after 11th Class Date)
0.3%- NC (No Credit)
3.0%- DC (Developmental Credit)

0.1%- Audited course

PI 2.3:

Contrary to the response on Q027 of the Faculty/Staff Survey the Organization Committee cannot provide an example of where permanent or long-term partnerships currently exist at PTC. Further, the organization committee cannot substantiate the survey findings for Q023 and suspect that in reality the college should rate lower.

PI 2.4:

According to the Controller, funding is inadequate. We have knowledge that we are the lowest funded two-year college in the state. Evidence from various departments suggests that they have ideas for improvement and professional development that simply do not get funding. This also is contrary to Faculty/Staff Survey results which give PTC an average ratings of "Moderate" for questions Q024-Q026.

Areas of Concern:

The college does not currently provide a course that acts as a "gateway" to PTC for those students not taking developmental courses. Further, currently policy does not enforce the requirement that students who are required to take College Seminar do so in their first semester.

Students are allowed to register after classes have begun. This has been done in the past in violation of College policy in an effort to boost enrollment numbers. This practice is not in the best interest of the student and their potential success in college. Allowing students to register late creates a "snowball effect" where underprepared students are allowed to enroll, many times without adequate advising and financial resources. These students then struggle academically in class (sometimes playing catch-up) and often end up withdrawing from school or dropping many of their classes. If the student is receiving financial aid this can result in serious implications in the future

Training for faculty in the area of academic advisement has been lackluster at best. Some academic departments have sent new faculty with no training in advisement to act as the primary advisor for their department/division.

Currently the Academic Alert form is the only type of early warning initiative that exists at PTC. This form is only used sporadically and many instructors are not even aware of its existence. Those that are aware of the form are not sure how it is used. Mid term grades are no longer provided and therefore many students have no awareness of how they are doing in a particular course. Online grade books are available and could be used as a type of early alert system for faculty and students.

Currently an identifier for first-time entering freshmen are on class rosters, however, transfer students who are new to PTC are not included in this cohort and no faculty training on how to utilize this information has been provided.

We provide students with academic advisement upon entry to Pulaski Tech, however, we do not require students to be advised after the first semester. Many students still need and want that advisement, but due to the number of advisors available, their part-time employment status, and the limited availability of days (4-5 weeks in the fall and 6-8 weeks in the summer) in which the SOAR Center is open, students are not being provided with the level of attention they deserve.

Students are currently being allowed to repeat successfully completed courses perpetually and are receiving financial aid for these classes. This violates federal financial aid regulations and is artificially inflating some students' grade-point average as only the last grade earned will be used in computing the grade-point average. Further if the student previously earned a passing grade and then fails the course upon a subsequent attempt the earned credit will be invalidated and the grade of "F" will be used in computing the student's grade-point average.

Pulaski Technical College is fortunate because it has several people committed to moving the college forward and trying to improve the college through the Foundations of Excellence self-study. Committee work can be effective in studying the situation and recommending steps in which to improve the college, however, in the long-term a committee structure becomes inefficient and slow when trying to implement recommended action items. Pulaski Technical College needs a single champion to oversee the implementation of many of the recommended action items. This person needs to be full-time well funded position member of the administration that has a seat in the budgeting process.

Summary:

Pulaski Technical College is a young institution that has been in existence as a two-year college for slightly more than fifteen years. Like most teenagers Pulaski Tech is struggling to find its identity and like an adolescent going through puberty has seen rapid growth and change over the past five years. It is this sudden growth and change coupled with its youth as an institution that has caused the college to straddle the fence between its identity as a vo-tech school and a true institution of higher learning.

To truly mature as an institution Pulaski Tech must embrace the philosophy of an institution of excellence which requires that the college commit the resources, both time and financial, to transform the first-year experience at PTC. If students are our greatest commodity, then more time and attention should be spent on both orienting them to the institution and providing them with truly intrusive advising that puts them on the correct path to a degree. Further, current policies regarding repetition of courses and the practice of allowing students to register for classes after classes have begun should be given serious consideration. Finally, like most teenagers a good mentor and person of authority can make a tremendous impact on that teenager. Pulaski Tech needs someone who

can help move this college forward and reach its full potential as both a institution of excellence and a quality institution of higher learning.

Recommended Grade: D

Recommended Action Items:

- Gateway Course : Develop Unique Course (*High priority*)

The committee acknowledges the need for fostering the skills necessary for a student to achieve success at PTC. Therefore, it is recommended that a unique gateway course that will serve all PTC students be developed. College seminar is an excellent course, and the committee wishes to more fully require college seminar for those students who have been identified as needing developmental education. We do NOT wish to recommend college seminar for all students. A course aimed primarily at developmental students may not meet the needs of the entire PTC student body. Instead, action item number one is to develop a unique introductory course that would be beneficial to the broader PTC student population.

While the committee recognizes the importance of a comprehensive orientation program, we do not believe it should be mandatory. Rather, the current online orientation program should be expanded to include a campus based orientation program and incentives provided to students to encourage attendance. Further, the committee believes that components that comprise the orientation program be integrated into and be among the first topics discussed as part of the recommended gateway course.

- Resource Manual: For Training, Professional Development, & Reference. (*High priority*)

This committee recommends the production of a comprehensive resource manual to use for training, prof. development, & reference. The organizational dimension committee believes that students deserve an efficient, knowledgeable, and prepared faculty and staff. This idea goes beyond just being proficient in a particular subject matter. Our committee knows that a commitment to students means being committed to learning the workings of the college. The operation of any college, especially a growing young college like PTC, requires a dynamic, aggressive commitment to continued training and professional development. Although our faculty / staff survey seemed to indicate the general sense that employees were aware of the workings of the college, it is believed that this knowledge is gained through individual hard won commitment rather than a systematic, institutional method of acclimation.

- Course Repeat Policy: Revise (*High priority*)

Currently students are allowed to repeat courses without limit. This practice runs counter to the philosophy of providing students with an affordable education and excellent student service. By allowing students to continue taking classes that they have successfully passed PTC is taking student/federal money, raising our credit hour count and facilitating a process by which students are artificially raising their GPA. Additionally, there may be financial aid implications to the practice of allowing students to get paid for courses they have successfully passed. The committee recommends that the College pass a policy that prohibits students from repeating a course in which a grade of "C" or higher has been achieved.

- Academic Advising: Availability (*High priority*)

The college should be committed to providing tools for assisting students in their goal of success. The committee believes that instructors play a huge role in making this success possible. The committee members also understand that students may need a view of their performance that is more comprehensive than just one class. For this reason, the committee recommends that PTC considers intervention when a student is placed on probation, intervention when a student repeats coursework, and attention to degree completion. To address these three components of student success, the committee recommends academic advising be provided year round.

- Registration: Establish Strict Deadline (*High priority*)

The organization committee believes that late registration is hurting first year students because they are being brought into the PTC system with little to no orientation to the school. In this way, they are being set up for failure. For this reason, we believe the current PTC policy of no application/registration after the start of classes should be strictly enforced. We believe this action item will also help our student body thoughtfully consider their educational options.

- FYE Position (*High priority*)

This committee recommends the creation of a well-funded position to oversee the implementation and continued focus of the FYE. All of these action items will require a commitment of not only time but also college financial resources. Our current committee structure is gaining strength and commitment from both faculty and staff participants. Eventually, an existing committee such as the Student Success Committee may be able to monitor, guide, and create policy that will address the particular concerns of PTC's first year student population. It is this committee's opinion however, at least in this initial phase of development, that improvement and change can best be fostered by the creation of a new position to coordinate and implement the action items of the Foundations of Education study. This is our final and perhaps most important high priority action item.

- Early Alert System (*Medium priority*)

The committee has found in our research that students often do not have any awareness of how they are doing in a class, or even if they do know they are not doing well, there is a sense that they are uncertain about what to do if they wish to improve their performance. Therefore, the college should provide a simple early alert system at a department level that will offer not only grade information but also tools for intervention.

- Identifier on Rosters (*Medium priority*)

The college does an effective job identifying "first time to institution" students during admission and registration. During the fall 2006 semester the college began to identify first-time entering freshmen on class rosters with an asterisk (*), however, this practice has not yet been extended to transfer students who are new to Pulaski Tech. This recent step by the student services division is a positive development and should be applauded; however, new to PTC transfer students still need to be identified on class rosters and faculty need to be trained on how to best utilize this information. Pulaski Technical College should add an identifier on class rosters for new to PTC transfer students and provide faculty with professional development on how to utilize early warning or intervention techniques to assist those students who might be struggling.

The school should expand the identifier on instructors' class rosters indicating if the student is new to the college and provide faculty with professional development training on how to utilize this information.