Tracking Engagement

After review of research and best practices related to student engagement, a steering committee comprised of administrators from the divisions of academic affairs, student affairs, and enrollment management concluded that increasing student engagement, in and out of the classroom, would benefit the college through increased student success. Dr. Patrick Chang, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, was part of the team of faculty, staff, and students who planned and implemented student engagement initiatives.

“Student engagement increases retention. It gives students a better sense of what is expected of them in college life. I think it makes it easier for faculty and staff when their students understand the expectations for them. These engagement initiatives are a great way to give them a sense of that,” Chang said.

As an institution committed to planning and assessment, Ramapo College sought to incorporate student learning goals and outcomes into the evolving Four Year Model of Student Engagement. In addition, the Steering Committee for Student Engagement reviewed appropriate assessments that would allow the college to evaluate student progress in the four overarching goals within the developmental model: academic engagement; social engagement; personal engagement; and campus/civic engagement. Understanding the first step in engagement is participation, the Steering Committee sought a way to record student attendance at various activities; OrgSync’s Co-Curricular Transcript (CCT) provided the ideal solution.

Ramapo utilized OrgSync’s card swipe feature, allowing students to “swipe in” to demonstrate event attendance. Administrators can even use the RSVP functionality in OrgSync to track attendance before events. Chang said, “Students instinctively now hold out their ID expecting to swipe in.”

Faculty members were excited to learn they could also require students to submit a writ-
ten reflection piece as a measure of student learning. Events not using card swipes can include the requirement that students submit a reflection piece, reporting what they learned from the event, and linking their progress to the learning outcomes included within the Four Year Model for Student Engagement. Students can opt out of the whole program, if they wish.

**OrgSync Features Ramapo College Uses for Engagement Initiatives**

- 29,535 Timesheet Hours Entered
- 29,065 CCT Entries
- 5,201 Card Swipes
- 4,533 Events Created
- 4,199 Form Submissions
- 1,036 Files Uploaded

**Program Design**

The Student Engagement Steering Committee, consisting of the Provost, Vice Provost, and senior Student Affairs and Enrollment Management officers, was charged with developing a plan to increase student engagement across a student’s four year career at Ramapo. After identifying student learning goals and outcomes through the Four Year Model for Student Engagement, the committee worked with a large group of constituents to review currently offered activities and to determine a link, if any, to the learning goals and outcomes outlined in the Four Year Model for Student Engagement.

Starting with the first year, thirteen “Key Points of Engagement” (KPEs) were identified and the First Year Experience Board was charged with oversight of the implementation and assessment of these KPEs. Similarly, a Second Year Experience Board was charged with oversight of the implementation and assessment of twelve KPEs for second-year students. KPEs have a particular focus on structured activities that provide students with the opportunity to meet one or more learning goals contained within the Four Year Model for Student Engagement; they also tie back to established literature and best practices for student development. KPEs were defined as activities, from orientation to graduation, every Ramapo College student should participate in.

Having launched several initiatives aimed at increasing the engagement of first- and second-year students, the Steering Committee recognized the need to more systematically assess the outcome of student participation. OrgSync provided a vital tool for evaluating the success of the programs; tracking student attendance and learning outcomes manually would have required extra staff and a time-consuming paper process. The *My CCT* initiative rolled out the use of OrgSync by students to create a co-curricular transcript that allowed them to track their involvement outside the classroom. The initiative also provided a way for faculty and staff to label academic and co-curricular events with a logo, identifying the program as eligible to be added to a student’s CCT.

The second initiative, *Earn My Wings*, is focused on the KPEs, such as Freshman Orientation, Summer Reading program, and attending such events as Club Fair, identified by the Student Engagement Steering Committee. These events count as “extra credit” opportunities on a student’s CCT. Students’ participation is encouraged through use of an incentive program; the more hours they have logged on their CCT in OrgSync, the more likely they will have first pick of residence hall rooms or preferred parking spots.

**With the My CCT and Earn My Wings programs, more than 70 percent of the first-year student population is highly involved, both on campus and in OrgSync.**

- Dr. Patrick Chang

As the Student Engagement Steering Committee members turn their attention to third and fourth year students, both the *Earn My Wings* and *My CCT* programs have been released to upperclassmen with a greater focus on the students’ future rather than material incentives. “The idea for those students is the more invested you are, the better the payoff,” Chang said. “We’re talking about how to use this with an e-portfolio product and your resumé to sell yourself better to that graduate school admissions officer or potential employer.”
Learning Outcomes

"Using the CCT in different ways, we can determine how many of the KPEs have been completed. We also like it as a reflection tool to determine what and how students learned from the event," Chang said. The data collected can be used to document students' learning as a result of participation in campus activities.

- Dr. Patrick Chang

The ability to track learning outcomes gives the engagement results extra utility. Not only can administrators track how many students attended which events, thus providing an assessment of the events’ “fit” with students’ interest, they can also track the relationship between an event and achievement of learning outcomes from the Four Year Model for Student Engagement. Chang has said these initiatives are “a huge success.” More than 70% of first-year students are highly engaged, both on campus and in OrgSync.

Community Involvement

While the My CCT and Earn My Wings initiatives were created very quickly, Ramapo College has buy-in from administrators, faculty, staff, and students. In fact, Chang considers community participation one of the main reasons the program is successful.

“We really pride ourselves on interdisciplinary learning. We had to really roll this out to the entire community,” he said. “You’ve got to get buy-in from people; you can’t keep it in one group.”

Ramapo’s OrgSync-facilitated engagement initiatives, Earn My Wings and My CCT, allow faculty to easily track student experiences and collect reflections all in one place. At Ramapo College, all courses require students to participate in five hours of out-of-the-classroom learning to apply academic lessons in the “real world.” Faculty can use My CCT as the means to track and assess these experiences.

In only four months of implementation, Chang has already seen a huge change on his campus, and his program earned his team invitations to present at the Association of American Colleges and Universities conference and the American College Personnel Association conference.