



HIGHLIGHTS

Published by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement

Profiles of Best-Practice Colleges

MetLife Foundation

Best Practices in Student Retention

MetLife Foundation Honors Four Colleges

The *MetLife Foundation Initiative on Student Success*, a partner project of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement with a special focus on student retention, has named four community colleges as the 2002-2003 *MetLife Foundation Best-Practice Colleges*. The honor goes to these colleges for their exemplary work on student retention. They are: Central Piedmont Community College (NC), Community College of Denver (CO), Maui Community College (HI), and Montgomery College (TX).

The award-winning colleges were selected through a process that took into account the colleges' performance on the "retention index" of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, student data from each institution, and written descriptions of retention strategies employed on their campuses. Final selections resulted from a "blind review" by a national panel of community college leaders.

Each college will receive a cash award of \$10,000. Following a series of student focus groups to be conducted at each of the award-winning colleges, the institutions' success stories will be summarized and disseminated through this publication — *Best Practices in Student Retention* — which will reach community and technical college presidents, administrators, faculty, staff, and state directors across the country.

In response to the naming of the four award-winning colleges, Sibyl Jacobson, President and CEO of the MetLife Foundation, said, "Community colleges have a tall order. They serve students whose goals range from taking a single class, to earning an associate's degree, to transferring to another school. Retention can be hard to measure when students have such varied objectives, but these four institutions have shown it can be done. They have used data to improve retention and create programs that meet a wide variety of student needs. Their work is an example to others."

Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) is a large, urban two-year college, serving 23,403 credit students in Charlotte, North Carolina. Gradual and steady decline in student enrollment during the last decade, along with state accountability measures, led the college to create initiatives to improve retention and student success. A learning communities project - an intentional restructuring of students' time, credit, and learning experiences through offering linked and block-scheduled courses - was initiated in fall 2001. The learning communities had a 90 percent within-term retention rate during 2001-2002. Overall, the college has an 83% with-in-semester retention rate and a 56% semester-to-semester retention rate for 2001-2002.

Community College of Denver (CCD) is the leading point of access to higher education for the City and County of Denver, serving 6,509 credit students in 2001-2002, with a 61% minority population. CCD's comprehensive retention strategies include mandatory student assessment and placement, a three-tiered integrated advising model, a nationally recognized developmental education program, the Academic Support Center, special populations programs, and learning communities. CCD's in-semester retention rate averages 80%, and the college has a 70% persistence rate from fall to spring semester for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen.

Maui Community College (MCC) is one of 10 campuses in the University of Hawai'i (UH) system. Serving 2,699 credit students in 2001-2002, MCC is the only UH campus that regularly serves the population of more than one island, namely Maui, Moloka'i and Lana'i. The shift to accountability-driven standards, new criteria for accreditation, and regulations of federally supported educational programs fueled the college to reorganize the instructional unit from discipline-based divisions to four interdisciplinary units, initiate a student services survey, establish the University Center to broker upper division programs, and implement a Student Enrollment Case Management System. Based on first-time enrollees in Fall 2001, Maui's with-in-semester retention rate is 94%, and the persistence rate from fall to spring is 56 percent.

Montgomery College is a member of the five-college North Harris Montgomery Community College District in the northern suburbs of Houston and serves 6,395 credit students. An unacceptable 46% success rate (success = 'C' or better) in developmental courses (1996-2000) prompted the college to target improvement of student retention and success as one of six primary goals. The college retention initiatives include a student questionnaire, learning communities, facilitated study groups, and other forms of extended learning. As a result of these initiatives, by the fall of 2001, the college had improved its developmental course success rate by ten percentage points to 56 percent.

Kay McClenney, director of the *MetLife Initiative* at The University of Texas at Austin, says, "The success of community college students matters a great deal, both to them as individuals and to our society. We welcome this opportunity to celebrate the achievement of colleges where the evidence shows that they are gaining ground in promoting student retention."

Selection of Award-Winning Colleges

Selection of the award-winning colleges was based on the institutions' performance on the retention index from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). The retention index is an additive index that combines colleges' scores in three key areas of student engagement: Active Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Support for Learners.

Thirteen colleges with the top retention index scores were identified as semi-finalists. They are: Butler County Community College (KS), Cascadia Community College (WA), Central Arizona College, Central Piedmont Community College (NC), Community College of Denver (CO), Hawai'i Community College, Hocking Technical College (OH), Johnson County Community College (KS), Maui Community College (HI), Montgomery College (TX), University of Arkansas Community College at Hope, Windward Community College (HI), and Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College. All exhibited innovative practices that support retention for all students.

Each semi-finalist institution was then invited to submit further information, including updated data on student retention and a description of key strategies for student retention employed by the college. Selection of colleges to receive the MetLife Foundation awards was based on a "blind review" of college portfolios by a six-member national panel of community college experts.

Continuing the Focus on Student Success

The MetLife Foundation will continue the award program through 2003-2004. Colleges that participate in the spring 2003 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) will be automatically eligible for consideration. (Please Note: The *Initiative* is an award and recognition program and not a program of grants for which colleges may apply.) We invite you to visit the CCSSE web site at www.ccsse.org or contact CCSSE at (512) 471-6807.

Also, if your college has an innovative retention program or strategy – and data documenting its effectiveness – please contact the *Initiative's* Project Manager, Evelyn Waiwaiole, at waiwaiole@ccsse.org to receive a Best Practice Highlights Information Sheet. We are always looking for new ways that colleges are supporting students to meet their educational goals. When appropriate, we will use the information in future publications and in Web-based features about the *MetLife Foundation Initiative*.

Highlighting Best Practices in Student Retention

Welcome to the second MetLife Foundation edition of *CCSSE Highlights*. This periodic publication from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) focuses on the work of the *MetLife Foundation Initiative on Student Success*. The purpose of the *MetLife Foundation Initiative* is not only to identify, recognize and reward community and technical colleges that demonstrate exemplary performance in the area of student retention, but also to highlight students' voices, to elicit their perspectives about what their college is doing "right" in the area of student retention, and to disseminate best practices in student retention to community and technical colleges across the country.

Through the *Initiative*, the MetLife Foundation honors *Best-Practice Colleges* for exemplary performance in student retention. Because community colleges serve as the open door to higher education, they confront the continuing challenge of ensuring that students persist in college and achieve their educational goals. The Foundation believes that one way to support this work is to identify colleges that are producing exemplary results and then to highlight the key retention strategies employed on those campuses.