Toys’n MORE Meeting  
Friday, April 8, 2011  
2:30 – 6:00 pm  
The Penn Stater Conference Center

Attendees:

Alison Bonner, Donald Bruckner, Majid Chatsaz, Cathy Cohan, Gregory DePalma, Angela Fishman, Germaine Fotta, Sandy Gleason, Javier Gomez-Calderon, Kira Hamman, Charles Helou, Nancy Herron, Anatoli Ivanov, Kristin Kokal, Steve Littell, Kevin Maxwell, Byron Parizek, Heather Parizek, Chris Rager, Javed Siddique, Abdul Siddiqui, Stan Smith, Dave Wells, Chris Wu

By video conference:

Alan Horwitz, Pattie Lombard, Janeen Madison, Dan Parrish

1. Welcome

Nancy Herron, Associate Dean for Academic Programs, welcomed everyone and explained that her office here at University Park analyzes programs and decides which to keep and which to prune. Everyone is concerned with how Penn State will handle the recent cuts in state funding. Her office is looking at how we can do things “out of the box”, for example use ALEKS, and whether or not we should be in the math remediation business with the Math 1, 2, 3, and 4 courses. Nancy encouraged faculty to monitor student outcomes and look into program sharing at their campuses.

Sandy Gleason, Associate Dean for Faculty, echoed Nancy’s words that it is time to answer some tough questions about what the core mission of Penn State is. We need to look at low enrolled courses and think about what kinds of programs would be beneficial to offer so we can better serve the communities where the campuses are. Instead of having faculty teach the lower level courses, maybe find an alternative and only have faculty teach upper level math. She encouraged everyone to take their blinders off, and be open to different approaches because technology is constantly changing.

Javier Gomez-Calderon, Math Division Coordinator, thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and for participating in Toys’n MORE. The project goal is to increase retention of engineering students, and math is an important part of engineering. Unfortunately, students are often unprepared for college math. It is our duty to help them succeed, and the tutoring funds provided to the campuses, even though they are small, will help do that.

2. Assessment

Cathy Cohan, Toys’n MORE Assessment Coordinator, told everyone that they are part of something very big and very important, and went over the three Toys’n MORE interventions: enhanced math tutoring (13 campuses), Toy FUN-damentals course (13 campuses), and Campus College Connection, which is a summer bridge program (3 campuses). Campuses are using a variety of math tutoring methods which include the Math 097 course, embedded tutors, online tutoring software, supplemental instructors, peer tutors, and professional math tutors. After one
year of our project, STEM retention of participating students has increased to 80%, up from the 67% that were retained during the comparison time frame (2003-2008). Passing rates in math courses and engineering student efficacy have improved, and the Campus College Connection participants had better Fall 2010 GPA’s than similar non-participating students. The initial three years of our project are almost over, and new Requests for Proposals will be circulated soon. Campuses that wish to continue with the project are urged to submit new requests for additional funding.

3. Math Center/STEM Lab at Brandywine

Charles Helou, mathematics professor at Brandywine, gave a presentation on the Math Center (now renamed STEM Lab) at his campus. The mission is to provide tutoring for students in Math courses ranging from Math 3 through Math 141, and Math 200. Tutors are mostly “master tutors” (carefully selected professional tutors with a degree in math or science), and the Coordinator of the Lab keeps an eye on tutors’ activities. The STEM Lab is separate from the Learning and Writing Studio so that there can be direct guidance from math faculty and interaction with them. Walk-ins for tutoring are welcome, but the main goal is promoting Math 97 structured tutoring. The Math 97 requirements are: attendance of two hours per week for at least 13 weeks, participation, homework completion, and weekly skills checks. Each category accounts for 25% of the total grade. In fall 2010, 73% of Brandywine’s students enrolled in a math course used the STEM Lab.

4. Math Tutoring at Beaver

Angela Fishman, from Beaver, is the Math 97 instructor at her campus. She feels that many students do not want to take the time to really learn math concepts; they just come to be tutored because they have a test in two hours and need a quick fix. Students are required to attend Math 97 once a week and must show their class notes and know what the expectations of the professor are. She also coaches them in time management, using resources, changing majors, and transitioning from high school issues. Students’ helping each other is encouraged.

5. Online Web Assignments for Math 22/26

Majid Chatsaz uses WebAssign as an instructional tool at Worthington Scranton. Instructors create assignments online within WebAssign and electronically transmit them to their class. Students enter their answers online, and their assignment is automatically graded and feedback is given. Students pay $47 for a textbook with access codes.

6. Teaching with ALEKS

Kevin Maxwell, at Fayette, told about his experience using ALEKS as a tutoring tool for Math 22 and 26. Students seem to like the worksheet feature; they can print it out and do their work on a hardcopy. The program assesses each student and gives them an individually designed program. Using Toys’n MORE funds, the campus buys access for each student for part of the semester, at $40 each.