



President's **FOCUS**

Monthly Report to the Board

May 2017

Impacts: Achieving the Promise

The challenge of closing the achievement gap is one on which MC focuses energy, time, and resources. Our annual Student Success Score Card, which indicates student achievement trends and disaggregates data by race and gender, indicates some areas in which achievement needs more support. Mentoring programs, scholarships, and learning cohorts have also shown value in closing the gaps that persist among students of different races. One of the key priorities of the Academic Master Plan is increasing retention and completion, which necessitates closing the gap. The Achieving the Promise Academy (ATPA) was initiated in spring 2016. It identifies students who needed extra support and enrolls them in a structured program to provide it. As you may recall, I have tried to alter the paradigm of “at risk” students in favor of “at promise,” thus the name, the Achieving the Promise Academy. This issue of *President's Focus* looks closely at the genesis and growth of this very recent program.

ATPA recognizes that some students benefit from a support system that tracks their progress more closely than traditional services do. In this vein, the program uses coaches whose responsibilities are limited to students who have agreed to participate in a rigorous series of workshops, weekly meetings, learning communities, and feedback from instructors. Coaches assess student needs, track their progress, and guide them to academic, financial, and social resources. They follow students intensively



to ensure they are taking advantage of all the support available to them. The program is in its first official year and is currently serving 57 students.

Recruitment

So far, the largest portions of ATPA enrollees are African American (46 percent) and Hispanic (40 percent), a reflection of the College's demographics and achievement trends. Students can enter the ATPA in several ways: through Starfish or by applying directly on the [website](#). They can also be referred by instructors or can identify themselves as needing extra academic support and apply independently. The program recruited ambitiously last fall, and targeted students in classes with traditionally high "DFW" rates, which marks them as particularly challenging. ATPA coaches, faculty associates who work one-on-one with the students, surveyed students in 28 sections of the Psychology 102 course on the Takoma Park/Silver Spring and Rockville campuses, to see who had previously attempted the course but not completed it or failed. Those students were targeted for special information sessions in which they were given an explanation of the program's benefits and invited them to apply.

Requirements and Support

There are eight enrollment windows for ATPA: three in the fall, three in the spring, and two in the summer. This flexibility allows students to enroll at times beyond just the start of the semester, when they may yet be unaware that they will need assistance. Once accepted, students sign a contract agreeing to attend certain mandatory meetings with coaches once a week. Coaches are diligent about reviewing the agreement in detail so that students are aware of the expectations for the program. Students are also required to take two workshops per semester. One is a foundational workshop on the four psychosocial success skills linked to persistence and completion; the second workshop is one recommended by the coach based on the assessment of the student's needs for improvement. Topics such as test anxiety, self-management, organization, and engagement with faculty are some common areas for student improvement. Workshops already exist at the College for many of these skill sets so students are referred there as needed.

Prior to the first official meeting, students take an assessment test, which identifies strengths as well as any deficits in academic skills, stress-management, and fiscal challenges. The test is reviewed by their assigned coach and they work to develop a student success plan based on their strengths and weaknesses, time to degree, focus of study, and work-life balance. The plan includes



weekly coaching sessions, class attendance, academic support sessions, attendance at the learning center and meeting with tutors. Students are also required to provide copies of the syllabi for all classes in which they are enrolled. The coaches are also authorized to communicate with faculty members in whose classes the students are enrolled. This allows coaches to keep careful track of students' progress. At the beginning of the semester, coaches alert faculty to the presence of ATPA students in their sections and continue communicating with the instructors throughout the semester, requesting updates on student progress. Because the coaches have copies of students' syllabi, they are able to ask specific questions about student performance on recent assignments or exams. They can also help keep students aware of upcoming deadlines. Written academic progress reports from faculty members allow them to communicate with coaches about how tweaks to out-of-class support may be influencing student performance in the classroom.

ATPA Staff and Faculty

There are currently three coordinators for the ATPA, one on each campus. There are 14 part-time faculty members who work as coaches meeting with the same set of students throughout the year, and allowing them to build consistent relationships. While the program is still small, a great deal of energy has gone into laying the groundwork for successful interactions among coaches, faculty, and students. First, ATPA requires its coaches to hold a master's degrees and pairs students with coaches whose disciplinary backgrounds are similar to their majors. This allows for more coherence in guiding students to career paths, explaining course selection, and even being able to envision how students might be challenged by specific course content. Second, the program emphasizes that coaches' relationships with faculty members are vital links to supporting students. Faculty who are willing to report to coaches about students' academic progress or failures provide vital information to coaches in their guidance of students. Faculty members who clearly understand the role of the coaches are better positioned to make referrals as needed and collaborate on helping students get the academic support they need. For that reason, the program has invested time and energy in educating faculty members about the benefits of ATPA and encouraging them to build relationships with coaches. The Academic Master Plan also calls for ATPA coaches to participate in embedded classroom support efforts. They will also help with the new Academic Success Day being piloted in fall 2017 to help aid transition to the College.



Advancing Achievement

Improving achievement among MC students is a multi-faceted effort. ACES has helped us start high school students thinking earlier about their plans and preparation for college. Our learning centers and tutoring offer extra academic support to those in need once they arrive at the College. Our Student Affairs activities try to get students connected to communities that can inspire them to stay in school. ATPA is another offering that targets students who have already had academic challenges or may be experiencing them, and links them with a structured set of tools and guidance. Rolling admissions allows students to enroll when they experience the need—usually the time that they are most open to assistance; and basing support services on the student's assessment profile creates a unique plan for each student. Although the program's outcomes are not yet available, research suggests that students who fall between gaps in support services are either unaware of them or unable—without proper accountability—to take advantage of them. ATPA aims to remedy these weaknesses by providing a highly structured program that addresses a variety of student challenges and position students for success.

Discussion Questions

1. What stood out to you in this report?
2. Are there additional support services that are not captured in the ATPA model that you would suggest?
3. Are there additional ways to recruit students to the program? Should some students be required to participate under certain circumstances, such as enrolling in a course for the second or third time?

