

Organizing for Student Success: The University College Model

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The success of first-year students is undoubtedly tied to our work as orientation professionals. As a result of programs administered by orientation and transition departments, first-year students are able to make valuable connections with one another, meet with academic advisors who assist them with course schedule creation, and experience a part of campus life prior to the start of classes, in addition to other important institutional processes that occur at new student orientation programs.

Orientation programs are not the only contributors to the success and retention of first-term, first-year students. Active participation in the following academic support programs can also help them to succeed: tutoring and Supplemental Instruction, placement testing, TRIO programs, first-year seminars, academic advising, developmental courses, and themed-living learning communities, to name a few. At many institutions, these crucial functions fall under the purview of a first-year organizational structure (FYOS) known as university college.

In the monograph *Organizing for Student Success: The University College Model*, university colleges are described as the “academic home” for students. While many services are targeted to first-year students, they often continue to utilize support programs and leadership opportunities provided by university colleges throughout their tenure at their institution. The services provided by university colleges are not unusual to campus professionals; however, the name “university college” is sometimes unfamiliar to those who do not work in such a structure. Of the institutions surveyed by this monograph’s editors, 45% indicated their first-year organization structure was titled University College, while the remaining institutions used 18 varying names for their FYOS.

Regardless of one’s familiarity with university colleges, this monograph will be useful to anyone interested in working with or learning more about the successful organization of academic support units. Faculty, professional staff members (in both academic and student affairs), and graduate students will likely find this work helpful in understanding the benefits of the university college model. Those who

are presently employed by university colleges will find this monograph useful in providing a detailed yet concise context for the importance of their work.

Monograph Structure

The introduction to this monograph effectively prepares the reader for the seven chapters that follow. Chapters 1–6 span a variety of topics related to the university college model: organizational structure, collaboration, involvement with undergraduate curriculum, learning support, assessment, and resource management. Chapter introductions provide the reader with a comprehensive theoretical framework related to the numerous practical case studies included in these Chapters 2–5. The final chapter serves as a summation to the monograph, detailing how university colleges can and should act as agents for student success and institutional change.

Overview of Chapters

In the first chapter, survey responses of 58 participating institutions are disseminated. These responses provide insight into the level of responsibility the university colleges possess for a variety of academic support services as well as populations of students served. Of the responding institutions, most had primary or shared responsibility for academic advising, first-year seminars, learning communities, and new student orientation. University colleges also frequently hold primary or shared responsibilities for services directly related to undergraduate coursework, such as tutoring, mentoring, Supplemental Instruction, and study skills cultivation. The authors report that nearly half of the University Colleges surveyed are in charge of developmental courses as well. In regard to student populations served, “undeclared students are the most frequently served” (p. 16). These institutions should be particularly proud of this fact as without university colleges, some undeclared students may experience feelings of disenfranchisement.

The second chapter addresses a theme central to the mission of every university college: student success. Case studies from five institutions provide detailed accounts of both celebrations and challenges experienced when collaborating with entities outside of university college. Collaborative efforts pertaining to first-year seminars, Supplemental Instruction, college readiness, and developmental education are explored. As noted in the case studies, university colleges have effectively collaborated with various student affairs units as well as area high schools to help students succeed in postsecondary education. Some of these partnerships provide learning experiences to two groups of students, those who receive the help and those who provide it.

The third chapter in this monograph partners nicely with the second, as it describes further institutional collaborations. Chapter 3 explains the involvement of five university colleges in undergraduate coursework and curriculum. These university colleges have the power and privilege of impacting undergraduate

education by their partnerships with faculty on such retention tools as first-year seminars, developmental education courses, and learning communities, some of which include a residential component. In addition to cross-collaboration, some faculty members have accepted positions within university colleges, which creates even more opportunities for campus professionals to understand the important roles played by one another. Finally, the impact of university colleges on general education programs is explored; this is a particularly thought-provoking case study as university colleges have varying degrees of engagement in general education.

The fourth chapter continues the focus on student learning and success by highlighting programs that support students as whole persons. In order to develop students as whole persons, it is necessary to acknowledge that their academic education and personal development are not separate processes. University college programs and support services allow students to make connections between their in and out-of-classroom lives, which allows them to develop both as learners and as individuals (p. 90, 91). Graduate students in higher education, campus professionals, and faculty alike will readily see the importance of this approach, as higher education theorists have posited the importance of treating students as whole persons for decades. Institutions contributing to this chapter recount student support in various forms: summer orientation programs, academic advising, and peer mentorship.

This chapter also discusses the significance of student employment in university colleges as a mutually beneficial partnership for all involved. New students greatly value the input and advice from more experienced peer educators; for example, "peer educators' closeness in age and experience to the students they assist gives them credence that students might not grant to a faculty or staff member..." (p. 94). The authors explain that "peer educators" include orientation leaders, peer advisors, tutors, and other student mentors. As we know from our experiences with our own student employees, paraprofessional experiences gained by peer educators give them the opportunity to create valuable relationships with staff and faculty, as well as allow them to put skills they have learned in class to use in real-world situations. University colleges, like other campus offices, also benefit financially as student employees cost less to employ than professional staff. This was particularly helpful for one institution which created and successfully sustained a learning center employing only students, with the exception of one professional staff member.

At this point, the reader is educated on the many effective services offered by university colleges, and Chapter 5 is especially helpful in determining the effectiveness of these services using data. This chapter focuses on assessment efforts and utilizes case studies to provide an in-depth account of program review and self-study processes. As financial constraints continue to dictate many institutional decisions, assessment remains paramount to the livelihood of support services and related programming. Without data to support the effectiveness of university college services, it may be difficult to assert that these programs have an impact on retention rates and academic persistence, even if this impact is known anecdotally to be true. Therefore, this chapter is particularly important for campus

professionals charged with garnering support and resources for their programs and services.

As Chapter 5 notes, well-planned assessment efforts are crucial to the sustainability of university college programs and services, in addition to wise management of resources. The sixth chapter educates the reader on the sensible stewardship of university college resources by proposing such ideas as a one-stop center and use of technological resources to curb spending. The authors maintain that a one-stop center is an effective tool for reallocating resources in a manner that benefits both students and their families. A one-stop center includes many vital resources in one location so students' time and energy are not wasted visiting numerous campus locations. Staff members stationed in one-stop centers are cross-trained so that they are able to assist students with a myriad of campus processes; this particular method of resource management is effective because as current staff are reallocated to the center, new staff are not necessarily added.

Furthermore, the authors assert that university colleges would be wise to follow other institutional units which have decreased their printing and paper usage by utilizing more online resources. In addition, it is suggested that university college leadership explore the prospect of federal and state grants, as well as continue to seek the support and buy-in of faculty who remain a very influential entity on any campus.

The final chapter in this publication serves as an ideal end to the monograph. The seventh chapter addresses the need for university colleges to act as institutional change agents, continually working to promote student success. In addition, the authors encourage university colleges to continue to support the changing student population, which is becoming increasingly diverse. Lastly, those working in university colleges are reminded to consider the "big picture" when thinking of student success. University colleges should celebrate current administrative successes but remain careful to avoid complacency.

Conclusion

As a result of intentionally crafted chapters with practice-based case studies, this monograph would be helpful to any faculty member, professional staff member, or graduate student interested in learning more about the university college structure, whether or not they are familiar with this first-year organizational structure. The chapters focusing on collaboration and assessment will be especially instructive to those wishing to build additional partnerships on campus as well as those looking to augment their assessment practices. Those who are less familiar with this particular model will appreciate the first chapter's detailing of the organizational structure and common functions. Furthermore, as a result of the comprehensive nature of this publication, readers can readily see that university colleges promote student success as well as student retention. This allows readers to see the alignment between the goals of university colleges and the mission of their institutions.

This monograph would be an instrumental tool in the reorganization of

academic support services should institutions decide to reorganize their units using the university college model. Institutions wishing to develop a university college can use this monograph to determine how to organize this new structure, as well as to identify key campus constituencies to help with this endeavor; resource management will also be a particularly salient chapter for those looking to maintain a new university college. In terms of evaluating existing university colleges, the chapter on program review will be of utmost importance.

While this monograph provides many insights on the successful implementation and maintenance of this FYOS, one topic for future consideration could be successful staff training practices.