

PROSPECTUS
for the
ACADEMY FOR IMPROVED STUDENT SUCCESS

*“Linking Student Outcomes and Improved Retention to Multicultural Diversity” –
A College-Wide Initiative*

Dr. Philip R. Day, Jr., Chancellor

Over the past four years the City College community has focused long and hard on the issue of student success. From the Enhanced Self-Study to our investments in developmental education and student support services, from the development of a transfer degree to the refinement of graduation requirements, and from the selective revision of curriculum to the redeployment of counseling services we have all worked diligently to increase student achievement, persistence, and retention, particularly for those students who engage the rigors of the academic environment for the first time. Last spring we began to see that these efforts were paying off, at least for those who are most vulnerable, and that we still have a distance to go to deliver equitable access and opportunity. We can now see that we can continue on our present course and realize incremental gains, or we can improve our course to more deeply address the multicultural needs of our diverse population and accelerate our progress. This prospectus outlines an approach to transform our programs and services by integrating multicultural and developmental education into a cohesive program which speaks both to academic and sociocultural development.

Analysis of Gains and Gaps

The *Pre-Collegiate Basic Skills Accountability Report* (2004) issued by the Office of Research, Planning and Grants indicates that student success increased almost 6% in math and 4% in English since 1998, with over half of the students enrolled now completing their pre-collegiate courses. The increase may seem small in the aggregate, but to the individual students who are the beneficiaries the increase is surely significant. With this documentation we know that our investments are making an impact and realize that we must strengthen our resolve and redouble our efforts to close the gap between those who arrive on our doorstep ready for college and those who enter unaware of the demands of academe.

Despite our gains, the performance gap is still significant. The *Report* also indicates that completion rates vary in direct relationship to the level of placement by as much as 15%, and differ for each discipline by as much as 11%. Similarly, students who test into the basic skills and simultaneously enroll in college level courses are successful 57% of the time, a rate 15% lower than their peers in upper level pre-collegiate courses, and almost 20% lower than their peers who begin in collegiate level courses. Overall, more than half (60%) of the students who begin their studies in pre-collegiate courses complete associate degree requirements, less than half (48%) complete CSU level courses, and only a fourth (26%) complete IGETC/UC requirements. With three quarters of the entering class placing into pre-collegiate courses, more in the basic skills and

fewer in upper level pre-collegiate courses, far too many of our new students continue to struggle and fail.

A closer look at the students themselves underscores our concern. Younger students, ages 18 and 19 and students of color – African American, Hispanic, Latino/a, Filipino and Asian/Pacific Islander – are disproportionately represented in the pre-collegiate basic skills population in comparison with all new first-time credit students. Moreover, with few exceptions, they struggle to complete CSU requirements and do so in smaller numbers, particularly in English and mathematics. Our retention/success programs, such as the African American Scholastic Programs (AASP), the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), the Latino Services network (LSN) the Learning Assistance Center (LAC), Math Bridge, and the Writing Success Project (WSP), attract and assist many of these students, contributing to their achievement and persistence. Most of the students associate with a single retention/success program, receiving instruction, instructional support, student support services, either alone or in some combination, all personalized by the program's faculty and staff, and the results are significant. Students who participate in these programs almost always achieve higher rates of course success, higher grade point averages, and higher graduation and transfer rates than their non-participating peers both by discipline and by ethnicity. However, their numbers are relatively small, accommodating only about a fourth of the 11,000 students who need them. Given the growth in the enrollment of diverse students who require pre-collegiate support, this data suggests that we need to reconsider the relationship between the multicultural and pre-collegiate needs of our entering students to transform the institution and accelerate student success.

Integrating Multicultural and Developmental Education

In practice, integrating multicultural and developmental education requires rethinking the program – the curriculum, instruction, support services and student services – to establish a pluralistic framework for learning which begins with the aspirations, literacies, and practices of students. Ideally, integrated programs provide more flexible, customizable content with learning activities that are accessible and applicable to students with a variety of backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities. Students still develop academic skills and problem-solving skills along with the attitudes and practices associated with success in college and a sense of their own learning interests and skills. However, they also expand their social knowledge and engage the perspectives of a wide range of social groups, adding their voices to the college community as they learn to negotiate and transform practices that promote inequality and privilege. In these programs the curriculum reflects a multicultural perspective in content and materials; instructional systems promote active learning through learning communities, collaborative learning, topical projects, and simulations; and support services actively engage students through mentoring programs, peer study and support groups, and campus life. Multiculturalism, therefore becomes a theme that informs the what, how and why of teaching and learning, enabling the college community to make the developmental program more open, democratic and just (Bruch, et.al, 2004).

Several institutions have already embarked on this journey. The Community College of Baltimore, for example, one of the League for Innovation's Vanguard Colleges, identified a similar need to improve the outcomes of its developmental program, particularly for students of color, and established a college-wide initiative to close the gap. A five-part strategy was implemented beginning with a comprehensive professional development program enabling faculty and staff to

expand their understanding of the effects of race and culture on teaching and learning and explore methods to facilitate learning in a culturally-mediated manner. Using the concept of mastery learning, the faculty and staff created a structured learning environment which addresses academic preparation through a variety of instructional delivery methods appropriate to diverse learning styles including contextualized small group instruction and learning communities. Personalized academic and student support services are incorporated into student learning plans based on a comprehensive assessment of motivation and attitude along with the basic skills, study skills, and metacognition. All developmental reading students enroll in a student success orientation course, Student Success Centers provide tutoring and computer-aided instruction, and a peer mentoring program helps students navigate the academic community. Finally, the college created an atmosphere in which pedagogy and the role of culture in learning is broadly discussed with safe zones for students, and enrichment initiatives which celebrate diversity and promote continued study (McKusick and McPhail, 2004).

The Community College of Baltimore is not alone in this venture, with institutions at all levels across the county joining in the conversation to increase the success of diverse students seeking entry to higher education. Only when the gap between traditional and non-traditional student performance is closed will access and opportunity truly become equitable.

Establishing the Academy

At City College we are ready to consider such an initiative. With a proactive Diversity Committee and growing investment in student success/retention programs supported an expanding multicultural infusion project and strong Basic Skills Committee promoting a comprehensive developmental effort, City College is in prime position to merge these initiatives and join in the multicultural developmental conversation. It is within this framework that we have proposed the establishment of an *Academy for Improved Student Success*, a unit which would bring a variety of programs together to integrate student learning with multicultural development throughout the pre-collegiate program. Through the Academy we would work to close the gap between traditional and non-traditional students and ensure equal access and opportunity for all students who study at City College.

The concept of the *Academy* capitalizes on our investment in student success, multicultural infusion, and learning outcomes to foster continued program development and institutional transformation. Focusing on students in need of pre-college assistance and support, both credit and non-credit, particularly those from underrepresented groups, the Academy would support the refinement of our pre-college program – curriculum and instruction, learning assistance, assessment and counseling – through an intensive professional development program which fosters improved student success in the basic skills and beyond and a multidimensional assessment program capturing the nuances as impact accrues. Key to the success of the Academy is the development of collaborative partnerships with the academic departments including ethnic studies departments, the success/retention programs and Transitional Studies, as well as the student services such as Matriculation, counseling, and Learning Assistance, and special initiatives including the Diversity/Multicultural Infusion Program, Grow Your Own and Students Supporting Students (S₃). And central to the institutionalization of such an effort is a considerable investment in creating a supportive structure, providing visionary leadership, and

ensuring the selection, orientation, continued development and recognition of talented faculty and staff.

Over the next month we will host listening sessions to gather your comments, thoughts, and suggestions. By October a special Task Force composed of interested teaching and counseling faculty and staff will be convened to refine this basic concept and expand upon it by integrating continuing themes, programmatic initiatives, and partnerships in a comprehensive proposal for the establishment of the Academy. Thereafter an implementation team will be identified to carry this kernel of an idea forward to fruition.

The development of the Academy requires a significant investment of time, energy, creative thinking, and funding, without which City College is likely to continue to struggle against the odds, making incremental gains instead of the significant change that we need if we are to deliver on the promise of our mission. We invite all interested parties to become involved in this effort. Help us accelerate learning and close the gap!

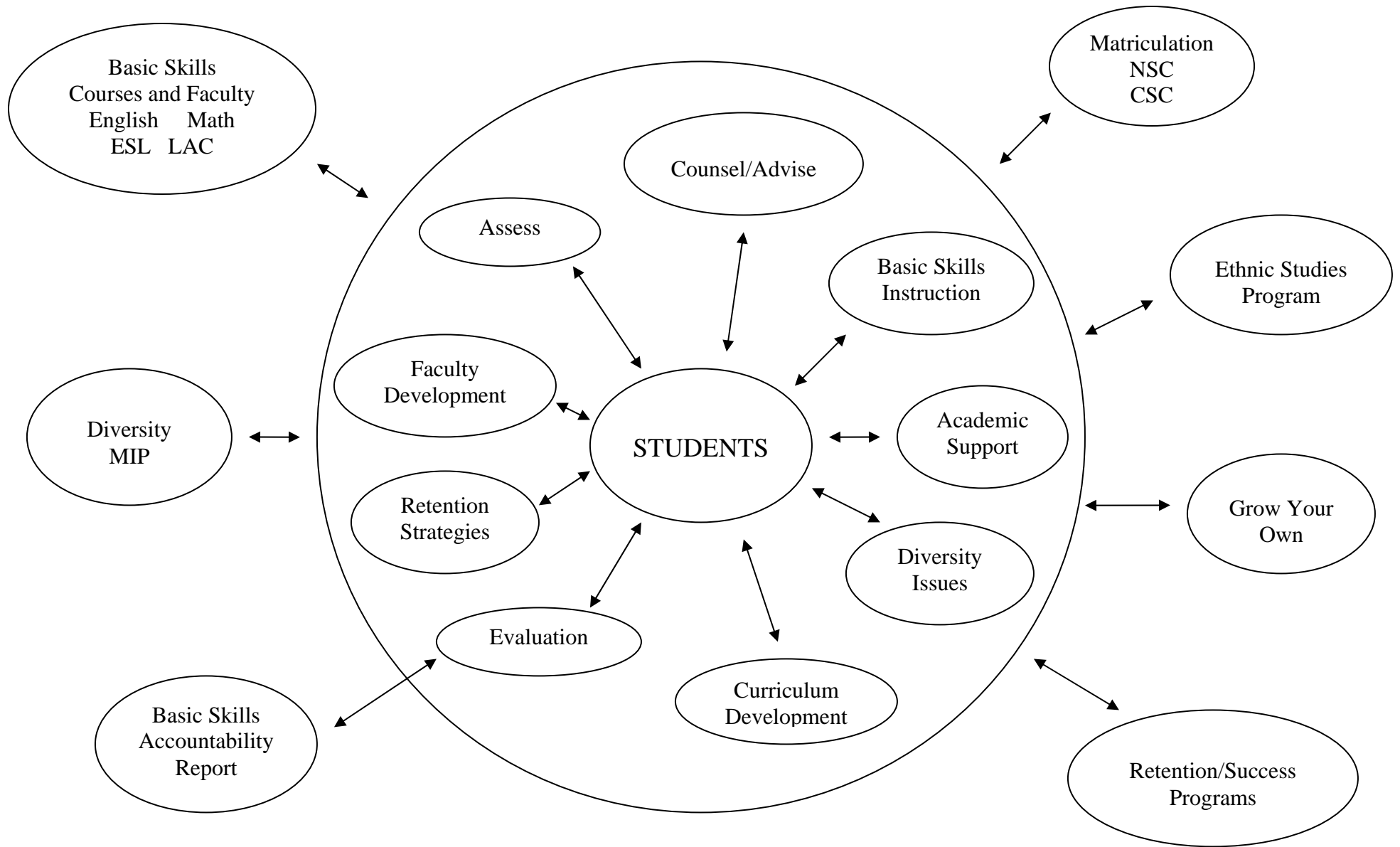
References

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