UM program teaches about college too

The children Lacy Dodd and Janie Cole work with in Delta schools immediately volunteer two pieces of information upon first meeting: their favorite food and what they want to be when they grow up.

Even though Dodd and Cole’s main objective is to teach students in grades K-5 about health, nutrition and wellness, going to college seems to always come into play on the “grown up” end.

“They see our university T-shirts when we walk in the door and they say, ‘Oh, you’re from Ole Miss’,” said Dodd, project manager and health educator for the “Eating Good… and Moving Like We Should” program.

Delta State University’s first-year experience should be a main priority for the university.

“The surveys completed by students, faculty, and staff showed that Delta State is really strong in a number of areas, for example, in faculty to student engagement, but there is always room for improvement,” said Dr. Moon, associate dean for assessment and planning.

Possible changes could include requiring all first-years to take the course and including more discussion on diversity. The center now offers students resume advice, mock interviews and lectures on pertinent issues such as “dressing for success.”

“Research shows that if our students can get off to a smooth start, their entire experience at Delta State will be successful,” said Dr. Ann Lotven, provost and vice president for academic affairs.

The committee was formed following the release of results from a Foundations of Excellence examination the university underwent in 2008-09. Foundations of Excellence is a comprehensive, externally audited self-study and improvement process that focuses on the first-year college experience.

Dr. Beverly Moon, who also participated in the self-study, said Jacksy’s focus on student study participants, one recurring theme that emerged was that rethinking the first-year experience should be a main priority for the university.

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University of Southern Mississippi teaches K-12 students about health and nutrition, as well as college opportunities, and retention and graduation rates, Dr. Hammond added.

The two-tiered system will emphasize selecting courses, strengthening basic skills, tracking and monitoring of student performance and enhancing overall student academic, personal and professional development.

A mandatory graduation day training for returning juniors and seniors understand and fulfill requirements will also be implemented.

For more information visit www.mvsu.edu.
**UMMC focuses on access**

**Nursing program offers support to students**

Students from underrepresented groups and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are now receiving financial support to further their nursing training at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

Ten students were recently awarded scholarships of $10,000 each to study in the School of Nursing’s Accelerated Degree Program. The scholarships are funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and UMMC is looking for another round of funding to provide more scholarships next year.

Students who are underrepresented in nursing, such as ethnic minorities, males and those who cannot afford the costs, benefit from the program. Teachers are trained to offer needed support to college graduates who have degrees in other fields and are pursuing a nursing career through accelerated programs.

Dr. Janet Harris, chief nursing executive officer for University of Mississippi Medical Center, said UMMC is doing a good job recruiting and retaining students.

“We are currently maintaining a nursing turnover rate around 6.5% and a vacancy rate of less than 4 percent,” she said. The accelerated program began in 2006 with the goal of offering nontraditional students an alternative way to earn a nursing degree. Students in the 15-month program receive much of their training by being paired with UMMC staff nurses.

**UMMC program a path to college, career**

Beginning this month, high school students interested in technical careers are participating in a program that will prepare them for transition from the classroom to the workforce.

Mississippi State University, East Mississippi and Itawamba community colleges are teaming up to provide the new program titled “Technology Initiative in Manufacturing and Engineering.” It aims to close the gap between K-12 education and postsecondary institutions.

“Technology Initiative in Manufacturing and Engineering is paying for the program,” said Dr. John Johnson, director of the Accelerated Degree Program. The RWJF is interested in finding ways to help health-care education.

“In 2008, they created a three-round diversity push designed to, number one, alleviate workforce shortages in Mississippi with the goal of offering nontraditional students an alternative way to earn a nursing degree. Students in the 15-month program receive much of their training by being paired with UMMC staff nurses.”

**Group pushes for more grads at all levels**

Mississippi lags far behind the rest of the nation in the state’s graduation rate. The Graduation Rate Task Force recommends that the state set specific goals to move Mississippi’s graduation rate to the national average by 2025. Reaching that goal will require better coordination between educational agencies, more support for education from key stakeholders, and the implementation of best practices proven to improve retention, persistence, and completion of college degrees.

The Task Force, established by the Mississippi Legislature during the 2009 session, has met monthly since June to study and report on graduation rates in the state’s public four-year and two-year postsecondary institutions.

Specific recommendations in the report include:

• Establishing a state level Education Achievement Council to sustain attention to this agenda, establish long-term goals and benchmarks, and publish an annual report card.

• Aligning K-12 with career-ready and college-level learning expectations;

• Ensuring developmental education is a statewide priority.

• Creating a seamless transition process from community and junior colleges to institutions of higher learning, and a seamless credit transfer process between the community and junior colleges and institutions of higher learning;

• Building in funding incentives for institutions of higher learning;

• Developing a statewide plan for retention, persistence, and completion by institution;

• Implementing student success best practices and programs within each institution. The task Force consists of representatives of the Mississippi Legislature, the Governor’s Office, the State Institutions of Higher Learning, Mississippi’s Community Colleges, Junior Colleges, the Mississippi State Board of Education, the Mississippi Department of Mental Health and the Mississippi Economic Development Council.

To view the full report or other information relating to the Graduation Rate Task Force, including meeting minutes and presentation information, visit mississippi.edu/graduation.