

SCCC/ATS Receives National Award

Seward County Community College/Area Technical School is a recipient of the 2013 Lee Noel-Randi Levitz Retention Excellence Award, one of three colleges and universities chosen to receive this award.

The award recognizes state-of-the-art programs and services that are improving retention by promoting student success and satisfaction through a comprehensive advising program, mandatory first-year seminar course, strong academic support, early alert and at-risk team intervention systems, Student Support Services through the TRiO program and opportunities for student engagement. SCCC/ATS, which has been recognized as having one of the highest percentages of foreign-born residents of any city in the United States, has made great strides in increasing the retention rates of its Hispanic students. Over 70 percent of the SCCC/ATS students are first-generation students and the vast majority enroll in at least one developmental education course.

Recognizing the need to improve its retention and completion rates during a strategic planning/quality improvement process, the college formed a retention committee in 2009 to develop comprehensive academic advising; a mandatory first-year seminar course; strong academic support through assessment, tutoring and disability services; an early-alert and at-risk team intervention systems; opportunities for student engagement; and other student support services.

As part of the 2009 annual goals, the retention committee used early-alert data to begin the process of improving Hispanic graduation rates. The college also created an “At-Risk” Team, encouraging faculty and other staff to e-mail the team any time during the semester with concerns about any students. At-Risk Team members immediately determine a course of intervention early enough to have an impact.

In addition, the retention committee surveyed the Hispanic American Leadership Organization (HALO) to identify barriers to completion, then developed strategies to address the barriers in key areas, such as financial, academic, advising and career planning. Strategies included promoting FASFA Assistance Days, implementing an English Comp I essay for scholarship applicants, developing online job postings and transfer workshops, measuring tutor satisfaction and usage and developing an advisor in-take process and a needs analysis for advisor training.

SCCC/ATS’s low-tech, common sense approach to continuous improvement has yielded impressive results. The associate-degree-seeking Hispanic graduation rate increased from a baseline of 25.3 percent in 2010 to 41 percent in 2012. The retention rate for Hispanic students within the early-alert system rose from 36 percent in fall 2006 to 55 percent in fall 2011. SCCC/ATS has been recognized by *Washington Monthly* (2010) and by the Aspen Institute (2012) as one of the top community colleges in the nation.

Retention Specialist Rhonda Kinser and Dean of Student Services Celeste Donovan will present the topic “Subiendo el Nivel (Raising the Bar)—Increasing Retention Rates of Hispanic Students” at the National Conference on Student Recruitment, Marketing, and Retention in New Orleans this month.

SCCC/ATS Press Release