Graduation Club Assessment Report 2014

Executive Summary

The Graduation Club Program, coordinated by the Office of Residence Life, is designed to support first-semester freshmen who are interested in developing academic skills. The program is available to any first year student in his/her first semester at JMU. Students participate in the program on a voluntary basis. Graduation Club is offered once during the fall semester with multiple class time choices. Each class meets weekly for five weeks and focuses on study skills. The content of the program is organized around five student learning goals.

Goal 1: Students will be able to recall common reading, studying and test-taking strategies
Goal 2: Students will be able to identify time and stress management strategies
Goal 3: Students will be able to identify ways to improve communication with their professors outside of class
Goal 4: Students will be able to recall strategies for goal setting
Goal 5: Students will increase their self-reported likelihood of healthy academic behaviors

Students who participate in Graduation Club take a pre-test at the beginning of the course and then a post-test at the end of the course. The assessment has two parts: a content-based knowledge test and a self-report of behavior survey. The content portion is subsumed under Goals 1-4. The self-report measures of healthy academic behavior are subsumed under Goal 5. Of the 31 students who participated in the program in Fall 2014, 18 (58%) took both the pre- and post-tests.

Results

Learning (Goals 1-4). Fifteen questions assessed students' content knowledge on the assessment. Students could earn a maximum of 50 points on this portion of the assessment. For the subset of students who have complete data, gains from pre-test to post-test were not as large as last year, and overall post-test scores were lower than last year as well. On average, students increased their content test score by 15.4 points ($d = 2.81$) when comparing scores on the pretest (M=13.1) to the posttest (M=28.6). When examining goals separately, Goals 1, 2, and 4 have post test scores of about 65%, 60%, and 28% correct respectively, which is below the target score of 76%. Questions with low average scores need to be investigated for ease of understanding, and programmatic changes may need to be made so that those concepts are emphasized more.

Behavior (Goal 5). Ten questions asked students to report on their levels of healthy academic behaviors (e.g., using a planner, setting academic goals, reading before class). Students responded by indicating how likely they were to engage in these behaviors (1= Very Unlikely, 7=Very Likely). Overall, students indicated that they were more likely to engage in the behaviors at post-test (M = 6.3) than at pre-test (M = 4.8), representing a move from likely to more likely on the scale ($d = 2.0$). When examining individual behaviors, the greatest gains pre- to post-test were in previewing a text before reading, using stress management techniques, changing schedules near exams, visiting a professor during office hours, and using time management techniques.

Attendance. As was observed in previous years, the attendance and attrition rates for this program are a concern, as 39% of participants did not attend more than three classes, and many of these did not finish the program or complete the post-test. Program coordinators need to work on keeping students in the class so assessment data better represents gains in learning and behavior.

Conclusions

Overall, the Graduation Club program helps students improve in areas of content knowledge and frequency of healthy academic behavior, although both gains and post-test scores are the content test are much lower than last year. Additionally, the target score on the assessment instrument was not met for any of the content area goals, and attendance was not at optimal levels. Areas of focus for future years include more in-class focus on the objective content, and increased attendance and post-test completion.