



HIGHLIGHTS

Published by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement

MetLife Foundation

Best Practices in Student Retention

MetLife Foundation Honors Four Colleges in 2003-04

Four community colleges have been named as recipients of the *MetLife Foundation Best-Practice College Awards* for 2003-2004. The awards honor community colleges for exemplary performance in student retention. The recipients are F.H. LaGuardia Community College (NY); Muskingum Area Technical College (OH); Northwest Vista College (TX); and Skagit Valley College (WA).

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 MetLife 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. That conviction prompted the Foundation's support for the Initiative on Student Success, now in its second year and operated through the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin.

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

Profiles of Best-Practice Colleges

LaGuardia Community College (LCC) is located in western Queens – the most ethnically diverse borough in New York City, and serves almost 13,000 students. The students are from 159 different countries, speaking 110 different languages. Over two-thirds of the students were not born in the U.S., and almost half of the

entering freshman class has been in the U.S. five years or less – making the retention challenges for LaGuardia very unique. The college has been focused on the issue of student retention since 1978. LaGuardia was among the first colleges in the nation to pioneer learning communities. More recently, the college has introduced e-Portfolios and outreach educational planning programs that are the basis for a strong student retention initiative. The components that come together to create the college's retention program include: The First Year Experience, learning communities, ePortfolio, Honors Program, Career and Transfer, Peer Mentoring, Leadership and Diversity Training, and Academic and Student Support Services. The college has a 92% within-semester retention rate and an 80% semester-to-semester retention rate for 2002-2003. For 2001-2002, the fall-to-fall semester retention rate was 65 percent.

Muskingum Area Technical College (MATC) in Zanesville, Ohio serves 1,900-2,000 learners annually in rural Appalachian Ohio. In the mid-to late 1990s, MATC's persistence rates were lower than national averages, and only one-fourth of its students were graduating within five years of their first enrollment. In fall 2000, the college began offering a required orientation course as part of its increased focus on the first year student experience. The course content grew out of students' comments regarding challenges and barriers they face; non-returning students' statements concerning factors that led to their withdrawal from college; and national models. One of the main objectives of the course was for students to make early connections with their peers and faculty. Because each year approximately two-thirds of incoming MATC students were under-prepared for college-level academic coursework and required one or more developmental education courses, the college also focused on strengthening the effectiveness of those learning experiences. The college's Developmental Education program now employs professional and peer tutors and in spring 2003 the program achieved certification from the National Association for Developmental Education. MATC reports that it is one of only 11 colleges in the nation that is NADE-certified. Overall, retention has greatly improved at MATC. For 2002-2003, the college

reports a 98% within-quarter retention rate, a 95% quarter-to-quarter retention rate, and a 56% fall-quarter-to-fall-quarter retention rate.

Northwest Vista College (NVC), located in San Antonio, Texas, is a young suburban college with 8,116 students. The NVC faculty and staff are committed to creating an open, student-centered culture that emphasizes active and collaborative learning. Cooperative learning labs are just one way in which the college has committed to the learning experience, particularly for developmental education students. One example is the Math Collaborative Learning Groups, a pilot program to aid developmental math success. Evaluation of the pilot indicates that success rates for the math collaborative learning groups in remedial math courses were 67% in Spring 2002, 70% in Summer 2002, and 77% in Fall 2002. The college also offers a Success Seminar, which provides new-to-college students with support to succeed and thrive. Instructors in this one credit hour orientation course engage students as learning partners. New-to-college students who participate in the Success Seminar have higher retention rates (Fall '02 – 87% and Spring '03 – 92%) when compared to the overall retention rate for the college (Fall '02 – 83% and Spring '03 - 82%). Overall, the college has a 93% within-semester retention rate, a 78% semester-to-semester retention rate, and a 51% fall-to-fall semester retention rate for 2002-03.

Skagit Valley College (SVC), located in Mount Vernon, Washington enrolls approximately 6,600 students and serves a predominately rural tri-county area. The cornerstone of an SVC degree is collaborative, integrative coursework. An ambitious curriculum reform effort culminated in the implementation of a new general education program in 1993. The revised program was designed around active and collaborative learning strategies to help students meet identified learning outcomes. Skills-designated courses and experiential learning are required for both the transfer programs and professional/technical degrees. Learning Communities are an important part of this coursework, emphasizing collaborative assignments, active learning, and exploration of ideas and issues from multiple perspectives. SVC is also committed to creating a sense of community and encouraging students, faculty, and staff to make connections. One example is the “Peer Calling Campaign,” initiated to connect new students with peers. Four times each quarter, returning students make contact with new students to ask them how they are doing at the college and what, if any, support they might need. The goal is to make contact with 80% of first-time freshmen during their first quarter at the college. Overall, the college has an 88% within-

quarter retention rate, a 74% quarter-to-quarter retention rate, and a 44% fall-quarter-to-fall-quarter retention rate for 2001-02.

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). Colleges with the top retention index scores were identified as semi-finalists. The retention index is an additive index that combines colleges’ scores in three key areas of student engagement: Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Support for Learners.

Each 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 “blind” review of college portfolios by a panel of community college experts.

Eight other community colleges were selected as semi-finalists for the *MetLife Foundation Best-Practice College Awards*: Cascadia Community College (WA), Isothermal Community College (NC), Johnson County Community College (KS), Louisiana Delta Community College (LA), Mountain View College (TX), New Hampshire Community Technical College – Berlin (NH), North Harris Montgomery Community College District (TX), and Phoenix College (AZ). All exhibited innovative practices that support student retention.

Best Practices in Student Retention

This is the second year for the *MetLife Foundation Initiative on Student Success* to honor exemplary colleges for outstanding work in student retention. In 2002-03, the Initiative recognized the first four *MetLife Foundation Best-Practice Colleges*: Central Piedmont Community College (NC), Community College of Denver (CO), Maui Community College (HI), and Montgomery College (TX). Please visit the CCSSE web site at www.ccsse.org to learn how these colleges support student success and view video clips of students talking about their college experience.