

Valencia Community College

Topline Summary of Response

**Student Success (SLS1122) and the 3-Prep Mandate:
Qualitative Discussions with Students**

Orlando, FL

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Achieving the Dream Data Team

INTRODUCTION

Valencia Community College is evaluating the strengths and successes of the Student Success course, SLS1122, and student reactions to the SLS1122 mandate for students testing into preparatory levels in all three discipline areas (3-prep). Qualitative research was conducted to explore the perceptions of 3-prep students who have taken Student Success courses under the mandate.

Two 60-minute discussions were held with 3-prep students who enrolled in a Student Success course in any semester from Fall 2006 to the present. These students had predominantly enrolled in the Student Success course alone, with the exception of two who were in sections that were part of a Learning Community (LinC). The sessions seated 7-8 students each.

The two groups consisted of a total of 15 participants with the following demographic breakdown: 13 females and 2 males; 7 of age 18-19, 5 of age 20-24, and 3 of age 25 and up; 8 African American, 3 Hispanic, 2 Asian/Pacific Islander, 1 Caucasian, and 1 Other; 5 earned A's, 3 B's, 1 W, and 6 were currently enrolled. Two of the students were part of the BRIDGES Program. During the recruitment process students were screened for eligibility and variation in demographics. They were informed only that the discussion would be focused on a topic related to education.

Representatives of the Data Team recruited the students from contact data provided by the Office of Institutional Research. Nicholas Bekas, and Julie Phelps conducted the sessions with Mary Allen, Joyce Romano, Jeff Cornett, and Jenelle Conner serving as

note-takers. The following summary was prepared by Roberta Brown using information provided by the moderators and note-takers.

Caveat—

The findings presented here are offered on the basis of responses heard from a limited number of students. Qualitative research is directional in nature, intended to uncover and explore issues but not measure their prevalence in the population. Therefore, the findings here are not intended to be projected to the population. Rather, these insights should be considered carefully and in context with other strategic information.

KEY INSIGHTS

Overall Perceptions and Attitudes— About SLS1122

- Variety in length of attendance at Valencia. Some students were in their first semester, while others have completed one to three semesters. Some came to Valencia because of location or cost, some because of reputation, and some because friends or family suggested.
- Overall, students felt like they benefitted from the course and found it useful in life and in other courses. Even students that did not want to take it commented about positive aspects of it and useful skills that they learned.
- Students listed a variety of skills that they acquired and appreciated learning in the course: goal setting, time management, research and presentation skills, learning to work with different types of people, and learning about learning styles.
- There were a variety of comments made about both the positive and negative aspects of the course.
 - Positive: Most students felt that the course gave them guidance and direction and helped them to become better students in that course and in their other courses. “It helped you figure out what you wanted to do and if you knew what you wanted to do, it helped you plan for it.” “I have a higher completion rate in my classes than my friend who is a genius!”
 - Negative: Most of the negative comments were focused on the instructors: faculty student interaction, sharing ideas, and the need for better training. One student withdrew from the course due to her bad experience with the instructor. “Have a work shop for professors on how to better approach students.” “I wish some professors would be better organized.”
- Most students responded favorably when asked if they would have “chosen” to take Student Success, knowing what they know now. Several students also

commented that they would like to see a “Part 2” to Student Success, and that they would be very interested in taking a course like that.

- Students said that they would definitely recommend the course to friends and other students.

Overall Perceptions and Attitudes—About the Mandate

- Most students were not fully aware of the mandate, nor did they have a complete understanding of the concept of a mandate.
- Several students commented that they enrolled in Student Success because a counselor “suggested” that they do so, or that they “heard about it” at orientation, or that it was “on the paperwork, on the course list” at orientation.
- Whether they were aware of the requirement to take Student Success or not most felt positively about having to take it. Comments centered on the positive things they had heard about Student Success prior to taking the course: “helps you become organized” , “helps you make better decisions in life” , “heard it was an easy A.”
- Two students felt that they had a negative reaction to the requirement. One student felt that he was “very aware” of himself and did not need the course. The other commented about the cost of classes and the fact that Student Success was not a required course in their degree program.
- After having taken the course, reflections upon having been required to take the course were mostly positive as well. Comments centered on the usefulness and helpfulness of the skills that they learned in Student Success. “It was a good idea. Something I needed . . . guidance towards your career . . . clarifies what you want out of life . . . lifts a burden off your shoulders as you know more what you want to do.” “It maps out what you need so you don’t waste your time.” “There is a reason they asked 3 prep students to take it – it gives them extra help.”
- The student who felt negatively about the requirement prior to taking the course commented that although he did learn some useful skills in the course that did not change his attitude about being required to take it. Other students felt that anyone would benefit from the course but didn’t think it should be mandated; they would rather be taking something required for their degree.
- In the second session, when the question of whether student success should be required for more students was put to a vote, the response was 6 – yes and 2 – no.
 - Affirmative responses included comments such as: “should be required for everyone” , “good for students that did poorly in high school” , “good for students who didn’t go right to college” , “require it in the first or second

semester . . . so you can use it in other classes and develop your plan” ,
“first semester is good for freshman . . . to get involved in college.”

- Negative responses were based mostly on the principle of giving students the freedom to choose. The students felt the course had some positive aspects, but that students should not be required to take it. “. . . the student is paying for the course. The faculty shouldn’t have the right to require it.”
- There was also some disagreement as to when it should be taken. Most students felt that it should be taken in the first semester, but others felt that students should be able to decide when to take it. While one student commented that it was helpful to take it simultaneously with Prep Reading, others felt it would be better to take it the semester following the completion of that course instead.
- When asked if the mandate made Student Success more like a “prep course” students had mixed responses. Most felt it was more like an elective and considered it neither prep nor college level.

Promoting Student Success Courses—

- Students felt that hearing about it at orientation was really helpful. However, several students commented that they did not listen to what the advisor said about Student Success as much as they did when the instructors came in and talked about it and when they heard about it from other students.
- Students suggested that there should be a presentation that includes student testimonials. Students also felt that the RoadMap Scholarship was a great marketing piece but many of them did not know about it until they actually took the class. They suggested that it be publicized more.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Based on the feedback from these students, it appears that students find Student Success (SLS1122) beneficial. They appreciate the skills that they learn and are aware of how it helps them be more successful. *“I didn’t know what to expect but once I got there, I could see where they were going with this”* one student reported. A number said it made for a good transition from high school to college.

However, although students felt positively about taking the Student Success course, there were mixed emotions about the mandate. Most students did not have a good grasp on the concept of the Student Success mandate for 3-prep students. When asked about being required to take the course many students felt indifferent towards the requirement and were glad that someone “suggested” they take the course. On the other hand, a few students resented being forced to take it and felt they would have preferred to take something that counted towards their degree requirements.