

Research Briefs

KEY FINDINGS

Case Management increased student performance in

- Course completion by 6%
- C or Better grade by 7%
- Fall to Spring Retention by 6%
- Fall to Fall Retention by 10%
- Percent pursuing associates degrees by 10%
- Semester GPA by .27

IMPLICATIONS

For Practice:

- Program should be expanded for all ftic's
- Program should be studied for expansion to all students

For Policy:

- Resource allocation should be made for advising and orientation staff
- Policy should be reviewed to ensure support and enforcement for mandatory orientation

For Research:

- Study population should be disaggregated to understand performance across groups and to identify gaps between groups
- Feasibility studies should be conducted for expanding program to all students



A Comparative Analysis of the STC Case Management Advising Program for First Time In College Students

A 2006 Achieving the Dream Study

In response to top 10 lists of student identified barriers to success, South Texas College piloted a new case management program in Fall 2005 which included mandatory orientation and subsequent assignment to a specific academic advisor for all first-time-in-college (ftic) students. A data analysis regarding the impact of this intervention to provide a contact person with information and guidance for these new students involved a comparative study between matched groups of participants and non-participants comparing performance in course grades, course completion, Fall to Spring and Fall to Fall retention, and percent of students selecting associate degrees versus certificates. In all of these measures the case management participants achieved higher levels of performance than their comparison group.

Background

During its first year (2004-05) with Achieving the Dream (ATD), South Texas College (STC) questioned students regarding barriers they had confronted in the pursuit of their education. The top three barriers were money, lack of information, and work/job time management. The Comprehensive Student Advising Taskforce, one of the initial three taskforces that were established after the first barriers study was formed to promote a personalized, student-centered environment that provides an integrated system of quality educational information and planning services for addressing students' needs from initial contact through graduation, transfer and/or job placement. This taskforce generated strategies to address the top three barriers (money, lack of information, and time management) as well as other barriers.

The barriers study conducted in 2005 was designed to be replicated in 2007 in order to investigate progress in the reduction or elimination of barriers to student success. The research design anticipates that if barriers have been adequately addressed shifts among the barriers should be observable in the data.

The Case Management Advising Program was designed by the Comprehensive Student Advising Taskforce after a thorough review of the current research on advising programs or methods and on student engagement and retention in community colleges. This program draws on the idea of providing a beacon of light to assist navigating students through the educational maze. The pro-

gram was initially targeted at first time in college students (ftic's) and included a mandatory orientation and an assignment of each student to a specific academic advisor (rather than the walk-in to a general pool of advisors.) The advisors would follow-up with the students at critical points during the semester to provide guidance and assistance as needed.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the current study is to evaluate the impact of participating in Case Manage-



A Comparative Analysis of the STC Case Management Advising Program for First Time In College Students (cont.)

ment Advising Program on course grades, course completion rates, retention or re-enrollment from one term to the next, and the proportion of students choosing to pursue an associates degree rather than a certificate.

Methodology

Although all ftic's were supposed to be required to participate in an orientation program after which they were assigned an advisor, the "mandatory" aspect of the program was not yet being enforced. This was actually a hidden blessing because it made a comparison group conveniently available since nearly 2/3rds of the FTIC's that term did NOT participate. This provided a good population for matching a comparison group to the participant group. In Fall 2005 the first case management cohort totaled 479 students, 57% of whom were female, 97% were Hispanic. The matched sample comparison group totaled 1560 students, 47% female, and 97% Hispanic. Other variables used to compare similarities of the matched groups are represented in the Matched Comparative Samples Table below. Overall the two groups were fairly similar.

Research Questions

The research questions asked in this study were simple null hypotheses that there would be no difference at $p < .01$ between the case management group and the non-case management group in average course grade, percent completing the course, percent re-enrolling in the subsequent terms, and the percent of the group pursuing an associates degree versus a certificate.

Key Findings

The case management group out performed the non-participant group in every category ($p < .01$). The findings were as follows:

Measure	CM	Non-CM
Course Completion	65%	59%
Higher Grades (C or higher)	71%	64%
Re-enrolled Spring	76%	69%
Re-enrolled Fall	56%	46%
Pursuing Associates	82%	71%
Semester GPA	2.22	1.95

Implications

Based on this high level of performance improvement with program participants, the program should be expanded and made available for all students. It would be highly recommended to disaggregate subpopulations within the participant data to confirm that the program is consistently successful across groups, i.e. gender, age-groups, etc. Also, it would be good to review whether these students were attending during the day or in evening classes to see if the program was successful for both.

The pilot program was conducted for only 1/3 of the ftic students. Additional advisors will be needed in order to expand the program to 3 times its size for ftic's only. If the College determines that this program should be expanded to all students it will take additional staff in various roles related to orientation and advisement. Additional methods or venues of orientation will need to be made available as well as ways to enforce the "mandatory" requirement. What consequences will occur should students not comply?

Matched Comparative Samples for Case Management Study

Case Management Participant	Age as of 9-1-2005	Credit Hours	Semester GPA	Ratio of Earned/ Attempted	HS GPA	Percent of Courses Dropped
No	21	11	1.95	0.84	2.49	2.24%
Yes	21	11	2.22	0.85	2.53	1.78%