

UM program teaches about college too

PLANTING SEEDS

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.

Serving schools in the South Panola and Quitman County school districts, the program is offered through a partnership by the Department of Nutrition and Hospitality Management and National Food Service Management Institute at the University of Mississippi.

The project, funded last year by the Delta Health Alliance, centers on access to a registered dietitian, teaching children to make healthy choices based on their nutrition needs, and encouraging them to engage in a more active lifestyle to prevent obesity.

However, getting students interested in college and – possibly – a career in nutrition, hospitality management or health



The "Eating Good... and Moving Like We Should" program at the University of Mississippi teaches K-12 students about health and nutrition, as well as college opportunities.

promotion has become a secondary benefit.

Younger students get to visit with people connected to the university. The project has offered older students the chance to tour UM and visit with student financial aid reps.

"There is one little girl who tells me every time I see her that she wants to work in her school cafeteria," Dodd said. "Who knows? She could be leading a school district in nutrition one day because of our interaction with her."

Year one focus of DSU recs

Delta State University's first-year experience class – GIS 100 – could be in for an overhaul this coming fall.

A nine-member committee currently investigating possible changes to the course will likely make their recommendations this semester. The goal is to increase retention rates and enhance learning in order to ensure student success from enrollment to graduation day.

"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 guided self-study and improvement process that focuses on the first-year college experience.

Dr. Lotven oversaw the implementation of the program on campus.

Dr. Beverly Moon, who also participated in the self-study, said in a survey of self-study participants, one recurring theme that emerged was that rethinking the 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.

"It isn't clear what the committee will recommend but what is clear is that at Delta State, we are all committed to meeting students needs," Dr. Lotven said.

FIRST-YEAR DEFINED

A student is defined by Foundations of Excellence as entering freshmen, transfers, and nontraditional students who are, according to the institution's criteria, classified as degree-seeking freshmen (for DSU, less than 30 hours), including online, returning, and part-time.

ASU beefs up student career counseling

Any expert would tell you career counseling for college students should no longer be limited to a personality test and a chat with an advisor.

Alcorn State University has responded to a new generation of students by beefing up its Center for Career Counseling to include a wide range of services at all levels.

"The reason you come to college is to eventually get a job, so we have to move students toward that goal in and outside the classroom," said Dr. Gerald Peoples, vice president for student affairs.

The center now offers students resume advice, mock interviews and lectures on pertinent issues such as "dressing for success." Twice a semester, the center hosts a career fair and counselors strongly encourage students to seek internships. This semester, the director of the center – Adrienne Willis – will also begin going to classes to speak to first-year students about preparing themselves for the "real world," Dr. Peoples said.

"A robust career counseling program is very important to keeping students engaged, graduating them in a timely manner and ensuring that they find employment," he said.

THE **U** REVIEW

January 2010

USM offers unique programs for transfers

WELCOME TO SOUTHERN

In the fall, nearly 1,300 students transferred from one of Mississippi's community and junior colleges (CJC) to the University of Southern Mississippi.

Over the years, Southern Miss has implemented some major changes in its first-year experience program aimed at keeping that number among the highest in the system and retaining transfers who are already enrolled.

Why? Providing students moving from a CJC with the same level of support as other students is part of USM's commitment to the state, said Wynde Fitts, director of the First Year Experience at the university.

"We wanted to make a conscious choice to implement programming that says, 'Hey, you're really important to us,'" Fitts said.

Aside from bringing in a staff member to work specifically with all transfer students, USM has created a separate, more self-directed orientation program that is different from the program aimed at first-time freshmen.

CJC transfers are able to choose which small-group sessions they want to attend. One of the sessions focuses specifically on helping students make a smooth emotional transition from a community college to a large research institution.

Activities during "Golden Eagle Welcome Week" – a four-day event before classes begin – are more academically focused, as



The University of Southern Mississippi offers newcomers an array of Golden Eagle welcome events. Some are tailored for recent transfers from area community colleges.

most CJC transfer students have already earned credit for general courses.

The university has also created a Transfer Leadership Board to help in planning programming and established an honorary society, Tau Sigma, which specifically serves transfer students.

"If we are going to continue to grow and serve the Gulf South, we have to support all constituents appropriately and equally," Fitts said.

For more information on USM's First Year Experience for all transfer students visit <http://www.usm.edu/admissions/transfers/>.

Miss. Valley adds 2-tier advising program

Mississippi Valley State University will implement a new Two-Tiered Intrusive Academic Advising program this fall aimed at upping retention and graduation rates.

All students – first-year through senior – will be a part of the new program, which will provide both general and discipline-centered academic counseling, MVSU Chief of Staff Dr. Anna Hammond said.

"Without a strong academic advising program, you really have no idea what's happening with your students," she said. "If a student thinks nobody cares, then he or she won't be engaged in the classroom."

Research shows that there is a strong connection between strong advising programs

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.



DR. HAMMOND

A mandatory graduation workshop to help juniors and seniors understand and fulfill requirements will also be implemented.

Staff and faculty will

begin receiving training in the spring and summer in preparation for implementation of the new program.

"Training is a huge component of this effort," Dr. Hammond said. "Everyone must be involved, from orientation leaders to department chairs, in order to make this system work and meet student needs."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Mississippi Valley State University is implementing a new two-tiered advising system for students at all levels.

For more information visit www.mvsu.edu.

Data key to raising JSU retention

Increasing the retention rates of first-time students at Jackson State University has become a coordinated effort dependent on solid data analysis and strong relationships between faculty and First Year Experience staff.

Dr. Evelyn J. Leggette, who oversees the program, said JSU is starting to see positive results.

"Success is so important in the first year," said Dr. Leggette, dean of undergraduate students and professor of reading. "If we can track students and provide more support where they are struggling, they are much more likely to stay enrolled and graduate on time."

A full-time retention coordinator tracks students as they move through their first semester at JSU. Students with low mid-term grades or a high number of absences are identified and the retention coordinator helps develop a plan to get them back on the right track.

The retention coordinator also offers workshops on issues ranging from graduation requirements to the keys to academic success, and hosts study jams throughout the semester, Leggette said.

At the beginning of every semester, the coordinator pulls together fall-to-fall retention data to identify and fix any gaps in programming.

"The data piece is important to us because it tells us how we are doing in our programming," Leggette said. "If we are going to keep students at JSU, we have to make sure we are fulfilling their needs."

For more information on JSU's First Year Experience visit <http://ugs.jsu.edu/show.asp?durki=151>.

'Early alert' at MUW keeps students on grad track

Repeatedly missing class? Neglecting assignments? Expect a letter of encouragement from Mississippi University for Women, where officials are using unique ways to help students succeed.

MUW's early alert system warns students that unsuccessful behaviors will hurt their chances of graduation. A student who is excessively absent, scores poorly on tests or papers, doesn't participate or shows disruptive classroom behavior receives a letter encouraging him or her to meet with an instructor or advisor. The student's advisor also receives a copy of the letter.

Faculty help students engage

For seniors Rebecca Stiles and Rachel McGibboney, the reputation of the food science and nutrition programs helped attract them to Mississippi State University, but what they found helped keep them.

"Individualized attention helped keep me from being overwhelmed as a freshman," McGibboney said. "The teachers know their students and are available to give individual attention."

Faculty involvement also is important to Stiles.

"All the teachers try to bring something new and interesting to each of our classes," she said. "Another interesting part of the food science and nutrition programs is the opportunity to prepare and serve meals for campus events, such as the ag alumni breakfast at homecoming each fall."

Both Stiles of West Helena, Ark., and McGibboney of Senatobia are in the nutrition program of the Department of Food Science, Nutrition and Health Promotion in the

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Following graduation, they plan to pursue internships in nutrition.

"The availability scholarships and internships while in school and following graduation help us attract and retain top-quality students," said department head Benji Mikel. "Most undergraduates in the department study either nutrition or food science. Graduates in either area find strong demand and great starting salaries in various aspects of the industry, from food processing to food service in settings such as hospitals and nursing homes."

The department, he added, has a new concentration this year.

"Culinology is being offered in conjunction with the Culinary Arts Institute at the Mississippi University for Women," Mikel said. "This is a growth field and allows students to be creative in food preparation and presentation while using what they learn in science-based classes."

DIVISION OF AG, FORESTRY & VET MEDICINE



Senior nutrition students Rebecca Stiles, left, and Rachel McGibboney discuss their courses with dietetics program director Michelle Lee on the first day of the spring 2010 semester at MSU.

"This is an effort to intervene at the lowest possible level to provide support to students to ensure success in the college community," said Dr. Bucky Wesley, vice president for student services.

MUW has been using early alert efforts for years, but the program now offers a complete network of care.

"I send out the link for our program in prompts that go out at important points in the semester, like after the last day to add or drop a class," said Maria L. Dunser, who joined MUW about a year ago as the early alert coordinator.

"For many students, this alert early in the semester provides the nudge they need to utilize our campus resources, and this early contact helps the students to turn their semester in a more positive direction."

Professors, staff and students are able to use the link on the university's webpage to refer students who may be in need of assistance.

Many universities have similar programs. But Dr. Eric Daffron, MUW's associate vice president for academic affairs, said MUW's program "is special because it is coordinated with the Behavioral Intervention Team through online software in an effort to support student success holistically."

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 applying 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 scholarships. The funding is for college graduates who have degrees in other fields and are pursuing a nursing career through accelerated programs.

Dr. Tina Martin, director of the Accelerated Degree Program, said 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 nursing shortages and, number two, to increase diversity in the workforce," said Martin, who wrote the application for the \$100,000 award.

The scholarships also allow UMMC to

increase diversity among its students while boosting retention and graduation rates. A recent report from Mississippi's Graduation Rate Task Force found that both initiatives

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— JANET HARRIS
Chief Nursing Executive Officer

are ways the state can improve its higher education system.

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

"We are currently maintaining a nursing turnover rate around 6.5 percent 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 UMHC staff nurses.

MSU program a path to college, career

Beginning this month, high school students interested in technical careers are participating in a new program that offers a more seamless 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 schools, community colleges, universities and manufacturing industries.

Other partners include the Mississippi Department of Education, Columbus Air Force Base and a number of regional entities. Nearly \$900,000 in grant money from the National Science Foundation is paying for the program.

The initiative is just one of the ways that Mississippi universities are trying to increase graduation rates. A recent report from the state's Graduation Rate Task Force found that better coordination between education systems will make it easier for more students to obtain diplomas.

"This partnership will expose high school students to careers in technical fields in the state and the path to getting there," said Sandra H. Harpole, director of MSU's Center for Science, Mathematics and Technology.

The program allows high school students to "test-drive" high-tech careers such as manufacturing and engineering while gaining required workplace skills. It will also help their school teachers and counselors learn about career opportunities and technical job-skill requirements, as well as the latest ways to apply science, technology, engineering and mathematics in their curriculum.

The student program began Jan. 11 at the Pontotoc Ridge Vocational Technical Center. Teachers begin participating in June.

Harpole said the program can serve as a model for the state and region.

"This will better prepare students to enter the workforce, and it has the potential to increase opportunities for under-represented groups to enter highly technical fields," she said.

Group pushes for more grads at all levels

Mississippi lags far behind the rest of the nation in the educational attainment level of its citizens, according to a task force report submitted to the Legislature.

To close the gap, the Graduation Rate Task Force recommends that the state set specific goals to move Mississippi's educational attainment 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 to improve retention and graduation;
- Developing a statewide plan for retention, persistence, and completion institution by institution; and
- 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 and Junior Colleges, the Mississippi State Board of Education, the Mississippi Department of Mental Health and the Mississippi Economic 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.