

MSCF Minute



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Terms and Phrases

by Kevin Lindstrom, MSCF president

Student success. Persistence. Completion. Closing the achievement gap. Time to completion. Graduation. You can probably add several other terms and phrases to this list of things we believe are so important for our students. These are terms and phrases you hear uttered in meetings and speeches all the time. You see them in newspapers and in legislation. There are several special interest groups out there “advocating” for these important items, some who at the same time are attempting to sell you a fix. If you go to a Board of Trustees meeting, it is almost inevitable that you will see one or more of these items in a Power Point presentation. These terms and phrases are so commonly uttered absent meaningful action that I sometimes wonder if some have been reduced to saying them more than they mean them.

At the very least, more can be done, including recognizing a meaningful solution that sits right underneath the noses of decision-makers. It seems, however, that “Yeah, but...” is the most frequently used response to real solutions. Someone will come up with an idea for meaningful improvement and the response will be, “Yeah,

but...” typically followed by something about cost, staffing, time, or other priorities. Worse yet, we’ll have a solution in place and it will be dismantled. As concerns about the dismantling are raised, again the response is, “Yeah, but...” followed by some excuse about cost, staffing, time, or other priorities. This is a cycle I’ve witnessed several times over the years.

This cycle was highlighted during the recent Chancellor forums and interviews. One candidate, in more than one setting, recounted his experience at a previous institution with a specific student population. These students wanted the first person they encountered at the college to be the person they turned to as their main connection to the college for their entire time at the college. For the students and their families it was a matter of trust and connection, in addition to the practical matter of knowing where to first turn for help when needed. The candidate talked about how powerful the results were when the college built a model based on the notion of a defined point of contact, one who served as a comprehensive resource from the time a student first came

in contact with the college until graduation.

As the candidate told of his experiences with this model, I watched heads in the rooms nod in agreement. Most notable were those nodding as though this were an entirely new concept. The merits of the model, regardless of perspective, seemed obvious to everyone who heard the description. To some the model not only made obvious sense, it also sounded very familiar.

As the candidate was describing the model and the heads were nodding, I received a text from Darci. It read in part, “In the child development field we call that continuity of care.” I texted back saying, “In the two-year colleges we used to call that counseling.”

This is the point in the conversation where a decision-maker typically says, “Yeah, but...” followed by something about cost, staffing, time, or other priorities. It’s the response that meets most every call to rebuild, or even go beyond, the counseling model we once had. It’s the model where students have a point of contact, one who can provide a comprehensive set of services, from their first

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contact with the college until graduation. It’s the one the Chancellor candidate described. It’s the one that made so much sense, as evidenced by the head nods, when someone else said it.

System decision-makers can continue to “Yeah, but...” counseling into extinction. When they do, they are also saying “Yeah, but...” to student success, persistence, completion, closing the achievement gap, time to completion, graduation, and all those other words and phrases so commonly uttered. The real tension resides in those who nod their head when the Chancellor candidate describes it and who then say “Yeah, but...” when it’s time to do it. That’s when I wonder if they are saying all those things more than they mean them.

Delegate Assembly Delegates

Please remember to submit your Delegate Information Form via the MSCF website by Friday, March 17!

2017 Delegate Assembly and Board of Directors Meeting
April 7, 2017
Ramada Plaza Mpls