
WVInsider

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CARE AND SHARE

Now is the time of year when every worthy cause seems to have its hand outstretched in the hopes that the season of good cheer extends good will toward others and certainly all of these agencies are deserving of our respect and support for their good works.

Many people are very happy to give to various campaigns and enough people were generous last year in the VVI Care and Share and Caroling program, that sufficient materials were donated to make the Christmas season a welcome and merry time for twelve of our less fortunate students.

The Care and Share program is on again this year and your donations, no matter how small, will bring warmth and delight to someone who would otherwise have little during this season of merriment and giving. Commencing Monday, December 9, donations to the Care and Share can be left at the Security Office and after December 13th they may be left at the base of the Christmas tree in the mall. Join in the spirit of the season and give substance to your Christmas wishes with a donation to the VVI Care and Share.

GBC

CAROLING

It's the time of year for tradition, and voice will be raised in salute as caroling will begin in the mall on December 16 from 12:00 to 12:30. Everyone is invited to partake but rumour has it that there will be some fierce (but good-natured) rivalries operating this year.

The Dental Department who made an impressive showing last year is flossing out the challenge to all departments and will start the caroling December 16th. They are convinced that the Hairdressing department who follows on the 17th won't be able to match their dulcet dental tones but word has it that the Hairdressers can coiffure a carol like no one else!! Not to be outdone, all the support staff and administrators will make the rafters ring on the 18th and following them on the 19th the Business Department will show their stuff. Capping off the week will be the Nursing department who have promised to make blood pressures stabilize and heartbeats quicken and to outshine all the other departments put together! The challenge has been made -- the action starts next week!!

The staff also invites everyone on Monday the 23rd to join in the caroling which will take place in the cafeteria. No competitions here, just good old-fashioned Christmas carols to warm the heart and welcome the Christmas season.

GBC

LIBRARY NEWS

The last film of the season will show on Tuesday, December 17 at 12:00 noon

PEEGE

A dramatization which shows how a young man who comes home from college for the Christmas holidays is able to break through communication barriers and reach his grandmother who has become isolated by age and failing mental and physical capabilities. Fumbling efforts to establish some meaningful communication between the full and active life of the family and the empty life of the senile grandmother in a nursing home are interrupted by flashbacks in the mind of the grandson, showing her as she was. He stays a moment longer than the others to tell her that he loves her. She smiles.

NEW BOOKS

Look like a winner; why, when, and where to wear what.
The personal computer book: complete with brand name buying guide.
Van Nostrand Reinhold manual of rendering with pen and ink.
Overcoming learning problems.

NEW A/V ADDITIONS

Employment opportunities
Working in a hospital
Working in a laundry and dry cleaning plant
Jobs for young men
Working with cars
Working with people
Clerical and stock work
There's work everywhere

Muscular Dystrophy

Transfer please: techniques for safe lifts and transfers (nursing)

POSITION OPENINGS

Camosun College needs a Director of Trades Training. Starting date is as soon as possible and applications will be received until a suitable candidate is selected. Apply to The President, Camosun College, 3100 Foul Bay Road, Victoria, V8P 4X8.

Continuing Education requires a Work Experience Counsellor for the Career Awareness Program at the Vancouver Vocational Institute. Apply to the Department of Human Resources, Central Administration. The contract is a temporary one to February 28, 1986, subject to renewal.



THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS ON STUDENT RETENTION

In the summer of 1978, Central Oregon Community College conducted a follow-up study of all full-time, first time freshmen who had enrolled in Fall 1977. The results were startling. Over half the students had ceased to attend sometime during their first year, and many more did not return the following year. Even admitting the many valid reasons why students leave, we thought the attrition rate unacceptable and noted that, pragmatically, we were creating hundreds of "dissatisfied customers" in our voting district each year. The overriding impression was, however, one of sadness, that the cold statistics represented so many human tragedies and lost opportunities. We set out to improve.

Our efforts centered around learning about—or at least rediscovering—the characteristics of many of our students. They are the students John Roueche of the University of Texas has termed "high risk." They unconsciously regard themselves as educational failures on their way to fail once again. That self-fulfilling prophecy is predictable from their behavior; they often come to class without pencil or paper, put off purchasing a text, sit near an exit, do not do initial assignments, become erratic in attendance. One day they simply vanish.

Using The FUD Desk

We decided to focus on attendance first. Attendance, after all, is basic: if students aren't in class, the instructor can't teach them. We came to believe that students who were likely to be in academic difficulty because of absences ought to have a personal contact from the College. The first choice would be a phone call; a distant second choice would be a letter.

The procedures we set up centered on the instructor. Instructors could make the phone calls themselves or could relay the necessary information to "The Follow-up Desk—or FUD desk." The FUD desk was staffed by a faculty member with excellent communication skills. The phone calls were no-nonsense. Though we listened sympathetically to the predictable excuses, the thrust was: "We care about your success. To be successful you must be in class. What barriers are keeping you from returning to class *today*?"

We were pleasantly surprised. Rarely was a student resentful at being phoned. We had expected a lot of "butt out of my life" reactions, but they almost never came. Instead, the usual reactions were first amazement, then appreciation. We found also that the phone calls were not as time-consuming as we feared. One efficiency we learned was to phone between 7:30 and 8:15 in the morning. Students seemed to be home then, and there was a special awakening urgency in getting out of bed and hearing one's instructor's voice on the phone. Further, since students who were absent from one class tended to be absent from all classes, they might hear as many as four or five different instructors' voices. That's impressive!

In a recent spring quarter, instructors and the FUD Desk phoned 200 students—all of them, remember, identified by their instructors as likely to be in academic difficulty because of absences. One hundred sixty-nine returned to classes, and 150 completed the quarter. It's probable that without this phone intervention few would have even returned.

Sometimes it's harder to keep an innovation going and improving than to start it. Believing that the FUD Desk retention effort is important and successful, we are taking steps to perpetuate it. Present faculty are reminded and encouraged through memoranda, readings about high-risk students, and occasional in-service sessions. New faculty encounter the concept first as candidates when the Dean of Instruction interviews them and next in orientation-to-the-College sessions. More important, though, the system tends to be self-perpetuating because of instructors' professional pleasure at seeing students returning to classes and succeeding.



Training in Appropriate Teaching Processes

A second retention effort has centered around emphasizing appropriate teaching processes during the first several class sessions. For students who have poor self-concepts and who may be setting themselves up to fail, an early classroom success is critical. We remind ourselves of such common-sense techniques as consciously teaching information on skills which can be learned readily and creating a classroom atmosphere in which there is no such thing as a stupid question. We also try to incorporate techniques which make good sense, but which are not always obvious, e.g., learning students' names, using testing procedures which test often and in smaller chunks, and facilitating the formation of study and support groups.

A third retention effort is to infuse all of the above into the consciousness of our part-time instructors. To do this, we invite them particularly to use the FUD Desk. Predictably, a higher proportion of part-time faculty use the FUD Desk than make their own phone calls. Also, all new part-time faculty must attend an orientation session (during the first weeks of class) which concentrates on teaching techniques. Periodic in-service sessions at the departmental/divisional level continue the reinforcement.

Using Academic Warning to Trigger Academic Advising

A fourth, very recent effort is a redesigned probation policy. Now called "academic warning," the policy identifies students with low GPA's and/or completion rates and assigns them to a special academic advisor, who is a full-time faculty member having received special training to fulfill that role. Whether or not this new effort increases retention is not known at present, but its value as a vehicle for expressing College concern and help makes it worthwhile regardless.

Implementing Flexible Reassignment

Finally, thanks to prescient curriculum designers of years ago, we have in place an extremely important retention device: the ability to move students from one level to another in freshman English and math classes. We can do this even in the middle of terms. Thus, students who have been misadvised (or who misadvised themselves) or otherwise inaccurately placed can quickly move to their appropriate skill levels in writing and in lower-level math classes.

In Summary

Though questioning of the worth of retention efforts is rare, a couple of dangers do exist. Especially in an era of declining FTE's, when emphasizing the importance of retention, care must be taken so that faculty do not feel compelled to retain everybody. There are, after all, students whom we should not retain; and in those cases, we try to ease the leaving by making it a conscious, good choice on the part of the student, not just another failure in a long string of failures. Trying to retain some students to keep up the FTE count invites frustrated teachers and lower quality teaching, as well as a deterioration of standards. Conversely, care should be taken to ensure that retention efforts are not misinterpreted as mollycoddling or spoon-feeding. Instead, we should hold high expectations (people tend to live up to expectations) for our students and work hard to help them meet them.

Like a hospital's reputation, a community college's rests partly not on how it treats well persons, but on how well it serves those who need it most.

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