Harnessing an explosion of educational ideas and multiple programs developed at a 2006 Strategic Planning Conference, De Anza College presently has a 92% completion rate for all its students, and more specifically, its at-risk students. Starting in their junior year of high school students are assigned a counselor/mentor. The students receive scheduled and drop-in counseling. Targeted students receive additional support while attending high school and are then guided into a college readiness summer program prior to starting the fall term. While in school they have a mentor and assigned counselor. At-risk students are counseled to improve their retention and success. Students are also set up with internships in their area of study. Industry sponsors will help them with tuition reimbursement.

Another major strategy developed at the 2006 Strategic Planning Conference that worked is “De Anza College’s Readiness Institute is a major factor in achieving our 92% completion rate”, says Brian Murphy, President of the College. “Ten years ago we were looking at a 47% retention rate and a 35% completion rate. We made a conscious effort to develop and implement dynamic institutional changes to improve those numbers.”

The College uses a variety of quarter long and short-term classes, such as “Learning Effective Study Habits” to assist incoming and continuing students achieve success.

As De Anza College sought ways to retain its students, the College built cooperative relationships with an extensive network of community-based and educational organizations. “Our partnership with our communities allows us to respond more effectively to the real needs from students, to bring community resources into play to support our students, and bridge the divide that often exists between colleges and their neighbors,” said Yolanda Arroyo, the Director of the college’s community collaboration project. “We recruit students, work with their schools and communities before they come and provide placements for them as they go through school,” said Arroyo.
Following the lead of special programs such as Automotive and Athletics, the entire campus community took on individualized student monitoring programs that focused on making sure students were attending classes, completing assignments, getting any extra help they needed, and acquiring the skills necessary to move to their next educational goal.

The focus on completion rates has created the need for counselors at De Anza College to have received extensive training to fully understand the needs of De Anza’s multicultural student body. Their assignments include working with a group of 40 new students per quarter and helping them plan an individualized curriculum plan to meet their needs.

Counselors meet with each of their students assigned twice per quarter. They review the students’ academic or vocational status and address issues of concern.

Because counselors establish a personal relationship with each student they understand the student needs: counselors adjust the student course load based on the personal issue the student is faced with. In addition, counselors provide the intervention services needed.

Yolanda Arroyo states that her success is due to the personal attention given to her by her counselor, Christina Espinosa-Pieb. As a matter of fact, Yolanda’s first born child was named after Christina.

De Anza College is actively represented by outreach liaisons in area high schools, cultural organizations and community agencies; attending area craft and art fairs with faculty and staff. As second year nursing student, Yolanda Arroyo told us, “I didn’t expect to learn about and become interested in a nursing career when I went to the Gilroy Garlic Festival. Look at me now with my daughter at the Child Development Center, a counselor/mentor who keeps me on track and the externship program. I’m graduating with a job lined up.