

DCCCD Retention Best Practice Submission Form

Across the district there are many successful practices that contribute to the retention of students. As the district begins to develop a greater emphasis on its retention strategy, all locations are asked to identify and submit information about successful retention programs and activities. Please complete the following information on selected practices.

College/Location: **Richland College, School of Humanities, Fine and Performing Arts**

The Retention Best Practice is primarily supported by what college/location area:

Instruction Student Services Administrative

Combination of areas: (Please list)

Contact Person: **Dr. Sherry Dean, Executive Dean, 972-238-6251**

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Retention Best Practice Title:

Building Community Through Engaging Philosophy Students in Outside-the-classroom Critical Conversations

Retention Best Practice Area of Focus:

Math STEM Honors College Other Philosophy

Retention Best Practice Executive Summary: approximately 50 words (Please use additional pages for a detailed description)

After several semesters of repeated requests, I began an off-campus discussion group for philosophy students in the spring 2008 semester. In these discussion groups, I engage students on a personal level about philosophical ideas and how they apply to their particular lives. My students have enthusiastically embraced this continuation of learning conversations. We meet at coffee houses, and my husband and I welcome students to our home for coffee and conversation as well. These exchanges have facilitated the creation of a community of learners who welcome dialectical exchange and allow me to engage in significant student mentoring.

Employing this dialogue is a successful means of underscoring the fact that education is much more than simply studying content for a test or degree and thereby a simple means to an end. Rather, education is the constant companion of one's life, even beyond the achievement of institutional educational goals.

At the end of every semester I give each student a personalized, handwritten card and convey how much I have enjoyed having him/her in class and how much I value him/her as both a student and a person. I end each card with these words to let students know that once they have me as a professor, they have me for life: *"As you continue your life journey, things will sometimes be hard, and there will be moments when you believe you are without recognition or support. In those moments, most of all, remember that I believe in your promise, your integrity, and your value."*

Please describe the evaluation measures utilized to support this initiative as a best practice.

I provide an anonymous survey to solicit honest student feedback. Additionally, I have students complete a class journal. Feedback gleaned from both methods confirms that these two practices are the most successful aspects of my philosophy courses.

Provide a summary of the results, including data (such as trend lines over time) to show how it impacted retention and is a best practice.

Many of my students report they have never experienced this level of personal support from a teacher. They also report that our conversations and the personal affirmation vis-à-vis the card positively influenced their confidence level as a student and renewed their faith in their personal value. That alone is enough to retain students at Richland College. Last, many of the students in my summer and fall classes were specifically recommended by former students, which is an affirmation of the power of these practices.

What would be needed to replicate the practice at other DCCCD colleges?

- A time commitment to meet students outside of class.

Cost to implement this practice (financial and human):

The costs of implementation are minimal.