VALENCIACOLLEGE
The REACH Program

"You gave us everything, we take it and make it happen…" (one of the students in the focus groups)

Overview

A cohort-based learning community, REACH, was implemented on the Osceola Campus in Fall 2011 after Valencia faculty and staff attended the National Summer Institute on Learning Communities in June of 2010. REACH is a cohort based learning community with 45 students originally enrolled. The idea behind REACH was to develop a learning community for both students and faculty. The goal is for students to get 21 college level credit hours and complete their developmental education courses in one year. Two focus groups were held July 12, 2012. This handout has been designed from those results in order to inform conversation.

When asked the student agreed that they would feel comfortable keeping in touch with many of their instructors after graduating from the REACH program. They had to learn to be comfortable communicating – it was not a familiar practice – "Teachers are available when you don't expect it – and will respond." The ropes course was among the most positive experiences they shared. This "made school enjoyable even though stressed out we can depend on each other beyond our roles [as student and teacher]." As an example of classroom teaching that they viewed as effective, a student recalled: "in one of the classes the professor did not speak [extensively] … gave clear directions and tips." Another added "… it was 'on us' [to do the activities]— it was us being creative." It was noted in one of the focus groups that students spoke about being disadvantaged or struggling; this was a clear identity they frequently shared and reinforced when in conversation.

Conversation Starters

1. How could you teach an instructor or staff member new to REACH…

    … what the students' prior preparation has been?
    … how students are coping (or not) with their responsibilities after high school?
    … what the culture was like in the high school classrooms they came from?
    … the most effective teaching activities for students who are at-risk and underprepared?

2. Who else at Valencia could help with this preparation? (Including faculty from psychology for example.)

3. What is the role of technology in creating the community? Example: Oovoo (Skype) 7-8 people at once

4. Which Skill Shops were the most memorable? They mentioned these were among their favorites: the blood drive; GPA calculation; My Education Plan; nursing; reading; relationships; stress management and time management.

Suggestions from Students

1. Shorten the time between classes and activities (Tuesday program) focused on tutoring connected to the class and required up front upon registration for the class.

2. Students described ways a new student could learn about REACH: (a) from student speakers who have completed the program; (b) the brochure at Orientation; (c) a video of what we learned-what we got out of REACH; (d) show how grades improved; (e) show how classes get harder, REACH can help.