

## **Volume 11, Number 1 Fall 2003 Abstracts**

### **Assessing Community College Student Knowledge in the Liberal Arts**

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The General Academic Learning Experience (GALE) is an assessment of community college student knowledge in the liberal arts. The study involved the design and administration of an instrument, which included a demographic survey and a multiple-choice content test. In total, over 2,500 students from 10 colleges in Southern California participated. Employing quantitative analysis methods, we found relationships between students' knowledge in the liberal arts and their course-taking and other background characteristics. The results of the study are timely in helping institutions respond to increasing calls for accountability in measuring student learning outcomes.

### **Putting Community College Enrollment Trends in Perspective by the Use of Census Data and Market Measurement Techniques**

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Over the decade of the 1990s, the student body of Prince George's Community College underwent dramatic shifts in its demographic makeup, as did the school's service area. This paper illustrates the importance, especially in these circumstances, of systematically comparing college enrollment trends with the demographic vectors of the surrounding community in order to assess true penetration rates for racial, age and other crucial educational marketing segments. It also shows how creative use of readily available U.S. Census data enables enrollment managers and college facilities planners to locate under-served areas of a service area and to identify the best sites for new extension centers.

### **Educational Objectives and Retention at Two Community Colleges**

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As a result of their mission to provide services to diverse groups, community colleges generally have lower retention rates. The present research reviews the theoretical basis of retention, with a focus on summarizing how the theory pertains to two-year schools. While numerous variables influence persistence, a student's educational objectives appear to be an especially important determinant of persistence at community colleges. Using regression techniques, this study examined which student characteristics best predict retention and other student outcomes at two community colleges. Fall 1997 cohorts were

tracked until spring 2001, and analyses involved testing the hypothesis that educational objectives are critical in predicting community college retention. The findings indicated a need for improvements in the quality of educational goals data collection, as well as the need to refocus college resources to support retention analyses.

## **The Role of Institutional Research in the Comprehensive Community College**

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This essay builds on and extends scholarly discussion of the role and functions of Institutional Research (IR), especially with regard to the community college. As institutional “conscience,” the primary value of IR is assisting in the identification of organizational weaknesses and challenges and helping to convert weaknesses into strengths and challenges into opportunities. The traditional direct and support functions of IR are reviewed, including federal and state reporting, enrollment analysis, strategic planning, institutional effectiveness and educational assessment. Given declining state support, increasing competition and changing technology, among other factors, it is argued that IR needs to play an additional role – helping to identify a college’s competitive advantage and marshalling the will and resources to advance their mission in challenging times.

## **Out of Class Testing: A Student Success Collaboration**

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The issue of student success is a common concern in the typical community college, and no less so at Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) in New Mexico. As a result of a comprehensive program review of student success rates in mathematics, the Mathematics Departments in the Divisions of Arts and Sciences and Developmental Studies collaborated on significant changes to the SFCC mathematics programs. The most significant outcomes of the program review included the development of a pre-and post-test assessment of math skills and a shift to out-of-class testing for the math class with the lowest success rate. The pre/post test study provided an alternative assessment which confirmed that there was learning taking place in Math 102.