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UNIVERSITY

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*"Identifying, Engaging and Working with both internal
and external stakeholders."*

Abstract: The process of identifying, engaging, and working with multiple individuals and groups both internal and external to the concurrent enrollment program (CEP) at the post-secondary institution can be challenging. These multiple stakeholders not only influence the mission and focus of the CEP, but may determine its very existence. This presentation will address this process, note issues, make suggestions, and encourage audience interaction.

INTRODUCTION

Whether small or large, most CEP's have a number of 'stakeholders' that have an impact on the CEP. An internal or external stakeholder may be an individual, group, or an organization, that has either an interest (i.e., perceived impact) in your CEP, or the success of CEP in general. A complete list of stakeholders may surprise you, and some may even be unknown, yet it serves an important purpose (i.e., budget, sustainability, etc.) in the identification of all possible stakeholders in your CEP.

IDENTIFY THE STAKEHOLDERS: PRIMARY & SECONDARY

Taking time to identify your stakeholders and assigning them a primary or secondary status, in terms of impact on your concurrent enrollment program (CEP), will help you more effectively respond to the needs inherent to each. It is likely those stakeholders I might identify as primary might actually be secondary for you; thus, thinking about their impact on your specific CEP is key.

Part of the point in determining primary or secondary status involves your time. Not every stakeholder can be primary. For example, two phone messages need response from two different administrators. While one message is from a high school administrator the other message is from a college

administrator. Although both messages are important, I have previously placed primary status on communication with high school administrators and would respond to that message first.

COMMON STAKEHOLDERS

1. High school students and their parents. Although separate stakeholders, students and parents are tightly linked, as both have similar course-specific concerns. We can say all we want about poor communication between these two groups, but I generally find that when it comes to educational issues involving the concurrent enrollment program and the future of their education, both students and parents tend to be fairly united in seeking the same information. Two primary issues:

a. Cost. Concurrent enrollment programs take a wide variety of approaches to addressing the cost of courses to students, including tuition and/or fees. Involvement in NACEP and discussions with program staff from other colleges across the country opened my eyes to the range of approaches. Depending upon the state, school, or school district, the specific CEP course cost may range from nothing to a minimal tuition fee (usually a fraction of the tuition paid at the college for the same course). Scholarships may be available to defray even a minimal tuition or fee; however, they are usually based upon a temporary federal or state grant or offered through a local/regional foundation or service club, and so should not be confused with the normal scholarship processes of the college. Should a CEP charge a minimal tuition fee, the collection of payment requires its own set of policies and procedures that may raise questions from students or parents unfamiliar with tuition or educational fees.

b. Benefits. The benefits of concurrent enrollment program (CEP) courses may seem logical to those of us in colleges that offer these programs. However, the logic is often lost on students and parents who have never attended college. They may not understand the academic concepts of credit acceptance, transferability, moving ahead on general education or elective courses, tuition discounts, or future tuition savings. Thus, explanation becomes very important to these students and parents.

Helping the student and parent understand how paying for concurrent enrollment program credit for a course now can mean later savings upon entering college can be difficult. Basically, each course offered through a concurrent enrollment program and transferable for general education or elective equivalency can save the student hundreds of dollars in tuition. For example, one story I love to tell involves a parent who called me one September and reported that his daughter had all of her concurrent enrollment program credits accepted at an out-of-state private college, which gave her sophomore standing and saved him more than \$20,000 in tuition. Similar stories recur every year.

2. Teachers in the high school seem to be most concerned about the students and opportunities offered to them by taking a concurrent enrollment program (CEP) course. Thus, course rigor is important only because it is ultimately important to the student in receiving credit for the course. Benefits for involvement as a CEP faculty member tend to be of limited personal interest, except for direct benefits received through professional development opportunities that may result in educational credit, which may in turn help move teachers up the school district salary scale. The use of monetary compensation paid to the CEP faculty member for participation is mixed across the United States, but when allowed it does provide an additional incentive for faculty participation. The option of offering monetary compensation can be limited by state, district, or teacher union policies. In addition, it may increase the competition between different colleges, as some qualified faculty may "shop around" and even offer their services to the highest bidder. The offering of teacher benefits is not a simple issue and should be

thought through carefully, as it will likely have direct budget implications for the program and college. NACEP standards require that professional development be provided for CEP faculty; however, nothing is specified as to other benefits or incentives that might be provided or offered. At the very least, a new program would want to find out what benefits are being offered to CEP faculty in the area. At the same time, a continuing program might need to revise its benefits based upon competition.

3. Administrators in the high school tend to be concerned with course rigor and professional development opportunities for their teachers. Course rigor is important in as much as it is reflected in graduation rates, college preparation, and credit transfer. Of equal importance for administrators are the public relations benefits gained by offering advanced opportunities to students. To the administrator, concurrent enrollment offered through the college program is simply another advanced opportunity in the same category as Advanced Placement (AP), Gifted and Talented Programs (GTP), or International Baccalaureate (IB). In some instances, the high school administrator may have an inherent bias in favor of an advanced opportunity other than concurrent enrollment, or concurrent enrollment may be an unknown. Either instance will require that the program staff spend additional time explaining the intent and educational value of concurrent enrollment. Never push your program onto an unwilling recipient; rather, step back and allow other pressures (usually parent or state related) to open the eyes of the administrator to the opportunity that is being offered. High school administrators have a variety of concerns; advanced opportunities, including concurrent enrollment, is only one. The concurrent enrollment program (CEP) staff should understand what advanced opportunities are offered by the high schools they work with and how each category might impact administrator support toward the CEP. The development and maintenance of positive relations with high school administrators is an ongoing task.

4. College administrators and department faculty

a. The college administrator(s), at all organizational levels, may need to be persuaded to accept your concurrent enrollment program (CEP), or to be at least neutral. Providing data about CEP success, beginning with NACEP and adding your own specific college data, can help garner acceptance by college administrators. Additionally, determining an “institutional place” organizationally for your CEP may be important to establishing and maintaining credibility for your CEP internally and externally. Thus, the areas of student development, academics, or admissions may each be a logical location for your CEP within the college. Yes, most administrators have accreditation on their minds and NACEP can help.

b. The department faculty may need to be persuaded to both accept your CEP, and participate as subject-area mentors in your CEP. Unwilling faculty can kill a CEP from the beginning, thus determining ‘payment’ (i.e., load credit, or salary) becomes critical for faculty support. Unfortunately, few faculty are willing to give up time to a program, like CEP, without compensation.

5. Local and State education organizations. These organizations may be representative of other equally important organizations you will come in contact with through your concurrent enrollment program. The point is, become aware of those organizations that might impact your program now and in the future.

a. Local educational organizations. The local school district would be the most common educational organization after the high school itself. Most school district administration members (superintendents or area/content coordinators) are interested in the same issues as the high school administrator. It is likely that the school district will be even more concerned than the high school

administrator about the concurrent enrollment program as an advanced opportunity as well as the public relations situation with parents and the community. Generally, the size of the school district will determine the amount of oversight placed upon the program in the high school. For example, one school district may allow the individual high school administrator to handle all concurrent enrollment program issues within their school; another district may assign a district administrator to coordinate all concurrent enrollment program (CEP) issues with all high schools in that district. The point is that administrative oversight from the high school and/or school district may become complicated, which requires the program staff to be somewhat flexible in process. However, the outcome in being more flexible is that it takes more time for the concurrent enrollment program staff. This does not mean a change in registration, policies, or normal procedures, but it does mean that communication of issues, i.e., a policy change, may require discussion with more individuals in the school district before it gets to the high school administrator and ultimately to the teacher in the classroom.

b. State educational organizations. Most states have some form of department of education, or staff, that oversees educational policies in that state. Becoming aware of how the state's education department might impact your CEP is very important; for example, noting state policies on all advanced opportunities (i.e., AP, concurrent enrollment, GTP, IB), professional development for teachers, and grant options. The CEP staff should actively communicate with state-level staff and be available to participate on committees when asked. Do not ignore the value of public relations opportunities with state educational organizations.

c. State legislature and committees. Depending upon the state, the legislature may have a great deal of impact on the concurrent enrollment program. At the very least, the assignment of money for education through the legislature may be of interest to you. Being aware of the legislative education committee(s), assigned representatives, and potential actions will at least allow you to communicate your views as a state citizen. Being prepared with information, or even being available to testify before a legislative committee, may be important to your concurrent enrollment program and college.

Working with local and state organizations, and the individual administrators involved with each, requires concurrent enrollment staff to spend extra time creating relationships, communicating opportunities, and carrying out basic public relations efforts with these stakeholders. However, the payoff in doing so is important to the longevity of your concurrent enrollment program.

6. Competitors. Colleges are not immune from competition from other colleges. We know that colleges, public or private, compete through the process of recruitment to bring students to their individual campuses. The concurrent enrollment program (CEP) can be an effective part of a college recruitment effort by providing rigorous college courses. A quality CEP provides a college name "brand" with the school, classroom, student, and parents whereby your college is seriously considered when the student is ready to go to college. At this point we know that no college wants to be on the "not interested" list from the start.

Since competition does exist, it is important for concurrent enrollment programs to work with each other. Working with competitors does not mean holding hands and singing "Kumbaya" around the campfire, nor does it mean that the playing field is level; it does mean keeping the lines of communication open and agreeing to disagree. Do not forget that competition is two-way. Before you can work with your competitors you need to determine who they are and what courses they offer. This

is especially important for a new or developing CEP. To prepare your competition list you may need to broaden your perspective and look at local, state, and regional competitors.

a. Local competitors are the most logical to be aware of and may be the easiest to identify. What colleges are located in your community and recruit students from the local high schools? Identification may be as simple as asking the local high school administrators, or doing a web-based search. Once identified, the competing college's website is an easy way to determine whether a concurrent enrollment program exists and what it offers, and to find program staff contact information. Also, remember that the college may not use "concurrent enrollment" for identification, but another term (dual enrollment, dual credit, concurrent credit).

b. State competitors may be easy to identify, but may seem less important than a direct local competitor. However, if these competitors do recruit students from the local high schools, then it is important to be aware of them. The same process for locating local competitors will work for identifying competitors elsewhere in the state. Of interest here would be branch campuses of in-state academic colleges that might offer concurrent enrollment program courses by traditional face-to-face delivery or through e-technology (online, live-connect broadcasts).

c. Regional or out-of-state competitors may be harder to identify or may seem less important. Yet, if they do recruit students from the local high schools that you might work with then they are important to consider. Asking local high school administrators may be the best way to identify them. Once these competitors have been identified, a website analysis will be important to you. Of continuing interest will be the use of branch campuses and e-technology course options by the regional competitor.

Now that you have identified your competitors, it is important to establish and maintain communication with them individually. At the very least contact each competitor and identify yourself, with the intent of opening an ongoing dialogue. Find out if your state has formed a group of CEP directors from the competing colleges, ask when that group meets, and attend the next meeting. If your state does not have such a group (formal or informal), the state education department might be interested in helping to create such a group for discussion purposes.

The entire concept of competition is not an easy one to think about, especially in the academic setting of the college. Yet competition is real and important to address by any concurrent enrollment program staff because of its close ties to recruitment issues. The point is to address competition positively through identification and ongoing communication.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately the choice is yours. You must believe that identifying the potential stakeholders to your CEP is important and you must work consistently to foster on-going and quality communication with the stakeholders. Ultimately, identifying and working with your stakeholders will go a long way to helping you maintain a quality CEP.

RESOURCE

Waller, Dennis R. (2016). "A quality concurrent enrollment program: Five considerations." In Gerald S. Edmonds and Tiffany M. Squires (Eds.), Bridging the High School – College Gap (pp. 41-58). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.