

Stakeholder Summary

Student Success Programs May Improve Grades, Show Limited Impact on Retention and Satisfaction

Programs aimed at supporting the academic and social needs of first-year students, often known as student success programs, are designed to help students thrive during the difficult transition into postsecondary education (PSE). A new study by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) finds that these programs do have a positive impact on grades, particularly for those with weaker grade averages, but show no indication of preventing students from leaving school or improving overall student satisfaction.

Project Description

The Student Success Program: From Pilot to Implementation examines the programs developed and offered at George Brown College. The college officially launched its Student Success Program (SSP) in 2008. Over three academic years from 2008 to 2011, the authors examined two different program areas to determine the potential impact of SSPs on academic performance, retention and student satisfaction. The findings are based on a variety of data sources including academic records, student surveys and SSP evaluations. The SSP program at George Brown offered a wide range of services, both in-class and during students' free time and were customized to meet the needs of the program of study. While the SSP program was college-wide, the development and administration of the activities were determined by the individual program departments.

Findings

Participation in at least one SSP program outside of class time was associated with higher grade averages, particularly for students with weaker grades. The programs had a stronger effect in the fall term, suggesting these types of supports may be most beneficial to students early in their program. While the SSP program at George Brown College was not designed as a remedial tool, these findings suggest that there may be a benefit to encouraging students who struggle early to seek assistance from these programs. However, a number of factors may have influenced SSP participation including student motivation, engagement and external time demands and these can also influence grade averages.

While there was no measurable impact of SSP on preventing students from leaving their program, the results for overall student satisfaction were mixed. Satisfaction increased in one program and decreased in the other, making any clear conclusion difficult.

It is important to note that the types of supports offered by SSPs typically only have minor effects. The 2011 HEQCO report [*Defining, Measuring and Achieving "Student Success" in Ontario Colleges and Universities*](#) found that while on their own these types of initiatives have a relatively small impact, combining multiple programs can have significant value.

The Student Success Program: From Pilot to Implementation was prepared by The Office of Institutional Research at George Brown College.