PASS

Promoting At-Promise Student Success

Ecological Validation Coordinating Groups: Key Processes Related to Campus-wide Culture Change

The first stage of the professional learning community (PLC) focuses on learning a research-informed approach to institutional culture that leads to improved academic and psychosocial outcomes for at-promise students. The second stage shifts from primarily learning with cross-functional colleagues to becoming a coordinating group that supports your campus in building and sustaining a culture of ecological validation.

The primary role of your group will be to coordinate across the multiple efforts, initiatives and goals that exist across campus in order to improve at-promise students' experiences and outcomes by drawing from the concepts of ecological validation to connect and coordinate efforts across campus with the goal of shifting campus culture. In addition, you will generate new ideas by identifying and reflecting on current initiatives and looking for new collaborations across and beyond campus. The coordinating role will involve six key processes:

Communicating: Communicate with campus stakeholders about the ecological validation approach.

- Develop a clear message about why this work is important for your campus.
- Use multidirectional communication with leadership, staff, faculty, and other educators in order to reach the entire campus, as well as to hear from campus stakeholders.
- Develop an approach for creating shared language related to ecological validation. Inform campus stakeholders about the learning, work, and goals of the coordinating group.
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Mapping and Auditing: Engage with multiple forms of campus data to inform and assess how ecological validation is enacted and sustained by identifying areas of need among students and/or barriers that result from campus organizational policies and practices.

- Identify existing areas of success on campus that could be expanded or scaled up.
- Map at-promise student experiences and pathways to identify gaps in support and opportunities to create a more cohesive and coordinated approach.
- Consider the campus movement toward creating a culture of ecological validation – with a central goal of improved student outcomes.

Exploring Networks and Connection to Leadership: Develop sustained networks and distributed leadership for culture change.

- Reflect on how to leverage the networks of the individual group members to reach the broader campus and identify areas on campus that may be missing.
- Identify individuals or groups who should be connected to the group and develop a plan to bring them into the work.
- Consider how to connect with leaders across campus and develop a strategy to engage with them on a consistent basis to ensure the work of the group aligns with and informs the broader goals and mission of leadership.

Reviewing Processes, Policies and Practices: Review existing processes, policies and practices for alignment with ecological validation.

- Monitor progress of groups to change processes, policies and practices.
- Encourage the use of ecological validation as part of the routine practices and processes across campus, including the programs, offices, colleges, departments, committees, and other spaces where the coordinating group members work.
- Include ecological validation within the process of creating new policies and practices.
- Review of unit and campus communications using the norms of ecological validation in order to ensure outreach to students is validating and supportive.

Developing Campus-wide Professional Development and Learning: Facilitate learning opportunities for the group members and campus related to how to enact a culture of ecological validation.

- Learn from research, other campuses, and members of the coordinating group about practical ways to enact ecological validation.
- Engage the "train the trainer" approach and host sessions about ecological validation across campus.
- Create professional development (e.g., summits, brown bag presentations, videos, etc.) that include a series of learning opportunities – and avoid one-off presentations of information that rarely impact policies, structures and practices.
- Develop learning opportunities that include students, staff, faculty, and leadership in the experience of ecological validation.
- Evaluate professional development and learning opportunities to justify if and how to continue doing this work.

Evaluating, Sustaining and Planning for Future Work: Reflect on what has been accomplished by the coordinating group and develop a plan to continue the work.

- Develop evaluation and sustainability plans for the coordinating group to continue moving toward a culture of ecological validation.
- Plan for maintaining and strengthening leadership support and buy-in to scale efforts.
- Developing a culture of ecological validation is a process, not a destination. Campuses will continue to face new challenges that directly or indirectly influence student experiences and outcomes. Other key issues that will need to be addressed as the work continues, include how to integrate the concept of ecological validation into annual reviews, hiring practices, reward systems (including promotion and tenure), and accreditation reports.

For more information about the PASS project, please visit our website. Please note that resources for practitioners are located here and materials related to Professional Learning Community can be found here.

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