

## II. Executive Summary

Portland Community College was awarded a five-year Title III, Part A, Strengthening Institutions Program Grant in 2003. The objectives of the grant are to increase retention rates of degree-seeking freshmen and decrease the rates of degree-seeking freshmen being placed on academic alert after their first term.

As of April 30, 2004, eight of the 18 tasks listed for year one have been accomplished and the rest are well on their way to being completed by fall 2004. Numerous minor tasks have been accomplished along with the following major tasks:

1. The Title III staff have been hired and put into place.
2. All committees are fully functioning and meeting according to the timeframe scheduled in the grant.
3. Computer hardware and software has been purchased to support the portal project.
4. Phase one of both the “virtual advising assistant” and the “First-Term Experience” has been developed and are currently being revised for final implementation in the fall.
5. All advisors and counselors at Portland Community College have committed to serving on working teams for all student services tools projects.

Related to the major objectives of the grant, many excellent accomplishments have been achieved in the first part of year one for the Title III grant. These include focus groups with students regarding services they would like to have improve their experience on campus, focus groups with staff and faculty to help determine what tools they need to serve students better and strong initial development of many tasks for a fall 2004 rollout to students. Some of these tasks are:

- Implementation of web-based email for all students.
- Roll-out of the “virtual advising assistant” tool for students.
- Roll-out of the “First-Term Experience” orientation program.
- Implementation of the online transfer center database.
- Training of students and staff on the new tools developed for students.

During the remainder of the grant period for year one, emphasis will be placed on adding the use of technical tools for student services to improve student retention. The tools listed above will be evaluated and improved each year of the grant in order to continue to meet the needs of our student population. More than just the technical tools being developed for year one, the grant also supports the development of in-class techniques deployed by faculty members to improve retention. The in-class techniques will be developed as part of the grant’s year two efforts.

While five major objectives comprise the approved project during year one, the performance of these objectives will be measured after the 2004 academic year data has

been finalized (beginning in January 2005). These objectives, as listed on page 41 of the grant application, are:

- Increase the fall-to-winter retention rate of degree-seeking freshmen from 68% in fall 2002 to 71% in fall 2004.
- Increase the fall-winter-spring retention rate of degree-seeking freshmen from 50% in fall 2002 to 53% in fall 2004.
- Increase the fall-to-fall retention rate of degree-seeking freshmen from 41% in fall 2002 to 44% in fall 2004.
- Decrease the number of degree-seeking freshmen being placed on academic alert after their first term from 26% in fall 2002 to 24% in fall 2004.
- Increase the number of degree-seeking freshmen enrolling in four or more terms over a two-year period from 44% in fall 2002 to 46% in fall 2004 using the fall 2002 cohort.

During the first half of year one, the grant staff experienced some challenges because of the time it took to hire highly qualified technical staff. This process took the most significant effort on behalf of the grant staff along with the Information Technology Services department. The grant staff also struggled with filling committee roles that reflected a balance of faculty and staff from all Portland Community College campuses.

### **III. Project Status**

The Title III grant for Portland Community College is currently in its first budget period. The following narrative reports the progress made since the inception of the grant toward meeting project activities, accomplishments and outcomes, referenced with page numbers and sections of the approved grant application.

#### **Year One Major Objectives in Measurable Terms**

- Increase the fall-to-winter retention rate of degree-seeking freshmen from 68% in fall 2002 to 71% in fall 2004.
- Increase the fall-winter-spring retention rate of degree-seeking freshmen from 50% in fall 2002 to 53% in fall 2004.
- Increase the fall-to-fall retention rate of degree-seeking freshmen from 41% in fall 2002 to 44% in fall 2004.
- Decrease the number of degree-seeking freshmen being placed on academic alert after their first term from 26% in fall 2002 to 24% in fall 2004.
- Increase the number of degree-seeking freshmen enrolling in four or more terms over a two-year period from 44% in fall 2002 to 46% in fall 2004 using the fall 2002 cohort (page 41).

#### **Interim Report Tasks**

Related to the major objectives, there were 18 tasks during year one of the grant that had to be accomplished but only four of which had to be accomplished by the midterm reporting period for the grant. Those four included: recruitment and hiring of grant staff; purchase of computer and other hardware needs for the Title III staff; purchase of servers and other components for portal operations; and installation of a five-bank computer station at the Cascade campus for student portal use (pages 48-51).

All **Title III funded staff have been hired** including the retention coordinator, the web analyst, the systems administrator and the transfer center specialist. The staff has all received computer equipment and necessary training to carry out the work of the Title III grant. Further information is available regarding the staff positions in the budget section of this report.

**Software and hardware components necessary for the student services portal have been purchased**, installed and are currently being tested by Portland Community College Information Technology Services staff in order to have a strong fall 2004 roll-out of the "MyPCC" student portal. Consultants from the portal solutions company, Luminus, were available to support the installation of this hardware. Following the successful implementation of the hardware, the beta software has been released to a small number of users and is being debugged. The portal coordinating committee which includes 4 of the 5 grant staff are all part of the Luminus software beta program. The expected date for release of the production version of the software is July 2004.

The **five-bank computer station at the Cascade campus** will be installed in the summer (2004) when the area near and around the future station is clear of high student traffic and the Information Technology Services staff workload is reduced. The computer station will be fully available for student use in fall 2004 when students return to school.

### **Year One Tasks**

Of the remaining 14 tasks, five have been completed and nine are being continuously and aggressively worked on (pages 48-51). All tasks will be completed by the end of year one of the grant. The start of fall term for Portland Community College coincides with the end of the grant year; Portland Community College's first day of classes for the fall term is Monday, September 27, 2004. The targeted date for rolling out the student portal (MyPCC, which will include web-based email, targeted announcements for students, the virtual advising assistant, online orientation and much more) is Monday, August 30, 2004. Specifically, the four technical tools developed for students to be used in the portal are in the process of being developed and finalized.

### ***Major Tasks***

The **virtual advising assistant** is near completion. This tool will act as a question and answer database where students, faculty and staff can all type questions into a web-based tool and get an immediate answer to their question. The advising tool measures keywords and answers questions based upon the information requested. Most likely, the tool will use an out-of-the-box software solution that provides question management for easy maintenance of the program. The virtual advising assistant will store popular questions being asked multiple times so that it can be added to the question database when it becomes apparent that the question is not one from just several students. The software will also have the ability to update questions based on the academic calendar which will allow pertinent and time-sensitive questions to be answered by default at the appropriate time during the academic quarter.

The **My First Term Experience Online Orientation** program is being developed based upon the current online orientation program available to students. This orientation will simply be moved into the portal for fall 2004 so that the Title III staff, in conjunction with the admissions teams, can determine how to best improve the online orientation for future years of the grant and beyond. Eventually, there will be 12 modules of online orientation where students can access important information not only about the college but also about college success tools such as study skills, time management skills and budgeting. The working team for the My First Term Experience is comprised of advisors, counselors and admissions representatives. This diverse team will help enrich the services of the product and therefore target the needs of students to improve their chance at success.

The **online transfer center** is in the midst of being converted from the current website to the portal for a fall 2004 rollout. The current e-transfer center was not easily accessible and difficult to use. The transfer center specialist will work closely with advisors over the summer (2004) to ensure that the correct information has been gathered from the four major schools where Portland Community College graduates transfer. By fall 2004, the

top four schools that Portland Community College students transfer to will have the top ten majors listed on the e-transfer center within the student services portal.

The **student email accounts** are currently being developed by the Information Technology Services staff. This team will devote many hours over the summer to this project in order to have a successful release to students when they return to school in late September 2004. Every Portland Community College student will receive an email account from the college. The overall goal of this task is to improve communication between students and their instructors by making it possible for students to use email as a convenient communication method that is accessible regardless of busy work, school and family schedules.

### ***Other Tasks***

Five of the ten faculty members for the **Intervention Strategies Team** have been chosen. They include:

- Marilyn Marshall, Development Education Faculty at Rock Creek
- Janice Rank, Psychology Faculty at Sylvania
- Jane Zunkel, Writing Faculty at Cascade
- Jeff Edwards, Accounting Faculty at Sylvania
- Judy Zimmerman, Psychology Faculty at Rock Creek

The remaining five faculty members will be selected before the end of Spring 2004. This group will commence in fall 2004 to begin their work on developing an Intervention Strategies Manual that they can present to their colleagues at in-service events for use to improve retention techniques in the classroom.

**Training students** on use of the portal and its tools will happen in the fall when students return to classes. **Training for faculty and staff**, however, will happen prior to the fall start as training will begin as soon as the portal (MyPCC) is released on August 30, 2004. This training will happen several ways. The plan is for students to have access to the “student help desk” for technical questions as well as access to “portal ambassadors” who will assist students with registration and other transactions via the portal when they return to school in the fall.

Quarterly meetings with the **grant evaluation** coordinator have been occurring thus far and will continue to occur throughout the grant period. A progress report about student retention data is provided in the supplemental information. Including error margins, the retention rate for fall 2003 was fairly consistent with that of fall 2002. The measurement taken in January 2005 will determine if the goals of the grant are being met through improved student services to increase retention. Finally, an **interim Presidential and Cabinet update** will be made prior to the official report that will be made to the President, Cabinet and Board at the end of year one.

## **IV. Budget Information**

Hiring of Web Analyst and Systems Administrator has taken longer than expected. The current industry standards for these positions pay at a much higher rate than Portland Community College offers for such positions. Since the positions did not get immediately filled, the grant funding still available allowed for a salary adjustment from what was listed in the grant and resulted in finding highly qualified candidates for the two positions.

The ITS Manager, Tammy Billick, is listed in the grant as providing 5-10% FTE in-kind support (pages 72-73 of the grant). Ms. Billick actually shifted more of her hours between February 2004 and May 2004 to be directed towards the Title III objectives as a result of not having filled the IT positions earlier. The budget reflects a salary shift of \$18,000 on behalf of this increased workload for Ms. Billick.

The half-time online transfer center coordinator (grant staff) and the half-time administrative assistant (grant management staff) for the grant have been merged into one position. Recruitment, interviews and hiring were finalized during May and the new staff person will be starting mid-June 2004.

Finally, the last portion of the budget from this reporting period that has not yet been spent is the \$8,000 for the computer station at the Cascade campus (as listed in year one tasks, number 17, page 51). This purchase will be finalized and computers will be installed this summer so that the computer station can be made ready for student use by fall 2004.

## V. Supplemental Information

### Possible Changes

Other than the minor budget changes listed above, there have been no changes to the grant tasks or objectives. The Title III Oversight Committee has discussed the possibility of adding additional tasks in years three through five that will focus on more non-technical tools to improve student retention than just the **Intervention Strategies Manual** listed in the grant. The oversight committee agreed to look at this possibility at the time of year two's interim report deadline and make a decision about task and objective changes at that point.

### Interim Update and Assessment

The grant measurements are based on fall 2004 and beyond and the retention rate graph displayed below shows the most recent three years for fall to subsequent winter retention. While these three years have relatively similar retention trends, the goal is to increase retention in fall 2004 to 71% for new degree-seeking students based on the improved student services funded by the Title III grant.

