

OCC seeks higher student success rate

By Tim Richard
staff writer

More and more new students at Oakland Community College will find themselves in a four-hour "Success Seminar" — a battery of placement tests and some realistic counseling.

"It's pretty much a national phenomenon," said R. Stephen Nicholson, chancellor of the five-campus OCC, citing twin advantages:

• For students, it's a higher chance of success in college — better placement and developmental courses in English, reading and math, if they need it.

• For the college, it's a higher student retention rate and the knowledge you're giving clients what they really want.

OCC, LIKE two-year colleges everywhere, has an "open enrollment" policy. Almost anyone can walk in the door and sign up for a class.

"People tend to use a community college like a library — as a resource for information, even for a Ph.D.," Nicholson said.

Sometimes the person wants a particular section of (say) a marketing course in order to run his/her own store. The student spends a few weeks in class until that segment is completed — then walks out without taking the exam or getting a mark, perfectly satisfied.

But the college doesn't know, for a fact, that that's the case. And so part of the new program follow-up contact.

In fall of 1985, some 500 students were run through the program, known as "ASSET" — for Assessment of Skills for Successful Entry Transfer. This fall some 2,000 persons were run through, about one-third of all newcomers, Nicholson said.

"IT'S AN ADDED service," the chancellor said. "We can't allow them to step in anywhere. You can't read at a college level just because you're sincere or think 'you can do this' — just turn it on."

"Nationally, 30 percent of students drop out before finishing high school. If they've been out of school a while, they can't expect to walk in and be successful in a Shakespeare course."

Early results indicate that two-thirds of incoming students need some developmental English course work at varying levels. Similar results popped up in the reading and math skills assessments — standard tests developed by American College Testing program.

Exempt from attendance are transfer students who already have college degrees or 62 semester credits, students in designated apprentice programs, and certain "guest" students.

CLIENT SATISFACTION, a big trend in business, is spreading to colleges, too. In addition, ASSET has other advantages to the college.

"We get more heterogeneous classes," said George Carlsons, college information officer. "Classes

work on the 'convoy' principle — the entire convoy moves at the speed of the slowest ship."

There should be fewer dropouts due to frustration. "We get hit over the head in the Legislature with the

number of students who are non-degree and who don't complete a program," Nicholson added. The Legislature provides about one-third of OCC's operating budget.

So far, any evidence that ASSET is

working is anecdotal, Nicholson said. But as data are collected, OCC will

be better able to predict a student's chances of success.

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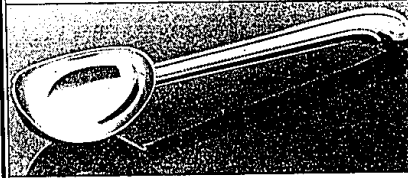
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