

Student Success is a Priority. By Cindy Bourne

Success at college can depend on a variety of factors. Students are often surprised by the level of writing skills, the amount of reading, and amount of time required to do well in their courses. No matter how gifted or successful they were in high school, or in the work environment, adjusting to higher learning is difficult even for the most dedicated learner. For the mature student, returning to school to start a program, or to upgrade skills, can feel intimidating after years out of the classroom. Additionally, today's students have many demands on them outside of school. They usually work part time, or are raising a family; sometimes they are doing both. While students are aware they might need support, they may not feel they have the time to seek it.

At the Kalamalka Campus of Okanagan College, we have made student success a number one priority. One of the ways we provide support for all students is through our Success Centre. The centre offers a wide range of supports in all subjects and programs from time management and study skills seminars to numerous writing workshops.

To encourage students to use our resources, the Success Centre has developed several "proactive" partnerships with instructors. For example, writing is a key factor to post secondary success, but most students find the change to academic writing a challenge. A number of first year English instructors have collaborated with the Success Centre to encourage writing skills early in the semester. Students attend a seminar linked to their coursework and develop a short written assignment. Although the assignment is not graded, instructors provide feedback and students receive credit for participating. These 'low stakes' writing assignments provide an opportunity for students to develop a feel for the course and their instructor's expectations. Hence, when it comes time to do a major paper, they have a better grasp of the writing requirements.

Participation credits are not confined to writing classes. Calculus, one of our most difficult first year classes, has incorporated credited incentives to increase student understanding of difficult principles. Other classes offer students participation initiatives to attend study skills and time management seminars put on by the counsellor. These seminars offer new students survival skills to do well in college and still manage to have a life.

The Success Centre also offers free tutoring in most subjects. With the support of senior students who are employed as peer mentors, we can provide one on one tutoring. While instructors are the experts in a subject, successful students have mastered how to learn, and their experience is invaluable in helping others. Not only do peer mentors help by tutoring, they also broaden their own knowledge at the same time.

The Success Centre works with students of all levels, and it is not just new students who find our resources valuable. Many second year students bring papers for review, or attend a library or research seminar. At Okanagan College, student success is everybody's business.

Cindy Bourne coordinates the Success Centre at the Kalamalka Campus. She is also completing a Masters degree in adult education through Saint Francis Xavier.