

The background of the entire graphic is a photograph of a multi-story brick building, likely a college campus, with green trees in the foreground and to the right. The text is overlaid on this image.

MEDAILLE COLLEGE'S

TRiO

**STUDENT SUPPORT
SERVICES PROGRAM**

**H107, 18 AGASSIZ CIRCLE
BUFFALO, NY 14214**

IT TAKES A VILLAGE: ACHIEVING STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH MENTORING



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WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

- ❖ Introductions
- ❖ Quick overview of TRiO and Medaille's TRiO SSS Program
- ❖ More in-depth analysis of our three mentoring programs, including
 - ❖ Professional mentoring by TRiO program staff
 - ❖ Peer Mentor Program
 - ❖ Alumni Mentor Program
- ❖ Q/A

FEDERAL TRiO PROGRAMS

- ❖ Set of federally-funded educational opportunity programs that motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds in their pursuit of a college degree
- ❖ Grew out of President Johnson's War of Poverty and the Educational Opportunity Act and Higher Education Act of 1965
- ❖ Pipeline of eight different programs that provide support to individuals from middle school through post-baccalaureate degrees
 - ❖ (Medaille's is SSS – we use "TRiO" & "SSS" interchangeably)



MEDAILLE'S TRiO PROGRAM PROFILE

- ❖ Medaille has maintained a TRiO SSS program on its Buffalo campus for 34 years
- ❖ We serve 200 low-income, first-generation students and/or students with disabilities
- ❖ Medaille is a college of opportunity: 86% of the entering freshman class is TRiO eligible this year
- ❖ 82% of all students currently enrolled at Medaille are first-generation college students

WHY MENTORING?

- ❖ Vincent Tinto (2012) *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action*
- ❖ The establishment of mentoring relationships contributes to a “sense of belonging and membership in [campus] social communities... [i.e. **‘mattering’**].”
- ❖ Tinto identifies four important benefits of social membership
 - ❖ Access to “a range of social support that eases the transition to college, reducing academic stress levels”
 - ❖ In the case of peer mentors, “enables students to more easily access informal knowledge from peers, helping to navigate the foreign terrain of the institution”
 - ❖ “Promotes a sense of self-worth”
 - ❖ “Enhances students’ attachment or commitment to the institution...especially important for underrepresented students who sometimes find themselves out of place in a largely majority-serving institution” (28)

WHY MENTORING? (cont'd)

- ❖ “The establishment of supportive personal relationships—**with faculty, peers, and other significant persons**—enables students to better cope with the demands of the college environment” (122). **(It takes a village!)**
 - ❖ Vincent Tinto (1993) *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*
- ❖ “The inability to obtain needed advice during the first year or at the point of changing majors can undermine motivation, increase the likelihood of departure, and, for those who continue, lengthen the time to degree completion as students transfer to other degree programs”
 - ❖ (11 *Rethinking Institutional Action*)

MENTORING AT MEDAILLE: A BRIEF HISTORY

“Start where you are; use what you have; do what you can.”

- ❖ **2004:** Peer Mentor Program's humble beginnings
 - ❖ Started with 7 juniors and seniors and one student coordinator
 - ❖ Original job description: “peer mentor meets with mentees in a group setting at least once a month, with possible individual meetings as needed”
 - ❖ The program was designed to be as flexible as possible to accommodate participants' busy schedules, but it was too flexible and not as effective as we knew it could be (at the time SSS didn't have the infrastructure necessary to support a different model)
- ❖ **2009-10:** Began formal transition from tutoring-based program to mentoring-based program
 - ❖ Professional staff became holistic academic advisors/mentors
 - ❖ Revamped Peer Mentor Program
 - ❖ Alumni Mentor program was a twinkle in our eye (gained traction in 2012-13 academic year)
- ❖ **2014:** Efforts currently underway to extend TRiO's mentoring successes to the greater campus community

MENTORING BY TRiO STAFF

TRiO'S APPROACH TO MENTORING: APPRECIATIVE ADVISEMENT

- ❖ The appreciative advisement model was developed by Dr. Jennifer L. Bloom Ed.D. at the University of South Carolina
 - ❖ www.appreciativeadvising.net
- ❖ “Appreciative advising is the intentional **collaborative practice** of asking positive, open-ended questions that help students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals and potentials”
 - ❖ Strengths-based
 - ❖ Puts students in control—especially crucial to TRiO's mission of empowering disadvantaged populations, but also has benefits to other populations, too

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

- ❖ “Collaborative practice” is at the heart of TRiO staff’s interactions with students
 - ❖ Embedded in job title: Student Success Advocates
 - ❖ Not from the top down—everything starts and stops with the student
 - ❖ Students shape the program as much as possible
 - ❖ Result is dramatically increased student ownership of and participation in the program
 - ❖ Example: physical layout of our space





WE SURVIVED FRESHMAN YEAR
AND LIVED TO TELL
THE TALES
TRIO PEER MENTOR

James White
Peer Mentor

WE SURVIVED FRESHMAN YEAR
AND LIVED TO TELL
THE TALES
TRIO PEER MENTOR

Asia Davis
Peer Mentor

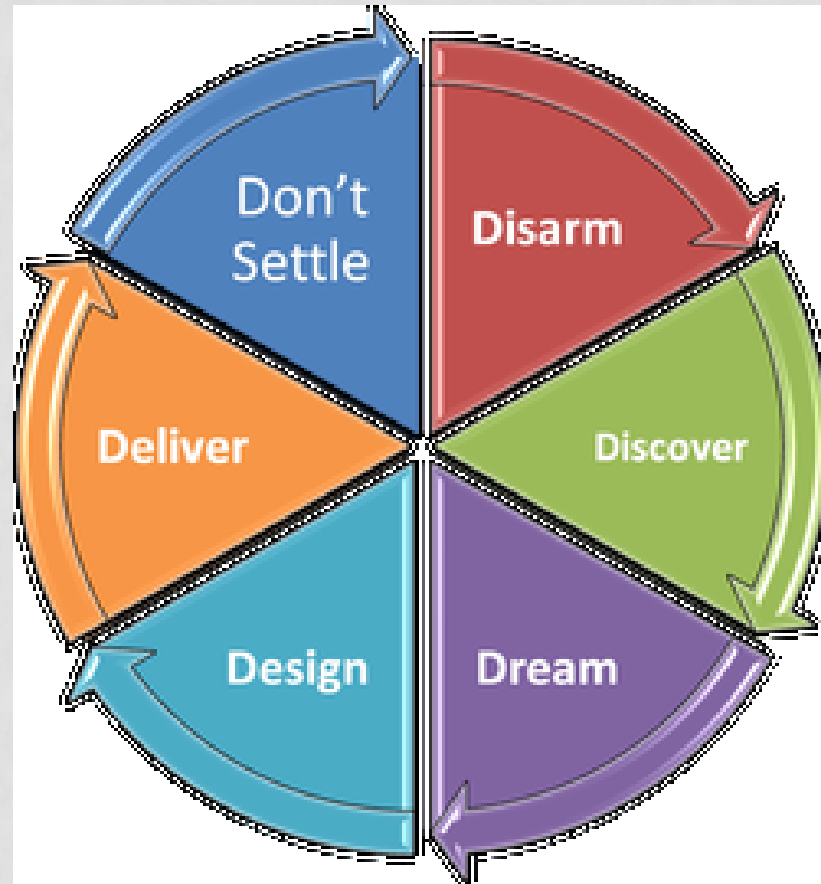
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Norman Thomas
Peer Mentor

6 PHASE PROCESS OF APPRECIATIVE ADVISEMENT

- ❖ Disarm
- ❖ Discover
- ❖ Dream
- ❖ Design
- ❖ Deliver
- ❖ Don't settle



- ❖ **Disarm:** Make a positive first impression with the student, build rapport, and create a safe, welcoming space
- ❖ **Discover:** Ask positive open-ended questions that help advisors learn about students' strengths, skills, and abilities
- ❖ **Dream:** Inquire about students' hopes and dreams for their futures
- ❖ **Design:** Co-create a plan for making their dreams a reality
- ❖ **Deliver:** The student delivers on the plan created during the Design phase and the advisor is available to encourage and support students
- ❖ **Don't Settle:** Advisors and students alike need to set their own internal bars of expectations high

THE KEY TO BEING AN EFFECTIVE APPRECIATIVE ADVISOR: KNOW YOUR INPUTS

- ❖ “You must make yourself indigenous to the place you hope to serve”
 - ❖ Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*
 - ❖ “Solidarity, not charity”
 - ❖ Community-based model
- ❖ For TRiO staff, this translates to being as **student-centered** as possible and trusting that the majority of the time, our **participants know better than we do** what is necessary for them to be successful

SO WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

- ❖ As part of the disarm phase, we ensure that TRiO staff are as accessible as possible:
 - ❖ Inviting “home base” for TRiO students
 - ❖ Personal items in our offices give a “feel” for who we are
 - ❖ Windows in offices
 - ❖ It is truly their space (they create bulletin boards, leave each other messages on whiteboards)
 - ❖ Welcoming community when they arrive and leave for the day
 - ❖ They become our ambassadors
- ❖ “Mentoring on the Run”
 - ❖ In addition to offering traditional appointments and drop-in times, we strive to meet students where they are
 - ❖ Doesn't end at 4 pm
 - ❖ Facebook
 - ❖ In hallways, student commons, even restrooms

DESIGN INTERVENTIONS WITH YOUR STUDENTS' NEEDS IN MIND

- ❖ Disarm phase goes hand in hand with discovery phase:
 - ❖ Once students trust you, they will disclose more about what their dreams are, what drives them, what holds them back
 - ❖ (ongoing process)
 - ❖ Knowing these things has helped us refine our programming
 - ❖ (also an ongoing process)
 - ❖ For example, even though Medaille students do tend to be academically underprepared, that is rarely the primary reason they leave the college:
 - ❖ Financial reasons
 - ❖ (partnership with Financial Aid)
 - ❖ Social/support reasons
 - ❖ (Planned Parenthood Breakup Skills workshop)

OTHER INTERVENTIONS: INDIVIDUAL GRADUATION PLAN (IGP)

- ❖ Serves as a contract between a student and an advisor about a student's plans for success, both academically, personally and career-wise during their time in college
- ❖ Goals are based in part on the success indicators laid out for each year while in college
- ❖ Student goals should help move them towards achieving these success indicators
- ❖ Meet at least once a semester

FRESHMAN SUCCESS SEMINAR

- ❖ Gives us a chance to meet with our advisees at least once per week and link them to crucial campus services
- ❖ Because students are often reluctant to seek out mentoring supports, “Effective programs...tend to be carefully interwoven with academic advising, career guidance, and other services and activities that are part of the student experience...**embedding a service with others increases its use and effectiveness**” (*Rethinking Institutional Action* 48).
- ❖ Designed curriculum with our participants’ needs in mind
 - ❖ Talking to your professors
 - ❖ Financial literacy
 - ❖ Opportunities to practice study skills in linked content courses
 - ❖ Embedded peer mentors

PEER MENTOR PROGRAM

OBJECTIVES OF THE PEER MENTOR PROGRAM

- ❖ Assist entering freshmen in making a smooth transition to college life
- ❖ Help new students feel a sense of belonging
- ❖ Provide students information and a link to resources they may need
- ❖ Encourage students to become active participants in their academic career
- ❖ Develop an environment supportive of new TRiO participants
- ❖ Develop leadership and professional skills for the mentors



DEVELOPMENT OF THE CURRENT PEER MENTOR PROGRAM

- ❖ Built on pre-existing program
- ❖ Researched what other schools were doing
- ❖ Created reasonable requirements for hours to earn stipend
- ❖ Developed mentor recruitment strategies and training materials
- ❖ Developed mentee recruitment strategies
- ❖ Survived the first year, assessed, and made changes

THE FIRST YEAR

- ❖ Summer mailing to recruit mentors
- ❖ August training day for mentors
- ❖ E-mail out to new TRiO students about program
- ❖ Meetings scheduled every week for further professional development
- ❖ Social planned in the fall semester to try to bring mentees and mentors together

LESSONS LEARNED AFTER THE FIRST YEAR

- ❖ Recruit in the spring for the following year's mentors
- ❖ Make sure mentors can commit to the entire year
- ❖ Ask for mentee interests on TRiO application to assist with assigning mentors
- ❖ Assign mentees over the summer so contact can be made prior to start of school
- ❖ Meetings every other week, rather than weekly
- ❖ Returning mentors help create and facilitate trainings
- ❖ Community service projects to increase mentee participation in the spring



FURTHER CHANGES

- ❖ Increase to 17 mentors and 200+ mentees
- ❖ Mentees opt in to TRiO via invitation to TRiO Orientation and/or are part of developmental learning communities
- ❖ TRiO Orientation with increasing Peer Mentor participation
- ❖ Addition of Wellness Center staff to August training

FURTHER CHANGES CONT.

- ❖ Rearrange required hours and stipend to be frontloaded in the fall
- ❖ New mentor workshop requirement
- ❖ Mid-year evaluations
- ❖ Universal Application with Student Affairs
- ❖ INT101 Peer Mentor Pilot



CHALLENGES

- ❖ Small campus = small pool of student leaders
- ❖ Mentors are still students themselves
- ❖ Mentee participation



ALUMNI MENTOR PROGRAM

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Offer a free exchange of information and ideas
- ❖ Introduce the idea of building long-term professional relationships and provide the opportunity to practice and refine those skills
- ❖ Have a positive impact on the participant's professional development
- ❖ Motivate students to work toward long-term goals
- ❖ Provide a better understanding of diverse career opportunities available

BENEFITS TO ALUMNI

- ❖ Support the professional development of future leaders
- ❖ Develop a reputation for grooming new talent
- ❖ Enhance coaching and leadership skills
- ❖ Provide a fresh perspective on your own performance
- ❖ Become a part of an expanded professional network
- ❖ Support Medaille College by increasing the likelihood that students will graduate

BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

- ❖ Network of career experts who are committed to their success
 - ❖ Positive role model who will share professional expertise and insight into career path
 - ❖ Advice on making the most of the college experience
- ❖ Opportunities to interact with the alumni community and other members of the larger Medaille community.



DEVELOPMENT

- ❖ Partnership between TRiO SSS and Alumni Association
- ❖ TRiO SSS began working on implementing program with just TRiO graduates in 2012, but found it difficult to reach interested alum
 - ❖ Recent graduates were reluctant – didn't feel they had much to offer yet
 - ❖ “Older” graduates missing or changed contact info
- ❖ AA coordinator had a pool of interested alum who had expressed desire to give back, but didn't have a target student population
- ❖ TRiO had the students, AA had the mentors – joined forces rather than duplicate efforts across campus

DEVELOPMENT

- ❖ 2013-2014 pilot year began with small pool; 1:1 match
- ❖ TRiO SSS matched mentor/mentees based on prior knowledge and application data
- ❖ Mailed out matching info to mentee and mentors including handbooks
- ❖ Help informational session with mentees to discuss expectations
- ❖ TRiO SSS and AA planned first events

EVENTS

❖ Etiquette Dinner – fall 2013

- ❖ First time many matches met in person
- ❖ Feedback: matches weren't able to talk because of nature of event

❖ Panel Discussion – spring 2014

- ❖ Matches shared mentoring experiences
- ❖ Mentors shared personal experiences and gave advice
 - ❖ Social media etiquette, importance of networking
- ❖ Mentees asked questions
- ❖ Students noted it was a great opportunity to widen their networking pool





LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ❖ Original idea was for program to run across the academic year similar to the PMP
- ❖ AMP relationships do not have a start/stop point
 - ❖ Alumni interest is continuous as AA reaches out through their initiatives
 - ❖ Phone-A-thon, Alumni Board meetings
 - ❖ The idea is that the relationship will develop into on-going, professional mentoring once students graduate
- ❖ Mentors want and can handle more mentees
- ❖ Mentees received mentoring from other mentors

UNEXPECTED BENEFITS FOR THE INSTITUTION

LIAISONS BETWEEN OFFICES

❖ Beneficial for Student Accounts

- ❖ Student holds resolved more quickly—communicate payment obligations/options

❖ Beneficial for Financial Aid

- ❖ FAFSAs filled out on time and correctly
- ❖ Help through verification process
- ❖ Talking about SAP early and often lessens the likelihood that they will run into aid issues

❖ Beneficial for College Relations

- ❖ Participant engagement in the TRiO community while undergrads leads to participation in the Alumni Association
- ❖ Current alumni have a meaningful reason to become more engaged (“giving back”)
- ❖ Engaged alumni are more likely to want to give financially

LIAISONS BETWEEN OFFICES, CONT'D

❖ Beneficial for Student Affairs

- ❖ TRiO Peer Mentors gain confidence and experience in leadership roles and go on to apply for other leadership positions (Resident Assistants, Orientation Leaders, etc.)
- ❖ Become part of college culture (attendance en masse at College functions/events, within clubs, etc. that might otherwise have low attendance)
- ❖ TRiO professional mentors help resolve Res Life issues

❖ Beneficial for Academic Affairs

- ❖ TRiO students are prepared for their advisement appointments and are in appropriate majors
- ❖ TRiO students have higher GPAs and are retained and graduate at higher rates than the general College population

TESTIMONIALS

EARL

- ❖ **Professional Mentors:** You all are like moms—you give us support, encouragement, and tough love when we really need it, plus reliable information that helps us.
- ❖ **Peer Mentors:** With [my peer mentor] Andrew being a Psychology major, he's helped me a lot to understand not only myself, but he's given me a sense of motivation and responsibility. He's helped me to understand that I'm not only in college for myself, but for my mother. Just as Andrew did, I would like to give back to another [student] ...I want to be that shoulder they can lean on if they need it or a kick if they need that.
- ❖ **Alumni Mentor:** With [my alumni mentor] Mike McKay, I feel like I've learned a lot. He's not just a mentor, he's like a professional dad. He knows the field that you're trying to get into and is there to guide you. He's there to smooth out the rough patches. With him at my side, I feel like I could take on the whole world.
- ❖ **Reflections:** The three mentoring programs come together to make a responsible student. TRiO is the cornerstone of the whole college. I feel that [each mentoring program is] separate, but like a tree with many roots that each has its way to help the student to grow.

ASIA

- **Professional Mentors:** You are all so supportive, helpful, and motivational – like cheerleaders!
- **Peer Mentors:** It's a great experience supporting my mentees and interacting with them as they adjust to school.
- **Alumni Mentor:** My mentor has been a great influence in my life. She is helping me decide what I want to be.
- **Reflections:** TRiO has made the greatest impact on my life.

DESIGNING YOUR OWN MENTORING PROGRAMS: SOME IDEAS FOR FIRST STEPS

Knowing your inputs:

- ❖ Where are your students struggling? What needs to improve?
What is the problem that you are trying to solve?
 - ❖ engagement? retention? GPAs? Something else?
- ❖ Important to know what this looks like on your particular campus with your particular population in order to design mentoring programming that targets their unique concerns
 - ❖ In our experience, mentor programs that primarily seek to benefit the institution fail because they are asking the wrong questions
 - ❖ Programs that put the students first, however, end up positively impacting the institution anyway!
- ❖ Ideas for figuring out your students' needs if you don't already have a built-in population:
 - ❖ Student focus groups
 - ❖ Surveys
 - ❖ Institutional retention/attrition data

DESIGNING YOUR OWN MENTORING PROGRAMS: SOME IDEAS FOR FIRST STEPS cont'd

Knowing your inputs:

- ❖ What do your students respond positively to?
 - ❖ e.g. On our campus, where the overwhelming majority of students are first-generation, we have found that a sense of membership/belonging is particularly important to them.
 - ❖ We have cut spending in other areas in order to be able to afford to buy new participants t-shirts each year.