ERIE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

INCREASING STUDENT SUCCESS
TITLE III EVALUATION REPORT
2006 - 2007

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IncrEaseing Student Success
Title III Evaluation Report
Year One - 2006-2007

Erie Community College (ECC) initiated its Title III project entitled *Increasing Student Success through the Integration of Academic and Student Support Services* in October of 2005. The overall purpose of the project is to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of student enrollment and academic support services to improve student achievement, persistence, and graduation. A single major activity defines project implementation by focusing on strategies that support the development of computerized admissions and placement, a pre-freshman bridge program, a network of learning communities, and restructured entry level math and English courses supported by an early warning system and academic guidance centers. Now at the end of the second year of implementation, ECC’s five-year project will continue through September of 2010. As a result, the College will realize significant increases in the enrollment of students placement tested and their persistence through the first year of instruction, with increased retention through the second year of instruction and on to graduation.

With the start of the project, the College contracted with Development Institute, engaging Katherine German and Phil Sbaratta to serve as the external evaluation consultants. Prior to the campus visit of February 4 and February 5, 2007, the Evaluators reviewed the College’s overall five-year project plan and implementation materials available online: the handbook, meeting minutes,
performance reports, training materials, and internal assessments. Following this overview, they outlined the evaluation criteria specified in the project for the first year of implementation as indicated through project objectives and implementation strategies. These criteria have been incorporated into the evaluation report for use as benchmarks against which to measure the progress of the project.

While on campus the Evaluators conducted a series of structured interviews to ascertain the progress that has occurred within the activity under development. During these discussions, they met with Mary Beth Orrange, Project Coordinator, and Jason L. Steinitz, Activity Director, as well as Nathan Wallace, the Assistant Project Coordinator and Lida Mosovich, the Software Specialist regarding overall project organization, management and development. Thereafter, the Evaluators met with the following members of the faculty, department chairs, and Academic and Student Services personnel directly involved with the Activity, as well as members of the Implementation Task Force and the Steering Committee to discuss the progress of the Activity:

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Department/Position</th>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Ballard</td>
<td>Office Management Department</td>
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<td>Kenneth Barnes</td>
<td>Assistant Academic Dean/Business</td>
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<td>Mary Beard</td>
<td>Assistant Academic Dean/Liberal Arts</td>
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<td>Gary Bellagamba</td>
<td>End User Specialist</td>
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<td>Jennifer Benedict</td>
<td>Technical Assistant</td>
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<td>Gus Brennan</td>
<td>Business Administration Department</td>
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<td>Pattie Burkett</td>
<td>Technical Assistant</td>
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<td>Marsha Gellin</td>
<td>Assistant Academic Dean/Liberal Arts</td>
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<td>Petrina Hill-Cheatom</td>
<td>Director of Admissions</td>
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<td>Deborah Doucette</td>
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<td>Peter Fernbach</td>
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<td>Mark Hoeber</td>
<td>Assistant Academic Dean/Technology</td>
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<td>Kathy Hoffman</td>
<td>Coordinator of Special Services</td>
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Overall discussion addressed the implementation of the activity, achievements to date, issues that have arisen during the second year, and plans for the future. Throughout the evaluation, the participating faculty and staff described their involvement, their accomplishments, and their enthusiasm for the project as the leadership described administrative initiatives, providing a comprehensive review of the project to date and a window on the opportunities that lie ahead. Upon conclusion of the evaluation, the Evaluators shared their perceptions of project implementation with the Title III Team and the Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs, Anita Kaplan, providing
commendations as well as recommendations and suggestions to ensure the continued success of the project.

**Needs Assessment**

Erie Community College’s comprehensive development plan was constructed to reflect the depth of analysis and breadth of response of the institution’s Governance and Planning (GAP) system, an effort that involves all major College constituencies. Building upon the institution’s academic, managerial and fiscal strengths, the project seeks to address two significant weaknesses which compromise student enrollment and overall success:

1. An outdated enrollment process and inefficient support services result in a chronic pattern of high first-year student attrition.
2. Student support and academic intervention services fail to improve the academic achievement of a significant population of educationally disadvantaged students.

These problems are addressed through the five goals of the College’s comprehensive development plan seeking to strengthen the enrollment process and integrate academic and student services to improve student achievement and retention to degree completion.

**Scope of the Project**

A single activity, *Increasing Student Success through the Integration of Academic and Student Support Services*, aims to solidify a holistic, comprehensive support system for student success, particularly in the early stages of the student’s academic experience. The first stage of the project focuses on the automation and standardization of the admissions process by computerizing the assessment of student’s skills, career interests, and learning
styles synchronized with subsequent course placement. A one-stop process will guide students from admission through registration. An early warning and intervention system will contribute to student persistence. Finally, a range of support systems such as the Academic Guidance Centers, pre-freshman bridge program, and peer mentoring will be bolstered by course delivery modifications in basic English and mathematics courses to promote student achievement.

**Activity Assessment**

The overall purpose of the single Activity is to increase student persistence and success through effective integration of student and academic support services from pre-admissions through to graduation. Consequently, the proposed changes and modifications comprise a challenging and ambitious project that has the potential to have wide impact on the College. The key elements of the activity include: 1) the college-wide computerization and enhancement of assessment; 2) the development of Success Centers; 3) the development of Web-based admissions and program information; 4) the development of an early alert and intervention system; 5) the enhancement of a summer bridge program; and 6) curricular modifications in basic English and mathematics courses. At the end of the five-year grant period, the College expects to achieve a 10% increase in the enrollment rate of students' taking the placement test; a 10% decrease in first-year attrition rates; a 15% increase in the 4-consecutive semester retention rate; and a 10% increase in the 3-year graduation rate.
To initiate the Activity, Dr. Jason L. Steinitz, Professor of Geography, was appointed Activity Director. An Implementation Task Force was established to implement the particular elements of the project, ensure that Activity objectives are met, maintain the implementation timetable, and design implementation modifications as necessary. Meeting monthly, the Task Force is composed of the Project Coordinator and the Activity Director collaborating with the Associate Vice Presidents of Enrollment Management and Student Services; the Deans of Institutional Planning and Assessment and Students; the Directors of Communications Systems, Admissions, and Choices in Technologies; the Assistant Dean of Liberal Arts and 7 faculty representatives; the Coordinators of Grants and Advanced Studies; and representatives from Disabled Students Services, Library Services, and Institutional Research.

It is important to note that over a year transpired between the submission of the grant and its actual funding. As a consequence, Erie Community College took the opportunity to re-evaluate its initiatives in light of changed circumstances, leadership, and technology, reaffirming the thrust of the proposal and its objectives.

Year One

In the first year of the Activity, the project focused on three specific objectives:

- Increase ECC academic curriculum-matching articulation agreements with area high schools by 5% over the baseline by September 30, 2006 (and an additional 5% yearly over the baseline towards a cumulative 25% increase project year ending 2010,)
• Increase number of Advanced Studies college credit courses offered by ECC in area high schools by 5% over the baseline by September 30, 2006 (and an additional 5% yearly over the baseline towards a cumulative 25% increase by 2010.)

• Increase identification of students who do not perform well on placement tests because of neuro-cognitive remedial deficits establishing baseline January 2006 (and increasing identification 10% yearly over the baseline towards a cumulative 50% increase over the project ending 2010).

From the outset the Activity was organized to facilitate the planning, tracking, and documentation of objectives, implementation strategies and anticipated results. To ensure the smooth operation of the grant, a Policies and Procedures Manual was developed to include the roles and job descriptions of key personnel, all Title III related report forms, and hiring, budgeting, and purchasing procedures. Additionally an open-access Title III Grant website was created to disseminate information, engage the college community, and to provide a repository of documents and data related to the Activity. The website, [http://title3.ecc.edu](http://title3.ecc.edu), contains a grant overview, research, committee information with agendas and minutes, and significant documents.

The first year called for the hiring of three personnel: a counselor, a technical support specialist, and a part-time administrative assistant. As the project began, however, it became clear that, instead of a counselor, an assistant project coordinator was necessary to support the scope of the Activity. Nathan Wallace was subsequently appointed Assistant Project Coordinator to work with the Project Coordinator and the Activity Director, facilitating initiatives to ensure the accomplishment of the Activity objectives.
Additionally, Lida Mosovich was hired as technical specialist focusing on video production, and Maryann Cabarga was hired as the Title III secretary.

A central focus for the first year built upon ECC’s strong outreach efforts to high schools through an improved articulation process and an increase in advanced studies agreements. In both cases, access to information for high school students and staff was provided on the ECC website. All articulation agreements were categorized by participating high schools, with details describing how students can participate in the agreements and what requirements must be met. The website included tables linking high school course clusters that are equivalent to ECC courses. Similarly, all advanced courses were available on the website, including specific information about advanced study courses, the application process, transferability, and tuition.

While using the College website for improved communication and information, the College also pursued an increase in agreements called for in the objectives. Twenty-five new curriculum matching articulation agreements were produced, which is more than a 10% increase over the baseline and double the number of agreements projected in the first year. Advanced studies agreements had even more successful results. The baseline for the number of courses in the Advanced Studies Program numbered 19, enrolling 290 students. By spring 2006, 37 courses were offered with 498 students, representing a 95% increase in courses and a 72% increase in students - much greater than the overall five-year increase originally projected at 25%. Obviously, the College met and exceeded that five-year objective in the first
year of the grant. Thus, the first two initiatives focusing on outreach to high schools had significant success.

The final objective of the first year addressed students with neuro-cognitive remedial deficits. Spearheaded by Associate Vice President Rick Washousky, the College established a pilot program, testing approximately 500 students to identify a cohort of students requiring special needs programming to improve the retention and success of at-risk students. Of the 500 students assessed in the pilot program, 15% were diagnosed with neuro-cognitive deficits.

In anticipation of the second year of the Activity, work also began on a number of fronts, specifically emphasizing retention. A work team started the initial planning and design for a Summer Bridge Program. The focus of the planning determined the target population, the curriculum, and the delivery system with linkages to the improved computerized assessment. During the first year of the effort, the Student Services staff and academic department faculty selected Accuplacer as its central assessment instrument and piloted Accuplacer with groups of students to improve course placements.

Related to these efforts, work also began on the improved use of Web Advisor through the College’s Datatel system. Simultaneously, a pilot advising program—the Student Success Plan—was designed as an intensive intervention approach modeled on Sinclair Community College’s case management system. Likewise, the Student Success Centers, part of a suite of improved student services originally called Academic Guidance Centers, were design for each
The Center at City Campus was completed with the Centers at North and South Campuses under development.

Finally, the Activity originally envisioned kiosks as a major technological innovation to improve services to students. But the technological frontier shifted, and the project leaders re-envisioned the technology component of the Activity. First, with the hiring of the software specialist, a plan for a series of streaming videos, available on the College’s website, feature programs of study and academic departments so that prospective and current students can better determine their educational and career interests. These videos can be important in the admissions process as well as advising continuing students. Software Specialist Lida Mosovich is the lead person, working with faculty and staff in the design and production of these videos. Second, instead of kiosks, the College planned for three smart classrooms—one on each campus—outfitted with state-of-the-art hardware, appropriate applications, and Internet access. These are both fitting developments.

The first year of any project sets the agenda for the duration of the effort; it establishes the infrastructure on which to strengthen the institution, and it creates a framework for sustained progress. It was clear from the accomplishments of the first year that the ECC Title III Activity had both effective leadership and enthusiastic collegewide participation. Meeting and exceeding the first-year objectives, ECC was well on its way to a successful Title III experience. As work continued, the College was encouraged to conceptualize its enrollment management system, envisioning a seamless,
supportive network of services delivered collaboratively to increase student persistence and achievement. In so doing, the Activity will build on the original concepts underlying the design of the project with the development of significant, sustainable change that will contribute to increased student success and institutional self-sufficiency well beyond 2010.

Year Two

In the second year, the Activity centered on three objectives in addition to the cumulative increases anticipated in the Year One objectives:

- Increase student participation in targeted student support services (academic advisement, career counseling, tutoring) establishing baseline October 2006 (and increasing participation 5% yearly over baseline towards a cumulative 20% increase of the project years.

- Record higher passing rates for students benefiting from new Summer Bridge Program 5% over college-wide passing rates baseline for Fall Semester 2006 (maintaining cumulative higher passing rates at 5% or better over the college-wide rates.

- Record higher passing rates for learning disabled students benefiting from new Learning Communities Program 5% over college-wide passing rates baseline for Fall Semester 2006 (maintaining cumulative higher passing rates at 5% or better over college-wide rates.

Three personnel changes were made during the year. First, the Administrative Assistant hired in the first year resigned, and it was decided not to replace her. Second, Gary Bellagamba was hired as End User Support Specialist, a position consolidating two part-time positions into one full-time position which should prove instrumental in establishing baseline data and integration initiatives within the technological framework as ECC migrates to Datatel Release 18. And third, the College also hired three Technical
Assistants—Jennifer Benedict, Teresa Page, and Pattie Burkett—to facilitate the new assessment process, converting what was formerly a Mentor position.

One of the most fundamental initiatives of the Activity was the computerization of the assessment of incoming students to establish a consistent assessment process. Significant progress was made over the course of the second year with the institutional decision to use Accuplacer, establish an online assessment schedule, enable a dedicated lab space for assessment on each campus, and incorporate additional assessment questions—all effective steps forward.

With the increase of three Technical Assistants, the staff analyzed the efficiency of the appointment system that was in use, particularly since there was a 40 percent no-show rate. As the third year began, the staff implemented a walk-in option, explained in a new Placement Testing Information Brochure. In addition the staff developed a Remote Testing procedure for out-of-town students and a new retesting policy that allows students one retest any time between initial test and the first week of classes; importantly, these policy changes are student-focused rather than rule-driven. Furthermore, improved communication and processes between Admissions and assessment enabled a smoother student flow through the initial intake experience. And finally, the initiative was bolstered with the development of a database located on a shared network to assist the Technical Assistants with uploads of student demographics, Accuplacer scores, and essay scores. This database can serve as the foundation for continued evidence-based decision making.
The first objective of the second year also focused on improved student services—both on the ground and online. The departmental video project, begun in the first year advanced further with 20 department videos completed. Under the leadership of Lida Mosovich, the videos, available through the College portal, provide students with a window into departmental offerings and careers, and even a GPA calculator. In addition, Nathan Wallace, Assistant Project Coordinator, worked with Lida in the development of ECC 101, an online enrollment guide modeled after Austin Community College. ECC 101 is highly interactive, directs students based on their responses, and concludes with a printout for further advising and counseling. To bolster online services, a five-question Career Interest Survey leads into information on sixty-four of the College’s programs. Finally, a video-based online tutor training program was added to the resources for those providing student services.

In the area of tutoring, the results were somewhat mixed. Although the number of students served decreased slightly in comparison with the previous year, the number of visits increased by 3 percent, suggesting increased access for fewer students. It’s somewhat difficult to assess whether the services evolved to reflect the changes in the curriculum or how tutoring fits into the overall constellation of student services, both issues that should be addressed.

One of the key features of the reformed Student Services is the development of comprehensive Student Success Centers on each of ECC’s three campuses. The Activity seems to have provided a springboard for robust discussion of the nature and organization of the Success Centers and
strengthened the relationship between the student services and academic components. Therefore, it was disappointing to learn that only the City Campus Success Center, which was essentially in place at the outset of the grant, was functional; and neither North nor South Campus Success Center was fully completed. Clearly, a renewed commitment is necessary to ensure that the Success Centers are completed, operational, and integrated into the fabric of student services.

Another area where only limited progress was made is in advising. During the first year, actions were dependent on a College-wide committee charged with developing a report and recommendations on advising. That committee continued to work during the second year, ultimately submitting its recommendations to the President. Hopefully, the next steps regarding improvements for advising will be outlined in the near future so that work can proceed. In preparation, ECC has conducted an Advisement Survey, which provides some information of the frequency and level of interaction for students with current advising practices. The survey should be useful in identifying elements of current advising activities that seem to have merit and those which need improvement.

In the interim, an alternative system—The Student Success Project—an intrusive advising system was piloted and the results analyzed. A cohort of 235 at-risk students was placed either into a control group, which received no “intrusive advising,” or an experimental group, which received a regimen of contacts and advising. Students in the experimental group were assigned a
trained advising specialist, with each specialist working with 5-10 students. At the conclusion of the pilot, the various measures of achievement, persistence, and retention indicated little difference between the performance of students in the two groups, with the control group often matching or outperforming the experimental group. Though some specialists reported a more connected relationship with students, there was little evidence to support this fairly costly and time-consuming approach to the thorny issue of advising at-risk students. Thus, despite the disappointing results, ECC used an effective experimental design to elicit data by which to make informed decisions in the future, and planned to pursue options developed as a result of the initiative.

The second objective for the year called for a Summer Bridge Program. Under the leadership of the Assistant Project Coordinator, the program was re-envisioned as R.I.S.E. — Readying Incoming Students for Excellence. The two-day program contains three elements: English skills workshops, math skills workshops, and ECC and You, an orientation/college success workshop. Depending on placement scores, students can attend all three workshops. Students who had participated in the R.I.S.E program discussed the benefits and advantages of the program had in terms of getting started on the right foot in their college careers. These students’ observations were confirmed by data collected on students participating in the program during Summer of 2007. The Fall GPA was 16 percent higher for R.I.S.E. students in comparison with all ECC students, and R.I.S.E. students scored approximately 10 percent higher in math
and English courses than their peers. These results suggest that R.I.S.E. clearly had a positive impact on student performance and achievement.

The third objective called for the establishment of Learning Communities for learning disabled students with weak math and English placement scores. However, it was discovered that less than 5% of incoming students met the criteria, which argued against additional resources. Indeed the use of the Washington Needs Survey to identify students was suspended in July of 2007. Therefore existing resources were used, and Coordinated Studies programs focusing on this population at City, North, and South campuses all included developmental courses. Learning Communities, offering a commonality of services, occurred within the Education to Recovery Program that provides students academic and vocational support and direction as well as skills training.

Finally, the objectives carried over from the first year met their incremental performance measures: ECC high school articulation agreements increased an additional 11 percent and the number of Advanced Studies courses offered increased an 50 percent over baseline.

The second year of the project built on the framework established in the first year and established the benchmarks for continuing progress. To ensure this advancement, the College held a Planning Retreat in April 2007 with participation from College administration, faculty, and student support. The retreat brought college faculty and staff together to discuss concerns and create collaborations as well as integrate Title III initiatives into action plans.
This effort, combined with the ongoing work of design and implementation teams and project leadership, resulted in a successful second year. Now as the Activity enters the third year, the College will need to focus on expanded assessment, tracking and monitoring, and curricular modifications — all of which complement the accomplishments of the first two years.

Project Management

Erie Community College’s Title III project is fully integrated into the structure of the institution with Mary Beth Orange and Jason Steinitz assuming joint leadership responsibility for the initiative. Together they provide overall guidance and supervision of operations, ensure effective communications, maintain records and documentation in compliance with federal requirements, and approve all expenditures, coordinating evaluations, as well as the preparation and submission of reports to the Department of Education.

Participation in the project is strong and widespread, with representation from all levels and campuses engaged in the implementation process. A Title III Steering Committee involves virtually all of the key leaders at the institution with attention to overall project coordination, communication, and impact. Meeting regularly to ensure that the tasks and strategies necessary to the success of the project are implemented in timely fashion, the Steering Committee is critical to the success of the venture.

A Title III Handbook ensures consistency and compliance with the administrative practices of the institution and the Department of Education. Staff hired for Title III positions were selected in accordance with College
policies and procedures; likewise, project expenditures were initiated by the appropriate individuals, approved by the Activity Director, and reviewed both by the appropriate College officer and the Title III Coordinator prior to submission for processing and payment. The negotiated budget for the project was submitted to the Department of Education to accommodate an award of $359,574 for the second year. With a carryover balance of $46,336 from the first year of implementation, the funds available to the project for year two totaled $405,910. During the year, $269,783 was spent, leaving a balance of $135,127 to carryover to year three. All program records were maintained in the Business Office under proper standards of accounting with online access and regular statements furnished to project leadership.

To ensure effective implementation, regular internal assessments of the progress of the Activity provide fundamental comparisons of accomplishments against the established baseline data. As the project continues, and measures of participation expand to include assessments of impact, on-going evaluation strategies will need to be developed to keep pace, providing documentation of increased student success and institutional effectiveness. Throughout the year, quarterly reports prepared by the Title III Coordinator and her Activity Director detailed program accomplishments, invited collaborative problem solving as necessary, and outlined plans for new initiatives to keep the leadership of the College informed of progress and ensure the success of the project as a whole. A web site keeps the wider community informed of project implementation, while the Title III Coordinator and Activity Director provide
information on the project and its initiatives at key events collegewide. And finally, the required Annual Performance Report was completed and submitted to reflect the progress of the second year of implementation. As the project continues the leadership team will need to accommodate the idiosyncrasies of the project design with an eye to the overall impact, integrating efforts and accomplishments across the five-year implementation period.

Commendations and Recommendations

The Erie Community College Title III project is fully embraced by the institution; to a person, those involved in the project have assumed ownership of the initiative, become knowledgeable in the areas under their direction, and worked to maximize the resources available. As a leadership team, the Project Coordinator and her Activity Director collaborate to facilitate integration across the College’s multi-campus environment. Additionally, both the Assistant Project Coordinator and the Software Specialist are poised to make significant contributions to sustain the development of the initiative as systemic reforms expand across the major components of the College.

The results of the first two years of work have been outstanding, with each of the objectives fully met - or exceeded! Moreover, the collaboration that is developing to ensure the effective implementation of computerized assessment and placement has proven invaluable, as have web-based advisories, the orientation and the virtual tour. Equally important is the work that began through the Advising Committee and continued through R.I.S.E.,
and the renovation that is establishing Student Support Centers on each campus. These initiatives represent significant building blocks for the future.

At the end of the first year it was recommended that the leadership conduct a retreat to envision the new seamless enrollment system and implement a computerized assessment and placement process so that virtually all entering students begin on a pathway to success. Additionally, consideration was focused on the value of the *Washington Learning Needs Screening Test*, the advising initiative, the use of the streaming videos, and the evolution of the project management structure. In all instances, the College responded, taking the initiative and, as a result, making significant progress on all fronts, particularly with the development of discrete design teams taking singular initiatives from planning to development, piloting, and implementation, and the management of the Title III Team.

Given this record of accomplishment, the following recommendations are provided to accelerate the success of the project into the third year:

First, as the Activity matures, the opportunity to “brand” the effort can bring cohesion to the various initiatives. A good start is the acronym R.I.S.E.—much more compelling than the Bridge Program.

Second, various initiatives have been launched in the first two years—now the challenge is to evolve them into sustainable efforts so that each major initiative culminates in a multiyear implementation/expansion plan:

 Assessment has been computerized, but there should be a three-year plan for expansion of systems, distribution of assessment information, and integration of assessment into Datatel and educational planning.

 While there is ECC email for students, a plan needs to evolve for mandatory communication protocols so that the College’s technological advancement can be communicated in a single platform. Apparently, the College has communication management software, which could be
part of a retention effort, but there is no internal system or process for implementation.

R.I.S.E. has been successful, but a clearly articulated plan for scalable expansion needs to be developed to move this from a pilot to a program.

Third, continuing effort and dialogue are essential to advance the Student Success Centers, which are a centerpiece for the seamless provision of student services. This collaboration is vital in that services are divided among academic and student affairs components; creating a clear bridge between them and establishing the physical space for such collaborations are essential. The Success Centers are critical to the tracking, monitoring, and intervention strategies that are on deck for development.

Fourth, many of the persistence and retention goals of the Activity rest on continuous advising. Such an advising system has yet to be fully developed, agreed upon, and planned for. This central academic support service hopefully can move beyond negotiations to full-effort design and implementation with real progress in the remaining years of the grant.

As the Title III Team continues project implementation and addresses the aforementioned recommendations it may prove helpful to consider the best practices of other institutions addressing similar issues and concerns. For example, the Community College of Denver has completely re-engineered Student Support Services and Advising, and North Shore Community College has developed a strong early alert, tracking and intervention system. Such exemplars, with others identified through such specialized organizations as NACADA, the National Association of Counseling and Advising Administrators, the ECC Title III Team will be able to consider a coterie of best practices for potential inclusion in the implementation process over the next three years.

Finally, with a new President about to assume the leadership of the institution, it is essential that the Title III Team provide a full briefing on the project, engaging him in the continued development and implementation of
the effort and assisting the Team with the resolution of issues impeding progress as they arise. With the support of the President, the spirit of the faculty and staff, and the talents of the Title III Team, the ECC Title III project will continue to soar through the third year - the midpoint of the project!

Congratulations on another successful year!