

RESEARCH BRIEF

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Engaging Faculty in ATD World Café Initiative at NOVA

NOVA became an Achieving the Dream (ATD) member in 2007-08 and was named an Achieving the Dream Leader College in 2010. To achieve student success, the College focused on incorporating ATD into planning efforts. The ATD Initiative is led by an ATD Core Team and ATD Campus Teams. The Teams meet frequently. An annual, all-day, ATD College-wide meeting was held on February 3, 2017 at NOVA. About 60 ATD Campus Team members, largely comprised of full-time faculty, participated in a day-long retreat. To explore faculty perceptions on ATD's institutional capacities to reform student success, the team met in a World Café format. According to ATD, there are seven capacity areas for student success but NOVA chose to focus on the following three areas as a starting point:

1. Teaching and Learning
2. Equity
3. Engagement and Communication

Faculty members provided the following valuable feedback in terms of strengths, weaknesses, and action plans for each of the areas.

1. Teaching and Learning

ATD's Definition of Teaching and Learning: The commitment to engaging full-time and adjunct faculty in examinations of pedagogy, meaningful professional development, and a central role for them as change agents within the institution. Also, the College's commitment to advising, tutoring, and out-of-classroom supports as well as restructuring developmental education to facilitate student learning and success.

Strengths

Where do we have the greatest strengths to build upon in this capacity area? NOVA utilizes a wide variety of educational programs, learning experiences, instructional approaches, and academic and non-academic support designed to facilitate teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are central to the mission of NOVA. Faculty shared NOVA's effort in this area. NOVA has faculty with diverse talents and strengths. In 2016, NOVA established an enhanced Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). CETL is dedicated to assisting faculty and staff in improving the quality of teaching and learning services. CETL Faculty Advocates inspire, guide, and mentor faculty in areas of pedagogy and classroom management throughout the academic year. CETL runs the Power UP Your Pedagogy (PUP) Conference which focuses on pedagogy and includes training opportunities. CETL also has a library with the latest literature exploring topics on teaching and learning.

Faculty acknowledged the wealth of data and reports produced by the Office of Institutional Research (OIR). The official annual Fact Book published by the office, specialized data, and reports inform the faculty. Faculty increasingly apply learner analytics to look more closely at student progress and the need for support or intervention. They receive reports such as placement data, Campus, Assessment, Response, and Evaluation (CARE) reports, Student Assistance and Intervention for Learning Success (SAILS) reports and gaps, cross campus diagnostics, standardized embedded data, assessment data, data on gender, full-/part-time status, advising data, and grade distribution reports. Institutional surveys such as the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) are a resource for benchmark data. Participants also mentioned actions taken by NOVA such as embedding tutors in Developmental English courses. NOVA continues to track developmental student success and progression to college-level courses to ensure students are progressing and are acquiring knowledge and skills necessary to succeed at NOVA.

Areas to Improve

While faculty strive to offer opportunities and services for student success, the forum made suggestions in terms of areas that need improvement. They also mentioned that data is critical to faculty in order to reflect on how to overcome the gaps and align with the College's goal of student success. While quantitative data is useful, qualitative information collected by other research tools should be utilized. There is a need to listen to the anecdotes. There is a wealth of data available to faculty, but they need the training to process the data on a regular basis.

One of the areas where NOVA needs attention is the various needs of its diverse student body. Active and collaborative learning must be emphasized by providing more opportunities for student engagement inside and outside the classroom.

Actions

What actions can we take to build in this capacity area? Faculty recommended that the administration should create information sources for all faculty in order to guide students who need help and provide charts with information about Campus Assessment Response and Evaluation (CARE), Working Student Success Network (WSSN), and other programs on BlackBoard and SlideShare. Workshops on training faculty on the use of data must be provided. Faculty also requested data at the campus-level. A suggestion was made to include data analysis as a regular activity for the ATD Team. OIR has routinely processed, analyzed, and distributed data. A suggestion was made to organize a conference or workshop during Welcome Back Week where faculty are given assignments with data to analyze and interpret. The message was clear to get more faculty actively involved in data analysis.

2. Equity

ATD's Definition of Equity: The commitment, capabilities, and experiences of an institution to equitably serve low-income students, students of color, and other at-risk student populations with respect to access, success, and campus climate.

The ATD team primarily focused on developmental education and completion in gatekeeper courses. Attention has recently shifted to narrowing the achievement gaps in many areas. Faculty teams discussed areas of strength to increase equity.

Strengths

Where do we have the greatest strengths to build upon in this capacity area? NOVA's Pathway to Baccalaureate program is a strong initiative providing support to underprepared and at-risk students. Attrition of students, especially during the first semester, is a significant problem.

NOVA's first year advising program provides students with academic, career, and social support. One program at the Woodbridge Campus, MAN UP, provides minority male mentoring. The program is producing significant results. As a result, other campuses will launch MAN UP. Faculty teams spoke about the Working Student Success Network (WSSN) that launched the Student Emergency Grant program. This program provides one-time financial support to students experiencing an enrollment-threatening financial emergency. While NOVA's greatest strength is diversity of students, faculty, and staff, it poses a challenge as well. Meeting the needs of low-income students, students of color, and other underserved populations may require different approaches and the College must continually strive to understand and respond to the needs of a diverse population.

NOVA provides mental health support to students through the Campus Assessment Response and Evaluation (CARE) program but the services are limited and cannot cater to a large student body. Another area of support for student success is tutoring services. All NOVA campuses provide tutoring services free to any current NOVA student. Tutoring services help many students succeed in the classroom and help bridge the diversity gap. A wide variety of resources including student clubs and activities help support diversity on campus. NOVA also offers food pantries which provide food and basic necessities to NOVA students at no cost.

Areas to Improve

Where do we have the greatest needs for bolstering capacity? NOVA's large student body and various locations pose a challenge. Many faculty and staff are unaware of programs at NOVA. The College must do a better job of educating faculty and staff of available resources so they can support students in need. The website should be comprehensive and an audit of support services should be done to ensure information is easily accessible to students.

Data provided by OIR detail the gaps. Faculty must foster in-depth discussions of achievement gaps and equity based on data across the College and develop scalable programs that focus on these gaps.

Faculty suggested providing more comprehensive alerts and warnings for high risk students. Faculty, staff, and students need to be better informed of the terms "Student Warnings", "Early Alert", and "Academic Probation". There were concerns about limited advising hours. The other areas of advising discussed were first-year advising, financial aid advising, and career advising.

Actions

What actions can we take to build strength in this capacity area? Based on the discussion, faculty recommended that NOVA must do a better job of informing faculty, staff, and students of the resources available. In addition, NOVA should ensure students understand that support is available to them when they need it. A way to bring more awareness to equity can be professional development, engagement, and awareness of diversity. In terms of services provided to students, NOVA can provide a behavioral health center at each campus, more funding for tutoring, and child care facilities. Other ideas proposed include reducing the class size and providing better accessibility for student orientation, especially for older students.

3. Engagement and Communication

ATD's Definition of Engagement and Communication: The creation of strategic partnerships with key external stakeholders, such as K-12, universities, employers, community-based organizations, and internal stakeholders across the institution to participate in the student success agenda and improvement of student outcomes.

NOVA's new president made communication with students, faculty, and staff a high priority. Many events are organized to keep the College community actively engaged. NOVA has a new Mascot which was selected after engaging the entire NOVA community. NOVA's new Pathway to Baccalaureate Program is a successful initiative to engage various stakeholders. Through Pathway to the Baccalaureate, NOVA partners with K-12 public school systems and George Mason University to provide seamless support to selected students as they pursue a four-year college degree. The program provides support beginning with the transition from high school to NOVA and then from NOVA to George Mason or another university.

The participants discussed ways to build this capacity area using NOVA initiatives to improve student outcomes.

Strengths

Where do we have the greatest strengths to build upon in this capacity area? Each campus at NOVA has an Achieving the Dream Campus Team whose purpose is to discuss issues of student success and engage the larger campus community in the student success agenda. ATD Campus Teams include faculty as well as representatives from other areas that impact student success such as counselors, librarians, and tutoring staff. NOVA's award-winning Pathway to the Baccalaureate Program is an example of NOVA's success in collaborating with a wide variety of stakeholders.

Areas to Improve

Where do we have the greatest needs for bolstering capacity? A primary challenge has been to ensure that the level of activity is consistent across campuses. Some ATD Campus Teams are very active while others are less active. If more communication and outreach were provided across ATD Campus Teams, projects and initiatives could impact more students. In recent years, many new faculty and staff have joined the College. However, many new faculty and staff have not become actively involved with the ATD Campus Team. Their fresh perspectives and enthusiasm would add new life to the initiative and strengthen the ATD Team. One way of engaging new faculty and staff may be to send out information on student success initiatives early and often, including at new faculty and staff orientation sessions or possibly on a Blackboard site where campuses can share their ideas.

The need for spreading the culture of student success was emphasized. All stakeholders must realize that their role is critical in student success. To help communicate this message, it is important that NOVA continues to offer public forums to provide input related to student success.

Actions

What actions can we take to build strength in this capacity area? Faculty recommended fostering multilevel communication by providing multiple options for information sharing for faculty, staff, and students to access the information via their preferred modes. Printed materials should be replaced by putting the information on NOVA's website. Information resources should be placed on the most accessed links from NOVA so that it is read by various stakeholders. There seems to a gap between what is expected at NOVA and what the placement tests are about. NOVA needs to bridge this gap. Other suggestions included making announcements via Twitter, opt-in texting for student support, using Instagram, and utilizing a digital Dropbox for student questions to give timely feedback.

This was the first ATD World Café; therefore, the focus was only on three of the seven capacity areas. Future ATD World Cafés will be more comprehensive in nature, cover all the capacity areas, and include other stakeholders such as the administration and classified staff.