Introduction

In the spring of 2012, the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program conducted a study of the impact of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program on partner high schools’ students, faculties and the schools themselves from the perspective of the partner schools’ principals, faculty members/high school adjunct instructors and guidance counselors. Principals, teachers and counselors were queried in similar, but separate surveys regarding the ways in which their participation in 1818 Advanced College Credit Program has impacted them personally, their students and their high school. Guidance counselor respondents indicated an overall positive experience with the 1818 ACC Program, a positive impact on their students’ teachers’ schools’ and personal experience, and high recommendations to future 1818 ACC students. They also offered some very specific recommendations for quality improvement of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program.

Methodology of the Study

The Program Director of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program and the Assistant Director developed the research instrument heavily dependent on the NACEP “Guidance Counselors’ Impact Survey” template. They converted the questions to a questionnaire, utilizing the Qualtrics on-line survey tool. The survey contained 15 questions, addressing school demographics, and the impact of the 1818 ACC Program’s presence in the school from academic, personnel, and marketing perspectives. Each surveyed group, principals, teachers and guidance counselors, received a similar survey. However, each survey focused questions from the perspective of the subject group.

The researchers conducted the entire study electronically. Guidance counselors received an email invitation on May 4 and May 14, 2012 to participate in the survey. The survey results were confidential, but not anonymous, as the researchers held email addresses and could identify respondents and non-respondents.

Subjects

The study included the 85 college guidance counselors of the 85 active partner high schools in the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program during the 2011-2012 academic year.

Respondents to the survey expressed a range of years of experience with the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program; 31% each had 3 – 5 years, 6 – 10 years, and more than 10 years of experience with 1818 ACC. Two respondents have worked with 1818 ACC for only 1 – 2 years. Forty-seven percent (15) of the respondents serve schools with enrollments of 1200 or more students; 25% (8), 250-499 students; 16% (5), 500 – 1199 students; and 13% (4), 249
students or less. Respondents predominantly serve suburban schools (66% or 21 counselors), but 19% serve urban or inner suburban schools (6 counselors) and 16% (5 counselors) work in rural schools. Sixty-six percent of the respondents serve in public schools, and thirty-four percent in private schools. Only two counselors indicated that he or she rarely interacts with 1818 ACC students. The other 26 respondents indicated that they interact with these students occasionally (11), often (8), or almost daily (7).

Rate of Responses

Researchers received 32 responses from the possible 85 active partner high schools in the study, for a response rate of 37.6%.

Summary of Responses

The first “impact” question with its four sub-questions dealt with 1818 ACC’s impact on students in the partner high school. Guidance counselors responding overwhelmingly agreed that the program has a positive impact on their students. They strongly agreed (15) or agreed (10) that students continued rigorous learning throughout their senior year; developed realistic expectations of college (12/11); and developed a good understanding of their academic skills (7/16). One item worth addressing separately is the item “considered for the first time going to college.” Only one counselor strongly agreed. Four agreed. The other 20 respondents either were neutral (7), disagreed (9), or disagreed strongly (4). A possible explanation for this may be the fact that all of the respondents are college guidance counselors in college preparatory high schools or the students in 1818 ACC courses are for the most part high ability, high achieving students.

Guidance counselors either strongly agreed (13) or agreed (6) that the presence of 1818 ACC on their campus encouraged their students to enroll in more challenging courses. Many agreed (6) or agreed strongly (8) that 1818 ACC was keeping their students from attending college courses off campus. However, nearly as many disagreed (6), strongly disagreed (4) or remained neutral (4).

Guidance counselors generally agreed that the presence of 1818 ACC in their high schools impacted them in several ways. Two strongly agreed and nine agreed that the program’s presence changed the way that they present college options to students. However, 10 disagreed and two strongly disagreed on that point. Four remained neutral. Four strongly agreed and ten agreed that 1818 ACC increased their knowledge of current academic requirements; six disagreed and two strongly disagreed, with five neutral responses. Three strongly agreed and nine agreed that they had developed a better understanding of the skills and knowledge students need to succeed in college; four disagreed and two strongly disagreed. Eight remained neutral. And finally, two strongly agreed and eight agreed that with the presence of 1818 ACC, they perceived more students as capable of higher levels of academic achievement; six disagreed, and two strongly disagreed. Seven respondents remained neutral.

Guidance counselors expressed high positive impact on their schools as a result of offering 1818 ACC courses. Counselor respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their schools had progressed toward meeting its goal of providing more rigorous courses for advanced students (6/13) offered prerequisite courses for the CEP courses that are appropriately rigorous (5/8) raised the expectations for student performance in courses preceding the CEP courses (4/10); demonstrated to parents that their students are doing challenging work as juniors and seniors (7/12); and enhanced its prestige and academic reputation (6/9).

College guidance counselors’ responses to the question “What is the single greatest impact the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program has had on your students?” were split among the opportunity to experience challenging college course work in high school, affirmation of the students’ ability to succeed at college course work, and the opportunity to earn college credit for that experience – and at a reduced cost.
The guidance counselors’ responses to the question of the single greatest impact on their school shared three common themes: increased academic rigor through their curriculum; increased opportunities for their students; and reputation.

**Analysis of the Responses**

Guidance counselors’ responses to the “Impact Study” questions came as no real surprise. The Program Director of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program remains in reasonably close contact with school college counselors through electronic and personal communications, professional development days, summer pre-service training, annual Principals Summit, and the 1818 ACC Advisory Board. She regularly solicits feedback on particular topics, and frequently receives unsolicited feedback on issues she may not have known to be issues. The generally positive tenor and tone of the survey responses comes as no surprise.

The scarcity of actual responses also comes as no surprise. The Program Director realized at the time of distribution of the survey that many of the counselors would set it aside, to get to it at a “less busy time.” However, everyone who has ever worked in a high school knows that time rarely comes. The Program Director interprets the lack of response as more of a comment on her poor timing of the survey in the last month of the school year, than a commentary on the impact of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program in its partner high schools.

At the same time, several of the responses from guidance counselors raised valid issues that are worthy of immediate attention. Several mentioned the time needed to assist students in completing on-line applications and registrations. While 1818 ACC has striven to make this process as smooth and seamless as possible, clearly challenges still exist. The 1818 ACC Program needs to revisit the process itself, along with the instructions for completing the process to identify a smoother, more painless and less time-consuming way to enroll students. Secondly, the 1818 ACC Program office needs to focus closer attention on the consistency of academic expectations across the CEP classrooms in 1818 ACC. Across all of the impact studies completed in 2012, each group of studies contained one or two references to courses, sections or instructors who fall short of meeting Saint Louis University’s quality standards. It is incumbent upon the 1818 ACC Program Director and Assistant Director to identify and correct those areas of weakness. Thirdly, counselors noted an emphasis in their respective schools on the Advance Placement Program, and de-emphasis on 1818 ACC. While this is an on-going challenge among all CEPs nationally, the counselors’ reference to it reinforces the need to find new strategies for bringing positive attention to the benefits of 1818 ACC for students, faculties and schools toward whom the mission of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program is focused.

**Conclusions**

The 1818 Advanced College Credit Program has not conducted a formal impact study from among its partner school guidance counselors prior to this inaugural study. The program does, however, note and document unsolicited feedback, whether through phone calls, emails or personal contacts. The use of impact studies such as the “Guidance Counselors’ Impact Study” provides quantifiable feedback that can only serve to aid the leadership of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program in providing sustainable and continuous quality improvement. Because of the need to comply fully with NACEP standards as part of the accreditation application, the 1818 ACC Program staff surveyed not only counselors, but teachers and principals as well. In the future, these groups will be surveyed on a three-year rotation, repeating teachers next year (2013), following with principals again in two years (2014), and completing the cycle with guidance counselors in three years (2015).

Respectfully submitted,

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Program Director
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