



Virginia Highlands Community College SOAR: Strengthening Orientation, Advising & Retention

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Complete details of our QEP can be found at
http://www.vhcc.edu/fac_staf/qep/qep.pdf

Virginia Highlands Community College (VHCC) has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that focuses on improving student success by revising the advising process. The plan is called SOAR: Strengthening Orientation, Advising & Retention, which reflects the key areas of emphasis. VHCC's plan emerged from a broad-based institutional assessment of the students' first-year experience. The plan focuses on supporting student learning, which is consistent with the mission of the College. It demonstrates institutional capability for initiation, implementation, and completion of the plan. Broad-based involvement of various constituencies has been a key strength of the development of the QEP. Goals have been identified and a plan for assessing their achievement is in place.

VHCC selected this topic as a result of an intense self-study process. In February 2005, the College was selected as one of ten founding institutions for the pilot Foundations of Excellence project for two-year colleges. During the 2005-2006 academic year, VHCC completed a comprehensive review of its current practices including extensive surveying of faculty, staff, and students. The process was externally guided by the Policy Center on the First Year of College. The resulting reports analyzed our current practices in nine dimensional areas (Philosophy, Organization, Learning, Campus Culture, Transitions, All Students, Diversity, Roles & Purposes, and Improvements) and developed an action plan for improvement.

The QEP Team Leader and the Steering Committee of the Foundations of Excellence Task Force reviewed the Foundations of Excellence findings and recommended that VHCC focus its QEP topic on the developmental model of advising and specifically target 1) Orientation, 2) Advising, 3) Communication, and 4) Early Intervention.

A QEP Team was recruited in the Fall 2006 by the QEP Leader. The twenty-three QEP team members were divided into four groups and were charged with the task of developing objectives, strategies, outcomes, a timeline, means of assessment, persons responsible, and estimated budget for their assigned area. A new team was formed in the Spring 2007 term to refine the plan.

The goals for each area are:

- Provide students with an **orientation** program that will develop their lifelong learning skills and enhance their college experience.
- Move from a prescriptive **advising** model to a comprehensive, developmental model.
- Improve both printed and online **communication** to enhance the advising process.
- Develop **early intervention** strategies that identify at-risk students and ensure they receive the appropriate services.

An advising Mission Statement has been developed and approved by the faculty. In addition, student learning outcomes along with assessment measures for both advising and orientation have been developed.

The resulting plan represents a unique blend of human interaction and technological assistance. Faculty development to train the faculty to be better advisors and to understand how to apply the developmental model of advising is crucial to the success of the plan. An emphasis on transition sessions will result in more effective communication with the Student Success Center's counseling professionals. Increased faculty/student interaction through semester-long orientation classes is another strength of the plan. The use of technology is a key element of the plan, as well. Strategies are included in the plan to improve the VHCC website, to develop an online preview of the College, to adopt tools for virtual advising, to use early alert software so steps can be taken to help the student, and to find better ways to communicate with advisees.

A QEP Director was selected to administer and oversee the implementation of the plan. The QEP Director will be supported by the SOAR Implementation Team, which includes representation from students, faculty, student development, institutional effectiveness, and the SACS Leadership Team. The College looks forward to implementing and making continuous improvement to SOAR so that it can have a positive impact on student learning.