

## **Philosophy Dimension Report**

Pulaski Technical College

*Foundations Institutions intentionally cultivate learning environments for new students that emerge from a philosophy of two-year colleges as gateways to higher education.* The philosophy is explicit and easily understood. It is consistent with the institutional mission, reflects a consensus of internal and external constituencies, and is widely disseminated. The philosophy is also the basis for organizational policies, practices, structures, leadership, and resource allocation to support the new student experience.

### **Philosophy Dimension Report**

#### **Committee Leaders:**

Rhonda Carroll, Director of Learning Support Services

Nancy Reedy, Chair of Teacher Education

#### **Committee Members:**

Mark Burris, Director of Distance Education

Sylvia Crockett, Counselor

Michelle Palmer, Instructor of Developmental English

Dr. Peggy Peterson, Director of Trio Programs

#### **Current Situation:**

After surveying departments and academic divisions and researching college publications and documents, this committee has determined that no institutional written philosophy for the first year student exists, although traditionally, a large majority of Pulaski Technical College students are first year (less than 30 hours). Some departments have an implicit philosophy for working with new students. While no formal statement exists, unwritten procedures and policies are understood by seasoned faculty and staff. We determined that certain specific disciplines operate more freely in this implicit understanding than others. This discrepancy may be due to the rapid growth of Pulaski Technical College. Because of this, we have been unable to mentor and train new full time faculty and staff or adjunct faculty to be aware of the implicit organizational policies, practices, and procedures which are central to first year student success.

The Foundation liaisons and steering committee with the assistance of Pulaski Technical College's Institutional Research Director conducted a faculty/staff survey this fall semester to determine the college's knowledge of and commitment to serving first year students. The six questions on the survey pertaining to the philosophy dimension indicated that faculty agree that a philosophy for the first year student is valuable. Mean scores of 3.0 and above on all six questions demonstrated to the committee that there is some general belief that a philosophy does exist. Though the philosophy may be implicit, there is an interest for a formal commitment to the success of new students. And, the value of a written philosophy was confirmed.

The Institutional Research Office has indicated that the failure rate in Intermediate Algebra, Biology and other gateway courses is unacceptably high. The figures from Spring 2006 Enrollment Report revealed that 63% of minorities and 48% of white students failed Intermediate Algebra. In Biology, 34% of minorities and 23% of whites showed failure rates. Finally, in Composition I, 54% of minorities and 35% of whites did not pass. The committee sees this as evidence of great challenge to the institution and its goal of serving the needs of the first year population.

#### **Sources of Evidence:**

In search of a college wide philosophy the committee reviewed the college catalog, web page, student handbook, five-year strategic plan, Minority Retention Plan, Mission Statement and Purposes, Vision Statement 2010 and the Enrollment Report Spring 2006. Specific evidence referencing issues pertaining to a philosophy and lack thereof is mentioned in the Current Situation and Area of Concern sections of this report.

To determine the existence of departmental philosophies, the committee members interviewed the division deans, directors and faculty to determine what philosophies they had about new students, written or implicit. Members of the committee found that the last philosophy statements written were in support of the self-study for accreditation in 1997. No further review or updating of these philosophies has been done since that time. Little has been done to address the needs of the rapidly changing demographics of the student population in these departments since that time. Committee members were gratified by the interest shown from deans, department chairs and leading faculty in revising and implementing new philosophy statements.

Specific activities for new students are centered in Student Services, from admissions and testing to advising and registration. The SOAR (Student\*Orientation Advising\*Registration) program for registering new students is two years old. Evidence reveals that most Student Service Departments have a stated philosophy and clear objective for serving students. They do not, however, directly address the diverse needs of new students. Implicit policies were evident. Such policies include the prohibition of online registration for new students in the belief that a face to face encounter is more productive. Additionally, Student Services personnel do not believe it is in a student's best interest to enroll in classes after a semester commences. The Transitions Dimension Committee Statement will further describe procedures for recruiting, admitting and enrolling new students.

The Faculty and Staff Survey had six questions relating to the Philosophy Dimension. Of the 77.1% of the faculty responding to these questions, these results can be reported:

Q11 To what degree has an institutional philosophy for working with new students at this institution been communicated to you? 3.06 Mean Score

Q13 To what degree does this institution operate from a commonly held philosophy about the new student experience? 3.04 Mean Score

Q15 To what degree is a formalized institutional philosophy for working with new students valuable? 4.23 Mean Score

Q12 To what degree has a department/unit philosophy for working with new students at this institution been communicated to you? 3.22 Mean Score

Q29 To what degree does your department/unit have a voice in decisions about new student issues? 3.25 Mean Score

Q16 To what degree do you believe that this institution has a special commitment to the success of new students? 3.90 Mean Score

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

For the institutional wide philosophy, two overriding challenges have been identified. First, no clearly written or widely accepted philosophy addressing the needs and concerns of first year students exists in any department or college wide. Secondly, according to our Director of Institutional Research, this 2006 fall semester saw a large majority of first year students falling into the academically under prepared cohort which needs remediation. The breakdown is as follows: mathematics, 68%, writing 37% and finally, reading 44%. This breakdown follows a fairly consistent pattern of remedial needs of our first year students at Pulaski Tech. The committee is concerned that the cognitive, social and affective needs of this segment of the first year population are being inadequately addressed and should be referenced in the proposed philosophy statement.

The mission statement of Pulaski Technical College references a commitment to provide access to high quality education which promotes student learning and the highest levels of student development. This committee agrees with this statement; however, we see challenges facing the college in fulfilling this for all incoming first year students. One such concern is the inadequate training and mentoring of new and adjunct faculty on the various needs of the new student population. In addition, we find that student services personnel and academic advisors are not consistently available during evening hours and at off site locations, thus limiting full service to our students who attend only during evening and weekend sessions at all locations. Thirdly, the committee recognizes that the online orientation and SOAR (Student Orientation Advising and Registration) have been successful for a segment of our new student population. Yet, we believe the college faces a challenge in the lack of a structured orientation which meets the needs of the large cohort of developmental students who enter each semester.

The Spring 2006 Enrollment Report indicates high failure rates in classes which traditionally enroll first year students. This indicates to the committee that more work needs to be done by all academic and student services operations of the college. While it is expected that a certain number of students will not pass these courses, the failure rates do appear to be alarmingly high.

#### **Recommended Grade: C**

#### **Recommended Action Items:**

- New-Student Philosophy Statement: Adopt (*High priority*)  
College wide Philosophy/Rationale Statement (High Priority)

deletion and change to better describe the overall campus philosophy and to ensure inclusion, accuracy and total commitment. Upon final approval, we will seek endorsement by the governing Board of Trustees.

"Pulaski Technical College is committed to provide access to high quality education that promotes student learning and enables students to develop to their fullest potential. The quality of the first year experience is central to the achievement of that mission and lays the foundation upon which future educational endeavors will be built. Pulaski Technical College is committed to the academic, social, and personal development of its students. The college recognizes that this commitment obligates all members of the PTC community to cooperatively and intentionally structure their programs, activities, and services to promote first-year success."

- Philosophy Statement: Dissemination (*High priority*)

We recommend that the philosophy be included in all appropriate college publications and documents. It will be widely visible to students, faculty, staff and community. It will be incorporated into faculty, staff, and student orientation and training.

- Student Services/Academic Advising: Availability (*High priority*)

We propose Student Services and Academic Advising be available at all campuses for students in day, evening, weekend and online classes during the heaviest registration periods.

- Orientation: Required (*High priority*)

In conjunction with expanded advising, the committee believes mandated orientation activities before each semester for new student enrollees would acclimate them much more quickly to the college environment and promote success.

- Advising: Developmental Education Advisors (*High priority*)

It is our recommendation that the hiring of designated developmental advisors be a high priority for the retention and success of this underprepared population. In the absence of funds, we recommend that release time be awarded to developmental faculty to assume these critical duties.

- Orientation: Developmental Education (*High priority*)

A mandated orientation for the developmental student population should be instituted. This would significantly impact first year student success and retention rates

- Professional Development: Working with New Students (*High priority*)

We propose that new and adjunct faculty be trained on the college and departmental philosophies and be given manuals describing strategies for working with new students and promoting their success both in and out of the classroom.

- First Year Council (*High priority*)

We propose the creation of a First Year Council comprised of all college department directors and deans involved in new student enrollment, advisement, education and student services to oversee the aspects of first year initiatives at Pulaski Technical College. This Council will report to the Vice President for Instruction concerning initiative outcomes.

- To Improve Practices (*High priority*)

We propose that new and adjunct faculty be trained on the college and departmental philosophies and be given manuals describing strategies for working with new students and promoting their success both in and out of the classroom. Secondly, we propose student services and academic advising be available at all campuses for students in day, evening, weekend and online classes during the heaviest registration periods. In conjunction with this expanded advising, the committee believes mandated orientation activities before each semester for new student enrollees would acclimate them much more quickly to the college environment and promote success. It is our assertion that the hiring of designated developmental advisors is a high priority for the retention and success of this underprepared population. In the absence of funds, we recommend that release time be awarded to developmental faculty to assume these critical duties. Finally, a mandated orientation for the developmental student population should be instituted and would significantly impact first year student success and retention rates.

- Learning Communities (*Medium priority*)

Learning communities can provide a supportive educational setting where students can get more involved in learning, spend more time learning, and share their experience with others.

In a commuter college setting like PTC, students have difficulty connecting with their peers and with the college. One solution that has been used in other first year experience programs is learning communities, with linked courses on a common topic.

Learning communities have been shown to increase student retention and academic achievement, increase student involvement and motivation, improve student time-to-degree completion, and enhance student intellectual development. Students involved in learning communities become more intellectually mature and responsible for their own learning and develop the capacity to care about the learning of their peers.

- College Seminar: Required (*Medium priority*)

We recommend consideration that some first year students entering Pulaski Technical College be required to take College Seminar during the first or second semester of enrollment.