

Innovation of the Year

GCC ACE Plus

Innovation Description:

- A. Title: GCC ACE Plus Comprehensive Retention Program (CRP)

Name of College: Glendale Community College

Team: Mark Reed, Director of Early Outreach/ACE

Fredrick Canales, Program Advisor

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- B. Executive Summary: “The Comprehensive Retention Program” of GCC ACE Plus is a unique set of programs, services, and processes which spell academic and personal success for tomorrow’s leaders, today.

- C. The ACE Plus program at Glendale Community College is the largest ACE (Achieving a College Education) program in the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD), serving over 500 students. Through this program, high school juniors and seniors take 12 credits of general education classes at the GCC campus each year, resulting in 24 credits of fully –transferrable course work upon high school graduation. Tuition costs are covered by the MCCCD Maricopa Grant Funds.

Selection for this program is competitive. Approximately 600-800 students apply each year and only 250 students are chosen. The major emphasis of GCC’s ACE Plus program, therefore, is retention. We focus on keeping students in the program and performing at a high academic level, and as they graduate high school, our goal is to retain them at a Maricopa college. By attending to program and college retention, we are not only accentuating students’ academic success, but are focusing on **cost effectiveness** by being good fiscal stewards of taxpayers’ money.

The GCC ACE Plus Comprehensive Retention Program has a beginning, middle, and end.

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Beginning: It begins during the selection process with the “Red Flag Process.” The ACE application consists of several components, including high school transcripts; letters of recommendation from high school teachers and counselors; and a personal essay. The Director of GCC’s ACE Plus program and the program’s Program Advisors review selectees’ application materials in detail, analyzing high school transcripts for deficiencies in English and Reading, low grades, a downward/spotty academic trend, or possible attendance issues. Letters of recommendation are scrutinized to identify concerns and insights from selectees’ high school teachers and counselors; and selectees’ personal essay pinpoints potential challenges and obstacles to academic success. Using this information, program advisors “flag” these students based on **quality** indicators, and call them into their office for one-on-one discussion of the issues. The guidance provided in these proactive retention sessions is positive and motivational in nature, identifying the “red flag” concerns, discussing them with students, and working out solutions, work-arounds, and strategies to overcome or avoid potential problems.

Middle: The GCC ACE Plus Comprehensive Retention Program continues during students’ tenure in the program in the form of early academic alerts and intervention. Each semester, faculty of the approximately 20 sections of ACE Plus classes are asked to identify students doing “D” or “F” work approximately 3 times each semester. Faculty provide detailed information on these “Academic Progress Reports,” including evidence related to attendance, missing assignments, and poor performance. Using this information, program advisors meet with students at their high school. Due to the close **collaborative** relationships the ACE staff have with high school personnel, students are allowed to be called out of class for these 15-20 minute discussions at their high school. Again, discussions with students are kept positive and motivational, focusing on students’ accountability to their academic responsibilities as well as support needed by students in the form of tutoring or mentoring. Many potential academic problems are identified via these academic retention visits, and students typically “turn themselves around” academically as a result of these “house calls.” A common comment we hear from parents is: “It’s obvious that you care about my (son or daughter) because you come to see them at their high school.”

End: As students enter their senior year in high school, they complete an ACE Plus senior survey that asks, among many questions, where they plan to enroll as a full-time college student upon high school graduation. Using this information, program advisors enter students into the “ACE Plus Senior Bridge” program, track them through the program, and schedule individual advising appointments with students to discuss future plans. During these Senior Bridge sessions, students are taught about financial aid, MCCCDC degree programs, the Arizona General Education Core (ACEC), course transferability, graduation requirements, transfer pathways, course scheduling, registration, and other related topics. The goal of these retention-oriented advising sessions is to **efficiently** enroll students in classes at an MCCCDC college for the summer and/or fall session following high school graduation.

The **creative** nature of the GCC ACE Plus Comprehensive Retention Program has been **shared** with other MCCCDC ACE program directors and can be easily **replicated** at other MCCCDC colleges, which could result in impressive quantitative results such as:

- Program retention rate of GCC’S ACE Plus program: 94%
- Percent of GCC ACE students graduating from high school: 91%
- Percent of GCC ACE Plus students who attend college after high school: 82%

* Source: MCCCDC ACE 2010-2011 Progress Report