

ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE USES DATA TO IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS

Elgin Community College is a publicly-funded two-year postsecondary institution that serves Community College District 509, a 360-square-mile area approximately 30 miles northwest of Chicago. The community served by Elgin Community College has approximately 480,000 residents representing predominately Hispanic and Caucasian ethnicities. In the 2013-14 school year, there were about 17,000 students enrolled at Elgin Community College, 70 percent of whom were part time. The average age of students was 27 years and 40 percent were PELL Grant recipients. In the 2014-15 school year, Elgin Community College awarded 2,578 certificates/degrees.

In the past few years, Elgin Community College has been growing its ability throughout the institution to use data, translate data into meaningful information, and make sense of that information in practice. The college was able to grow a culture of evidence-based decision-making through the Student Success Infrastructure (SSI) and the use of Data Rangers.

Student Success Infrastructure

Now in its second iteration, SSI 2.0 is a collection of people drawn from both staff and faculty who approve small grants for projects aimed at improving student success. While SSI 2.0 is a huge investment of staff and faculty time, it is a relatively small financial investment at the college. SSI 2.0 has an annual budget of \$300,000, less than one percent of total college revenues. Yet, SSI 2.0's influence has profoundly changed the conversation about using data and evidence in areas well beyond the projects it has funded.

The idea of SSI developed from Elgin Community College's participation in Achieving the Dream, a national network of community colleges, state policy teams, funders, and higher education experts dedicated to accelerating success among diverse student populations, particularly low-income students and students of color. Achieving the Dream advised Elgin Community College to use evidence to improve student success. SSI was the structure that Elgin Community College established to promote the use of evidence in decision-making.

SSI 2.0's structure is comprised of a central Equity Coordinating Council and four teams and each focused on one or more goals of the college's strategic plan. The four teams are:

- Learning-Centered Environment Team
- Promoting Student Goal Completion Team

- Promoting a Climate of Collaboration, Equity, and Inclusion Team
- Strengthening Educational and Workforce Partnerships Team

The Equity Coordinating Council is comprised of representatives from business/finance; communications; faculty; human resources; information technology; institutional research; planning and institutional effectiveness; professional and organizational development; and teaching, learning and student development.

Task forces are linked to each team. For example, the Latino and African American Task Force is part of the Promoting Student Goal Completion Team.

Faculty can bring a proposal to any of the four teams for consideration. If the team supports the proposal, it is forwarded to the central Equity Coordinating Council. Any employee or student (with pre-approval from a coordinator in the Student Life Office) can bring a proposal forward. If selected, the Equity Coordinating Council recommends approval to Elgin Community College's president, who ultimately makes the funding decision. Any proposal submitted for consideration by the Equity Coordinating Council must provide a data-supported rationale that the problem actually exists and describe what data will be used to demonstrate the project's impact on student success.

Data Rangers

Data Rangers are a dozen or so data analysis-savvy staff and faculty from different departments who understand data and their use. Data Rangers possess the skills and the enthusiasm that enable others to engage with making sense of data when developing proposals or assessing their work. Data Rangers, many of whom are volunteers, have played an important role in spreading the benefits of data use. Data Rangers help faculty or other staff find data to justify a project and help design strategies for collecting data about a project's intended benefits. Sometimes, Data Rangers become part of a project design team, sitting in on meetings and analyzing relevant institutional data in support of the team's efforts.

Evidence-based decision making

SSI 2.0's insistence on evidence coupled with the availability of Data Rangers is a structured, transparent, and direct way to grow a culture of data use at the college. The culture is growing bit by bit, project by project. According to college representatives, SSI 2.0 and the Data Ranger activities have changed the conversation within the college about evidence and the role of data and information, whether or not a project is

funded and, indeed, whether or not it involves an issue related to student success.

Elgin Community College's experience with SSI 2.0 and Data Rangers demonstrates that building a culture of data requires a combination of producing relevant data, collectively making sense of the data, and then using that information for decision-making. It is this interplay of the technology/data capacity and the skills, focus, and enthusiasm of people who want to have and use evidence that made Elgin Community College successful in creating its culture of data use.

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