LEVELING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP THROUGH INDIVIDUAL STUDENT SUCCESS RATES
Deborah Bauer, Performing Arts Instructor

James Cameron’s statement, “failure is always an option, fear is not,” reiterates the adage that as long as we try, we really do not fail. The premise is, do not let fear stop you from attempting to reach a goal even if you fail to reach that goal.

An example of how fear may be applied in a classroom was demonstrated in a class I had taken whereby the professor, angry he was not getting a response from the class, presumed no one had read the chapter and asked how he could ‘punish’ the whole class. The word punish sent a chill up my spine. Those who had read the assignment were put into the same category that the professor assumed to be ‘underachievers,’ those students who supposedly did not read the chapter. I read the assignment; why should I be ‘punished?’ The use of such a derogatory term in such a derogatory manner did not stir nor inspire but instilled fear. It disillusioned half of the class. Fifty percent of the class dropped out.

This incident also brings up the idea of pooling groups of people into one category which only serves to confound the problem of measuring an achievement gap. We no longer take into consideration the individual.

Of course this one incident would not have caused the 50% dropout rate but it makes one wonder as to how this could have been handled in a more positive way. It also makes me question whether instructors hinder students’ abilities unknowingly. We give rewards and bonuses in the business setting for jobs well done. We give incentives to prevent failure in the work world. However, reward systems do not always work either; somewhere rests a happy medium.

There are socialization orientations for employees in order for them to feel more comfortable, less fearful, and less disoriented in a new organization. Work this into education. Instead of a punitive classroom platform that infuses fear, a professor might upscale his or her method to promote a platform that presupposes success. The working hypothesis is the less fear a student has, the less likely a student will fail. In more positive terms, the more a student feels at ease in a new situation, the more likely that student will succeed.

Aside from the differences in measurement of the achievement gap (differing indicators of achievement) and the fact that multiple strategies are important to decrease a gap, I propose that more mentoring programs be encouraged in order to strengthen student success rates. We have, in effect, a program to mentor the brightest students (the honors program). I agree that this is effective for those students who are high achievers; but they would be high achievers with or without the program. That is to say, I am mentoring one young bright student but I feel as though I am only guiding her through the research; she is self-achieving. I would like to say it is my input but most likely she is going to do well with or without my help. On the other hand, implementing a similar program for those who are struggling might be one more effective way to promote a student’s successful completion of a degree program.

Given the fact that achievement is affected by such factors as school climate, sense of safety, relationships with teachers and counselors, guidance on successful strategies (Bodenhorn, Wolfe & Airen), and self-efficacy as well as teacher and counselor self-efficacy (Bandura), it would be beneficial to extend the honor’s program to students who need extra help in other ways. Instructors as mentors could also trickle down to those students who have gone through a mentorship program the first year and thus could also become a mentor to new students in their second year. This is not the same as a learning
community nor a cluster but an individual attempt, a one on one endeavor whereby the student who is floundering is encouraged to finish.

The Student Success Institute gives the faculty insight to some of the underlying problems that inhibit student success. A step further is to take this information and help our students on an individual basis. This of course is all contingent on funds and resources. Our current economic status already stretches an instructor’s time and ability to help students. Many community colleges incorporate programs such as WAC (writing across the curriculum), OCAC (oral communication across the curriculum). While these programs are supported through grants, a dialogue on this course of action could be a starting point.

DVC is continuously seeking new ways of mentoring such as the Peer Mentoring program piloted in the fall. Also, several departments already utilize the Student Instructional Assistant program (299), formerly called Field studies. However, I think it is underemployed. This program allows students to register as an assistant for a class and receive credits. Professors can encourage assistants to help other students. This is an excellent mentoring system and I believe that this program should be marketed on a larger scale here at DVC so that more departments and students are aware of its benefits. This is not a program that gives the student an inflated grade, nor a program that doles out any unearned credit. A student’s reward is development of his or her own self-efficacy.

I am a product of a mentor and I can say that it was the single most important factor in my own educational achievements. Be optimistic. By implementing new and strengthening current mentoring programs that give our students a positive platform and someone to work with, we might entertain the idea that neither fear nor failure would be options.

**IS SB1440 AND THE ELIMINATION OF CRITICALLY IMPORTANT HEALTH EDUCATION CLASSES REALLY THE ANSWER OR IS IT JUST ANOTHER FUTILE ATTEMPT TO REFORM OUR BROKEN AND UNHEALTHY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM? Dr. Kristen Colchico, Health Science Instructor**

As I was going through some papers in my office in an attempt to clear out some fall semester clutter I came across a Time magazine with an article titled *The Sorry State of American Health: Despite the advances in medicine, Americans are less healthy than we used to be, and the next generation may be even worse off*. I found this discovery to be symbolic considering the burdensome thoughts I have been having for the past several weeks regarding the recent decisions that were made at the district and faculty senate meetings to eliminate Health and PE from local board requirements to align with the new SB1440 bill, which establishes a streamlined educational path from the community college level into the CSU system (a final vote will take place Tuesday 12/14/10).

I think it is safe to assume that many faculty members support a streamlined path to a 4-year institution, but really, does this so-called more efficient path to attaining a degree *really* guarantee that people will be ready to join the workforce and be productive citizens of our country? Government policies that try to pigeonhole education into a uniform format have proven ineffective, as evidence by The No Child Left Behind act that encourages k-12 educational systems to focus primarily on reading and math (and cut other programs such as Health, PE, Music and Arts) to ensure some kind of academic success. Years after this bill was enacted America still falls far behind the academic advancements of other nations; not to mention that our younger generation is experiencing an epidemic of obesity, diabetes, mental illness, sexually transmitted infections, teen pregnancy, and will be the first generation that is likely not to have a longer lifespan than their parents. In theory, the SB1440 streamlined path appears to be a solution for those students wanting to quickly obtain a higher education degree, but what makes the government, administrators and faculty think that instituting the same kind of uniform (failing) program in the higher education system is going to ensure a successful future? There is no doubt that basic skills and specialized training is important to prepare workers for our economy, but morphing education into solely a transfer-model curriculum limits creativity, diversity, free-thinking, and opportunity. The core foundation of community colleges has been to provide open access to educational resources for not only students, who want to transfer, but for those who want to obtain a specific AA or AS degree or certification, or who simply just want to learn. If we only focus on the transfer students, then we are leaving behind a large diverse population of students who come to our college for the reasons on which our institution was established in the first place – to obtain a well-rounded education and utilize a myriad of our public services and educational resources.

In regards to Health Education, I think it is glaringly obvious that these kinds of classes, which educate individuals on preventive health behavior change should be at the forefront of required classes at all levels of education considering that thousands of work days are missed each year resulting in billions of dollars lost in productivity due to illness and disease. The American health care system spends trillions of dollars on treating disease rather than investing in a preventive health
infrastructure that includes health education in the home and school systems. It may seem like a good idea to shuffle students in and out of the educational system as quickly as possible so they can join the workforce, but how productive will they really be if they are part of the 67% of Americans who are overweight or obese, 27% who have hypertension, 96% who can’t recall the last time they had a salad, hundreds of millions who don’t eat enough vegetables, 40% who don’t get any exercise, or the millions suffering from stress-related mental illnesses? And let’s not forget the thousands of college students who experience unplanned pregnancies, are sexually assaulted, die of binge drinking or commit suicide and can’t even finish their streamlined educational path.

I entered the Health field because I believe to my core that health is the one of the most important assets that any human can possess. Illness and disease will cause even the most educated and employable person to perform less than their best at any job or skill. As the Surgeon General’s report states on a vision for a healthy and fit future, “Americans will be more likely to change behavior if they have a meaningful reward – something more than just reaching a certain weight or dress size. The real reward is invigorating, energizing, joyous health. It is a level of health that allows people to embrace each day and live their lives to the fullest without disease or disability.” I teach at a community college because I believe in the founding principles of this institutional system. I embrace the “melting pot” of our student population, each student with his/her own educational and personal goals. I think it is imperative that the faculty and administration at Diablo Valley College take careful consideration over the next few months as we develop an educational track that aligns with SB1440 because transfer students are not the only students who we educate. I can accept that local board policy must be eliminated for this new streamlined process, but we need to remember a 60-year founding philosophy of our college that includes the promotion of personal growth and lifelong learning for all students, and provides educational resources to a diverse population of students with varying goals for their futures. If we are to be accountable to implementing our mission then we would not even consider entirely eliminating policies or courses that provide our students with valuable access to (much needed) health information, or pigeonhole ourselves into such a narrow educational focus that stifles health, critical thinking and intellectual transformation. I am passionate about being a faculty member at DVC because I believe we are more than just a “feeder institution” that shuffles students through a uniform system that does little to promote overall wellbeing for its students. I believe that DVC has more heart and substance, and that we need to remember our REAL purpose of being here for ALL of our students.

READING SUPPORT FOR EVERY STUDENT IN EVERY COURSE
Elizabeth Pirie, English Instructor

You probably have some of my students in your class. They look at you glassy-eyed when you ask if they have any questions from the reading. Their textbook is awash in orange highlighter but they don’t seem to have retained anything they’ve read once it comes time for a quiz. And whether you realize it or not, they’re starting to feel like they’re falling behind in your class because there’s just so much reading, it’s so boring, and if they were to admit it, they get pretty lost and don’t understand as much as everyone else seems to.

These are the great majority of the students I have in my English 116 Reading Development classes. The purpose of the class is to give students who need it, the skills and strategies to do the reading required of them in college. I’m sure that I can speak for every English instructor who teaches basic skills classes when I say we take the aims and goals of our courses very seriously. I personally try to impress upon my students the importance of reading to learn in college and the importance of having good strategies for dealing with all the reading they’re being assigned.

Developmental English classes can only do so much though. English 116 is not the only course my students are taking, and many students put off taking their English requirement until several semesters, or even years, into their attendance at DVC. Therefore, I think it is every instructor’s job on campus to make sure our students don’t struggle, or even worse, fail, because they don’t have the reading skills for college. If they’re taking English 116 this semester they’re working on the skills, but I see my class as a beginning, not the final cure or magic bullet.

Helping students get the most out of their reading is everyone’s business, not just English teachers. And it’s not just students at the developmental level that need some support with their reading. I’m going to guess, and I don’t think I’m too far off the mark, that every student who is experiencing college for the first time and taking DVC’s general education courses, could use some strategies and support for dealing with the reading that they are now expected to do. So much of a college students learning happens outside of class with a textbook. Being able to get the information they need out of their reading can mean the difference between becoming a successful student and being one of the many that decide they just aren’t college material and never finish their degree or transfer to a four-year university.
So what can instructors do for all of their students to support them with their reading? If anyone is really serious about it, they could attend some training. I attended a Reading Apprenticeship flex workshop last year and came away with several ideas for use in my own classes. If a similar flex opportunity is ever presented in the future, I would encourage instructors of any discipline that requires a substantial amount of reading to join a session.

There are also other, simple things instructors may want to consider doing in their classes to support student reading. English teachers know this already, but research shows that writing can help students understand what they read. Assigning a reading journal, where students can respond to what they’ve read, note what’s not making sense, and put the ideas they’re reading about into their own words can be helpful. Having students write summaries or outlines, and even simply answering end-of-chapter questions, can all help students get more out of their reading.

Talking is also a great way to help students understand what they’ve read. I’ve found that I have to go beyond simply asking if anyone has questions about the reading. This is when I get the deer-in-the-headlights stares. Here are a few things I’ve found to be helpful: Asking students to find a place in the text where they got “stuck” and have them share it with a group or partner. Give the group the task of helping each other get “unstuck.” This technique was mentioned in the Reading Apprenticeship workshop. Or even pass a blank sheet of paper around during lecture for students to write their questions on and then address some of the most asked questions at the end of class.

Most of these activities take very little class time and instructors can decide for themselves if they’ll read every summary or journal entry. These activities can also be a great way to check student comprehension, rather than the usual pop quiz.

There are a multitude of reasons that students struggle with college. But reading comprehension skills are something that we all can help with and it shouldn’t be the one thing standing between them and success in school. English teachers know the urgency of this. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if every instructor at DVC was aware of the need to develop and support students’ reading skills? Reading is everyone’s business. It’s the one thing that every instructor in almost every discipline can do to help our students succeed. And I think the more instructors that support students with their reading, the more strong, confident students we’ll create in the process. It’s a positive cycle that will help instructors teach better, and students to learn better. Who wouldn’t prefer to have students who have intelligent questions about the reading over students who don’t even know where to begin?

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**ARE YOU KIDDING ME?**

Deya Brashears Hill, Early Childhood Education Instructor

Our department of Early Childhood Education is very complex and cumbersome. We are part of the vocational education program working with Work Force Development and we are a full academic program; we house three areas within our department (ECE, ASL and ED); we have 1 degree (and one in process), and 7 certificates; we coordinate 5 grants; we have 53 courses offerings; we are required to meet state licensing regulations and state course alignments; we operate an instructional Child Study Center, and we offer about 32 classes each semester. For these reasons, I thought our Program Review was more extensive than most departments, however, after talking with numerous colleagues, especially those who also fall under Workforce Development and state licensure, I now know it is a ridiculously tedious process for all. Our department alone worked over 40 hours this semester on the ANNUAL review. There was an overshadowing stress factor that if we did not include something in our Program Review we could not request the need or support, so we were diligent about every word.

But it doesn’t end there. We now have to be trained in the validation process, attend a 3 hour meeting on a Friday, and then work as an evaluation team to validate another department. This is coming the week before finals. **ARE YOU KIDDING ME?**

In our department many of our other required processes were put on hold in an effort to get the Program Review finished by the deadline. We are now playing catch up on things like course rewrites, SLO’s, new course creations, state alignment efforts, certificate realignment, and degree development. All of this is not to mention teaching a full load. We have only four faculty members in our department (one probationary) and cannot, therefore, divide the tasks among us. All of us must work on all processes as a unit. Ten to twelve hour days are the norm for all of us now.

I think the thing that nags at me the most is that I feel the integrity of my teaching is being compromised because of the amount of work required with Program Review, not to mention SLO’s, course re-writes, faculty evaluations, etc. For the first time in 20+ years of college teaching, I am considering using scantron tests and eliminating some of my assignments. This is very disheartening for me because I pride myself on the teaching/learning process. I was, after all, hired as a faculty
I believe we all share a need to feel good about what we do, and a desire to continue to be proud of DVC and hopeful for its future. A fundamental aspect of realistic optimism is reality checking that leads to constructive, efficacious change. To insist on sticking with a system that burdens us and prevents us from nurturing the living organism that is DVC is to ignore the reality: Program Review As-It-Is is unreasonable. Program Review As-It-Is reduces faculty buy-in to the Theory X level—fear of non-compliance—rather than seeing all this as the opportunity it could be. Let’s pull ourselves
together to figure out what works, what accomplishes our goal without losing sight of our mission and the diverse gifts that each of us could contribute to it. Then, Louis, this could be the start of a beautiful process.

(N.B.: Here’s a specific example: when we attempted to correct our full-time faculty head count, we were told the count was correct. Faculty teaching in more than one department are counted as full-time members of each department. This error affects faculty head count, hiring priorities, and A-C ratios college-wide. We had to convince the Instruction Office to make the correction two years in a row. How about creating a new payroll code—an “AB” code—so those folks don’t get double-counted in the full-time head count every time? This is a short-coming that should have shown up the first time in the Instruction Office’s own program review, and could have been fixed by the second year.)

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**BUDGET DISCUSSIONS**

**Coleen Lento, HR**

Dear Colleagues,

We have a unique opportunity to once again pull ourselves together and face a threat to our district. Just ask yourself what is happening across this country in the educational environment? Everyone is following the same mantra: “We have to do more with less, we have to restructure how we deliver our programs, etc…” CCCCDD values are similar to the values in every learning institution. The public schools in our nation are in a crisis. We have the opportunity to show other schools in other parts of the state or country a model of reform that could be a shining example of how things should be done.

This is an educational institution. If we can’t figure out how to trim our structure, we shall once again be forcing the Chancellor’s Cabinet to make the cuts as they see fit regardless of any other conversations we may have. Across the board cuts are not necessary if we pull together as a community. Since 90% of our costs are human resources, we have to talk seriously about everything. It all needs to be on the table. There are areas that could benefit from reform which could save hundreds of thousands of dollars for the district without compromising our benefits or pay structure.

We need to able to openly discuss any area in which money can be saved. Please join me in encouraging our union leaders to agree on a uniform change that will solidify our commitment as a community, and may help to preserve this district. The only way any change is going to happen is if we, as constituents and a community, inform our unions and management what we want to preserve, our threshold for loss, and the utmost value of ensuring our high standards of education remain intact.

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**COUNSELING CORNER: CONFESSIONS OF A PUBLIC EMPLOYEE**

**Rob Peters, Counselor**

Wait, wait . stop the presses: I can't go on. The political dust has finally settled and the election returns are in. From all the political ads we know, thank goodness, who the really rotten/awful guys and gals were/are. Rather than skulking about in the shadows of privacy, civility and mutual respect, I bare my beating breast, Benicia: It had to come out someday, and now is the time, dang it!

I have a deep, dark secret to reveal: I, Rob Theodore Peters, am an avowed public employee. The shame!?And it gets worse: I possess membership in a professional public employee union.

(Forget it, Mom - tears won't work, even from the grave: I'm coming out of this infernal closet once and for all).

A prelude: Weep not for me, my accusers. There'll be no short-circuiting of keyboards for my shame.

There will be no mealy-mouthed excuses, no soppy socialist rationalizations for me: Just due justice. Let's be totally adult about this: Word of my membership may spread, and I am certain that several remarkably articulate voices in our community will demand my civic rehabilitation and political atonement immediately - if not sooner.

I've worked three insidious decades passionately doing what I believed in: Serving all people who wanted to better their education. The conduits of my misguided dedication? Four - count them, four - tax-supported institutions of higher learning here in California.

I have fed greedily at the trough of the hapless taxpayer, consuming monies that were ruthlessly gouged from the innocent souls of pristine citizens. I actually believed - saints forgive me - that by collectively pooling our resources we could provide, for a reasonable cost, high-quality services and myriad options to fellow citizens of each upcoming generation. I, the
public parasite, serving generations of kids and grandkids and neighbors and cousins and parents and grandparents' spouses. Oh, the shame.

In hindsight, I confess to being blinded and seduced by nefarious union bosses- leaders I actually elected in a democratic fashion. (I so wanted to follow the smoky streams from the Lear jets of corporate bosses - who wouldn't? Alas, another failed dream. )

Would that I had known my freeloading bosses would handcuff my American freedoms and visibly savage my indivisible liberties, each and every one of them wily, sinful seditionists with bloated appetites, bad comb-overs, hunchbacks and egos the size of Mount Kilimanjaro - and those were just the ladies! Intimidation, it was. Shame!

Somehow, perhaps as we were slouching toward Gomorrah, we convinced ourselves that professional employees ought be organized - as opposed to disorganized - and stand up for better resources and facilities and opportunities and support services and improved technology tools for our students - as well as safer and more effective work conditions and reasonable compensation for ourselves. Mea culpa. A candid confession: As a public employee, I'm contract-bound to dither around endlessly and ignore daylight-saving time at work; I pilfer Post-Its and snore smoothly by noon. I sabotage my staplers, saunter about in slippers and use dated slang. I have no skills. I have a Social Security number. And following union rules, I refuse to lift a finger at work to be of any help whatsoever - unless it's to re-heat my third cup of morning cappuccino. Guilty, guilty, guilty.

And worse yet: I still believe that reliable, defined benefit pension plans should be available for Americans everywhere - even in the pure, unblemished halls of the private sector. Mea maxima culpa.

I begin my cultural and civic re-indoctrination in the new year. A "political 12-step program" is being offered locally by various patriot groups. Tea will be served. It's advertised as "life-altering penance and salvation for the born-again public employee." I hereby tithe half my plentiful earnings - make that all my earnings -from this column to help defray costs.

Stay tuned.

ANNOUNCEMENT

PILGRIMAGE TO CORNWALL AND THE WEST OF ENGLAND

Ready to make some long-term travel plans? Retired history instructor Jim Rawls will be leading a fully-escorted, small-group tour to Cornwall and the West of England, May 13-23, 2011. Known as the English Riviera, Cornwall boasts not only the country’s mildest climate but also some of its richest history. Our tentative itinerary includes visits to Plymouth, Exeter, Avebury, Penzance, St Ives, and Land’s End. In the spirit of the pilgrimages of old, our pace will be leisurely with plenty of time for contemplation along the way. Registration is through the American Council for International Studies (ACIS) and will be limited to 30 participants. Contact Jim Rawls at jrawls@dvc.edu or 707.938.1981.

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DVC FACULTY SENATE
VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS

The DVC Faculty Senate Voluntary Fund has traditionally help support the Annual Faculty Lecture, the Faculty Senate Dinner Theater, the DVC Retirement Dinner, scholarships and other events as approved by the Faculty Senate Council. The Faculty Senate Legal Defense Fund has been paying on the debts incurred in the lawsuit over Division Deans. You can help by donating through a payroll deduction or a quarterly, annual, or lump sum donation. You can use the form below to submit your pledge of support. Thank you!

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