

REPORT ON SUPPORT SERVICES AT OAKLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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INTRODUCTION

For college students, support services - in the form of financial aid, child care and of course academic support - are crucial in reaching goals successfully. Oakland Community College provides these services to some degree of success. As with any institution, however, there is always room for improvement. Here, there may be a need for widening the net to catch students in danger of falling, by increasing the number of staff and hours and perhaps providing more aggressive intervention early on in the academic careers of our students.

FINANCIAL AID

Each campus runs an office for financial aid. Besides providing information and assistance for loans and scholarships.

Cooperative education is run out of a separate office, the placement

office at the Auburn Hills and Orchard Ridge campuses only. Auburn handles jobs involving technical work, such as CAD. Currently the campus handles about 30 students. Orchard handles business and computer information jobs. Together, the two campuses handle 60 - 100 students each semester. Medical positions are handled differently, and mainly at Highland Lakes.

Strengths

Sally Kalson, Program Coordinator at Auburn for cooperative education, was interviewed. She is a helpful who is eager to help and seems to maintain a good rapport with the business community. She was also able to give me feedback on what our students seem to lack academically - what are the complaints of employers. Students receive opportunities for practice interviews to polish their skills. It seems to be an effective program for the what it does cover.

Weaknesses

As Ms. Kalson said, many students seem unaware of the importance of coop education in grooming them for better jobs. Given the amount of students at OCC, we do need to make them aware of the program - with perhaps more publicity, more involvement with counselors - and its usefulness. It would be interesting to survey the students on what they do know about coop education. This type of education could better prepare students by knowing what is expected of them in the field and the importance of taking their academic courses. Also, perhaps the program can be expanded to

include more career options, such as education

As Ms. Kalson said, employers regularly complain about the lack of communication skills - writing, speaking and computer literacy. It might be helpful to include members of the business community and other employers as part of orientation for all college students, with info, as well, on coop education.

CHILD CARE

Child care is available at Auburn Hills, Orchard Ridge, Southfield and Royal Oak campuses. The atmosphere at the Auburn Hills facility was cheerful, clean and orderly. The staff seemed attentive towards the children. Students receive experience with art, music and of course play. They also receive snacks. Although legally there is space for 60 students, the director said the facility would be cramped and noisy with that number and does not support that size. Fees are as follows : infants (six months to one year) at \$4/hour; toddlers (one to two-and-a-half) at \$3/hour, and preschool (two-and-a-half to five) at \$2/hour. Auburn is the only campus that allows infants.

Payments are made three times during the semester. There is a drop-in center for snow days or emergencies for children in this age range. Hours are Monday through Thursday 7:45 a.m.-5:15 p.m. and Fridays 7:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.

Strengths

As mentioned above, the atmosphere is very pleasant in child care with a welcoming, intelligent staff. There seems to be a variety of activities, as well. Fees seem reasonable.

Weaknesses and Questions

It might be wise to see if the college is meeting the demands of students. There is, for example, no provision for school-age children who may at least need a place to go on snow days and emergencies. Also, there is no evening child care which may make it difficult for single parents.

COMPUTER LABS

All main campuses have computer labs. The college is converting all machines to be IBM - compatible.

Strengths

The computers are good quality and the staff is helpful.

Weaknesses

There is a huge problem, at least at some campuses, with an insufficient number of paraprofessionals in the labs. As an English instructor, it can be difficult to help students in developmental classes with their writing assignments when computer problems develop. A professional may have to be contacted which can also be difficult. Also, some late hours for open labs would be helpful for students.

INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION CENTERS (IIC)

All of the main campuses have an IIC with fairly length hours. The Royal Oak IIC, for example, is open from 8:30 a.m. tp 10 p.m., Monday through Thursday, Friday 8:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Saturday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

More tutors are becoming involved directly in the classroom. This seems to be a good and popular option at the college. Orchard has done this for a number of years. At Auburn, the IIC has worked with instructors to implement an "SI" program in which successful students are hired to lead a tutorial class after the class period. Math, science and now the English discipline are involved and the number of sections with SI support is increasing.

Strengths

The SI program, with student tutoring, seems to be very fruitful and effective. All around, there are a number of good tutors and academic supporters. There are also mini-workshops on topics such as test taking, textbook reading, note taking, and time management. Topic for tutoring incluce accounting, CAD, drafting, French, Spanish, nutrition, math and science. Hours for some types of tutoring is available as late as midnight. There is also the PASS office which helps students with a variety of disabilities or academic problems.

Weaknesses and Questions

There probably needs to be an increase in the number of tutors available, however, and a growing number of SI sections. I am

unsure as far as what type of computer programs the college has available for helping students.

In addition, I am unsure about the image the IIC has. I noticed that at Oakland University, support services of many types were centralized. Apparently thousands of OU students take advantage of the programs offered even in advanced curricula. There were many hours of tutoring, including both walk-in and by appointment - 6000 hours of tutoring last semester. Banners claimed that 100% of the students who went through peer tutoring would recommend it to others. Other tools include self-paced materials, such as 250 math review videos, covering basic math up through calculus. They have a center that includes financial aid, tutoring, educational research and social programs so there seems little stigma attached to going to the "Academic Skills Center." They also have many late tutoring sessions available, but hours seem to be more regular.

In addition, at OU, there is an aggressive system of intervention and mentoring. Students on probation, with a grade point below 2.0 MUST participate in Probation Outreach, requiring on-going meetings with administrators who help develop individual academic plans. In assessing student problems, administrators also look into reasons such as financial problems, family problems and poor advising. Perhaps we might look into a system of mentoring, even if it's peer mentoring. Many students come from backgrounds in which little knowledge of college or little support is provided. It can help students to be around others who are ambitious and disciplined.

CONCLUSION

Oakland Community College has a strong reputation in the State of Michigan. Although programs are in place and in most cases support staff is excellent, there is often room for expanding hours and staff numbers, and for being more aggressive in familiarizing students with what is currently available, while intervening when there are problems.