

Step-UP

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Introduction

Step-UP is a student retention program that employs life coaching techniques as a means to connect with and engage participants. Faculty and staff from constituencies across the campus come together with students; all are volunteers. During the weekly meetings, coaches encourage, guide, and support their Step-UP students as they make the transition to college. Although Step-UP targets at-risk students, it is open to all. The program reflects the mission of Howard Community College to “create an environment that inspires learning and the lifelong pursuit of personal and professional goals.”

Background

Step-UP is a grassroots program; the idea evolved from the 25-member, cross-functional Developmental Education Committee that, in 2003, sought to create a program to improve the success and retention of developmental education students. The objective was to create a program that would provide positive support and encouragement to students as they made the often difficult transition into college. Recognizing the importance of bonding with students early in their college experience, the committee sought to develop a program that would help students connect to Howard Community College and its resources. Volunteers from the Developmental Education Committee researched case management models, spoke with colleagues in other institutions, interviewed developmental education students, and met with a certified life coach in creating the model for Step-UP.

From the start, Step-UP has been a completely voluntary program. In spring 2005, 15 members of the Developmental Education Committee volunteered to serve as coaches. By fall 2007, Step-UP had grown to 115 trained coaches on campus; 84 of them coached during the fall semester. Today, coaches come from all employee groups, including the president, two vice presidents, two members of the Board of Trustees, full-time faculty, full-time staff, adjunct faculty, and part-time staff—each one a volunteer.

The population of students served by Step-UP has also grown and diversified. Originally, only developmental education students were invited to join. Today, our students come from programs throughout the college. ESL students have especially embraced it as a means of assimilating into American culture. From 15 students the first semester, Step-UP has grown to serve 92 students in fall 2007.

How the Initiative Works

Purpose & Design

The purpose of Step-UP is to support and encourage students as they adjust to college life. In so doing, the program endeavors to help students connect to campus resources, provide seamless communication between the academic affairs and student services departments, and most importantly to assure students that, at every level of the institution, HCC is concerned about their personal success and academic achievement.

Students who participate are randomly paired with a faculty or staff “coach.” The partners meet once a week for an hour throughout the semester, during which time the coach offers support, encouragement, guidance, and attentive listening. The life-coaching model allows staff and faculty to connect with students in a unique way. As coaches, staff and faculty are expected to step out of their traditional roles to meet with their Step-UP students. Coaches are encouraged to leave their offices and meet their students in a less formal atmosphere, free of work-related distractions. To encourage the informal meetings, the administration at HCC provides lunch vouchers for coaches