Improve Student Success

Purpose of the Strategic Focus

North Central State College is a national Leader College in the Achieve Dream, which is a national initiative focused on student success. Developing basic academic knowledge and abilities, success skills and flexible and creative problem solving are critical to success in learning, work and life. This strategic focus recognizes that improvement of student success depends upon achieving significant additional progress in these critical areas. Further it recognizes that all faculty and staff can contribute to improving student success.

Intended Impact on Ends Policies

Successful completion of developmental sequences and gateway courses improves NC State's ability to achieve each ends policy. While developing success skills has a positive impact on all ends policies, development of these skills most significantly impacts Job Readiness and Career Development. Similarly, flexible and creative problem solving (e.g. critical thinking), has a positive influence on all ends policies and is critical to the achievement of Career Development.

Strategic Initiatives (MEANS) - Descriptions

Developmental and Gateway Course Success

Developmental education focuses on enhancing students' ability to successfully complete gateway and subsequent courses. Gateway courses are those which, upon successful completion, open the gateway for students to continue with college education in their chosen field. Significant continued progress in improving developmental and gateway course success is needed. It is important to continue to pilot and take to scale successful initiatives to reduce success gaps while improving success for all students.

Success Skills

Success skills can be thought of as personal mastery skills or work habits that are fundamental to achieving success in learning, work and life. It is critical that these skills be developed as students begin their college education and be reinforced throughout college.

Critical Thinking

The Career Development ends policy refers to students developing flexible and creative problem solving skills. Critical thinking encompasses creativity and flexible problem solving in college, at work and in life.

Specific Objectives and Background Planning and Policy Considerations

Developmental and Gateway Course Success - *Increase successful completion of developmental sequences and gateway courses while closing success gaps among groups*

Background, Planning and Policy Considerations

NC State has a solid DE program that has been in existence for decades.

Currently, two-thirds of students place into developmental courses. When developmental course sequences are not successfully completed, students are unlikely to successfully complete college courses, persist and be successful completers. The same is true of students who do not complete gateway courses. The lack of success means the ends policies will not be achieved.

While progress is being made, more is required. About one half of students successfully complete the reading and writing developmental sequences and just over one quarter complete the math developmental sequences. Over a 3 year period from initial enrollment about half of all students complete gateway English. While successful completion of gateway math appears to be significantly lower, the actual rate is difficult to determine because some programs do not require college level math.

The ends policies, especially the diversity/equal opportunity policy will not be achieved until the gaps in success by groups of students such as males, low income, and some ethnic categories are eliminated and success is improved among all students. Understanding and relating to underperforming groups is also important.

Any course which upon successful completion opens the gateway for students to continue with college education in their chosen field, and which has a lower than the average success rate for other courses in the program can be considered to be a gateway course. It is time to determine if the focus on gateway course success should be expanded beyond just English and math. A review of success rates among all potential gateway courses is required to make this determination.

Student success goes beyond the AtD and DEI initiatives and the work of the Core Team. It is important that the entire college community understand current success rates and find ways to share ideas, participate in improvement pilots and contribute to improving successful completion of developmental sequences and gateway courses among all groups of students. Further review of college policies may reveal changes that could be made to improve student success while maintaining high standards.

It is expected that the DEI and TRIO initiatives will be taken to scale. Also, it is expected that there will be continued experimentation in which current and future successful pilots will be expanded and with continued success taken to scale as well.

Success Skills - ***Assure that students master learning, work and life success skills***

Background, Planning and Policy Considerations

The current FYE program contains many success skills for learning, work, and life.

Within the context of the Ends Policies for Career Development and Job Readiness, the task forces interpreted the terms "administrative skills", "foundation for learning" and "work habits" to be basic success skills for learning, work and life. These were defined as: accepting personal responsibility, discovering self-motivation, mastering self-management, employing

interdependence, gaining self-awareness, adopting lifelong learning, developing emotional intelligence and believing in oneself.

The task forces recognized these as skills that employers wanted our graduates to posses.

This specific initiative builds upon the foundation provided by FYE by incorporating the development of these success skills into FYE (which includes study and test taking skills as well as career exploration and planning) to provide an even more powerful success skills course.

Development of the success skills goes beyond just having a success course. The skills must be threaded into DE courses and ideally other courses including program courses and then reinforced by instructors. Additionally, a culture of success is also created when advisors, tutors and other staff as well as instructors speak the language of success and reinforce these skills. Creation of the culture of success is further enhanced by college wide embracement of the success skills.

To address the strategic objective for the success skills initiative, operational plans should be developed and implemented that by the end of two years will:

- Incorporate the success skills into the FYE course for all students placed into DE
- Provide an end-of-course assessment to determine the level of skill development
- Determine the feasibility of issuing a certificate for success skill development upon graduation based on an appropriate assessment
- Thread the success skills within all DE courses, tutoring and advising to reinforce and emphasize skill development in each
- Provide professional development for all success course instructors, DE instructors, tutors, advisors and others as appropriate
- Provide threading and reinforcement opportunities and instructor training for interested program course instructors
- Provide a way, by the end of 2012-2013, for assuring that college ready (non-developmental) students either already have or develop success skills

The plan should also assure that necessary policy changes are identified and acted upon.

Consideration should be given to incorporating the success skills as core learning objectives along with the development of an assessment rubric and process for conducting the assessment.

Critical Thinking **– *Assure students master flexible and creative problem solving skills***

Background, Planning and Policy Considerations

Critical thinking is currently part of the CORE Learning Outcomes. According to 2008 CCSSE results, 75% of survey respondents in upper level courses indicated their experiences contributed "very much" to "quite a bit" to their development in critical thinking. In the 2009 Graduate Survey, 91% of survey respondents indicated that their education had a "great" to "Moderate" impact on their ability in critical thinking. 2010CAAP Critical Thinking test results indicate that NC State students, in selected capstone classes, moderately to substantially outperformed the normative group in 6 out of 9 reporting categories. In addition, there is ongoing work on critical thinking at the College. A faculty learning community, led by Bob

Brownson, is studying the impact of critical thinking training on student performance, and Ann Strouth has used the new critical thinking rubric in her course with interesting results.

The ends policy on Career Development identified flexible and creative problem solving as a job skill that remains relevant in changing jobs markets and wants students to acquire, maintain and enhance this skill. The college's core learning objective of critical thinking is intended to encompass creativity and flexible problem solving.

During the assessment of the current situation, concern was expressed that among all academic areas and programs there be a uniform definition and understanding of critical thinking, what it encompasses and how to assess it. It is important that a culture of critical thinking…flexible and creative problem solving be created within the college community.

During 2011-2012, an appropriate group of faculty, with staff support, should develop specific recommendations to:

- Assure there is a uniform definition and understanding, among all academic areas and programs, of critical thinking, what it encompasses and how to assess it (rubrics and process).
- Thread critical thinking among academic and program courses.
- Assure a college wide culture of critical thinking…flexible and creative problem solving be further developed and maintained within the college community.

Faculty, staff and college leadership should take the steps necessary to adopt and implement the recommendations in 2012-2013.

Learning and Growth Strategic Objectives

Human Capital Specific Objective **- *Prepare faculty and staff to carry out the strategic initiatives***

Informational Capital Specific Objective - ***Assure data and information necessary to inform, monitor and evaluate the strategic initiatives is available***

Organizational Capital Specific Objective - ***Assure alignment of all units of the college with the strategic initiatives***

Community Capital Specific Objective - ***Obtain active involvement from individuals, employers, and organizations to help carry out the strategic initiatives***

Background and Planning Considerations for Learning and Growth Strategic Objectives

Human Capital

Appropriate professional development will be necessary to support the three specific initiatives of the Strategic Theme, especially for success skills development.

Informational Capital

The support of IR and IT will be necessary to assure that the data and information required to plan, monitor and evaluate efforts to improve student success is conveniently available. Success rates for potential gateway courses will also need to be determined by quarter/semester.

Organizational Capital

College leadership should continue to actively encourage and support the involvement of the entire college community in improving student success.

College leadership should appoint an ad hoc committee of faculty and staff to: develop and implement the new success course; seek the involvement of other faculty in threading and reinforcement efforts, the incorporation of success skills in core learning objectives and the development of an assessment rubric and process; and seek the involvement of both faculty and staff in creating a culture of success. A member of College leadership should be appointed as a champion for the task force.

College leadership should appoint an ad hoc faculty lead committee of faculty and staff to carry out the critical thinking initiative.

Community Capital

It is important to gain the active support of a wide variety of community organizations for improving student success.