

Project Finish Line & Completion Coaching

South Seattle College

NCAN Conference

September, 2016



Project Finish Line, a Gates Foundation grant, was launched in response to declining completion rates at community colleges. Nationally, only 23 percent of first-time, full-time community college students earn degrees within three years. The impact of these low completion rates disproportionately affects low-income and underrepresented minority students.

The program is modeled after Walla Walla Community College's completion coach program, which won the 2013 Aspen Institute Prize for Community College Excellence. The two-year grant funds completion coaches at the three colleges in the Seattle Colleges District and at Green River College.

The Completion Coaches at South Seattle College offer support to students nearing completion of their certificate or degree. Our services and resources are designed to educate, support and encourage individuals to reach their goals and graduate on time.

Our staff:

- Manager of Retention and Completion
- 2 part-time paid graduate assistants as Completion Coaches
- Embedded into the work of our Student Veteran Transition Specialist

Attributes of successful coaches:

- Self-starters, problem solvers, systems navigators
- Data analysis skills and knack for connecting dots
- Breadth versus depth of college/campus knowledge

With a case management approach, we:

- Assist students in navigating the college system
- Coach students through academic, financial and/or personal struggles
- Connect students to resources and services on and off our campus
- Engage or re-engage students at risk
- Partner closely with departments and programs across campus

Common barriers to completion:

- It's complicated – a majority of the issues we've helped students through don't fit into a simple box of financial, academic or personal
- Difficulty in systems navigation does seem to be the common thread
- Financial issues are much more complex than just paying tuition
- Institutional barriers as an important category – how the institution gets in the way of student success

Lessons learned & recommendations:

- Partnerships are absolutely critical to our success, both on campus and with the other grantees
- Cooperation with Institutional Research and Information Technology teams is vital
- How to share the story – raising awareness and shifting to a culture of completion, including celebrating and sharing early wins
- Financial Education is an essential component – just providing the funding is not enough
- Systems that are responsive to needs – technology tools and systems, access to and use of data, and responsive policies and procedures are all integral to a successful completion coaching model

<http://www.southseattle.edu/student-resources/completion-coach>
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