



Center for Teaching Excellence Hampton University Teaching Matters

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Best Practices in Teaching and Learning

By Lillie Calloway

This past summer, I attended the Associated New American Colleges (ANAC) conference held on the campus of Elon University from June 13 – June 15. There were about 150 participants representing 22 institutions who were eager to share information about their respective institutions. The conference addressed many timely topics and provided insight into programs offered at other institutions. It also validated many practices already in place at Hampton University. I attended sessions and came away with the following broad conclusions.

1. Many institutions are grappling with the idea of engaging students actively in their learning to produce better prepared students for the workplace and post graduate experiences. Questions and statements posed for discussion included the following:
 - a. Who are the disengaged students and how do we reach them?
 - b. Who are we losing and how can we prevent some of these losses? (One university has an early warning system that allows faculty members to turn in the names of the students who are frequently absent to a centralized location to determine if a pattern exists which is followed by conversations with stakeholders- Deans, Resident Assistants, etc.).
 - c. How do we shift the focus from teaching to student learning?
 - d. How can students facilitate their own learning?
2. Colleges and universities are realizing the importance of the first year experience in the progress of the student in subsequent years. Several institutions shared details of their first year programs. All of the participants stressed the importance of developing a sense of belonging to a team and developing a sense of personal and social responsibility early on as important elements in student success. Elon University shared details of a comprehensive program designed to help students become acclimated to their college environment. Questions posed for discussions included the following:
 - a. How does the way faculty members relate to each other affect the way students relate to other students, faculty and staff members?
 - b. Does the program contain team building skill activities?
 - c. Should it be a common experience for all students?
 - d. Are critical thinking and problem solving skills enhanced?
 - e. Are global issues addressed?
 - f. What is it we want students to know, to understand and to do during and after the first year experience?

- g. What about requiring students to read certain books before coming to the campus and establishing learning communities which focus on discussing the books?
 - h. How do we assess the first year experience?
 - i. What about using the student handbook as a teaching resource to increase student awareness of its content?
3. General education programs, the formation and structure, were discussed in several sessions. All had components which focused on the following questions:
- a. Does the General Education Program fit the mission of the institution?
 - b. Does the program cultivate a link between general education and the core disciplines?
 - c. Why should the program change from time to time?
 - d. What is the purpose of the General Education Program?
 - e. How do you address the WADITW (we've always done it that way) attitude?
 - f. Before changing the current program, reflect on and evaluate it.

Some observations as a result of discussions:

1. Our Center for Teaching Excellence is more progressive with some of our initiatives than many similar campuses. We were one of only three centers with budgets and few had more than one staff member. Two institutions had virtual centers and are trying to find space for an actual facility.
2. Learning communities are valuable tools for enhancing student achievement, focusing on student learning, developing team building skills and building relationships between faculty and students.
3. Interdisciplinary teaching and learning is being used on many campuses as one strategy to help students answer the age old questions: "Why do I need to take this course or when will I ever use this"?
4. In order to help students' oral and written communication skills, reading and writing requirements for all students during their tenure at the University should continue to be implemented.

Announcements

The Fourteenth National HBCU Faculty Development Symposium will be held October 18-20, 2007 at the Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center in Tuskegee, Alabama. The preliminary program, registration form, and hotel information are available on the website <http://hbcufdn.org>.

The Grant Institute's Grants 101: Professional Grant Proposal Writing Workshop will be held at the Kellogg Conference Center at Gallaudet University, November 14 - 16, 2007 and at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, November 26 - 28, 2007. All participants will receive certification in professional grant writing from the Institute. For more information call (888) 824 - 4424 or visit The Grant Institute at www.thegrantinstitute.com.