



SHOP TALK # 39: Kilgore College's Community for Transition

During the summer of 2009, Kilgore College received a grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to identify, select, and prepare a cohort of ten individuals planning to begin college studies in the fall of 2009. Candidates had to have received their GED during the previous 24 months.

But let's cut to the exciting news: 100 percent of the students in the cohort have enrolled in college, and all are taking at least two classes. Credit hours range from six to fifteen. All together, students are enrolled in and passing one hundred eight hours of college credits. It is expected that 60% will complete their college academic programs, which is ten times the rate of completion for typical GED graduates.

In the past four years, Kilgore College's Adult Education Program had produced four hundred eighty GED graduates, but only thirty-seven were documented to have entered postsecondary education. According to the Journal of Developmental Education (Zafft, Winter 2006), less than five percent of GED graduates complete a program of postsecondary study. The literature further revealed that GED completers had a poor probability of success and lacked a sense of classroom or school community. Given the high level of risk for the GED graduate, Kilgore College committed to an intensive and comprehensive orientation program to build a community of learners.

In preparing to launch the intensive summer program (ISP), Program Director Bobbie McGee Benson located a tool entitled, "The Classroom and School Community Inventory", consisting of two short forms which address the dimensions of the learning and social communities. Results were encouraging: Students participating in the ISP scored higher in terms of feeling a part of a social and learning community than traditional college students. Overall attendance was significant. 80% of the participants had perfect attendance in the 80-hour intensive summer program. One student missed one class session, and another missed several. Those who completed the program and enrolled in college received laptop computers two weeks after the beginning of the semester in which they enrolled. To improve students' functional computer literacy, the first 30 minutes of each day was devoted to computer skills development .

Toward completion of the ISP, students were asked to complete a six-question survey focused on the effectiveness of the ISP. The questions solicited a variety of responses:

1. What is your overall opinion regarding the program?
Wonderful... too short... good program for students interested in going to college but insecure about doing so... a helpful link to college... getting my GED was one milestone, but taking it a step further is unbelievable for me...
2. Is there anything that we should change that will benefit the next group of students enrolled?

- Make the program longer by two weeks... more practice tests... try to pin point two to three weakest subjects for students and base course of study on these...*
3. What did you like about the computer class, and is there anything we should change?
Learned a lot about the “real use” of computers... group students according to their tech savvy...
 4. What did you like about the writing class and should anything be changed?
Write more... more details about the kinds and organization of essays... more timed writing and group activities... more feedback on my writing skills...
 5. What about the reading class? Any suggested changes?
More focus on vocabulary, main idea, and author’s purpose... more reading aloud... expand teacher responses to students’ answers about readings...
 6. What did you like about the “community of learners” class that met for thirty minutes daily? Any suggested changes?
Soothed a lot of my fears about going to college... helpful information about study habits and time management... make this class longer... felt I could ask about anything during this class and learn about others’ concerns... developed a sense of what to expect... focused on basic college survival skills... what an opportunity!

The Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) pre/post statistical analysis indicated that each individual student improved on all three subtests (reading, writing, and math). Four students passed all three THEA sections; two individuals passed two of the three THEA sections; three passed one section each; and one individual did not pass any of the THEA test sections. On the Learning and Study Skills Inventory (LASSI), there was evidence of significant change in two dimensions: Selection of Main Ideas and Test Strategies.

Both students and staff supported extending instruction from 80 hours to 100 to 120 clock hours over a six-week period versus a four-week period, making for a more robust impact. The community of learners’ portion of the program was emphasized for two reasons: first, the program application called for attention to community building among learners; and second, the research literature clearly stressed the need to help transitioning students develop a sense of community with their peers and within the context of the college environment.

For additional information about Kilgore College’s Intensive Summer Program, and for details about the “Classroom and School Community Inventory” (CSCI), contact Bobbi McGee Benson at BMcGee-Benson@kilgore.edu.