Student personnel preparation programs: The capstone seminar

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that there has been a statistically significant improvement \((p < .05)\) in the mean QPAs. Of the students, 73\% improved their cumulative QPAs during the semester of SAGE participation.

Over the past 3 years, statistics indicate that 22\% of the students achieved cumulative QPAs of 2.00 and higher, and 33\% achieved their goal of “good academic standing” by the end of the semester in which they participated, thereby removing themselves from academic probation, and another 42\% made sufficient progress to remain on probation.

The Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (Form C) pre and post differences indicated an average change of 9 percentile points. The overall pre- and posttest data are striking in terms of study-habit change from the beginning of a semester to the end; the study-attitude change, however, was more moderate, at 3 percentile points during the same period. The nature of the SAGE program is such that study habits would change more rapidly, because a structured study session and specific study procedure are required of all students on a weekly basis. It seems that regulating habits is easier than is effecting a change in attitudes.

Student perceptions of program effectiveness determined by anonymous student evaluations indicate a high degree of satisfaction with all aspects of the program, except one. Most noteworthy, more than 87\% of the students believed that the structured study sessions helped them to improve their time management and organizational skills and their semester grades. Additionally, more than 90\% indicated that the coach-conversation service was helpful, and an equally high percentage supported the program’s continuation. The one service area rated less favorably than we had hoped was the series of mini-study-skills seminars, with only 50\% of the students viewing this as helpful to their academic progress. This could possibly be the result of the seminars’ concentration on generic skills, and the students’ inability to relate them directly to their own study situations.

**CONCLUSION**

SAGE has been an experimental program to assist students who are on academic probation with improving their levels of performance. It is unique in its holistic approach of assisting underachieving students to go through a required set of program services that include supervised and structured study and continuous academic mentoring, advising, and performance feedback. The results achieved thus far are promising in that students have experienced a significant improvement in cumulative GPAs, with one-third achieving good academic standing. Additionally, positive results have been achieved in terms of changes in study habits and students’ perceptions of the program’s effectiveness.

**REFERENCE**

relevant journal articles on the chosen topic and
distributing them to seminar members several
days prior to the meeting. Articles stimulate
thought and discussion. Those members also
serve as “leaders” for the informal discussion
that takes place. The seminar’s membership list
consists of 2nd-year graduate students, depart-
mental faculty, and student affairs professional
staff. First-year master’s students are invited to
attend the seminar during the final (spring) term
so that they may become acquainted with the
purposes) format, and procedures.

The goals of the seminar are the following:

1. To provide a rigorous and challenging
arena for exploring the major develop-
ments in and concerns of the profession
2. To promote continued discussion of stu-
dent affairs issues during the 2nd year of
a degree program when students and major
professors usually experience less inten-
sive regular contact with one another
3. To apply and share learnings from practica, cognate studies, elective courses,
and assistantship experiences
4. To continue the enrichment of close rela-
tionships between faculty, students, and
professional staff
5. To provide ongoing communication and a
support system for 2nd-year students
6. To provide a forum for addressing issues
related to the impending transition from
student to full-time professional

A wide variety of topics is addressed includ-
ing the following: the future of higher education,
professional career development, moral devel-
opment in men and women, translation of theory
into practice, national conference preparation,
articulation of one’s philosophy of education
and student development, morals and profes-
sional ethics, publication writing, and “packing
the intangibles” (important ideas and concepts
to take to one’s next job).

In the Capstone Seminar’s first 3 years, par-
ticipant response has been very positive. Partic-
ipating students have developed an increased
connection to peers and faculty. Success de-
deps upon a core group of committed students,
coupled with faculty attendance and involve-
ment. It is a simple, low-cost, effective avenue
for continued professional development and per-
sonal and intellectual growth. An opportunity
for participants to exercise their commitment to
student affairs and their role in the field, the
Capstone Seminar provides an open and sup-
portive environment in which to define and ar-
ticulate this commitment.

Focusing on Freshmen: Increasing
Persistence and Success at a
Historically Black University

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Since 1980, increases in Hispanic and Asian
enrollments have resulted in an overall increase
in the minority enrollment in higher education.
Black undergraduate and graduate enrollment,
however, has declined significantly. More spe-
cifically, the enrollment trends for Black stu-
dents in the historically Black colleges and uni-
versities indicate a disturbing loss (Ottinger,
1986).

An analysis by Noel and Levitz (1983) of
data provided annually to the American College
Testing (ACT) Program by all colleges and uni-
versities in the United States reported that the
freshman-to-sophomore year attrition rate across
all types of institutions was 32%; further inves-
tigation revealed a linear relationship between
ability levels of entering students and attrition
at the end of the freshman year. Institutions
admitting freshmen with ACT composite scores
of 26 or higher and Standard Aptitude Test total
scores of 1100 or higher retained 90% of their
freshmen-to-sophomore (F-S) students,
whereas only 59% of the F-S students remained
at institutions that admitted freshmen whose av-
erage ACT scores were 15 or lower and whose
SAT scores were 700 or lower.

Although an increasing number of students
entering all institutions of higher education dem-
onstrate a lack of competence in the core skill
areas, this is particularly true for institutions
with liberal admissions policies, such as Ala-