

Innovation of the Year Proposal – Spring 2009

Estrella Mountain Community College Student Peer Mentoring Program

Program Team:

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| a) Stephanie J. Fujii, Counseling Faculty | EMCC 623-935-8908 |
| b) Laura Dulgar, Director of Outreach & Recruitment | EMCC 623-935-8315 |
| c) Vivian Miranda, Director Early Outreach | EMCC 623-935-8900 |
| d) Annette Wilson, Student | EMCC |
| e) Chris Esteen, Student | EMCC |

Executive Summary

EMCC in recognizing the challenges in our retention and persistence efforts with under prepared students, created and developed a structured student-to-student peer mentoring program aligned with and as a component of the college's I Start Smart initiatives. EMCC peer mentors serve as guides and role models assisting and supporting new, first time students in their transition to college.

Program Description

Estrella Mountain Community College in recognizing the challenges in our retention and persistence efforts with under prepared students, created and developed a structured student-to-student peer mentoring program aligned with and is a component of the colleges I Start Smart initiatives. Mentoring is defined as “a structured and trusting relationship that brings people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee” (http://www.mentoring.org/find_resources/elements_of_effective_practice/). EMCC student peer mentors serve as guides and role models assisting and supporting new, first time students in their transition to college.

The initial idea for a peer-to-peer student mentoring program originated from a group of students desire to make a meaningful contribution in support of student success with their peers. As these students began to develop their ideas, they visited with college personnel in hopes of finding an advisor and a “home” office to sponsor the program. At about the same time, the Maricopa Community College District began investigation and discussion about best practices in the implementation of strategies to address the persistence and retention of under prepared developmental education students. The Outreach Office at EMCC had the responsibility for implementation of the enrollment steps for I Start Smart; the Counseling Division had responsibility for AAA 115/CPD courses. These two offices were aware of the student group's desire to mentor, and so all three areas began meeting to discuss how to collaborate. What emerged was the creation and implementation of a very structured and purposeful peer mentoring program integrated into the AAA 115/CPD courses, which are components of I Start Smart.

Quality

The program seeks to increase the quality of new, first time students' educational experience at EMCC by building rapport and connectedness to the institution as facilitated by a peer student-to-student mentor. It

is believed that as a result of a positive, quality interaction with a college representative who has evidenced academic success (peer mentor), students are more inclined to persist. Thus Fall 2008, EMCC began offering CPD/AAA 115, College Success Skills.

Rather than have student support programs operate independently, it is believed that retention is a responsibility which all at the college share. This philosophy serves as the operating foundation of the program. As role models, EMCC student peer mentors invest their time, energy and effort in helping new students by using their own experiences as a frame of reference to inform, advise and support new students through their first semester of college. This is done through structured interactions and consistent communication.

This program seeks to not only increase the quality of experience for the new student (mentees), but also recognizes the opportunity to increase the quality of the mentors' collegiate experience. Mentors are mentored and supported by student services staff in their academic and personal goals as a result of this program.

Efficiency

The mentoring program aids institutional efficiency, because the mentors are credible resources for mentees on general college information and support services. The mentors serve to direct students to the appropriate services, staff and processes in proactive ways, rather than reactive. This saves the time and energy of front line student support staff.

Cost Effectiveness

The program is cost effective. The only expenditure is for the mentor's time (student hourly wages). The program has the students working directly with counseling faculty in courses where load is currently maintained. No extra contracts are required for personnel who train the mentors (faculty and staff) or the mentor advisor (faculty). It is all a part of current responsibilities in college retention. In our first pilot (Fall 2008) of the peer mentoring program, 14 new students participated. A small cohort was used due to timing (program's development as a part of DO I Start Smart initiatives) and a desire for flexibility. Thus, the mentor to mentee was 1:7. Of the 14 students having mentors, all (100%) attended and completed the semester. 11 students (80%) are enrolled and are continuing this Spring 2009. Of the 3 students who did not continue, one moved out of state, one returned to the high school and the other is currently trying to enroll in the second 8 week session for classes for Spring 2009. The program was expanded for Spring 2009. Currently there are 7 peer mentors and 73 new students, making the mentor to mentee ratio approximately 1:10.

The program also saves the college money. It aids in student retention, keeping students enrolled is much more cost effective than having to recruit new ones to maintain FTSE.

Replication

Replication of the program can be done with minimal challenge, due to the highly structured way in

which the program was developed. The program has maintained documentation of all activities. It includes a mentor job description, expectations, application and a clearly defined selection process, as well as regular (meet every two weeks) training agendas.

Creativity

The program uses peer mentors to role model student success behaviors and strategies. Peer mentors attend (throughout the semester) a college success course (AAA/CPD) working with the instructor to facilitate small group discussions, follow up and class presentation/application of success skills. The presence of a peer mentor serves to energize the faculty, because in working collaboratively the peer mentors can provide immediate observations from a student's perspective helping to better inform teaching practices.

Timeliness

The peer mentor program was implemented in Fall 2008 as a part of the college's I Start Smart pilot. During that first semester, the team and the mentors met to discuss strategies to improve and adapt. This is a constant for the program- always looking for ways, strategies by which to grow and improve in our efforts to meet the needs of under prepared students. The college is seeking to revise its orientation program, and plans to use the mentors as student facilitators.

Learning

The program has been shared throughout the college, as well as the district. Since it serves as a component of the AAA/CPD 115 courses, the program's strengths and challenges) are being shared with the Counseling Instructional Council. Student mentors have also shared the program with their teachers, peers and other students not affiliated with the program.

Collaboration

This program was developed out of two initiatives that were able to collaborate and work together in the best interest of all students: a student group seeking to start a peer mentoring program and the college's I Start Smart efforts. Collaboration is also evidenced by the constant training of the peer mentors. The mentors are trained by college personnel (not just one person), but have had training sessions with developmental mathematics faculty, outreach staff, other counselors and the more experienced mentors. The peer mentoring program receives guidance from an advisory board made up of representatives from faculty and student services.