



HIGHLIGHTS

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MetLife Foundation *Best Practices in Student Retention*

MetLife Foundation Honors Four Colleges for Successful Student Retention Efforts

Four community colleges will receive the 2005-2006 MetLife Foundation Best-Practice College Award. The award recognizes colleges that show exemplary results in student retention and highlights each college's retention strategies. The winning colleges are Gainesville College (Georgia), Parkland College (Illinois), St. Philip's College (Texas), and Sinclair Community College (Ohio).

"Students enroll in college because they understand the value of higher education in today's competitive marketplace," said Sibyl Jacobson, President and CEO of the MetLife Foundation. "These four award-winning colleges are showing us innovative ways of giving students the extra help they need to reach their goals and be successful. These 'best-practice' colleges offer us a roadmap for what is possible."

Each award-winning college receives a \$10,000 award and will be featured in *CCSSE Highlights*. In its fourth year, the *MetLife Foundation Initiative on Student Success* operates through the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin.

Best-Practice College Profiles

Gainesville College, part of the University System of Georgia, serves almost 6,000 students in Northeast Georgia. With a 78% increase in enrollment during the last five years, the College was recently recognized as the fastest growing two-year college of its size in the nation. Almost three-fourths of Gainesville's students receive financial aid and half are the first in their families to attend college. Gainesville has various initiatives designed to help all students succeed, with particular attention to those needing additional support:

- Varied uses of technology personalize communication between students and faculty.

- Academic assistance is available to all students through the Academic, Computing, Tutoring, and Testing Center (ACTT Center).
- The Office of Hispanic Outreach and Development encourages enrollment of Hispanic students, provides opportunities for leadership development, and offers support services to enhance academic success and promote graduation.
- Targeted and personalized intervention and advising are provided for students who need additional support to complete required courses.

Gainesville's efforts are resulting in steadily improving student retention rates, as well as student satisfaction rates that are higher than the national and University of Georgia System averages.

Parkland College, located in the twin cities of Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, enrolls approximately 10,500 credit-seeking students from the 12 counties in its largely rural, east-central Illinois district. Parkland's board, administrators, and faculty realized that as many as three-fourths of its students were not prepared for college-level work and required remediation. Frustrated by their lack of satisfactory progress, many were dropping out within their first two semesters. To help those students, Parkland created the Academic Development Center.

- Student Development Advocates monitor student progress in developmental classes and quickly connect students to needed services.
- Academic Development Specialists focus on students with documented disabilities or a history of learning difficulties in reading, writing, or mathematics.
- The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning strives to increase the number of faculty with expertise in developmental education.
- Study groups facilitated by math faculty target "difficult courses," rather than "difficult students."
- Jump Start English adds more intensive remediation to the traditional English composition class, making it possible for students to bypass developmental English.

Through semi-annual progress reviews, the college is seeing significant increases in student persistence, retention, and success.

St. Philip's College, located in San Antonio, Texas, enrolls almost 11,000 students. With 49% of students Hispanic and 17% Black, the College is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as both a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). When College leaders realized that fewer than 40% of St. Philip's students returned for a second year, they increased student support with two major strategies:

- The Advisors in Residence program places academic advisors in large departments with retention difficulties.
- The First Time in College (FTIC) program offers intensive advising and mentoring, specialized tutoring, career assessment, student success workshops, and "learning communities" that invite groups of students to enroll in courses together.

To complement these strategies, St. Philip's is also providing ongoing faculty development. After two years, results show that additional support services are helping improve student retention.

Sinclair Community College, the second largest community college in Ohio, serves more than 22,500 students on its Dayton campus. Almost 30% of Sinclair's students represent minority groups. Sinclair's retention and graduation rates are low compared with other Ohio community colleges. Looking for ways to help students succeed, Sinclair leaders thoroughly researched best practices in student retention and reviewed the College's best internal practices.

As a result, Sinclair launched a comprehensive Student Success Plan, a holistic counseling and intervention system that offers additional support for identified high-risk students.

- Each student receives help in designing an Individual Learning Plan and a plan to pay college expenses.
- Individual Counseling Action Plans offer help in choosing majors and setting career goals.
- A Web-based Developmental Studies Early Alert system directs services to students in remedial classes.

In addition to seeing improved retention and success of its most high-risk students, Sinclair's efforts are also resulting in major gains for minority students. For the first time, Sinclair reports no significant difference between full-time minority and non-minority students in the percentage who return to Sinclair the following semester.

The Selection Process

A national panel of community college experts chose the award-winning colleges, based on a "blind" review of

college portfolios and the colleges' performances on the "retention index" of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). Last spring, students from more than 250 community colleges took the survey that assesses college practices and student behaviors that research shows are important to a successful college experience.

The retention index addresses three areas that have been proven to contribute to students remaining in college:

- active and collaborative learning in and out of the classroom;
- a high level of interaction between students and faculty; and
- programs and practices that support learners.

Award-winning colleges use CCSSE results, along with data from other student success indicators, to continually make improvements. The colleges then measure the effectiveness of those changes to insure that specific approaches are meeting students' needs.

Sixteen other community colleges were selected as semi-finalists for the *MetLife Foundation Best-Practice College Awards*: Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (Georgia), Chandler-Gilbert Community College (Arizona), Community and Technical College at WVU Tech (West Virginia), Dona Ana Branch Community College (New Mexico), El Paso Community College (Texas), Guilford Technical Community College (North Carolina), Johnson County Community College (Kansas), Kirkwood Community College (Iowa), North Harris Montgomery Community College District (Texas), Northwest Indian College (Washington), Palo Alto College (Texas), Pueblo Community College (Colorado), Southern University at Shreveport (Louisiana), Texas State Technical College Marshall (Texas), Vincennes University (Indiana), and Walters State Community College (Tennessee).

Introducing the CCSSE Course Feedback Form

This new toolkit piece for member colleges is for students' end-of-term course evaluations. It was developed with the help of an advisory panel including administrators, counselors, and faculty members from six CCSSE colleges. The form is based on student engagement items from the CCSSE survey and additional course feedback items submitted and reviewed by the advisory panel. You can access the form in the CCSSE Toolkit at www.ccsse.org and use it free of charge. The instrument is intended for local use in accord with campus policies.