

## TRANSCRIPT

## Panel Discussion Presentation #2: First Year Experience Program

PRESENTER Tara McCarthy, El Camino College  
EVENT TITLE *Strategies Fostering Successful Student Education Plans*  
EVENT DATE April 24, 2015

[Title Slide: *FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE PROGRAM*]

MARY RAUNER

And our second speaker is Tara McCarthy from El Camino College. Ms. McCarthy serves as a counselor in the First Year Experience program at El Camino College. Her passion for first-year experience and learning communities began when she joined the First Year Experience program at Riverside City College, and after completing her undergraduate and master's degrees, she began her professional career working with the program at El Camino College. She was initially an outreach recruiter and later began an advising role.

TARA MCCARTHY

Good morning. My name is Tara McCarthy, and I am one of the full-time counselors with the First Year Experience program at El Camino College. Dr. Cynthia Mosqueda is our coordinator of the program, and she could not be here today, so I am here on her behalf.

[Slide: *FYE HISTORY*] Just a little bit of history on our program; we were started as a Title V grant. And just to let you know where El Camino is, we're located in Torrance, California, about 10 minutes away from LAX, and on a good day about 10 minutes from the beach. So we are an urban campus. We serve about 27,000 students. And our program was launched through a Title V grant in 2001. Our targeted population, obviously, is first-year college students, since we are the FYE program. And our focus is on pre-college. We do learning communities in our program. It's a one-year commitment. After the first year, they are no longer enrolled in a learning community, but they can continue in our program—receiving our counseling services, our educational planning services, and any other services that we provide through our program as well. During their one-year commitment, they are required to go to an information session to learn more about the program.

Now I will admit, we have been around for about 16 years now, and we have a very strong connection with our high schools now. The high school counselors know about this program, they know about the success, and they push their students into this program, and they come in droves. We really do not have to do any type of outreach or recruitment at all anymore. It's been a blessing for sure, because we have been around for a long time now.

---

But once they have come to the information session, then they are required to, of course, do their application for the program, as well as their assessment. And once they have done their assessment, they will make their counseling appointment. And that's where we will actually do their first educational plan; it's just a one-semester educational plan. We will place them in the program based upon their English placement. We do English learning communities; it's paired with one more class. Fifty percent (50%) of their schedule is two classes in learning communities, and the other half of their schedule is math, or any other course that we might recommend for them to take based upon their major or schools they might want to transfer to.

And then also once they start the program—for fall semester—they do need to meet with at least one counselor in the program and then do workshops; they have to do two workshops. We offer workshops on everything from how to get into a UC to time management. We have about 20 different workshops that students can attend, and they can just choose which ones they want to come to. Now our carrot—because our students don't do...they only do mandatory—is, if you do your two workshops and you do your one counseling appointment, you can receive priority registration. So that is the carrot. We register the second day of enrollment as FYE; second day. Which is, again, a blessing for our students. And so we tell them constantly during the fall semester, “If you want to have priority registration in the spring, you need to do your counseling appointment and your two workshops,” and they come running, because they know the importance and how important it is to have the registration.

[Slide: *INCORPORATING ED PLANS*] So how do we incorporate ed plans into the program? So the very first entry point is, they do the abbreviated ed plan through the counseling appointment in...during either the spring semester, prior to entering in the fall, because they are currently seniors right now. And that's just a one semester—what are we doing in the fall? And we do that with them. Once they come in during their second visit—this is technically during the fall semester—we update that plan, adding in what their learning community classes will be for the spring, in addition to their additional classes for their schedule in...also. Now, we don't do comprehensive ed plans until the third or fourth semester, depending upon their goals, because as we know as counselors, one day they come in, they want to be an engineering major; the next semester they want to be going to medical school, and then the fourth semester they want to go to cosmetology school. So we never know what they want to do. So in our program, we really try to hold off on doing the comprehensive until at least the spring semester, to work with them.

Our FYE faculty also will require them to have an ed plan—show proof that they did an educational plan—and they can get up to 10 points in their classes for doing that. And we really do target our developmental classes. As a counselor—and our other part-time counselors—we go into the classrooms at least three times a semester to talk about the importance of an ed plan, remind them they need to do their appointment, doing their workshops. So we have a very close connection with the faculty. They will let us just walk in at any point. I mean, they have been with our program for a very long time, so we can help remind them of things. And again, the carrot is the priority registration, which...I know a few of you are probably thinking, “There is no way we are going to get priority registration for students like this.” But we were able to really...to push the importance of this and show through our success what happens.

[Slide: *PERSISTENCE RATES*] So, just some data; our persistence rates from second to third semester, our FYE students do significantly better with persistence. [Slide: *PERSISTENCE RATES (CONT.)*] Also, through the fourth semester, again, our students are persisting in our program compared to the control group.

[Slide: *SUCCESS AND RETENTION*] Our success rates—overall success rates and retention—again, our students are more successful and are being retained through our program. And, again, we really feel that...because, again, after the first year, they can continue getting priority registration if they meet with a counselor and update their ed plan. So the first year, yeah, we can kind of hold them to it because they are in a learning community, but we have been able to convince the administration that these students should stay with us. And they don't have to be in a learning community more after the first year, and they are taking just regular El Camino classes, but as long as they meet with their counselor once a semester, they continue that priority registration. And we have students who have been at the school four or five years, and every semester they meet with an FYE counselor, and they continue to use their priority, and they're making...they're making progress.

[Slide: *COURSE SUCCESS AND RETENTION (CONT.)*] Our course...so our English 1A...so we do also have pre-college English; 1A is our college level at our school. And again, the success rates of our students compared to the control group; they're doing significantly better in their classes.

[Slide: *PROGRESSION THROUGH COURSE SEQUENCE*] And this is interesting. So English A is one semester below English 1A at our school. And so you can see our students—who can go from English A and actually can complete English 1A—over the last three years that we have of data here, are again, doing significantly better, and they are actually completing the courses. English 84 is our...one level below reading to get to our English 1A, and same thing again. Our students are actually completing both courses through our program and succeeding at a higher rate than the control group.

[Slide: *PROGRESSION THROUGH COURSE SEQUENCE (CONT.): English 84 to English 1A*] And then this is our two semesters of college-level English, so you have your English 1A and your English 1C; and so, again, our students are doing significantly better in their courses compared to the control group.

[Slide: *PROGRESSION THROUGH COURSE SEQUENCE (CONT.): English 1A to English 1C*] So really, in summary, the students in the FYE program perform better in all the measures. They demonstrate high persistence rates, have healthy success and retention rates, and outperform the comparison group in progression through the English sequence. That's the FYE program in El Camino.

MARY RAUNER

So let's take just one or two clarifying questions, please. Yeah?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

So we're doing an FYE program at Folsom Lake College, and I'm interested in your, kind of, breakdown of information here—you've got a thousand students participating. Is it the continuing to the second year or is that your incoming students?

TARA MCCARTHY

That's the incoming freshman, yeah, that we would consider our first cohort.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

And so I'm curious about how many you're actually providing priority registration to, when you talk about your second-year students also getting that.

TARA MCCARTHY

I don't know the number off the top of my head; I can find out from our coordinator, though, since she's the one that runs those numbers. But I can get that for you. And definitely we did not start with a thousand students. We were a very small...our program was very small at the beginning. And because of the success of the program, I mean...I think we just added two more learning communities this semester, and I think we are being asked to add two more next year. And it's like, oh, we are getting a little tight on our budget and things, but we are managing. But I can get that information for you, definitely.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

And then, lastly, do those success rates just represent the freshman group, or is it...?

TARA MCCARTHY

Yes, that's just the freshman group, yes. Yes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

What are the courses in your learning communities?

TARA MCCARTHY

So most of our learning communities include, like let's say, we have, like, a Chicano studies class paired with an English class. We have what we call human development, or some places might call counseling courses. So kind of like your college success strategies course. We have a transfer...a one-unit transfer process course that's paired with some of our developmental classes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

By developmental classes, do you mean developmental language class?

TARA MCCARTHY

Yes, English, yeah. We don't offer math; we just started offering recently...the math department created...we have three levels of math that you need to take before you can get to intermediate algebra. And this semester we are piloting, through our program...the math department asked for us...it's offered; it's Math 37. It basically combines all three levels in one semester. So we are piloting that through our program. So it's the one math community, I guess you could call it, that we have, even though it's not paired with anything else. But yeah, we have communications courses paired with some of our other...but again, it's just two classes that the learning community is. Because other learning communities sometimes will put three or four classes together, and, I mean, that really limits students. Like, "Okay, so that's my full load. I can't take anything else. I can't have a job because of these timeframes." And so we decided, let's just do half of their schedule be kind of mandated by us, but then they can choose two other classes that they want to take. But they do have to be full time to be in the freshman portion of the program.

MARY RAUNER

Okay, one more question, please, for now. And remember that we can ask more during the discussion sessions.

TARA MCCARTHY

You can choose!

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I'm Sheila \_\_\_\_ at De Anza College, and I'm new back to the system. For both of you, do you have any challenges in terms of meeting the triple-SP requirements for comprehensive ed plans at a certain time?

MARISSA ILISCUPIDEZ

With our program, or...?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes, with your program. Both of you had in your program a third \_\_\_\_ for the development of those comprehensive ed plans.

TARA MCCARTHY

We haven't had...our administration hasn't come down to us to say that we need to be doing it, let's say, in the second semester yet. So until that point, I guess we will continue our...

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Is it the 15-unit...

TARA MCCARTHY

It's a 15-unit mark, yeah.

MARISSA ILISCUPIDEZ

So we do, like I mentioned, comprehensive SEP—what we are counting as the comprehensive SEP—which is two semesters in the summer. And that's...we kind of have it where it's English-math, English-math, and then general ed; maybe major if they know it. And then that educational advisor/counselor team really kind of works with them that first year, and we have—I didn't mention—but workshops for them and a lot of contact with them. And we invite them—well, not invite them—we really encourage them to come back and see us to update for the more two-year, three-year...yeah. Once they are kind of in the college system, taking classes, and are more, maybe, knowledgeable of what direction they want to go to.

MARY RAUNER

Great. Thank you both very much.