

PROJECT REENTRY: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T
AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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The literature on re-entry programs for women in two-year colleges clearly documents that special programs or services definitely aid in recruitment and retention of students. However studies on engineering programs for women were non-existent. An ERIC search produced twenty abstracts, only four had information pertinent to enrollment in programs. The following is a summary of three of the studies:

1. Enrollment Information: 1985-86, State of Connecticut Board of Trustees, State Technical Colleges Enrollment reports submitted by colleges during the 1985-86 academic year indicated women constituted nearly one-fifth of the enrollment, however, 1985 saw a decline in the proportion of women enrolled reversing a 5-year general trend.⁴

2. Female Student Participation at Illinois Public Community Colleges. This 1987 study was conducted using enrollment and program completion data for fiscal years 1984 through 1987 to analyze female student participation at Illinois Community Colleges. Female enrollments outnumbered males in the traditional programs while the trend was reversed in the industrial programs and engineering technology. More females than males completed degrees and certificates in every degree category except Associate in Science and Associate in General Studies. Community colleges can play a greater role in encouraging female students to establish higher career and educational goals and in providing a sound educational foundation for attaining these goals.³

3. FACET: Making Something Happen for Women 1979 The Female Access to Careers in Engineering Technology (FACET) at Trident Community College was reviewed in terms of planning, high school involvement, and development of a summer curriculum.¹

An article in the October/November 1988 American Association of Community and Junior College Journal

entitled A Soft Technology: Recruiting and Retaining Women and Minorities in High Tech, described an excellent program at Washtenaw Community College in Michigan.² This program has many of the same components as a program at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio.

The project at Washtenaw was first designed as the Basic Skills Upgrading Project and has been implemented in phases. Prior to 1975 there were only one or two women or minorities in each high tech class and a high attrition rate of 45% to 64% each semester. The results of a study brought to light four important variables in a student's ability to succeed in a high tech program; academic preparation, sensitivity of instructor, group and individual support, and tutorial services. Funding for the project came from a JTPA grant for the first year and the college continued the funding for the following year. The initial design included identifying 14 low-income, disadvantaged women, upgrading their basic skills and enrolling them in the digital equipment technology program. The following are some of the components: upgrading of basic skills, intensive support and counseling, a Counseling Support Seminar, a math anxiety class, study groups, tutoring, and financial support.²

Through careful study of Phase II, Phase III evolved into a more definitive approach now implemented college wide and supported by many staff members, administrators, and instructors. Phase III focuses on recruitment, selection, enrollment, financial support and advocacy. The Adult Resource center now coordinates activities to engender motivation, develop good study habits and provide the counseling and support necessary to retain the students. Certain instructors are identified as better suited for the group. Instructors help identify and work closely with technical tutors. Tutors are generally women only one semester beyond the subject matter that they are tutoring. The tutors also participate as peers in the non-traditional support group that meets formally and also functions informally.²

The model at Washtenaw requires that as many services as possible be centralized and administrated by an office like the Adult Resource Center. The Adult Resource Center resembles the Adult ReEntry Department at Sinclair Community College; a department in Student Services which provides services for adults who want to begin or resume a college education and has centralized services.

The department has grown from a one program department with a small staff to four programs. The department was first funded by a grant from the Ohio State Department of Education to provide services for

economically and academically disadvantaged adults. The department continues to receive the grant but due to expanded services, programs have become institutionalized. Other programs include a Women's ReEntry Program, JTPA programs, Experienced Worker Program and a new program for AFDC recipients. All programs have one thing in common a strong counseling and support system component plus a staff that is trained in adult development and practice as generalists. The staff provides information on services such as applying for financial aid, registration procedures, testing, provide personal, career and academic advising. The staff also has expertise in designing and facilitating workshops, writing newsletters, marketing programs, and knowledge of community support services.

Women who are enrolled in a three credit Career Planning course are encouraged to research engineering programs at the college. They also view video tapes on non-traditional careers. This course also serves as a prerequisite for a cooperative education work experience. Individual career counseling sessions also assist women in exploring all career fields.

The coordinator has written and received funds from several sources including JTPA, Carl Perkins Innovative and Sex Equity grants. Two Sex Equity grants provided special programming for Sinclair female engineering students. One grant provided funds to plan an event for engineering students to interact with women employed in technical careers. The networking event was titled "Taking a Closer Look at Women in Technical Careers." Fifty students attended this first time event. Many of the students requested a similar function be held annually and also commented there was the need for an organization for students to provide support and network. This has not occurred at the college.

The only statistics that are reported from the Engineering Division are graduates and enrollments. The Coordinator of the Adult ReEntry Department collected data on women enrolled in engineering programs. In Spring Quarter 1986 two hundred sixty female students were enrolled in 21 engineering programs which was an increase of 50 students from Fall Quarter 1985. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the students had a GPA of 3.00 or above. Credit hours accrued per program totaled 50 with a range of 3 credits to 207 credits. Graduates in 1985-86 included 96 males and 18 females. Female graduates in 1986-87 declined to ten. The Fall Quarter 1989 enrollment indicated there were 234 women and 1,798 men in engineering courses. Current statistics are not available due to the installation of a new computer system.

There have been separate events for women and a Women's Technology Task Force was formed to promote recruitment and retention, however, it has disbanded. A very successful career day for girls in 7th, 8th, and 9th grade was held in 1989. Three hundred fifty attended and twenty professional women made presentations and served as role models. Demonstrations were scheduled in engineering labs for hands on experience. However, it is a "band aid" approach and there needs to be some form of organized effort and commitment for programming for women engineering students.

The topic of the article speaks to what works and does not work. It is clearly evident that the program at Washtenaw Community College is successful in recruiting and retaining women in technical programs. The Adult ReEntry Department at Sinclair Community College with its specific supportive programs has also been successful in increasing enrollment and has documented increased retention of the students accessing the department. This department does not have a program for women engineering students. To develop a program, leadership must come from the Engineering Division and also the top administration at the college. Resources many times are scarce, but grants can provide the seed money. However, to keep programs from falling by the wayside the institution must commit resources for continuation.

REFERENCES

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