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Local Faculty Input on Student Success (or Lack Thereof)
Part One of a Series
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Everyone is interested in seeking ways to enhance student success at the California Community Colleges: Governor Brown, faculty, students, the Legislature, administrators, and others. A key question surrounding this topic is which groups are in the best position to make substantial recommendations. When the Student Success Task Force was empaneled a few years ago, there was concern that it was light on faculty representation, and the ensuing report seemed to reflect this. With significant emphasis on student services, the report was lacking in addressing how to enhance classroom success. The Student Success Initiative, SB 1456 [(Lowenthal) of 2012], followed suit by incentivizing colleges to increase student services, with virtually no emphasis on classroom teaching.

There is no question that students need to be prepared when starting at our colleges, with a basic educational goal in mind, knowledge of where their skills lie, and an idea of what courses should be taken. However, success must eventually go through our classrooms. If we are truly committed to increasing completion rates, faculty input is essential, especially as it relates to ensuring that those taking our courses have the best chance to pass.

The reduced emphasis on faculty input in discussions relating to student success has been carried forward to our local colleges. As Academic Senate President at Rio Hondo College, I learned during the summer of 2013 that the

college had put together a task force to examine how to increase student success and implement the Initiative. Excited by the news, I contacted the administration to learn about the makeup of the committee and how faculty would be involved. The reply was disappointing. The task force was to be comprised solely of administrators, but I was assured that all groups would be able to participate in the future (something that never really materialized to any significant extent).

By the fall of 2013, this participation portion came to fruition, sort of. The task force had developed a comprehensive presentation describing the new funding mechanisms stemming from the Student Success Initiative. The college would receive money based upon a complex equation relating to student services (such as the percentage of students who had educational plans developed, had taken assessments, and so on). Constituency groups (such as the Academic Senate, the board of trustees, our overall planning group at the college, and others) were given the information during lengthy presentations. A modest amount of time was allocated for comments and questions.

Armed with the buzzwords, “Student Success,” few could suggest that this was not a worthy enterprise. Even greater legitimacy was afforded to the plan because of the money involved. Who could claim that the proposed steps were nothing but the utmost urgency when millions of dollars were at stake? Overall, however, the Academic Senate and other faculty groups were disappointed with the results. While the plan included an important step relating to student success, it did little to address the challenges faculty faced every day, desperately trying to help students pass our classes. More concerns followed as a central part of the success plan was announced: an administrative position in the student services area would be enhanced (i.e. there would be a pay increase for an administrator).

Believing that little faculty input about classroom success would be part of the discussion, the Academic Senate decided to develop its own plan for student success, one that would emphasize input from faculty. This will be described in the next installment....

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Contact Communications Director [Austin Webster](#) to contribute a future blog.