

Impacts of Faculty Mindset and Cultural Competency on the Success of Community College Transfer Students in Engineering at a 4-Year Institution.

ASSETS - Academic Intervention, Social Supports, and Scholarships for Engineering Transfer Students is an NSF sponsored program at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga (UTC) designed to help engineering transfer students overcome known academic, social, and institutional barriers that impede retention or prolong graduation time following transfer from two-year community colleges into four-year colleges. ASSETS is now in its fifth year of implementation. Evaluation of the ASSETS program has revealed that engineering transfer students feel isolated due to entering UTC later than their peers who started as freshmen, as students who enter as freshmen have had a longer period to develop relationships with faculty and other students and to adjust to the rigors of a university environment. Transfer students also tend to be nontraditional students who work more hours than their peers, due to coming from a low-income background or family obligations. Several focus groups conducted among these scholars suggest that these students perceive the four-year institutions as lukewarm at best and hostile at worst to their ability to acclimate but also provide opportunities for these institutions to address their concerns by adopting strategies that are intentional in addressing their needs. Attitudinal surveys were conducted among students and faculty to gauge how pervasive these negative perceptions are among engineering transfer students. The survey analysis revealed that many faculty members do not differentiate between transfer students and traditional students and may therefore not be sensitive to their unique needs. However, faculty members associated with the ASSETS scholars, through serving as faculty mentors, and participation in a pilot cultural competency training program were found to be aware of these differences and are implementing measures that reflect a shift in mindset benefitting transfer students. This paper presents the findings of the surveys and the outcomes of the new mindset toward providing support to and enhancing the success of a diverse engineering transfer student population.