Re: Bakersfield College Making it Happen (MIH) Program

Dear ASCCC Exemplary Award Committee,

I have served as a faculty member, a dean and now president of Bakersfield College (BC), but I have never known Bakersfield College until my participation in the Making it Happen (MIH) Program which enabled me to see the college through the eyes of students, my mentees. The MIH program assigns new first-time, first-generation students to about 41 mentors who include faculty, classified and each of my administrative team. I was assigned two mentees. Mentors serve as the advisor and guide for these students who have very few resources and no close family member to guide them through the higher education maze. The program also involves about 28 faculty, called classroom interventionists, who intervene with SARS alerts and implement Habits of the Mind (HoM) tools within the content of their classes. These strategies, combined with summer bridges, are an effort to embrace and stabilize our new freshman straight out of high school. Because of the close contact with these students through the mentorship component, we have identified institutional problems which must be fixed, immediately, because they represent great barriers for our first-generation students. But even more so, we have learned that this work, transitioning students from high school to college, must begin earlier-in the high schools, even grade schools, and deep within our diverse community.

BC has worked with CalSOAP transitioning high school students for four years, but we were not significantly influencing success for our first-time students; in fact, our lowest course success rates were first-time 18 to 19 year old students. The “Making it Happen” program started as a holistic approach to better serve our first-generation, economically disadvantaged students transitioning from rural high schools to our college. We began by viewing a documentary called First-generation which has won international movie awards and actually stars one of our BC students. We showed the movie to 600-700 students, faculty and community members and received amazing responses. The unspoken needs and lack of effective structures to facilitate the transition and success of first-generation students became very real to our college and community. What could we construct for our CalSOAP, first-generation students, and eventually scale up, to meet all of BC’s first time students?

The concept of approaching students before they get to us and having a high touch interface after they arrive was important. BC had been collaborating with CSUB and the high schools on the CalSOAP interventions for four years, but the interventions were inadequate. We targeted the 2014 cohort of about 450 CalSOAP students and worked closely with the high school and the
CalSOAP/CSUB counselors. Our first strategy was to provide placement testing at the high school campuses, where students perform better. Our second step was to implement multiple measures, using the ASCCC paper as a guideline. We believed, part of setting the students on a path to success, was starting them off in the highest correct level placement. We also placed the ones with high school grades indicating they could handle it, into compressed or accelerated basic skills curriculum or self-paced labs. This greatly changed the placement of our students to higher levels and shortened basic skills pathways. These placements combined with the last several years of Basic Skills curriculum revision saved our students over 571 semesters of student work. Some higher placements were a result of students testing better at their own high schools, some from giving credit for EAP and ERWC as part of the placement process, and others as a result of multiple measures criteria developed by discipline faculty. Although this work is recent, affecting only the freshman class of this year, we have compared it to our previous years of CalSOAP transitioning work which was improving very slowly and have seen increased retention. We are tracking the results of these multiple measures strategies closely and gearing up for the 1500 CalSOAP students coming to us this Spring; this scaling up is only possible through strong partnerships with the high schools and CSUB’s CalSOAP counselors. Further, we will provide onsite assessment at all 41 feeder high schools with improved testing processes automated multiple measures with the help of CalPASS and the high schools.

In addition to pre-registration transition work with placement, BC trained the CalSOAP and high school counselors to provide abbreviated education plans. These plans included first semester enrollment in English, Math and Student Development classes with full-time status as a goal; these factors have been shown in research to increase success. After students are fully matriculated they are invited to bridge programs that orient and engage students with important concepts such as: accessing their email, purchasing books, interpreting the schedule, contacting faculty, looking at career and educational options, exploring campus support services, navigating financial aid and end with completion of a comprehensive education plan.

The MIH program development was a collaborative effort where faculty devised the high touch mentoring program. In order to reach out via alternative pathways the plan built in the role of classroom interventionists, in addition to mentors. These three major strategies: 1) assignment of students to faculty, staff and administrators as mentors/advisors and 2) identification of classroom interventionists who agreed to implement Habits of the Mind strategies, SARS Early Alert and delivery of ILO assessments in sections of their classes, 3) bridge programs led by mentors, have made a major difference in the retention of this cohort. This structure for the MIH program involves adjunct and full-time faculty, administrators, management and classified employees, allowing the institution to operate in a more integrated fashion.

As the word got out, classified employees asked to become mentors. As president, I assigned my administrators to take on at least two mentees each, some requested more i.e. one dean has eight. The response has been more than we expected. The classified mentors from financial aid and EOPS have provided workshops for faculty and students. Counseling mentors have provided student ed plan and SARS alert workshops. One benefit of these interactions is growing respect and collaboration across departments and between instructional and student services professionals. Yet
another benefit has been the identification of institution-wide barriers and issues that are quickly and collaboratively solved. For instance, when I found out my mentee had no access to a computer because the library commons was closed during her bridge experience, we quickly created alternative access for students. As mentors tried to contact their mentees we uncovered another challenge. Many first-time, first-generation students do not have a computer but they have phones and access the internet from this device. We recognized the importance of mobile apps for our new students. We also learned that texting is the best form of communication with these students, but texting has issues we must overcome.

Just prior to the beginning of school, I planned the first annual convocation for students and family members of our first-time, first-generation students. At the convocation the mentors took an oath to help the students; the families took an oath (in Spanish or English) to recognize that school is work and committed to supporting their students and prioritizing school work; and mentees took an oath to prioritize schoolwork. As the semester began, mentors thought they would help the students, but soon found that they did not know the answers to many of the student’s questions. These questions often revealed barriers for students. For instance, students lacked textbooks and the financial aid was not timely, setting students up to fail the first semester. This was solved by mentors immediately calling publishers and getting agreements that the first two chapters of the text would be available for free online. The financial aid issues revealed a very difficult process that first-generation students could not navigate, and solutions were developed, including educational workshops for mentors/advisors and students.

The vital loop between students and mentors revealed institutional issues and improvements that were immediately addressed and partially or fully resolved:

- Problems with BC Application; we are moving to CCCAPPLY
- Issues with KCCD email accounts: currently discussing options
- Difficulty for undocumented students filling out the BC application; new access and solved by CCCAPPLY
- Practices at high schools to have all seniors fill out the CCCApply application but KCCD was not part of CCCApply; resolved by move to CCCAPPLY
- Problems with Assessment/Placement test practices; when students tested at the high school instead of the BC campus student scores were higher; Spring testing will be at high schools
- Technical problems and errors with placement results: the test process was changed and implemented Oct 2014
- Incomplete or absent application of multiple measures; Updated Multiple Measures criteria with English, ESL, math and academic development faculty
- Unsatisfactory online orientation needing revision and updating; currently in progress
- Unmet need for intrusive counseling with ASEPs directing students to English and Math first semester and to build basic skills, accelerate to get to college level first year, encourage to go full-time; ASEP and training of high school and CalSOAP counselors corrected this
- Problems dropping financial aid students for non-payment; revised issues with the 10 day drop policy, DO NOT have district or college drop automatically; currently correcting with district
• Incorrect messaging about academic probation; IT issue tracked down and resolved through financial aid, counseling and admissions and records
• Problems with student academic sophistication regarding grades, attendance, and ultimate success; implemented progress reporting and SARS alert
• Issues with plagiarism; budgeted for software solution to teaching about plagiarism in bridges and on campus
• Student fear of meeting with faculty; budgeted for more student mentors and planning to reach out during bridge experiences
• Lack of understanding and communication campus-wide with regards to financial and issues, academic probation and SSSP targets; Better communication and coordination with BC student Services, Financial aid, District IT

In general, we discovered that the vital link between student feedback and mentors became a barometer of barriers and issues that need resolving. We learned that to establish this necessary feedback we needed to begin communicating more effectively with students sooner. We learned that we must have a viable messaging process to alert students before they come to BC about practicing for assessment tests, completing matriculation steps early, registering as soon as they can, paying for classes and completing all financial aid steps on time. These technical features of college make it very hard for first-generation students. Focusing on our student success has united our efforts by mentors across instruction and student services as well as across classified, administration and faculty. BC’s quick response and honesty about issues increased partnership, communication and trust among college employees and also with high school counselors, principals and CSUB CalSOAP.

The BC mission was revised last year to emphasize work with our first-generation and diverse student population, focusing on the outcomes that are valued by our students and community. The BC ILOs are embedded within our mission statement and the MIH program built-in ILO assessment using classroom interventionists. The college used BSI funding to kick off MIH training and is using SSSP funding for mentor/advisors and interventions (follow-up) as well as reaching out to the high school counselors to train them in creating abbreviated education plans. You will see in the data provided that we were able to double the number of high schools participating last year in CalSOAP. Partnership, with 41 feeder high schools, will provide onsite placement testing to each high school. BC has provided training to high school administrators and counselors on research-based success solutions. Impassioned mentors have begun specific community outreach to our lowest achieving groups (African American, Economically Disadvantaged Hispanics, Students on Financial Aid and Veterans); this work is supported by and integrated with the Student Equity Plan. In addition, BC has created a matrix to look at all the personnel, activities and metrics used to define our major plans (e.g. strategic initiatives, SSSP, Student Equity Plan and Basic Skills Initiative) to maximize funding, integrate efforts and align success metrics with the MIH cohort as our manageable focus.

Will this effort become institutionalized? We are encouraged by requests from the college community to participate next year as mentors and interventionists. We have begun incorporating this program in our new classified and faculty training as a way of life at BC. The personal and institutional gain from this program has surprised us and leads us to believe that the program will be sustainable even as it scales up. We are looking forward to 1500 CalSOAP students next spring according to our CSUB partners. In addition to getting more mentors and interventionists in our MIH program, the training of and collaboration with high school and CalSOAP counselors is distributing the work and increasing efficiency in our contacts with students. As partners we share the vision and the work. This will continue to fuel our resources for scaling up.
Although our website provides multiple links to research and resources for the program (https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/making-it-happen) below are some additional resources if other colleges are interested in using this program as a model –

Background - http://www.firstgenerationfilm.com/
Current BC website for MIH - https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/making-it-happen
Bakersfield College Institutional Scorecard data and page for MIH - https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/scorecard/completion/MIH
Multiple Measures - http://www.asccc.org/sites/default/files/Multiple%20Measures%20in%20Assessment_0.pdf
Student Transcript-Enhanced Placement Study (STEPS)- http://www.rpgroup.org/projects/steps
http://www.rpgroup.org/system/files/RPSteppingFinal_0.pdf
Student Support http://www.rpgroup.org/projects/student-support-redefined
Equity - Practices that Promote Equity in Basic Skills in California Community Colleges http://www.asccc.org/sites/default/files/publications/promote_equity_basic_skills_spr2010_0.pdf

Thank you for consideration of our program,

Sonya Christian
President
Bakersfield College
http://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/president/