



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Middle College

Middle College, a program for at-risk high school students located on the De Anza College campus, was established with the Fremont Union High School District in January 1989. The program was modeled after the La Guardia Project in New York; its philosophy was to keep students in school and help them raise their expectations for academic success in high school and college.

Fremont Union High School District was seeking to combat a rising dropout rate. Administrators from the District and De Anza College had read about the La Guardia Project and met to discuss whether a similar program could be instituted. Agreement was quickly reached and a memorandum of understanding established. Responsibilities for both De Anza and the District were clearly defined. De Anza's responsibilities included:

- providing office space for three instructors;
- providing dedicated classrooms;
- waiving all student tuition fees except parking fees;
- providing registration assistance;
- affording Middle College students access to all programs and services just as any other college student, with the exception of athletics; and
- providing high-level administrative oversight.

Fremont Union High School District's responsibilities included:

- providing high school instructors;
- providing an operating budget;
- purchasing college textbooks, materials, etc. for students;
- screening and selecting students;
- monitoring student progress;
- overseeing disciplinary action; and
- providing high-level administrative oversight.

One of the most critical components to the success of the program is its screening process. Students who fit the following profile might be suited for the Middle College environment:

- the student may be "at risk" of dropping out of school;
- there may be a clear discrepancy between standardized test scores and grades;

- the student should show adequate social adjustment within the regular high school environment but may express dissatisfaction with that environment;
- the student should be able to work independently in a flexible environment;
- the student may be a creative, artistic individual—a nonconformist;
- the student should express a sincere interest in completing high school and going on to college even though the "paper evidence" such as grades and attendance may indicate otherwise.

Much time has been spent educating school personnel about the purpose of Middle College. A brochure has been developed to enhance the self-selection aspect of recruitment. This brochure is mailed to all sophomore and junior students in the district. After initial recruitment meetings are held at each school, a districtwide parent-student night is held. Middle College students are selected from the five high schools in the Fremont Union High School District. Some are self-selected (they hear about the program from graduates and friends), and some are selected by teachers and school personnel.

Students are asked to write an essay to be submitted with the application. Students also are required to submit teacher recommendations. After their files are complete with transcripts, recommendations and essay, students are interviewed along with their parents. Upon completion of this process, students are selected for the program. Many more students apply than the program can accommodate.

Middle College students enroll in both high school and college courses. They receive high school as well as college credit for college courses. An advantage of this program is that the serious student not only completes requirements for high school graduation, but gets a head start on his/her college career. Some students, upon completion of the program, have earned as much as one year of college. Three teachers from the high school district teach the required high school classes. One teaches a two-hour interdisciplinary course in American history, American literature, and creative writing to 35 eleventh-grade students. Two teachers at



the twelfth-grade level share 70-80 students and teach writing for college/contemporary literature and economics/U.S. government. These teachers have a strong counseling background and handle all but the most severe discipline and personal problems.

Some students begin the program at age 16; therefore, one of the major issues for these students is moving to independence and assuming the responsibilities which accompany their transition to adulthood. It is important, from the beginning stage, to get these students to shift from external controls on their actions to internal controls. Program supervisors attempt to teach them to respect reality, whether pleasant or painful. Most of the students are bright but have avoided the reality of school, sometimes by cutting classes or by adopting inappropriate coping strategies. Instructors help them make changes to initiate successful behaviors. Many of these students do not deal effectively with authority. Instead of getting hooked into power games, students are encouraged to take charge of their lives. The staff is firm, but fair. Positive behavior is reinforced, and acknowledgment is given for even the smallest accomplishment. Instructors intervene when appropriate, but they allow as much independence as possible.

A six-year longitudinal study on student success indicated that 87% of the students successfully complete the program. (Success is defined as completing the necessary high school requirements for graduation.) It also found that 90% of the students continue with their college education at De Anza. They then transfer to the Cal State University system, the University of California system, or private colleges throughout the U.S. De Anza's 1995 commencement speaker was a 1992 Middle College graduate, who had just graduated from UCLA *summa cum laude*.

The De Anza Middle College was the first of its kind in California. The program has received numerous awards, including the 1993 National School Board Association Award (recognizing the top 100 programs in the nation). It enrolls approximately 100 students annually; more than 300 students have graduated.

This program is a valuable addition to the college community. While bright, these at-risk students were likely to drop out of high school and never attend college. They now contribute to the De Anza classroom environment and are reported to be enthusiastic students. And because parents are grateful to the program for helping their children, some make sizable donations to the program.

De Anza College has a strong community outreach

philosophy. The Middle College is but one of De Anza's outreach efforts into the community and but another example of its commitment to expanding student diversity and developing proactive strategies to combat increasing dropout rates from its public schools.

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