Welcome
by Naydeen T. Gonzalez-De Jesus, Ph.D.
Vice President of Student Affairs

Four years ago, Bergen Community College (BCC) celebrated the receipt of a $2.3 million Title V grant, which is specifically for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI). Our college, a designated HSI with over 33% (Fall 2012) of its student population of Latino/a or Hispanic descent, has positioned itself to strategically utilize Title V funding to increase the retention and completion rates of students.

Recognizing the importance of making social connections to success at college, Title V implemented a Peer Mentoring program called 1-2-3 Connect. First-year students connect from the start with students who have been successful in their studies to help navigate their new world of college. Scholars agree that student connectedness with the institution is prompted by early association with professors, counselors, student life professionals, mentors, and peer-to-peer interaction (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010). These intentional connections aid student’s persistence efforts and completion of their academic goals through to graduation.

With one year left on the Title V grant and potential reapplication, it is imperative to revisit the College’s purpose to receiving HSI funding. The grant mandates the entire college community embrace student body diversity by paying closer attention to diversity in teaching methods, learning styles, professional development, and student support services. These factors are intricately connected to student success in as much as technology, facility development, and curriculum.

Focusing on what it means to be a HSI will help to set and achieve higher goals which impact the success of all students; including but not limited to students with disabilities, students who are low-income, homeless students, first-generation college students, students who are highly motivated or in need of motivation, and students of color.

As a HSI with Title V funding, BCC has the responsibility to provide evidence that it is also addressing the unique academic and social needs of its students of color. The following questions must be reviewed as the College strategizes for its re-application for Title V funding:

• How can an HSI increase the “persistence rate” of Latino and African American students, which is at 63% and 52% respectively when compared to the “persistence rate” of White and Asian students, which is reported to be at 70% and 73% respectively?*

• How can cultural perspectives and differences be infused in teaching methods to strategically motivate students in the subject matter?

• What professional development tools can be implemented to re-energize our approach to student learning and engagement, with a special focus on learning styles?

• What would we learn from a student panel if we were to ask them about our college-wide approach to matters of inclusiveness in teaching, learning, and academic support services?

• What would student retention look like at BCC if best practices for persistence and completion, such as peer mentoring, supplemental instruction, and learning communities were to be implemented college-wide?

BCC has made great strides in its four years of Title V funding. However, when it comes to test scores by specific subgroups of students, measurements of retention and completion continues to show disparities among student groups.

Through our renewed commitment to student success, along with resource allocation to support all students, including at-risk students, Title V takes center-stage at BCC. The paradigm expands from an open-door policy to a policy that includes access and success.

The spring semester will soon be coming to an end and it's time to make room for the many changes and challenges that are a natural progression of academic pursuits. While some students are planning for summer classes, graduation, and/or transferring to a four-year institution, our 1-2-3 Connect third semester students explore options for their future at Bergen Community College (BCC).

Many of the students who have completed the 1-2-3 Connect, First-Year Experience (FYE) program decide to make the transition from mentee to Peer-Mentor. Stepping in to the role of Peer Mentor allows students the opportunity to "give-back" and share the advice they may have received as first-year students. Similarly, the faculty and staff at BCC are continuously looking for ways to engage our students to improve their educational and future career-path employment opportunities.

Bridging college academics and the student interaction with Peer Mentors, our 1-2-3 Connect program offers BCC students ongoing support. The benefits of having this First-Year Experience program in place were recently discussed at the Tri-State Best Practices Conference held at the BCC Meadowlands campus on March 1, 2014. Keynote speaker, Dr. Davis Jenkins of the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University’s Teachers College, emphasized key goals for community colleges to help improve student retention. Dr. Jenkins suggests colleges redesign academic programs and support services to integrate progress monitoring, feedback, and support:

### Pathway Redesign Principles

- Define program learning outcomes and align curriculum to achieve them
- Give each student a clear roadmap to completion, further education, and careers
- Monitor student progress, providing frequent feedback and support
- Engage faculty and staff in collaborative improvement communities

Implementing these suggested best practices are challenging. The day-to-day operations of our 1-2-3 Connect program highlight the need for ongoing support for student services, faculty integration, and the importance of peer mentorship to keep students in school. The pathway to success is clear, make a connection!

Robert Fusco  
1-2-3 Connect Program Coordinator

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**Counselor’s Corner**  
by Jamie Smigelski  
1-2-3 Connect Academic Counselor

At this time of year, students usually schedule one-on-one academic planning sessions for advice on which classes to take for summer or fall, changing their major, and/or transfer planning. Some general academic counseling questions or concerns addressed during meetings with students are the following: life and career planning, holds on their student account, issues with a professor, personal issues preventing the student from doing well in classes, time management, personal organization, and financial aid concerns. Also, students on probation or suspension may schedule a session to discuss returning to the college and receive help navigating the academic curriculum.

### Financial Aid Advice

Current students are already thinking about their financial aid for next year! Financial aid may include Federal Pell Grants, state of NJ TAG grants, and student loans. We suggest students fill out their Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) as soon as possible. If a student is filling out a tax return, it is recommended that they file their taxes first and then use the FAFSA IRS Data retrieval tool, which may help to eliminate additional verification paperwork. Returning students MUST fill out the FAFSA and application for NJ state aid by June 1, 2014.

Throughout the year, faculty and staff benefit from our counseling services. We offer Pipeline and Portal training, as well as discussions on advising and registration topics. Faculty or staff member consultations are held at the Center for Student Success in A-118. Please call (201)-879-5014 or email jsmigelski@bergen.edu to schedule a session.

**Message from Coordinator**

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BCC Peer Mentors Share Lessons Learned

The 1-2-3 Connect Peer Mentor Program offers Bergen Community College (BCC) students an opportunity to connect, engage and learn. Our primary goal is to help first-year students make a smooth transition to college by connecting to – the inner self, the college community, and ultimately, to graduation.

The role of the BCC Peer Mentor is to assist first-year students through the rigors of their first three semesters. All Peer Mentors are required to have completed the IST 123: Success 101 course, which is offered to BCC students in their first semester. The Success 101 course assists Peer Mentors in helping first-year students to make positive and informed choices.

Peer Mentors facilitate weekly Success 101 “Walk-Ins” which are designed to provide students taking this course with academic support in understanding course content - journals, brainstorming ideas for other assignments, and guidance in applying short and long-range planning skills, and more. Students should bring course materials (textbook, syllabus, handouts, assignments, paper and pen) and are encouraged to invite another student from their class to join in the Success 101 Walk-In session.

Students interested in participating in a Success 101 Walk-In receive academic support services, along with first-hand knowledge from a BCC Peer Mentor. For more information, please contact us at (201) 879-8930 and/or stop in the Drop-In Center, Room B-220, at the Paramus Campus.

Need a BCC Peer Mentor?

The Peer Mentor Drop-In Center is a safe and welcoming office environment for students. Within this office, you can find Peer Mentors available to provide a listening ear and to be helpful in providing a wealth of information regarding feedback on assignments, study and time management skills, events and activities, advising assistance and a lot more.

The Peer Mentor Drop-In Center is located at B-220 and is open Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. We look forward to your visit!

Recruiting Future BCC Peer Mentors

The 1-2-3 Connect Program is truly proud of its commitment to setting high expectations for ourselves and our students. Meeting the needs of our students is a collaborative effort of our diverse campus community and the partnerships between students, faculty, and administration. The experienced BCC Peer Mentor acts as a bridge between the programs and opportunities available to first-year students with academic proficiency and fun social activities.

Outstanding students who have successfully completed the first-year of the 1-2-3 Connect Program may apply for a paid Peer Mentor position. The benefits of becoming a BCC Peer Mentor include the opportunity to build leadership skills and work experience for your resume, while giving back to the college community.

If you are interested in learning more about the 1-2-3 Connect Program and how to become a BCC Peer Mentor, please contact Ann Gill, Peer Mentor Manager, at 201-879-5346 or via email at agill@bergen.edu.

Are you interested in becoming a BCC Peer Mentor?

Contact: Ann M. Gill,
Peer Mentor Manager
201-879-5346 or agill@bergen.edu

Peer Mentor Drop-In Center, B-220
Pitkin Education Building,
Paramus Campus

For more information online, go to: http://www.bergen.edu/123connect.
Benefits of Becoming a Peer Mentor
By Nora Figueroa, Peer Mentor

Being a Peer Mentor for the 1-2-3 Connect, First Year Experience (FYE) program at Bergen Community College (BCC) has been one of the best experiences of my life. The responsibility of being a Peer Mentor has given me the opportunity to gain skills that many jobs require. For example, it has taught me about diversity, teamwork and interpersonal skills. Most of the valuable relationships I have developed with faculty/staff, mentees, and fellow Peer Mentors will definitely last a lifetime.

I entered BCC in the fall of 2012 as an extremely shy and withdrawn student. The professionals in the 1-2-3 Connect: FYE program and my dedicated and caring Peer Mentor for those first semesters helped me step outside of my comfort zone. Soon I began to communicate with my peers in group meetings, at events, and college activities. My Peer Mentor kept me engaged and connected…introducing me to other students, always going that extra-mile, and trying to help me with whatever problem I had at the time. As a first-year student, my Peer Mentor’s actions showed me I was not alone. This connection made me want to become a Peer Mentor so I could offer other students the same experience.

It was a great feeling of accomplishment when I became a Peer Mentor because I did not think I would get the position and now I’m working alongside my Peer Mentor.

For me, there was a benefit to being a student in the FYE program before becoming a Peer Mentor—it’s like having this secret language and knowing exactly how to decode the first-year experience. Often, I am able to share these experiences with my fellow Peer Mentors to help them in connecting with their mentees.

Becoming a Peer Mentor has also helped me develop leadership skills. For instance, I had many fears—one being that I did not want to mess-up a new student’s schedule or give them wrong information. My Peer Mentor has helped build my self-esteem and I am now confident in my skills as a Peer Mentor.

Mentoring provides students a great opportunity to build critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, creativity, communication and many other skills that are helpful to classroom interaction and in the long-run, a career. I am very thankful to Peer Mentor Manager, Ann M. Gill and my fellow Peer Mentors for always being positive, helpful, and most of all, for creating a welcoming, family environment at BCC. I recommend that students looking to build their self-esteem and skills apply to become Peer Mentors.
**Requirements**

- Completed one year at BCC
- 3.0 GPA or higher
- Desired— completion of IST 123: Success 101
- Flexible schedule
- Strong communication skills, both written and oral
- Work well independently and in groups
- Comfortable working with professors
- Leadership Skills/Campus Involvement

**Please Contact**

Ann M. Gill, Peer Mentor Manager  
B-220, Pitkin Education Building  
400 Paramus Road,  
Paramus NJ 07652  
Phone: 201-612-5346 (Ann M. Gill)  
Peer Mentor Drop-In Center: (B-220)  
Phone: 201-879-8930  
E-mail: agill@bergen.edu

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**1-2-3 Connect First Year Experience**  
Peer Mentor Position | Paramus Campus Only

BCC has received a $3.2 million Title V Grant to fund an intensive five-year, institution-wide program to improve students’ academic success and retention. The 1-2-3 Connect: First Year Experience is the Program that supports students throughout their first year and beyond.

**1-2-3 Connect: First Year Experience Program**

This Program enhances student engagement and retention during the first-year students’ first three semesters at BCC. By connecting first-year students with their individual interests, talents, and potential, they become engaged in the process of personal growth and improved learning. Students will acquire academic and life skills instrumental to their success. This is achieved with academic and social support of a mentoring community.

**Peer Mentors**

A Peer Mentor is an elite student leader devoted to encouraging and assisting the first-year student in a successful transition to college. The Peer Mentor guides his/her new peers through the academic, social and career rigors of the college environment while collaboratively setting attainable goals.

**Job Description**

Peer Mentors work with their first-year students (mentees) for the first three semesters. The job requires Peer Mentors to attend IST 123: Success 101 with their mentees. In addition to being a positive role model, the Peer Mentors will support their mentees and also make referrals to professional staff and offices when needed. Continuous training will be provided to foster resilient rapport and a positive environment for mentees, Peer Mentors and professional staff.