TCC Courses: Gatekeepers or Gateways?

What is a gatekeeper course? Typically, this is a course that has high student enrollment and a student success rate below 80%. A gatekeeper’s high enrollment is often due to its critical place in the pathway of a degree; developmental and 100 level courses are particularly problematic for student progression. Gatekeepers’ lower rates of student success stop many students from advancing to degree completion.

This year at TCC we have seventy-one gatekeeper courses.

Each year at TCC we calculate course completion rates and determine which courses are serving as gatekeepers. We organize these courses in three areas: general, developmental, and professional/technical. We call our TCC gatekeepers “lower completion courses.” Common gatekeepers are first college level courses in English and math. But gatekeepers can be first level courses in any degree program, or any course in our curriculum that exhibits a low rate of student success. Our current list is located here: (insert web site address).

Now that we know which courses are lower completion courses, what can we do? A first step is to look at the courses on the list with the highest enrollments—interventions to increase student success in these courses will affect the most students. Some of our lower completion courses with the highest enrollments are ENGL&101, PSYC& 100, HD101, MATH 90, MATH 99, and ENGL 95.

Common strategies to increase success rates in gatekeepers are 1) support activities, such as supplemental instruction and tutoring; learning communities with linked courses; an early warning system; 2) curriculum and pedagogy improvement, instructional improvement and multiple pedagogic techniques; clarifying course objectives; and 3) innovative training such as Universal Design for Learning. At TCC, we’ve implemented all these strategies as appropriate to course and program.

We’ve been tracking our lower completion courses for two years and many of our courses show marked improvement. Here are just a few courses with increased student success:
Our focus on lower completion/gatekeeper courses, the WA State Momentum Points, our Declared and Prepared student services model, and our administration of the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) all represent our continuous commitment to increasing student success. At TCC, we’re focused on turning our “gatekeepers” into “gateways.”

For more information on Gatekeeper Courses at TCC, contact the TCC Office of Institutional Effectiveness: Scott Marsh, smarsh@tacomacc.edu, 253.566.5124.

Copyright 2010 Tacoma Community College. All rights reserved.