

Barriers to Degree Completion at ARCC (and some recommended actions)

Focus Group Data Collected From Evening-only, On-Campus Business Students, Spring Semester 2013

A transcribed and classified recording of the oral responses to the question, “*What are the barriers presented by ARCC that delay the achievement of a degree?*”

N=37 evening-only students (Two classes, Coon Rapids Campus)

Submitted by Mark Widdel

Student Services

1. The bookstore and financial aid office are not open past 4:30 P.M. Many people don't get done with work early enough to get to those offices before hours are done.
2. Have books available to purchase in the classroom, and have bookstore/resale available online.
3. Online bookstore doesn't have pictures, so it's more difficult to find them online for lower price.
4. Have the ISBN numbers for textbooks easy to find on the A-R website, earlier.

Scheduling/Registration

1. Not all classes are available each semester; better class planning would alleviate this issue.
2. Missed a class two semesters ago, and it is no longer available.
3. If you're going to require a class for a degree, it should be made available with a secondary option in addition to day classes so people can get them in.
4. Some courses required for degree are not offered at both campuses. Poor excuses made as to why they are not available.
5. Accelerated classes - no options for the 2nd half of the semester once a half-semester class has ended.
6. Classes are not always listed with the instructor. Making it more difficult to plan and schedule classes with best teachers.
7. ARCC works together with Metro State, but not all information shared with the student.

8. Flexibility – rather than having classes multiple nights a week, open up the 2nd night for another class each week
9. Flexibility of the scheduling for the evening classes needs to be improved. Day classes are more open but he cannot go during the day and the classes he needs at night often overlap so he cannot complete his classes.
10. When you go for a degree at AR some of the courses are not offered at all the campuses so you have to transfer to other campuses just to complete your degrees.

Advising

1. Better planning would provide an outline for students that would help in their field of study, rather than just recommending an elective class to a student so that they can get an easy “A”.
2. Advisors who do not provide useful information. Finding a class was particularly challenging, because the advisor provided erroneous information.
3. The website will not pull up classes from both campuses unless you know specific tricks to find them.
4. Guidance and support – feeling rushed when you go in to the office. A guideline is needed to outline what is needed for a program. Returning learners or first-time learners don't necessarily know what they need. Half hour appointments are not enough time, people feel rushed.
5. Elective classes – free-for-all, not good guidelines. Advisor telling him how to get the “easy A” rather than actually learn something useful.
6. Was looking for a 4-year degree, Advisor gave the business technology route, turns out to be a 2-year degree.
7. Was originally told it was every-other week class for hybrid class by an advisor. It meets every week.
8. Had plans to transfer to Metro State, was being told she needed to re-take financial accounting because it was over 2 years ago that she took the class.
9. Issues come down to planning – the need for someone to help you lay out what you need to get through this. Also scheduling – availability and ability to FIND the classes you need.
10. Instructors don't know what classes they will have in upcoming semesters.
11. Well trained advisors are needed to help students with scheduling and which career might be best for them.

12. Getting student helpers that know the system who can be available when advisors aren't. Someone needs to know the system.
13. Maybe assigned advisors – advisor have a vested interest in answering a student's questions.
14. Assign advisors to a select number of students to help them with their degrees so this way they have a vested interest in their students.

Programming/Certificate programs

1. You can take classes at other schools, but if you are working towards certificate, all classes must be done at ARCC.
2. Inflexible entry, exit, and re-entry . People who have started programs have a short time frame to complete classes needed for a degree. Because they are non-traditional learners, it may take longer than 5 years to complete their degree.
No option for credit for work.
3. Required to take classes that have nothing to do with your degree. Causing frustration and disinterest from the student.
4. Taking credits for classes that have nothing to do with future degree plans.
5. Why need classes like accounting if you're not going into that field? Why algebra or calc if not becoming engineer?
6. ARCC needs more interaction with community, build a relationship with businesses to encourage people to go back to school.
7. Changing classes and instructors after you've registered.
8. Enroll in a program, have a set group of classes per semester that a student needs to take rather than making them guess which elective to take

Placement testing

1. Placement test guidelines – Math only lasts 2 years. She now has to re-take her math placement test because she didn't take the class right away after her original placement test.

Class Practices

1. Forced to use software for classes that doesn't work correctly. Accounting class software not accepting answers, needing to go through tedious process with instructor to get information back and forth.
2. Offer courses classified as "working adult" classes. Regular schedule for when things are due on a weekly basis, so you are able to get it into your schedule.

3. Deadlines are not always predictable, making it difficult to successfully complete a class.
4. Short deadlines on assignments. Some given one day and due within one or two days. When working full time.
5. Online class requiring daily interaction, taking up a large amount of time – including work time.
6. Online classes that are read chapter/take test, with no interaction.
7. Online class that is also offered on campus, same instructor. Instructor commented to seated class that over half the online class fails every semester. Feedback has been given, but still being run online.
8. One class spends ½ time talking about things that have nothing to do with course topic.
9. Feedback on papers from instructor contains no constructive criticism, but opinions.
10. Prefers flexibility of online class, don't know what type of instructor you're getting. One instructor didn't respond to questions, didn't give feedback throughout course. Ended up submitting final test incomplete, because access to something instructor asked for wasn't there.
11. Please don't have new instructors teaching online their first year.
12. No idea how you're doing in a class because instructor doesn't update you either in class or online, or when you ask.
13. Instructors are on both ends of the spectrum on how much they use D2L, students aren't sure what to expect.
14. There should be department-wide agreement on what materials to use.
15. Group grades dependent on everyone's participation online should be eliminated, not everyone is equally motivated.
16. Group projects for online are horrible - waiting for people to get their piece done so you can complete things for the group to get their grade.
17. Group projects are very frustrating and you end up having to do everything yourself so everyone gets a fair grade.
18. Requirements to post regularly, but no need to do the homework and prove that you've learned the topic. Postings by other students are dependent on your grade, because you need to respond. Instructor doesn't keep any reign on the discussions or enforce rules/standards.
19. Difference in which book is required for class depending on which instructor has the class.

20. Teacher should not talk negatively about the class and the “constructive criticism” he was putting on students papers was “every job I have had feels like a dead end job”.
21. Teacher said the first day of class “I bet some of you know more about this subject than I do.”
22. Another teacher said, “I don’t know anything about D2L” and refused to use it.

Value of Degree

1. Uncertainty regarding what we’ll do with a 2-year degree when most jobs require 4-year at the least.
2. What good is an associates degree - by the time she is done with school everything is requiring a 4 year degree.

Day Care

1. Daycare centers close at 6:00, working full-time, having available child-care on campus would be helpful.
2. How many students would make use of a daycare facility during classes? Would they take more classes if it was available?