This newsletter consists of reports about Achieving the Dream (ATD) activities from Alexandria, Annandale, Medical Education, Manassas, and Woodbridge campuses.

Alexandria Campus update

In addition to new student orientation, campus team meetings and sub-committee meetings, the following activities have been held at the Alexandria campus in the fall of 2008.

Meetings and workshops

On September 25, a breakfast meeting was held with community members to discuss partnerships that can be enhanced or created, community expectations of NOVA graduates, and suggestions to help NOVA students succeed in their educational goals. The community members who participated were from businesses, non-profit organizations, and the local high schools. By request, a second meeting with high school administrators is planned for November 18. Two workshops on learning disabilities were organized as a result of interest expressed at the meeting with the Deans and Assistant Deans last spring. The first was held on October 28. The second will be held in late November. A representative on the learning communities team held two workshops on October 23 and 24.

Questions and concerns

The Alexandria Campus ATD team put together some questions about various topics in the ATD Initiative. Regarding learning communities, there have been questions about which courses should be linked, which semester they should first be offered, how the students will know which courses are linked, and when training for instructors will begin. Regarding cross-college communication, the following suggestions are meant for improvement of the Achieving the Dream core and campus teams: facilitate better communication across the college, encourage sharing of ideas and resources, plan for regular meetings to discuss activities, and circulate regular updates on Achieving the Dream-sponsored campus-specific activities.
Annandale Campus update

The Annandale campus held a student orientation during the summer of 2008. In addition, the campus team continues to meet to discuss strategies to improve student success.

Learning communities

The Annandale campus currently has a learning community which links one section of Math 004 with SDV 100. In Spring 2009, three sections of Math 003 will be linked with SDV 100. In order to make these learning communities as effective as possible, the faculty involved with these courses are part of a college-wide learning communities team, which pulls resources together to teach faculty the best practices regarding learning communities.

Monthly forums

Monthly forums with the Provost are held to discuss Achieving the Dream plans for the spring and beyond, to develop ideas for implementation, and to investigate areas that need improvement. All faculty and staff are welcome to attend the forums. September’s forum on “The Culture of Evidence” was presented by Dr. George Gabriel and the Annandale campus team. October’s discussion on “Learning Communities” was led by Nan Peck. Terry Doyle presented the data from the fall student focus groups at the November forum. All of the forums have been well-attended and some very interesting conversations have been started.

Questions and concerns

The campus team has a fundamental question for Annandale: How does the Achieving the Dream initiative affect different facets of the campus and what can be done to get the most for each division? The Annandale team is working with division deans to determine the needs of each division. The purpose of these discussions is to determine how the Achieving the Dream initiative can best meet the specific needs of each division. In addition, faculty who teach gatekeeper courses are being asked for their insights on how to best improve success in these courses. We recognize that we have a wealth of information on campus for helping students succeed and want to work together to share that information.

Manassas Campus update

Faculty forum

At the Manassas campus convocation in fall 2008, a faculty forum was held entitled “Conversations from the Classroom”. The purpose was to engage faculty in conversation about what has and has not worked for them in the classroom. Specifically, the conversation included: adjunct and new faculty mentoring program; learning communities; use of technology; strategies in the classroom that have proven successful; and new and innovative strategies in the classroom.

Mathematics summit

A Mathematics summit was held to discuss: use of technology and publisher software in the classroom; placement tests – collected and summarized data on who was placing where; use of grades A – F for developmental courses; current MTH-STD learning community that incorporates the use of coordinated syllabi, embedded tutoring, and weekly themes; and a new student orientation that used some very creative marketing strategies to attract student attendance.

Questions and concerns

We would like to invite someone who has experience in learning communities to come and conduct a workshop for us. Our faculty want to know how we will expand our content concentration to disciplines other than Math and SDV. How and when will we bring attention to the other gatekeeper courses and how and when will all faculty be involved more specifically in the initiative?
Medical Education Campus update

Allied Health Program updates

The Respiratory Therapy program has implemented a successful big brother/ big sister program. Collaborating with the MEC tutoring center, six students volunteered, were trained, and began to provide regularly scheduled study sessions. The project not only helps the first year students, but the second year students have found the review of first year information helpful in preparing for licensure exams.

After the first year of the mentoring program, faculty will use data driven outcomes to identify areas still requiring focused support. Tutoring in these areas will then be made available as directed by respective faculty members. These tutoring activities will be mandatory and activities for this goal will begin in 2009.

Nursing student focus groups were created for the core courses: Health Science I & II (NAS 161-162). These groups were formed to encourage improved retention and student success. The results were presented to the NAS faculty. A NAS 161-162 sub-cluster met during the fall convocation day. A wiki site was establish for faculty to post, review, and comment on course content (Chapter Study Guides, Chapter Outlines, and/or Objectives, etc.) in an effort to develop a standard set of documents for these courses.

Nursing Program updates

An initial survey was conducted for program evaluation and satisfaction assessment for all nursing classes.

The nursing program is providing special tutoring sessions and extra classes for students who need additional help. Remediation courses are currently being offered with a high response rate. Study strategies for the NCLEX-RN Licensure exam are currently being included in core courses. This began in the spring of 2008 and is being expanded in the current year.

The nursing program would like to review the feasibility of either remodeling classrooms 151 and 152 into a single classroom or developing a larger lecture hall with a capacity to seat 150-200 students. This goal is expected to take at least two years to implement (2010) as funding for this goal is not currently available.

Additional updates

Last year, NOVA nursing students scored an average of 78.2% (124 students) on the NCLEX-RN licensing exam. This year, NOVA nursing students scored higher with an average score of 83.1% (184 students). Students scoring 78% or lower are automatically identified for remediation courses. The goal is to have an average NCLEX-RN score of 90%.

During classes, students can answer questions with “clickers.” This allows teachers instant feedback on student content knowledge and which topic areas require more review. Also, it links the responses to student id numbers. Students in both the classroom and taking courses on-line are required to purchase “clickers.”

Plans are being made to publicize and educate students, faculty and staff about the Achieving the Dream Implementation Plan. The Achieving the Dream Committee planned a Student Success Open Forum to be sponsored by MEC ATD committee and held on Monday November 17 from 2-4 pm. This forum plans to provide opportunities for students, faculty and staff to give input and share personal experiences and opinions related to retention.
Woodbridge Campus update

In the fall 2008 semester, the Achieving the Dream team on the Woodbridge campus held a student orientation seminar onsite, campus team meetings, and sub-committee meetings.

Open house meetings
The Woodbridge campus hosted “Open House” meetings for all interested professional staff and faculty. Everyone was invited join us for a casual discussion about student success. These meetings occurred twice this fall: October 20 from 3:00-4:00pm and November 13 from 5:30-7:00pm.

ATD campus meetings
Campus ATD meetings were held on September 22nd and November 3rd. At the meeting on September 22nd, the team discussed the following: plans for student coaches on October 1 at the Woodbridge Campus; distribution of the statistics used for choosing the Gatekeeper courses and discussion about which courses need special attention and ideas to improve student success; and review of the ATD implementation plan. At the meeting on November 3rd, the team discussed the following: how to improve communication with other campus colleagues, how to keep the initiative active, and it was noted that requests from core teams will be reported at the meeting on November 11th.

Questions and concerns
The Woodbridge campus ATD team developed a list of topics at the October 20th discussion to be addressed by the Achieving the Dream teams: (1) focus groups for other classes, (2) survey instructors, and (3) discussions with divisions.