

A COMPANION FOR ADDITIONAL READING

# Engaging Faculty and Staff in the Student Success Agenda:

## Case Studies from the Walmart PRESS for Completion Grant Program

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Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count



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# FORWARD

William E. Trueheart, Achieving the Dream, Inc.

Community colleges are the pathways for millions of Americans to gain valuable education and to access career opportunities leading to family-sustaining wages. While great strides have been made to improve community college student success, the proportion of faculty and staff involved in these efforts remains relatively modest compared to the overall proportion of faculty and staff reaching students.

Faculty, student services staff, and administrators must share in the responsibility for student success if we are to meet national completion goals and reach even more students. To that end, Achieving the Dream, Inc. partnered with Walmart on the PRESS (Persistence, Retention, and Student Success) for Completion grant.

Through this grant, Achieving the Dream selected 15 Leader Colleges to test and expand innovative faculty and staff engagement strategies and student success interventions. Over a 27-month period, these colleges received technical assistance from experts in the field and Achieving the Dream, Inc. as they engaged faculty and staff in institutional reform.

There were two interconnected goals for the Walmart PRESS for Completion grant. The first goal was to broaden and deepen faculty and staff engagement so that colleges achieved more significant, sustainable gains in student success and completion. The second goal was to develop the capacity for Achieving the Dream to scale grant strategies by developing a robust national peer-coaching model that improves the transfer of knowledge from college to college.

This publication is a companion to *Engaging Faculty and Staff in the Student Success Agenda*, which is intended to be used as a tool to help Achieving the Dream colleges understand effective faculty and staff engagement strategies that promote student success. In this document, we provide additional case studies to assist you in your efforts to promote faculty and staff engagement.



## WORKING TOWARD A CULTURE OF EQUITY

David S. Powell, Lumina Foundation

*“Why do students waste their time and ours with appointments when they haven’t submitted the paperwork and tests we need to make any decisions?” asked a registration receptionist. “Students want special treatment but don’t do enough to help themselves,” bemoaned a faculty member. “What students today need is more personal responsibility,” declared a staff office professional. These expressions of exasperation echo throughout the halls of many a community college, including Brazosport College.*

*Brazosport College joined Achieving the Dream to foster understanding of the many challenges and barriers students confront and to work with colleagues nationwide finding creative solutions to bolster student success. Significant strides fostered notable improvement in transitional education programs at Brazosport, but by 2012 most of the college culture remained little changed. President Millicent Valek and Vice President Lynda Villanueva sought ways to broadly engage stakeholders other than counselors and transitional education personnel. They sought to spark conversations and dynamic solutions by engaging adjuncts, staff, and students in the task of understanding and adopting a culture of equity campus wide.*

*Clearly – and fortunately – things have changed at Brazosport, and History Professor Sasha Tarrant is part of that ongoing evolution. Empowered by President Millicent Valek and Vice President Lynda Villanueva, Tarrant is among those who are working to build a culture of equity at Brazosport. That culture – a shared set of policies, practices, and norms that shape behavior – is helping to close achievement gaps and improve educational outcomes for Brazosport’s students.*

*The job isn’t complete, of course, and never truly can be. After nearly 18 years in the president’s office, Valek knows that—and she’s well aware of the challenges that she and her colleagues face.*

*Still, the Brazosport record is an admirable one.*

*Since becoming an Achieving the Dream college in 2006 – through efforts such as its Learning Frameworks student success course, its College Writing Center, its work in improving developmental education and its commitment to faculty development – Brazosport has helped its students achieve:*

- *A 58 percent increase in degree and certificate attainment.*
- *A 21.2 percent increase in fall-to-spring retention.*
- *A 21.6 percent increase in the successful completion of gateway English.*
- *A 15.8 percent increase in the successful completion of college algebra.*
- *A 36.4 percent increase in the successful completion of developmental courses in reading.*
- *A 21 percent increase in the successful completion of developmental courses in writing.*

*In addition, Brazosport has closed the achievement gap between its Latino and white students. In fact, the college’s Hispanic students – 34 percent of its enrollment – now actually outperform their white counterparts academically.*

*These student success efforts have earned Brazosport national attention. In 2010, it earned a STAR award from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. In 2011, Excelencia in Education recognized it as one of the nation’s top programs in increasing*

*degree completion among Latinos. And last year, the Aspen Institute named Brazosport one of ten finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence.*

*The question, of course, is how did Brazosport make these strides? What has been its process for creating a culture of equity? How has it succeeded, and what student success and equity issues remain unresolved or unaddressed? In short, what lessons does the Brazosport experience offer to other institutions and their leaders? Perhaps the best people to impart those lessons are the college's senior administration and faculty, beginning with President Valek...*

When Brazosport College joined Achieving the Dream in 2006, President Millicent Valek embraced the effort, and she's worked since then to put student success at the center of the college's mission. The student-success agenda is now embraced by the board and embedded in Brazosport's strategic plan. It helps drive decisions about instruction, staffing, student services—even the board's annual review of Valek's job performance. However, she admits that it took some time for the student success agenda to permeate the culture at Brazosport. And she acknowledges that the more recent focus on equity is not yet fully adopted.

"This has been a journey of many years, and it's certainly not over," Valek says. "The way we started was probably the way many colleges do—with a specific group of hand-picked people, including administrators, faculty, and staff. They did a very good job with it, but a lot of the work was concentrated within that small group, and it didn't necessarily have a way of moving into the other parts of the college very naturally. That worried me for a long time."

Lynda Villanueva, Brazosport's vice president for academic and student affairs, cites an early example of what one might call the "island effect" of the work to forge a campus-wide culture of equity.

"When we began this work, we faced a challenge with some of the staff," Villanueva recalls. "They would often complain about 'those students who don't turn in forms or register early.' This type of attitude can adversely affect the way we interact with students, and it can leave some with the perception that they're not welcome. The reality, as we discussed it later, was that many of our students don't come from a college-going culture and don't have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to navigate college. We're learning that we need to provide these skills to our students and their families much earlier on."

Thinking back, Villanueva admits to being a bit surprised by some of the early pockets of resistance to the equity effort at Brazosport. "We initially thought that non-participants would be individuals who were not in the routine business of participating in student success interventions," she recalls, citing HR staff or child-care providers as possible examples. "But what we found was quite the opposite. There were many people from these areas who participated, and it was certain faculty and other departments who were less interested in participating. Early resistance was rarely overt or strident, Villanueva says. Rather, it revealed itself in "questions regarding whether this was a required activity and complaints that there was little time to participate."

Reaching the reluctant and changing some of those long-held attitudes hasn't always been easy, Brazosport officials admit. "At the end of the day, we still have some non-participants," Villanueva acknowledges. Still, she and other officials see significant progress. And the push for broad adoption – for a campus-wide, commonly held vision and mission – is still on Valek's mind, particularly as she and her colleagues seek to refocus the student success effort through the lens of social equity.

She says the commitment to student success was present early in the ATD experience, even though the "culture of equity" terminology didn't enter common parlance until about two years ago. "I think the language has



evolved, and the way we talk about this work has changed a bit,” Valek acknowledges. But she and Villanueva insist that, at its root, the work hasn’t changed; it’s always been about closing attainment gaps and helping each student succeed. At Brazosport, they say, building a culture of equity is all but synonymous with ensuring student success. And it was very much a natural outgrowth of the more tactical, task-oriented work that was launched with ATD – that is, looking at student outcomes data and using that data to identify and address gaps in achievement.

One of the first echoes of inequity at Brazosport came directly from that 2006 data—specifically, from the dismal success rates of students in developmental classes. For example, at that time only 5 percent of students in the college’s lowest-level developmental math courses went on to earn a C or better in college algebra, even after five years.

“A lot of our students come to us with math scar tissue,” Villanueva says. “They don’t see themselves as math learners or even attempt those difficult tasks. They have low self-efficacy. When we really looked at that data, well... talk about having some courageous conversations. What were we doing as an institution – or not doing – so that we were losing 95 percent of these students?”

From then on, increasing student success in developmental education has been a key part of the college’s equity agenda. “Closing that achievement gap between developmental students and college- ready students is at the heart of our equity work,” Villanueva says.

“Every college is different,” she points out, so each will approach this equity framework in its own way and time. “At first, though, you at least have to recognize that there are achievement gaps. You have to be willing to take a good, hard look at the data, identify those gaps and then really start drilling down and focusing on why those gaps exist. That’s usually where you hit those root issues of equity.”

According to Valek and her team, this leap from results to root causes – from the statistical to the social, if you will – was fairly simple for some of Brazosport’s faculty. For them, the culture of equity concept and language merely “acted as a trigger,” pushing them into active engagement “because it resonated with what they already felt.”

Sasha Tarrant understands that feeling. “As faculty members, we’re here because we’re passionate about teaching students and seeing each one of them achieve their goals,” she says. “That’s in our blood as educators. We care deeply about student success. It’s not just what we do; it’s who we are.”

But translating that passion into action isn’t always easy, and Brazosport’s leaders admit they faced challenges in that regard. Looking back to the early years of ATD, Valek recalls several important steps that she took as president to address those challenges.

Before 2006, she says, Brazosport’s student success work was housed in several separate areas. Faculty and staff were involved in a number of grant-funded initiatives—all worthwhile, but not systemic and not necessarily connected.

“Back then, we were very focused on meeting the deliverables for those various grants and projects, and they all had different names,” Valek recalls. Then came what she called a “watershed moment.”

“I called in the person who was then the vice president for student services, and I told her: ‘I’m taking our

work in all of these disparate initiatives and pulling them together. We're going to quit calling each of them by name; instead, we're going to make all of it one thing and just call it all our student success agenda.' And more important than that, I told her that this agenda was going to be one of the college's top priorities going forward."

This initial change from the top helped in several ways, Valek says. First, it simplified things—in effect, putting all of the various pieces of student-success work into one bucket for all to carry. Second, it cut the verbal clutter that had surrounded the work and prevented some individuals from embracing it. "I know that sounds like a very small thing," Valek says, "but it really did help when we reduced the confusion of language." Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Valek's move was a clear and visible step toward systemic change. "It took away in a lot of people's minds the temporary nature of this work," she recalls. No longer were faculty pursuing a collection of discrete two- or three-year grants. Each was part of a larger, unified, permanent effort—an effort clearly identified as an institutional imperative.

This initial, organizational step was crucial, Valek says, but it was just the first step. The next one, and one that continues in many forms and in many corners of the Brazosport campus, was the effort to foster broad engagement in the work—to get the student success agenda into the water supply and create a true culture of equity.

And one of the earliest moves in this effort? Valek went on tour.

Over several weeks, the president conducted a campus-wide "listening tour," a series of about 20 small-group discussions involving workers at all levels, from faculty and staff to maintenance personnel. At every stop, Valek says, she sought input from 20 to 30 campus colleagues on essentially one item: "I want to know what you're doing in your area to promote our student-success agenda."

The tour served two important functions. First, it gave Valek various front-line views of how, where, and how tightly Brazosport's student-success effort was being embraced. And some of those views were unexpected. "At one session, the first person to respond was one of the groundskeepers," Valek recalls. "And he told me: 'When I'm up on the lawnmower, I'm that extra set of eyes that keeps students safe on the jogging trail.' Well, that showed me that the message really was getting through, that people were internalizing the idea that this is everyone's job."

The second benefit of the listening tour came not in the messages Valek received during the sessions, but in the one she implicitly sent by meeting with scores of campus workers – at length and on their own turf. "It was a reinforcement of my seriousness about this, a statement about how important it is to me, and to the college." Though she feels her engagement efforts as president were valuable, Valek is under no illusions that everyone on campus is engaged or that she alone can make that happen. She knows that broad engagement can't be engineered from the top. Rather than directing the effort to create a culture of equity, she knows her most important role is to foster the environment that enables faculty and staff to drive that effort themselves.

That's where people like Sasha Tarrant come in.

Tarrant, a fourth-generation public educator and a 15-year member of Brazosport's full-time faculty, was an adjunct instructor in her first few years at the college. She still works as an adjunct, in fact—teaching an online course for another institution. The depth and breadth of her teaching experience – coupled with her history as a Brazosport student decades ago – make Tarrant uniquely qualified to understand the college's strides in

improving student success.

She well recalls the days before ATD. Back then, she says, there were “plenty of people who cared about helping students succeed – and a lot who cared very deeply,” but they lacked the system that could help them clearly define and tackle the problem in a structured way.

ATD brought that structure and provided a mechanism for – and an insistence on – information sharing. “Nobody wants to admit that they’re not successful, and yet deep down we knew weren’t as successful as we wanted to be,” Tarrant recalls. “And so in a way we dodged the bigger conversation about the lack of student success. Achieving the Dream threw light on the entirety of the problem; it helped us all see it from a broader perspective, not just from our own. By disaggregating the data, by helping us see old problems in new ways, it opened up these broader conversations that gave us more insight on how to deal with them.”

In a way, it’s now Tarrant’s job to keep those broader conversations going.

For one thing, she’s a member of the college’s equity committee, an interdepartmental, cross-functional group of about 20 individuals that includes Valek and Villanueva. The committee works in three broad areas: faculty development and engagement, infusing equity across the curriculum, and changing policies and practices that support equity. For example, committee members were instrumental in arranging a workshop in 2011 that helped Brazosport faculty and staff better understand the equity challenge. The workshop, led by MDC President David Dodson, explained the concept of structural inequity and helped campus personnel examine their own policies and practices to reveal possible examples of inequity at Brazosport.

However, Tarrant’s role in the faculty engagement effort goes beyond membership on the committee. Most visibly, she’s the outspoken advocate and co-chair of a program called Gaining Achievement Through Organized Reading (GATOR), a college-wide reading and discussion program that Valek calls the college’s “single most effective, explicit strategy to foster widespread engagement.”

Using funds from a WalMart PRESS for Completion grant, Tarrant worked with Library Director Tami Wisofski to transform GATOR into an interactive, organic effort that helps the entire campus community delve deeply into cultural and social equity issues. Created from successful programs at other colleges and then customized to the particular culture and personalities at Brazosport, GATOR launched in 2012- 13 as a six-phase, year-long examination of a single topic: poverty. Though participation in several phases of GATOR met with widespread interest, others fell flat.

Participation in the first phases of GATOR drew broadly from all areas of the college. Drawn only by the offer of professional development credit and their own commitment to our students, 70 percent of full time staff and 52 percent of full-time faculty attended one or more of the first three sessions in the fall of 2012. Rates of involvement fell by more than half of the fall rates in the spring of 2013 when GATOR centered conversations around journal articles rather than documentaries and a novel.

The GATOR team retooled the program to enhance what worked – documentaries and novels – and scrap what did not: journal articles. Feedback from the first year highlighted the powerful connections, insights and relationships developed between college employees and students during GATOR discussions. Though almost 100 students engaged in GATOR, we saw the potential for these conversations to further the culture of caring growing at Brazosport. The GATOR team decided to offer capsulated but paired topics from fall to spring so that each semester could be woven into courses, but the year-long program maintained a thematic continuity.

In 2013-14 participants examined the structural inequity challenges connected with race and ethnicity—focusing on Latino students in the fall of 2013 and African-Americans in the spring of 2014. Compared to the participation in spring of 2013, GATOR turnout rebounded in both fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters. Student attendance blossomed from about 100 in the first year to over 300 the second. Still, deeply seated dismissal of the persistence of ethnic and racial barriers drove away some who thoroughly enjoyed and benefited from the poverty conversations. Several felt so strongly about their feelings that racial and ethnic barriers are fabrications, they voiced these sentiments explicitly when they dropped out of the program for the semester. A strong undercurrent of “not in our back yard” drove these denials despite an abundance of evidence to the existence and magnitude of these barriers.

The voluntary GATOR program is just one element of the faculty-development effort, Tarrant points out. The college mandated other professional-development events for full-time faculty, including a workshop on Skip Downing’s On Course student success program and a three-hour Community Action Poverty Simulation designed to help faculty “walk a mile in the shoes” of low-income students.

Tarrant’s faculty-engagement role isn’t a casual or ad hoc affair. She’s paid extra – “not a lot,” says Villanueva, “but enough to show her that we value her contributions” – and, as in any institution committed to data-driven decision making, she’s expected to demonstrate results.

So far, though she’s “never fully satisfied,” Tarrant is pleased with the results. At least 100 students attended the GATOR sessions, sharing their perspectives with more than 200 faculty and staff members. What pleases her most, though, is that the engagement activities haven’t ended with mere dialogue.

They’ve led to meaningful, concrete actions that are chipping away at structural inequities on campus.

For instance, when GATOR discussions revealed that spotty bus service was hampering class attendance among part-time students, a campus group formed, took the issue to the local transit system and helped improve service. Likewise, when a faculty member pointed out that the college would only process tuition payments made by credit card or check, the GATOR group helped change bursar policy to allow partial payments in cash.

Tarrant’s peers agree that the faculty engagement strategies have changed attitudes and raised the collective consciousness of Brazosport’s faculty and staff. For instance, Villanueva recalls: “Last year when we focused on issues of poverty, I’m certain no one here thought that any of our students were homeless. Many were shocked to learn that we do indeed have homeless students.” She insists that this realization helped them more readily embrace the equity agenda. “There were several ‘non-believers’ among the faculty who, through the feedback sessions, sang a different tune after hearing from some of our own staff members that even they struggled to earn a living.”

Valek, too, is convinced that the engagement strategies are moving Brazosport’s faculty and staff in the right direction. “There really is a cultural mindset change,” she says, “and it’s been reflected in people’s attitudes and interactions.” Still, she admits that, to this point, faculty engagement has been more about awareness than about pedagogical action. The changes in mindset and attitude are absolutely vital and the next step is to ensure they are infused in classroom practices.

“At the end of the day, what happens in the classroom is the critical piece,” Valek acknowledges. And that, she says, is one of major challenges that Brazosport faces in moving the student success agenda forward.

“We are definitely a work in progress,” Valek says, “But in my mind, we’ve made significant movement over the years in creating the culture we need.” By her own, internal 10-point culture-of-equity scale, Valek gauges that Brazosport has progressed from “about a three to about a six—and that’s a huge step. But I’m well aware that getting from six to 10 is going to be even harder. And realistically, I don’t know that we’ll ever get to 10—or if anyone can. But I certainly want to keep the needle moving toward that target.”

“We have the data foundation now,” Valek says, “but we haven’t made full use of it.” And that, she says, has to change. “It’s critically important that we now fully capitalize on this.”

One way to do that, Valek suggests, would be using the data system to uncover what might be called hidden achievement gaps. For instance, the ostensibly positive data on the performance of Hispanic students may not be telling the whole story. There may be subpopulations – Hispanic students of low income, perhaps, or those who enrolled at the lowest level of developmental education – whose achievement rates are far below those of their peers. Making these sorts of targeted, detailed data sweeps – and making good decisions based on the results – could yield significant gains in student achievement, Valek points out.

But she sees an even bigger opportunity, a broader application of Brazosport’s data capacity: tying it directly into the college’s accreditation process. “That’s a next step I definitely see us focusing on,” Valek says. “The data capability can inform the reaccreditation process as part of our institutional effectiveness model. That has great potential to benefit students in the classroom, and it can have a significant long-term effect.”

Still, she admits those long-term effects won’t even begin to show up in student success data for at least three years. And even when that data system is being used to best effect, it can’t carry the whole load when it comes to equity and student success. The key, Valek says, is a coordinated, systemic approach featuring several elements, both human and technological.

For one thing, she says, faculty engagement must continue—in a permanent, systemic way that invites broad participation and therefore requires delegation. Second, Valek says, faculty development efforts must continue—sustained, embedded programs that give instructors and staff the tools they need to truly serve students and help them succeed. Finally, the use of data mining for student success indicators must be ramped up and tied to the accreditation effort. And all three of these things must happen concurrently.

“There’s no one thing that does it all,” Valek insists. “But when you layer all of these things together, that’s how the deep change comes about, I think. You’ve got cultural change going on through broad engagement on campus, and you’re giving faculty the tools they need to help students, and you have your institutional effectiveness model working at the program level, with people really engaged in it. I think the gestalt of those three strategies is what will yield the results we need.”

Keeping these three trains moving simultaneously is the big challenge, Valek says, but there are other things that keep her up nights as well. “For one thing,” she asks: “how do we ensure that the work we’ve been doing doesn’t ever have to start over—that it continues?” Succession planning is important, she says—and not just at the senior administrative levels. Making sure that equitable viewpoints and practices endure among faculty is just as vital.

“That’s why our work in professional development is so critical,” Valek insists. “And those efforts have to become systemic, too. If we can nail down our systems and get those institutionalized, then [individuals’] roles can change more easily and the systems continue.”

Sasha Tarrant agrees that sustaining momentum will be key.

“This requires long-term persistence and creativity,” she says. “The minute you think you have this solved, you’re in trouble. If we’re going to continue building on the successes that we have, we need to communicate effectively—both on-campus and in the wider community. We need to keep that information loop going—and that means really listening, not just telling people what we’re doing. We need to listen to our students, to our community, to each other. We always need to keep pushing on that. Yet pushing to fast, too long and too hard on one spot can foster resistance where we seek empathy. The focus on race and ethnicity in 2013-2014 drove that lesson home. This doesn’t mean we shy away from the big issues, but rather we need to mix the palatable with the jarring to maintain a positive, proactive environment.”

## **CREATING PERSONAS (OR WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS CAN HURT YOU)**

Brian Hayden, Leslie Tennant, & Melissa D. Denardo, Community College of Beaver County

A small, paper stand up figure named Katie sat on Dr. Joe Forrester's desk as Carl Dennis, John Gall, and Brian Hayden talked with great enthusiasm about design thinking and the game they played during the Strategic Horizon Spring Colloquium at the University of Cincinnati (UC). Katie was a fictional student. She was 19, worked at American Eagle Outfitters, and wanted to be a teacher. A few days earlier, this team watched her try to get through four semesters of community college only to be stopped, slowed, and discouraged along the way. Katie didn't graduate on time in our game, a similar outcome for the other college teams from around the country and, of course, for our own students at Community College of Beaver County (CCBC).

Carl, John, and Brian shared with President Forrester how this game had opened their eyes to the challenges many community college students face during their time on campus, and how it helped them, as college employees, feel their students' frustrations and successes along the way. In the room at UC, you could listen to other teams cheering and cursing as their students faced similar experiences. In a few short days, we recognized that this could be a powerful tool on our campus and asked Dr. Forrester to find a way to introduce design thinking to a larger audience.

This re-energized group of administrators sensed that should more employees get a chance to "play the game," this collective experience could have a deep and wide impact on how the college community interacts with and serves students.

Taking a leadership leap of faith, Dr. Forrester brought the same consultant who led the design thinking exercises at the Strategic Horizons event, Dr. Ann Welsh, to facilitate faculty, staff and students in creating our own "Katies" and playing the game at Faculty Convocation.

What we saw and heard surprised us all: "You don't have a clue about us."

A CCBC student uttered this simple yet powerful statement matter-of-factly to a faculty member during a discussion of things that enable and inhibit student success on our campus.

The statement caught the attention of Dr. Forrester, who insisted we explore its implications further. It turned out the student was right. We didn't know our students or why they came to us—much less how we could assist them or how we should communicate with them. In order to focus on a better understanding of our students, their needs, expectations, and goals, we had to develop a more structured and creative approach to profiling our students and generating informed decisions on how best to respond to and serve them.

As Dr. Welsh explains, "design thinking is about examining possibilities. It is best understood as a user-centered methodology of enablement wherein the needs and aspirations of people are identified, and experiences that

satisfy them are created.”

The five phases of the design process include the following steps:

1. Discovery – I have a challenge. How do I approach it?
2. Interpretation – I learned something. How did I interpret it?
3. Ideation – I see an opportunity. What do I create?
4. Experimentation – I have an idea. How do I build it?
5. Evolution – I tried something. How do I evolve it?

*Source: [www.ideo.com/work/toolkit-for-educators](http://www.ideo.com/work/toolkit-for-educators)*

The college became acquainted with Dr. Welsh through our participation in the Horizons Network, a program that began in 2004 (as Strategic Horizons) with 14 community colleges from across the country as its charter members. Operating out of the University of Michigan Center for the Study of Postsecondary and Higher Education, the program is based on the shared belief that community colleges are in a position to move to the forefront of higher education and build on their emerging high profiles. Areas of strategic focus for member colleges include: change design and management, strategic thinking, process management, creating value, communication, organizational culture mapping and change, and leadership development.

During our fall convocation in 2011, college faculty, staff, and administration participated in a design thinking exercise that identified enablers and inhibitors to student success. The pathways and roadblocks were then used to either advance or detain our student game pieces. We found that enablers to student success are the people in students’ lives (highly engaged faculty, tutors, and counselors) and inhibitors are many of the processes of the college (including study skills, time management, and understanding the college’s culture).

### **Enablers to Success**

- Family and Friends
- Teachers
- Counselors
- Tutors
- Finances
- Personal Traits

### **Inhibitors to Success**

- Family and Friends
- Learning Habits
- Alcohol and Drugs
- Transportation
- Childcare
- Finances
- Personal Issues

One faculty member, in particular, recounted the frustration level at her team’s table while playing the game. “The lack of progress we were making in getting our ‘student’ around the game board and successfully to



graduation day was aggravating,” she said. “It was also the first time that we, as faculty and staff of the college, really got a sense of what our students must feel like when life gets in the way of their studies or when our internal processes make it more difficult for them to achieve their goals.”

It was the impact of game day at fall convocation that led to the decision to move forward with creating personas, or archetypes, to broadly represent the student population on campus.

During the spring of 2012, we applied for and were awarded the \$100,000 Walmart PRESS for Completion Grant. At the Reston, Virginia kickoff event, we began selecting membership for a group of college stakeholders who would first interview students to determine their expectations, needs, and aspirations, and then go on to use this new-found knowledge to design a leading edge educational experience for our students.

As a result, the F.A.S<sup>2</sup>.T. Academy became a diverse team of faculty, administrators, staff, students, and trustees. All of the college’s vice presidents are members and active participants of the F.A.S<sup>2</sup>.T. Academy, as was one of our nine trustees. All participants attended meetings regularly and were involved in the creation of the personas. As the game, and our own student, so bluntly pointed out to us, in order to design new learning environments or student experiences, we first needed to get to know the student population better, including their individual needs, aspirations, and motivations.

The first step was to talk to current students about their experiences at CCBC and why they come here. All 50 F.A.S<sup>2</sup>.T. Academy participants were provided with questionnaires and asked to talk to at least 10 students each from groups such as student government, student ambassadors, athletics teams, and more. Faculty members teaching general education courses with diverse populations of students, such as English Composition and Introduction to Information Technology, were also tapped to survey their classes and gather a broad perspective of their experiences at CCBC and why they come here. In the end, we interviewed more than 200 students asking them questions about their family situation, education background, socioeconomic condition, work experience, and hobbies. We also found out how they wanted to feel at CCBC, their motivations for enrollment, and their aspirations for life after graduation.

The F.A.S<sup>2</sup>.T. Academy gathered again following the student interviews and worked intensively discussing the feedback in an attempt to come up with similarities, or common data points, among our students. During development of the personas, we also worked diligently to determine what our students needed in order to be fully engaged at the college. Personalities and stories began to emerge as we sorted the data and began to give faces, names, and “Day in the Life” stories to our personas.

One academy member remembers the workshop day spent sorting through the hundreds of student interviews as “hard work.”

“The directions that Dr. Welsh gave us were purposely vague. Working in teams to sort through the student interviews in order to find clarity and consensus, was probably the hardest, most frustrating point in the process for most members, including myself.”

The group walked away from that session tense and unsure of where we were heading. Because the design thinking process is not prescriptive, it froze some people within the organization. We had to break free from our tendency as a culture to build from constraints and instead examine all the possibilities. The next step in the creation of our personas allowed us to do just that as we began sketching with markers and paper what these students would look like. Laughter filled the conference room as participants had fun drawing and embellishing (complete with 80’s rock star hair) each persona’s physical characteristics.

The total design thinking process led to the creation of 12 student personas, which now serve as archetypes (not stereotypes) of the student population at CCBC. In the end, the personas were created and achieved with broad engagement across campus, including participation from over 20 percent of our employee base and 10 percent of enrolled students.

However, one of the contentious, yet key, points in finalizing the personas was a difficult discussion on the distinction between personas and stereotypes. Some members of the F.A.S.<sup>2</sup>T. Academy expressed concern that we had missed some personas, including a person of color. Our consultant helped us to think about the difference between personas and stereotypes, and that our purpose was to only work with what our students told us. From that point on, our mantra was “students didn’t tell us that!” But, to make sure we had correctly understood our students, we did a focus group with approximately 10 African-American students asking them if they identified with the existing personas; their unanimous answer was that they did. It turns out that their experiences were more related to moving here from another city or being in a lower socioeconomic class. Finally, we tested our personas with a diverse group of real students, faculty, and staff by asking one very simple question: “Do you know this person on our campus?”

When the personas were finally complete, they were presented at the annual board retreat. A “Day in the Life” of Mary, a divorced empty nester deciding to return to school to fulfill her long-deferred career dream, was read aloud. This interaction was the beginning of the change in the way we think about, communicate with, and respond to our diverse student population. Mary, and students like her on campus today, became truly real for every person in that room for perhaps the first time.

What we didn’t know about our students prior to the persona project really held us back as we sought to improve student success and retention. Now, we are using these personas as a tool to better understand all of our students and to better inform our decision-making processes.

“We no longer talk about our veterans, we talk about David and how serving in Iraq affected him,” reflects one faculty member. “Instructors started sharing with each other tips about teaching to veterans: don’t use laser pointers as they can remind them of being targeted by an enemy. I don’t know if we would have had that conversation without the David persona coming to life on our campus.”

It is this personalization that is helping us to more effectively serve and support students in ways that have relevance to their issues, needs, and concerns. The personas are helping us to focus on all aspects of the student experience at CCBC, and here’s another example of how.

Emily and Jessica are both 19 year old female students at CCBC. When a fairly significant tuition increase was on the table during the 2013-2014 budget process, we looked at the impact the additional costs would have on both of these types of student. How does a significant tuition increase impact one student versus another? Emily, who lives at home, works part-time, and has her education funded by her supportive parents, will most likely stay enrolled at CCBC. However, Jessica is a single mother, living on her own and surviving on public assistance and two or more part-time jobs. For Emily, the tuition increase likely has minimal impact, but for Jessica, the increase represents money no longer available for bus passes needed to travel to work or to campus, for childcare, or for food. The increase makes it likely that she will no longer be able to attend college.

Looking at a potential tuition increase through Emily and Jessica’s eyes, forced the college administration and the board of trustees to think about the decision differently, and while the increase did take effect that fall semester, interventions were also addressed to ensure that Jessica remained enrolled at CCBC if at all possible.

These included: increased promotion of scholarship opportunities and the establishment of emergency funds for special populations through the CCBC Foundation.

Creating student personas also prompted us to change direction on several key student success initiatives ranging from new structures for developmental math, college success strategies, first-year seminar courses, and new student orientation.

Through the work of the PRESS grant, our academy members were able to review the data, both quantitative and qualitative, for two new initiatives that were implemented that academic year, the first of which was a year of transition and challenges for our developmental mathematics course, PREP 300.

After determining that the previous design of two levels (Improvement of Mathematical Skills and Fundamentals of Algebra) was not creating the results we desired, we switched to one course, utilizing the emporium model where students are scheduled for class time with an instructor and work independently utilizing MyFoundationsLab through a series of chapters and modules. It was intended that students would be able to move quickly through topics in which they were proficient, all with the benefit of an instructor present for questions or assistance. Unfortunately, first semester results were disappointing with passing rates lower than the previous, traditional course design. Many suggestions surfaced during the F.A.S<sup>2</sup>.T. Academy meetings including standardizing course orientation for students, re-training faculty, improving campus-wide communication about the course, publicizing tutoring hours, and creation of a Blackboard discussion board, just to name a few.

The second initiative the F.A.S<sup>2</sup>.T. Academy reviewed was new student orientation. During the summer of 2012, we “revised” our new student orientation event. Our first outcome was to ensure that students felt welcome on campus and received the necessary information to enable success right from the very start. The college ensured in-depth assessment of this initiative by collecting student evaluations at the event, conducting a Compression Planning session with the faculty and staff volunteers, and gathering information through student focus groups. A wealth of data were gathered and examined by the F.A.S<sup>2</sup>.T. Academy during the workshop our design thinking consultant, Ann Welsh, facilitated. During this intensive workshop, college faculty, administrators, students, staff, and trustees identified changes to the registration process, the welcome session, campus tours, breakout sessions, and lunch with the faculty based on student feedback for implementation in the fall. While the college was able to identify what changes will be made to these two initiatives, many other items surfaced during the workshop that will be discussed over the next year. And, possibly, the college will change many other policies, procedures, and practices based on what we now know about the students who enroll at CCBC and their desired experiences.

The persona project also helped us improve communication and plan more targeted marketing strategies for various student groups as we learned more about why they enroll and what they want to experience when they get to CCBC. Based on conversations with our students during fall 2012, we now know for certain that students expect an environment where they are welcomed, respected, feel financially secure, are challenged, and where they can develop a sense of accomplishment.

Getting to know our students better through persona creation and storytelling has inspired our faculty, staff, and administration to hear the voices of our students all the time. Every department on campus has their own set of persona cards, and we have a common story and vocabulary to use when talking about students, their experiences with us, and the impact our daily decisions have on their lives.

One year later, Dr. Forrester, who is now preparing for impending retirement, is walking across campus and stops outside the conference room where students and employees had gathered to play a simple board game. Stepping inside the room, he looks up along the wall to see the faces of 12 CCBC students staring back at him—framed, poster sized persona cards that serve as his living legacy on campus, and a constant visual reminder for the rest of us that we have transformed into a more collaborative and student-focused college community as we look towards the future.

### **MEET OUR STUDENTS**

**Amanda** – 28 year old, lives with boyfriend, has 2 children, works part-time

**Chris** – the unknown student

**Emily** – 19 year old, lives with family, works but has support, plans to transfer

**Jessica** – 19 year old, lives away from family, single mother, receives public assistance

**Tyler** – 19 year old, lives with family, works part-time, plans to transfer

**Andrew** – 24 year old, single, wants a degree to get something better out of life

**Clarence** – 21 year old, lives at home with parents, uses Supportive Services

**Mary** – 50 year old, divorced mother of adult kids, taking her turn to go to college

**Brittney** – 24 year old, online student, single living with family, works full-time, wants to advance

**Michael** – 35 year old, got degree and moved away, lost job, returning home for new career

**David** – 30 year old, returning home from military service, needs a new career, married/kid

**Heather** – 34 year old, has a degree but no job, returning for new career options, married/kids



## **JOHNNY CAN READ....AND DO MATH, AND BUSINESS, AND BIOLOGY**

Andrew Bajda, Patty Shelton, Patrick Stansberry, & Peter Wickley,  
Cuyahoga Community College

### **SUCCESS**

The overarching goals of the biology, math, English, and business initiatives supported by the Walmart PRESS for Completion grant were to identify, refine, and implement strategies to increase faculty, student, and staff engagement with the goal of improving student success and completion in a specific class for each of these disciplines. Here is a deeper look into each class and their outcomes through the eyes of a fictional student: Johnny Komlatly.

### **JOHNNY HAS DOUBTS**

Johnny Komlatly tried to convince himself that the irritating knot growing in his stomach was due to the unavailability of parking spaces, but in reality he knew otherwise. As he was maneuvering through the overflowing parking lot, his thoughts bounced back and forth between reflections of the past ten years and the unknown of what might lie ahead.

Ten years had passed since Johnny last attended school. And walking out the doors of Yumadit High School, Johnny was convinced that he had seen the last of any school. School was never really his thing. Graduation afforded an opportunity to get a job, get his own place, travel the world, and even buy a car that wouldn't break down every few months. But life sometimes has a way of changing plans.

Johnny was married now, with a five year old daughter and increased responsibilities beyond what he could have ever imagined. He managed to maintain a job at the local grocery store, but his last promotion had probably taken him as far as he'd go with the company. And he wasn't very happy at work, feeling underappreciated and unable to utilize the creative skills that everyone told him he possessed.

Fortunately, his wife had recently gone back to work at the bank and told him now was the time to make a move. If they were to ever move into their dream house and grow the family, Johnny had to follow up with a plan to go back to school and increase his options for finding meaningful employment. However, what sounded so simple at the time was now being met with growing apprehension.

Still searching for a parking space and observing students walk out of the parking lot toting bulky book bags, Johnny mused about how he would manage this. Textbooks! Just the thought of reading and retaining information from that thick biology textbook sent shivers up and down his spine, not to mention increased that knot in his stomach. How would he possibly manage to comprehend and understand all the complex-looking information in that textbook?

Here our tale needs a bit of exposition. Reading issues are prevalent at all colleges and are too often ignored. However, reading is a foundational issue, and you cannot build on a faulty foundation. Too many students – the majority? – do not get what they need out of texts. A few statistics cited from The Literacy Cooperative (<http://>

literacycooperative.org/litstats.htm) illustrate the scope of the problem.

- 47 percent of the population of Cuyahoga County over age 16 have literacy levels below Level 3. (Level 3 Literacy: read a bus schedule to choose the correct bus to arrive on time, write a brief letter to explain a billing error)
- 12.5 percent of county residents and 30 percent of Cleveland city residents are at Level 1 Literacy (Level 1 Literacy: locate one piece of information in a sports article, locate the expiration date on a driver's license; total a bank deposit entry)

And if students struggle with something as fundamental to college work as reading, how can they persist and succeed, and will they return for the following semester and the next and the next?

Back to Johnny: Beyond the fear of textbooks, he wondered how he could possibly compete with the throng of students he watched walking towards the campus buildings. Ten years is a long time to be away from school, and doubt again began to creep in. Was this really a good idea? He was never very interested or good at school, and had a bit of a reputation for not completing what he started. Suddenly, going back to school was not sounding like a very good idea.

Finally, he found an open spot! After pulling into the parking space, Johnny stopped to take one last look and made sure that he had everything he needed. Peering inside the book bag revealed fresh blank notebooks, pen and pencil, textbooks, and of course a schedule for classes that he had viewed umpteen times. He took out the well-worn paper to check one last time before exiting the car.

- BADM 1020 Introduction to Business
- BIO 1100 Introduction to Biological Chemistry
- MATH 0910 Basic Arithmetic and Pre-Algebra
- ENG 1010 College Composition I

This was NOT going to be easy. How could he possibly succeed in taking four courses that appeared so daunting, and when he had not attended school for 10 years? Why did he need English and math to get a job? How will he survive that biology class? And could he actually learn enough about business to compete with better students or more experienced professionals? Johnny tried to reassure himself; the ad for Tri-C did say "Where Futures Begin." That was what caught his attention, and now was the time to find out. Johnny grabbed his book bag to join fellow students walking toward the maze of buildings; the knot had not gone away.

## WHERE FUTURES BEGIN

The television and radio ads for Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) certainly did have an impact. One evening, while watching a Tri-C commercial that ended with a former student happily proclaiming, "Tri-C, Where futures begin", Johnny's wife suggested that he leave his job to take classes in preparation for a new career. Johnny visited the Tri-C website and found the following information to be quite compelling.

The mission of Cuyahoga Community College is "To provide high-quality, accessible and affordable educational opportunities and services – including university transfer, technical, and lifelong learning programs – that promote individual development and improve the overall quality of life in a multicultural community."

Opened in 1963, Cuyahoga Community College is the largest college in Greater Cleveland and the first and largest community college in Ohio. The college serves more than 60,000 credit and non-credit students each

year and offers more than 1,000 credit courses in over 140 career and technical programs, as well as many programs for continuing education, business and industry, and workforce development.

Cuyahoga Community College provides educational opportunities through its four campuses – in downtown Cleveland, Highland Hills, Parma, and Westlake – in various community locations, and through a variety of distance learning options. College facilities also include the Advanced Technology Training Center on the Metropolitan campus, the Brunswick University Center, and Corporate College facilities in Westlake and Warrensville Heights that provide employers with custom-made training and educational opportunities to enhance the skill levels of those already employed.

More than 85 percent of the college's graduates continue to live in Northeast Ohio, providing a pool of skilled workers for area employers. Cuyahoga Community College is a member of the prestigious League for Innovation in the Community College, a consortium of the 20 most innovative two-year colleges in the nation. The latest student count is a very healthy 27,910. And the following demographics provided Johnny with a bit more security in attending classes at Tri-C.

- Average age is 29 years
- Student ages range from 15 to 75-plus
- 62 percent are women
- 35 percent are from minority groups
- 59 percent study part-time
- 59 percent are enrolled in technical job training courses
- 34 percent are taking courses to prepare for transfer to a four-year institution
- 23 percent attend classes only in the evening and on weekends
- Overall student-teacher ratio is 18:1

Johnny was surprised to learn that Tri-C employed a total of 1,342 full-time and 2,442 part-time workers. Of the faculty, 360 served full time and an additional 1,064 were employed by the college. All adjunct professors are required to have both work experience and an advanced degree in the area of their teaching.

Another fact that caught his attention was Tri-C's recognition as an exemplary learning and teaching community, fostering service and student success. It seemed that Tri-C was a Leader College in a program called Achieving the Dream (ATD). This national program was the most comprehensive non-government reform movement for student success in higher education history. One of the ATD initiatives was a program called PRESS (Persistence, Retention and Student Success), in which the college worked to deepen faculty and staff engagement for the purpose of increasing student success.

Johnny was beginning to feel a little bit better about his decision... although there remained a great deal of apprehension.

### **JOHNNY'S JOURNAL**

Tri-C has a very effective new student orientation that introduces students to a multitude of student support services the college offers. One important aspect to this experience is that new students can sit down with a Tri-C counselor to discuss a wide variety of topics ranging from academic scheduling to dealing with test anxiety. Johnny's anxiety wasn't just about taking tests.

Jill had been a counselor at the Western campus for many years and has seen and dealt with many things. She

loved her job and she was in fact very good at it. She could immediately feel Johnny's anxiety as he slowly sauntered into her office. His stress was palpable.

He eyed the seat in the corner of the room, politely introduced himself, and began to explain his apprehensions about starting school all over again after so many years. After intently listening for several minutes, Jill had a simple request that at first seemed too simple to Johnny. "A journal?" Johnny asked. "Yes," she said. "I want you to write down what you are feeling as you go through this semester. It will be your release."

Johnny walked out of the counselor's office and immediately visited the campus bookstore, where he purchased a notebook that would serve as his journal. The pages that follow contain excerpts from the pages of his journal. They represent the thoughts and feelings of Johnny as he progressed through the good times and bad times of his fall 2013 semester at Tri-C.

### 8.30.13 (Math)

*I can't believe how nervous I was today for my first math class. Math was my worst subject in high school and I am so dreading that class. I really hate math. That 200 page syllabus had so many words and assignments on it. I have no idea how I am going to keep up with all of this! I don't even know why I need this class; I am never going to use this stuff! Why do I need to know how to add fractions when I'm a doctor or a business owner... UGH!?! I have homework every night and a quiz every week and I have to complete some kind of worksheets that aren't math related! How stupid is that? I guess I won't see any of my friends this semester.*

### 9.1.13 (Biology)

*I just had my first BIO 1100 class and the professor made me feel a little at ease with all this chemistry. The material we covered today I actually sort of remember from high school. But, after looking at the syllabus and the class schedule I think the hard stuff is yet to come. One interesting thing about this class though is that multiple review sessions (called something else I think) run by Tri-C faculty are offered this semester for help in this specific class. Our professor handed out the schedule for these sessions and the session run by my professor works with my schedule on Friday mornings! I will have to check this out.*

### 9.2.13 (Business)

*I think I'm really going to enjoy my Intro to Business class. I came in really nervous, not having much idea what to expect with a business class or even the business world. When I think of business I see a bunch of people dressed in suits, working all kinds of business deals, requiring advanced degrees and complex friendships with powerful people. But our professor made it sound very interesting and being more about finding what you enjoy, working with people, and aspiring to do meaningful things in life. We're going to be meeting many people who have been successful in different areas of business throughout the semester. And almost 1/3 of our final grade is going to be based upon our own personal plan, which I think is cool. We're going to take a test that shows what area of business may be best suited to us based upon our skills and interests. Can't wait to see what the test will show for me! We'll also be meeting with a counselor in the classroom, who will work with us to schedule classes that will get us in the degree of our choice in a timely manner. All of this support will go into our final plan, and we'll learn how to market ourselves and make the plan appear as a professional business report.*

### 9.2.13 (English)

*This class is a lot like what I remember from high school. You read some stories and articles and write about them, then you write big essays. I never liked English class back then, and maybe that's why I never read much of anything now except stuff on the internet, but these articles are a lot harder. They have words I don't know and long sentences that seem to go nowhere. We don't start the big writing for a few weeks. I am not looking forward to that.*

### 9.10.13 (Biology)

*I do not understand why this class is a Biology class when it is SOOOO much chemistry. But, I feel as though I am staying on top*



*of everything even though I haven't been able to go to a single Friday morning recitation period like I hoped I could. My daughter's daycare has changed its hours and my work schedule has been changing quite a bit lately and this has messed up my school schedule. With my first exam coming up, I hope I will be ready.*

#### 9.13.13 (Business)

*Well any level of apprehension about attaining a business degree is quickly vanishing. Today I attended a "Welcome" for all business majors, and it was actually fun. Not only did I meet with a number of students in the business program, but I also met many of the business professors, the dean, and even the campus president. It was mostly informal and everyone was friendly, they even had snacks and gave out some prizes. Each of the professors spoke for a few minutes to introduce themselves, explaining the courses they teach and providing a bit of their teaching philosophy. I wrote down the names. Now I have some ideas on which professors I'd like to have for future classes. One of the professors is an advisor to a PRESS Club; PRESS was mentioned a lot during the welcome. It's a program that gets students to successfully complete their degrees, and the club does a lot of fun and interesting activities on the campus. I signed up and will attend the next meeting. Seems a good way to meet people and have some fun. I also won a prize. All you had to do was ask around and pay attention to the speakers, find out who teaches certain classes, who is the dean of the business program, what PRESS stands for, stuff like that. From what I learned, this flash drive that I won with the PRESS logo will come in handy.*

#### 9.14.13 (Math)

*Last week I had to complete a syllabus quiz and make a weekly schedule for my math class. I guess doing that will somehow help me learn math. Whatever! I had to write down the days and times to do my homework for the next 4 weeks to get ready for the first quiz and test. So far this week, I have stuck to my schedule. I had a quiz this week and I think I got them all right. I thought these worksheets would be annoying but I actually don't mind them. They seemed like they would be a lot of work but so far, they have helped me find time to do my homework.*

#### 9.16.13 (Reading Issues)

*One thing that I think I am struggling with right now is reading my textbooks for my classes. It seems like I read the material over and over but nothing is sticking in my brain. I don't know if I am reading them the right way. Come to think of it, I don't remember ever being taught how to read a textbook in high school. Reading my biology and math textbook is so much different than my English and business ones. I wish I had a plan to follow to read these texts.*

#### 9.20.13 (Biology)

*Wow. I just had my first exam in my biochemistry class and it did NOT go well. I know chemistry is not my thing but, boy, if this exam is any indication of how the rest of the class is going to be, I am in a heap of trouble. I am not a huge fan of admitting that I need help, but I officially do in this class. Good thing my Friday mornings have finally cleared up because I REALLY need to get to Dr. Wickley's recitation period.*

#### 9.23.13 (Biology)

*So, I went to my first recitation period and it was awesome! There was a lot of group work that was a little weird at first, but one of the students in my group today understood conversion factors (something that I really struggle with), and she explained it to me in a way that just clicked. I even went up to the board to show how to do a problem and I had the correct answer! I walked out feeling so much better about myself because I actually understood how to do some of this stuff!*

#### 9.27.13 (English)

*I got my first paper back, and it turns out I'm not as bad a writer as I thought. The professor said my basic sentences and paragraphs were pretty good, though I've got a lot of what he called comma splices. But my ideas are completely disorganized, and I don't have a thesis and introduction. The professor showed me a chart in the textbook that explains all the parts of an essay. How did I miss that? Then I looked through the chapter and realized there's a great summary at the end. If I'm going to write better, I*

*need to be a better reader.*

### 10.3.13 (Math)

*I just got my math test back and I only got a C on it! I thought I would do better since I aced the quiz a few weeks ago. Now I have to complete a required Post Test Review form and one of the questions on there was if I followed my schedule. I followed it for the first 2 weeks but not the week before or of the first test. Another question asked if I missed any classes and when I thought about it, I missed 3 classes and was late to a couple because I was late getting my daughter to daycare. That doesn't seem like a lot but we only had 10 classes so far. This form also asked me to list what's working and not working and I think following the schedule worked for me and I need to make sure I do that. Missing class is definitely not working for me.*

### 10.15.13 (Biology)

*I just had my second exam in my BIO 1100 class. It covered a lot of complicated chemistry calculations, but I really feel better about this one. After going to 3 recitation periods, I had these calculations down a whole lot better. I know that I screwed up some things, but I think this exam should be better than the first.*

### 10.18.13 (Biology)

*82!!!! I got a 64 on my first BIO 1100 exam. Second exam...82!!!! I told Dr. Wickley after I handed in the exam that the recitation periods are working! I will not miss a session from here on out cause I know the content is only going to get harder.*

### 10.19.13 (English)

*I got 80% on the revision of my latest essay, and this was a longer one. Five whole pages and I had to cite three sources. My only big problem was that I totally misread one of the sources. It was an article from a website called The Onion and I totally missed that it was satire. The professor said part of reading is checking out the source's credibility. I won't be fooled again.*

### 10.21.13 (Math)

*I just got my second math test back and I aced it! After following my schedule the last 3 weeks, I did all my homework, scored A's on my quizzes, and have a passing grade for my midterm report card. I can't wait to complete my Post Test Review form now! I have been meeting with some classmates the hour before each class, in the library, to work on some homework problems. I'm adding that time to my weekly schedule. And since I was meeting with them, I didn't miss any other class since early in the semester. That has helped a lot, so I am going to keep doing that the rest of the semester. We have 2 more tests and a final, and I plan on acing all of them!*

### 10.22.13 (Reading Issues)

*For the past couple of weeks I have been watching some reading videos that were created by Tri-C faculty that demonstrate the proper way to read textbooks. These videos are AWESOME!!! These videos give great advice on how to preview the format of the text, how to properly skim each chapter for overall content, and even how to take notes. I feel so much more confident that I am doing the right things when I open my textbooks. I hope my grades improve because of these videos.*

### 10.23.13 (Business)

*I can't believe how fast this semester is going. We're almost half way done. For my business class, I've been able to take advantage of so many of the tools that are available to us. Our PRESS club is having a study session two days this week. We've reserved our meeting room and anyone interested is invited to attend, working together to help each other study. I'm so happy I joined that club. Everyone is so involved and active in doing things around the campus and even in the community. We're hosting an entrepreneurial event for aspiring business owners, creating internships with local businesses, sponsoring field trips, and even involved in an upcoming fashion show. Our advisor also got us to be in a Read poster that will be posted on the campus. It will be good advertising for our club. There I go again, always thinking about how to promote our PRESS club. I've been thinking that maybe I should get my degree in marketing. Anyway, I'm off to the study session so that I can be prepared for the midterms next week.*

## 11.3.13 (Biology)

*So we have now moved on to organic chemistry and I am completely lost. We have to name the crazy looking molecules using a set of rules that make no sense at all to me. But, I just went to my Friday morning recitation period and it is starting to make sense. Don't get me wrong; I still don't like naming these molecules, but at least it makes a little more sense now. We did a bunch of naming problems in this recitation period and I was able to show a classmate of mine how to name one of the structures. That was a first! And I was right!!!! I don't think I would be passing this course right now without these review sessions. They have given me confidence in this material that I don't think I would have got on my own.*

## 11.16.13 (English)

*So now that I'm reviewing chapters in all of my textbooks, I understand the material better when we go over it in class and my understanding gets even deeper. I passed the rhetorical analysis paper because I knew exactly what logos, pathos, and ethos are. I went over the little summary box on page 785 ten times at least. Got 85% on my draft. On my DRAFT. I WILL get an A on the final revision.*

## 12.3.13 (Business)

*Well, my first semester is almost over and I'm feeling really good about how it's going. Last week, I received my report back for the Intro to Business course and now I have a game plan to attain my marketing degree in two years. What's more, I'll be able to transfer to Cleveland State University with all my course work counting, making me a junior. Gee, I almost forget to mention that I received an "A" for the report. Although the "A" was great, I actually feel better knowing that my report is complete. As my professor stated, it also provides a great example to prospective employers of the type of work I can do. I'm going to add this in the electronic portfolio that I've created. We learned about creating portfolios earlier this semester, and I already have a number of really cool artifacts and reflections that I've included. I want to make sure that by the time I graduate my portfolio shows just the right examples that employers are looking for. And between the Club activities and class work, there are plenty of opportunities to update my portfolio. Enough of the portfolio, I should probably go and do some studying for my finals. My stated SMART goal (another thing we learned) was to earn a 3.0 GPA this semester, and I've got a chance to do even better than that.*

## 12.8.13 (Math)

*I just got my grades and I actually got an A in my math class! The guys I met with before class all passed the class too. A few of us will take the next class together and we are going to keep meeting before each class to do homework and review. The final was over all the chapters and I can't believe I understood that stuff! When I started this semester, I never thought I would get it. Once I started making a weekly schedule and doing some homework every day instead of every other day, it made the quizzes seem easy! I was so worried the first week but once I organized my time, the material got easier. I will definitely do the same for my next math class.*

## 12.9.13 (Biology)

*So I got a "C" in my BIO 1100 course. At first I was not happy with this, but I don't think I would have passed without the extra help that was offered for this course. I will actually miss those Friday morning recitation periods. I never thought that biochemistry could be fun but it was during those sessions. I heard other students talk about the sessions that they attended and how much they liked them. I hope they benefited from them as much as I did.*

## 12.9.13 (English)

*I got a B in English, and if I knew at the start of the semester what I know now, I would have gotten an A easy. Which is what I'm going to get in ENG 1020 next semester.*

*12.10.13 (Reading Videos)*

*One last note from this semester. I need to thank the English team of the PRESS grant for coming up with the idea for the reading videos that I have watched this semester. The videos saved me during this semester when I was really frustrated with reading my textbooks. I would recommend these videos to all Tri-C students!*

**JOHNNY HAS HOPE**

Johnny finished his first semester at Tri-C and is looking forward to his future. It wasn't easy for Johnny to find a parking spot on the first day and it wasn't easy for him to find his spot in college. Students like Johnny benefit from the multiple initiatives developed through the PRESS grant. In his English class, he developed deeper and more critical reading skills. Despite his concerns about understanding biology, he found that attending recitation periods helped him pass the course. He took control of his learning in math and earned an A. And Johnny left his business class with a portfolio, a long-term plan and a connection to Tri-C.

Not only did he have to learn math, English, biology and business, he also had to learn teamwork, responsibility, and networking. He was unsure of himself when he started, but he slowly gained the confidence that he needed to PRESS on. Johnny has already registered for classes next semester and he has made a plan to join academic and social clubs next semester. He is very happy to have a wide range of supportive classmates that he now can call friends. That knot in his stomach is still there, but instead of a knot of doubt, he has a knot of excitement, courage, and hope that will lead him to success.

## PROMOTING FACULTY AND STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Warren Yarbrough, Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE ISSUE

As Dr. Bostick sets her phone back in its cradle, she adds the appointment time for the advisee to whom she has just spoken to her calendar, leans back in her chair, and sighs. Kaitlin, her advisee, will be coming in tomorrow morning. Dr. Bostick has never met Kaitlin before. She knows that she needs to prepare for Kaitlin's visit, but she dreads doing so. Certainly, the course registration technology is easy enough to use. The folks in admissions will have processed all her application work and placed her in the system. Ms. Dibble in the advising area will have met with Kaitlin, reviewed her interests, put her in a program, and built the first semester of an educational plan in the system. Tomorrow, it will be her turn to help steer Kaitlin's future, and she finds the notion to be a bit frightening and overwhelming. Dr. Bostick considers herself to be open, accessible, and a good listener. She feels that these are good traits for an advisor. However, she knows that advising is much more than these things.

Furthermore, who is Kaitlin? Dr. Bostick knows that her community college students are a unique bunch with a host of life issues and concerns that she could not imagine having had when she was in college. She gathers her things and heads to class, feeling competent about the teaching part of her job but at a complete loss about the advising side.

Ms. Dibble closes the e-plan on her computer for Kaitlin Smith. She tells Kaitlin that Dr. Marie Bostick, a history instructor, will be her faculty advisor. She gives Kaitlin Dr. Bostick's contact information and tells her that the next step is to set up an appointment. She bids Kaitlin goodbye and watches as Kaitlin leaves her office. Kaitlin is "in the system," and her first semester's course work is laid out. Kaitlin, though, is going to need a great deal of help. She is personable, excited, and full of life, but Ms. Dibble is worried about her. She has at least a year of developmental work in front of her. She does not seem to have much home support for college. No one in her family has ever gone. Apparently, there is a small child in the picture. Kaitlin has to work at least 20 hours per week to meet her obligations. She is also deficient in soft skills. She has potential, but she will need a great deal of guidance and support. Ms. Dibble is worried. She knows that Dr. Bostick is a very nice person and a wonderful history instructor. However, as is the case with most faculty members, she teaches a full load, has papers to grade, serves on several committees, and takes keeping up with her field and teaching practices seriously.

She also knows nothing about advising! She will do her best with Kaitlin, but will that "best" be good enough? Mr. Weeks is a highly qualified adjunct faculty member in the college's teacher education program. He brings a wealth of experiences to his courses, and the college is lucky to have him. He not only has the necessary academic knowledge, but also draws on a wealth of first-hand experience in the field. Just as important, he gets the material across to his students well. He does not know about his new student, Kaitlin, though. She has been 10 minutes late for class every day. Her writing skills are deficient, and she seems to lack many soft skills that are important in today's world. She always has an excuse for late work. He is trying to figure out who put her in his class? Mr. Weeks wonders how Kaitlin can ever be a teacher, but he does see a spark of something there. If only he knew how to get her the help that she needed to be a success.

## A CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE

Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College (OC-Tech) serves a rural two-county area. It averages 3,000 students per semester, with the vast majority falling into one of the categories common to community colleges across the United States: first time in college; underprepared; working single moms, and so on. Each of these students enters the college with hopes and dreams for the future, and the faculty and staff do their best to meet them. Or does it, thinks Ms. Dibble. Ms. Dibble holds a central position in the college's advising area. She sees the students as they first come in the door. She notes how fearful they are. After all, to them, this place is huge and intimidating. She knows that many, if not most, will need a degree of "hand holding" to make it through. However, she knows that the means are not in place for this support. In her mind, advising at the college is woefully inadequate. Indeed, it is an informal and often unplanned process in which the various players are disconnected and the training is at a minimum. Furthermore, she has spoken to advisors before – good ones, such as Dr. Bostick – so she knows that not only are the means and mechanisms not in place for good advising sessions, but also they do not provide ample opportunity for the type of interaction truly needed between the student and various college personnel involved in the process. She sees advising at the college as disjointed process in which each person does his/her best to ensure the student is proceeding along the correct college path. She makes a pledge to herself that she is going to do something to rectify this situation.

As the Achieving the Dream core team leader, Warren Yarbrough works consistently with the college's student success initiatives. He knows that, for a variety of reasons, some have worked over the years and some have not. As he has always stressed when reporting at college gatherings, though, the success has come from the dedication of those involved—something that he notes stems from the approach taken. Ideas have always been grassroots efforts. Faculty have noted problems, raised concerns, explored best practices for rectification, and worked to put them in place. Administration just found the means for making those interventions happen and stood back. Perhaps it should not have surprised Warren, but as he was putting together a report on the interventions, he saw the same names again and again. In other words the plans emerged from the bottom up, but the bottom did not come from everywhere. He suggested a survey of perceptions to be given to all faculty, staff, and adjuncts to isolate how people felt about them and to get their thoughts about what was needed. This survey was produced and administered by an outside evaluator. It assembled and codified input on student success initiatives and corresponding beliefs and doubts concerning them. This survey was re-administered in the same fashion after the completion of the conversion. A few interesting points emerged from the results of this survey. Initially, 75 percent of faculty viewed advising as a legitimate faculty role. Post-intervention results indicated that 86 percent of faculty saw advising as a component of their student success work. Furthermore, whereas 67 percent of faculty initially saw themselves as working to influence a student's decision-making process pertaining to academic strategies (i.e., guiding what they believed was best for students), post-intervention results showed a change to 80 percent. However, the point that caught Warren's eye the most was that folks seemed to think poorly of the college's advising process. He made a note to himself to get with someone in Student Services and do a bit of thinking.

As Dr. Bostick prepares for Kaitlin's visit, she knows that what she will really be doing for this young lady is registration, and, to the college, she will be doing her job, for "advising" simply is "putting students into classes." Dr. Bostick has been at the college for 20 years, though, and she knows this is not enough—especially for the high-needs students such as Kaitlin who comprise her list of advisees. She has said before that advising is support and assistance to students during registration times and maybe even a mentoring relationship. She always gets positive lip service to her concern, but nothing more. "Maybe one day, someone will fix this situation," she mutters to herself.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT HAPPENED IN ADDRESSING THE ISSUE**

At the fall of 2012 college convocation, Dr. Tobin, the college president, stressed (once again) that faculty and staff play a significant role in creating a pathway for student success. Ms. Dibble usually “knits her way” through these meetings, listening with half an ear, but this time she heard something: pathway. It dawned on her that this was the concept that she needed to get something happening at the college with advising. As she saw it, the advising system created no real opportunity for the kind of interaction needed for authentic advising to occur between instructors and students, nor were faculty members given the background they needed should they have desired to be better advisors. Student services staff certainly had the ways and means to do front-end advising.

However, they knew little in the way of specifics about programs, requirements, suitability, or course specifics. The only help that they could provide here was based on what could be read in the college catalog. Thus, they were of little help to students as to the nature and qualifications of the programs themselves. As for adjunct faculty, they knew little about the college in general, less about the students, and virtually nothing that could pass for advising. In other words, the advising system at Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College was not structured and supported in such a way that it could do what it should. There was no “pathway.” What was needed was an advising roadmap with clearly defined roles for student support, training, and a medium in place for instituting such a plan. She now had her idea, but she knew that for it to work, she would need a counterpart for the faculty side. After all, the notion that advising was “theirs” (i.e., student services personnel) was entrenched among faculty, and adjuncts were not involved in the process at all. Not everyone was like Dr. Bostick.

At the convocation, Warren Yarbrough gave his usual overview of Achieving the Dream work, making special note of the engagement survey and the concern for advising expressed in it. Of course, Ms. Dibble perked up a bit, but Dr. Bostick was the one who really heard the findings. After the meeting, she approached Ms. Dibble to see what could be done.

## **AN EXPLANATION OF HOW THE ISSUE WAS RESOLVED**

“Perhaps we should take a strong look at advising,” said Ms. Dibble. After the faculty/staff convocation, she called Dr. Bostick in, as well as Warren Yarbrough, to see if the college’s advising process could be reviewed. Dr. Bostick replied that “review” was not the best word. With the knowledge that flaws in advising was a serious concern for all parties, the college needed to totally revamp its advising model and put an authentic advising approach in place. As a “battle-hardened” veteran of faculty-student services “wars,” Warren Yarbrough knew, in order to see solid advising system put into place, the college would ultimately have to create an advising team co-chaired by faculty and student services personnel that would be composed of: respected faculty with a genuine interest in providing good advising; competent adjuncts to give insight from that often-neglected side of the process; and appropriate student services staff. He stressed, “Any advising plan would need strong support from all impacted groups, something that could only be attained if everyone felt he or she had input in the process. Faculty feel disconnected from advising and often say that advising was something [student services staff] do.” Ms. Dibble countered, “student services staff recognize that they can only do so much and that advising needs to be a team effort in order for the student to be most successful. Students spend most of their time with faculty in their program areas, not in student services.”

Thus, as these three brave souls realized, the team had to work together to develop not only a sustainable plan, but also a scenario through which faculty, staff, and adjuncts could come to see themselves in advising and working collectively to create the outcome. Each person would have a voice in what happened. It would be heeded, so the plan would be mutual, not one group pushing its agenda onto the other group. They closed this initial meeting with the realization that, as is the case in most colleges, this was one of those “easier said than

done” situations.

After sharing their vision with the college’s vice president, Donna Elmore, Ms. Dibble, Warren Yarbrough, and Dr. Bostick created an official advising team, co-chaired by Warren Yarbrough (faculty) and Tracy Dibble (student services). Deans from each area chose a faculty representative—a person recognized for whatever reason as being “a good advisor.” All student services advisors participated. Select adjuncts known for being more active and interested in the students and the college at large were brought into the fold as well. What developed was a devoted, cohesive group that took its task seriously, developed a plan, assisted with training, and, most importantly, promoted good advising to others as, perhaps, the key element in the chain of student success efforts.

“Perhaps we need to think in pictures,” said Ms. Dibble, noting that a key flaw in the advising system was the lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities for student services and faculty advisors. “Earlier in the fall, Dr. Tobin used a term that I liked: pathway,” she said. Thus, the first task of the team was to develop an advising flow chart. Perhaps the most interesting, and eye-opening, task they did was to put themselves in the place of a student advisee. An adjunct, Mr. Weeks, acted as a hypothetical student and went through the college advising process as it existed. His comment: “I knew nothing more when I finished than when I started other than my English class started at 8:00, the worst time of the day for me, especially with writing being my weakest subject.”

What emerged from this team was a flow chart, a “picture,” as Ms. Dibble had wanted, of a hypothetical student through an advising process consisting of five major steps: (1) admissions; (2) advising center; (3) campus orientation, registration, and enrollment; (4) program orientation; (5) ongoing support. “This is all good and fine,” said Dr. Bostick, “but what good is it? We had steps—such as they were—before? All this chat seems to do is to lay out in a diagram what we already have in place, except maybe a bit more clearly.” “What we need then,” said one of the team members, “is a detailed a list of items and issues applicable to each area on the chart. With this inventory, we can create a staff/faculty developed definition of advising, along with clearly-defined roles and responsibilities for admissions personnel, student services staff, and faculty advisors. Thus, the most significant result of the advising team’s work has been to establish this flow chart that laid the framework for an authentic advising model for all personnel (admissions through faculty) who encounter students in an advisory capacity. “OK,” said Warren Yarbrough when the team met again, “The flowchart explains what faculty and staff do, but how do we get them to do it?” Ever the researcher, Dr. Bostick, mentioned how she had seen something called an advising syllabus on the NACADA (National academic advising association) website. As she maintained, “The advising syllabus represents an outgrowth of advising flowchart. It will become the core of what we do to make advising something ‘authentic’ and not just the process of putting students into classes.” As she stated, “The syllabus treats advising as a learning process, and it also provides the college with measureable student learning outcomes to gauge its impact.” The team concurred and developed an advising syllabus. The syllabus detailed what faculty and student services staff needed to learn to be better advisors and what students needed to learn to be advisees. In other words, it represented a second step on the revamp process.

Warren Yarbrough played a key role in the college’s professional development plan, so he knew that while roles, responsibilities, and a clearly-defined advising path were essential to the college’s authentic advising model, these measures provided only the outline. Advisors at all stages would need the tools to assess and work with students effectively. Furthermore, this training would need to be staff/faculty-led for buy-in. Over the next few months, the team worked hard to develop and implement these training sessions. The sessions included: advising theory and practice, communicating with advising/advising tools/resources, advising with technology and building an educational plan, interpreting test scores, campus support resources, advising the at-risk student, and financial aid issues and advising. All faculty were trained in mandatory sessions. Adjuncts were invited. In addition to the training sessions, the advising team created a handbook for advisors.



Kaitlin, the student who had been the initial impetus for the whole revamp of the advising process, had been a student of Mr. Weeks, an adjunct faculty member. As the advising team met over the course of the semester, Ms. Dibble often thought about Mr. Weeks, for she knew he was a good, devoted instructor. She knew that some initiatives lend themselves well to the inclusion of adjunct faculty, but advising was not one of them. She suggested that Mr. Weeks be added to the team. He was, and he quickly became a vital and vocal member. He reminded the team that not only did these faculty members have something to offer students, but also had direct impact with them on a daily basis. In point of fact, as Warren Yarbrough said, “While Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College has one of the lowest full-time to adjunct faculty ratios among the technical colleges in South Carolina, there is still a strong adjunct presence in the faculty/student contact situation. In fact, in a few cases on the Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College campus, adjuncts assist directly in ‘crunch’ circumstances with advising.”

“What do adjuncts need to know about advising?” stated Dr. Bostick. “Perhaps we need to look differently at adjuncts as advisors, seeing them as information sources for their students.” “Certainly,” Mr. Weeks said, “for we have little awareness and, conversely, sense of engagement in student success efforts.” Thus, the development and implementation of a plan to inform and engage adjunct faculty more fully has become a significant part of advising team’s work. What emerged was a plan for making adjunct faculty more “college aware” through: an adjunct faculty handbook, orientation activity, and mentoring program; the creation of a communications plan consisting of email and an adjunct faculty office on the campus learning management system; an online training program with modules both practical (policies to people and places to know) to theoretical (adult learners to the community college concept); and online professional development. All adjuncts were included in this process.

At the final meeting for the year of the advising team in the spring of 2013, Dr. Bostick felt a bit better. She knew that much work had gone into generating an effective advising model in which all impacted areas of the college feel a sense of ownership. However, the team’s work was not done. She stated, “We need to keep meeting and working. We need to keep advising central and active in all student success efforts.” The other team members agreed, and in the fall of 2013, the college made the advising team a permanent, standing team, replete with guidelines for members, roles, and responsibilities.

Sure, there will always be Kaitlins, but the team and the college are in better shape now to deal with them. Whereas student survey results primarily reveal perceptions and provide only anecdotal data, they are of value in that the information can reveal what the numbers do not show, and they can provide it in “real time,” thereby allowing service providers to be more proactive. Baseline survey data show only 51 percent of the students served as being extremely satisfied. Of course, this point in the scale should be the one for which the college strives. Post-intervention survey results show an increase to approximately 78 percent.

Karen came in for her initial advising session yesterday. Ms. Dibble put her “in the system,” and laid out her first semester’s course work. Ms. Dibble thinks to herself that Karen is going to need a great deal of help. She is personable, excited, and full of life, but Ms. Dibble is worried about her. She has at least a year of developmental work in front of her. She does not seem to have much home support for college. No one from her family has ever gone. Apparently, there is a small child in the picture. Karen has to work at least 20 hours per week to meet her obligations. She is also deficient in soft skills. She has potential, but she will need a great deal of guidance and support. But Ms. Dibble is still worried—at least not as much as she used to be. She knows that the means and mechanisms are in place for providing Karen the support that she needs. She wishes Karen well and tells her to come back again should she ever need to do so, and she sends her to her advisor, a math instructor named Mr. Jones, with confidence.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What kind of learning occurred during this process?
- What kind of reaction might you expect at your college to this kind of proposal?
- How might you anticipate addressing any kind of push back?
- What did OC-Tech do to anticipate or counter this kind of reaction?

## BUILDING A NEW FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE THROUGH THOUGHTFUL COLLABORATION

Joyce Romano, Leonard Bass, Laura Blasi, Christina Hardin, Karen Reilly, & Landon Shephard, Valencia College

### *Abstract*

*This case study records a version of how Valencia College achieved a long anticipated goal of developing a common first-year experience course for all degree seeking students. The vision of the long anticipated first-year experience course is focused on students developing an acute ability to persist in college, become self-aware (emotional intelligence) of their learning behaviors (good and bad), and ensure a thoughtful exploration of their purpose for attending college as expressed in career goals and articulated in their personal academic plan. Throughout this story, readers will hear from three different perspectives about the work.*

### *Protagonists*

*Joyce Romano is a seasoned college administrator who, during a 20+ year tenure at the college, witnessed the birth and evolution of the student success course. During much of Joyce's tenure, the initiative lived at the college as an optional three-credit course and has grown to a much larger institutionalized commitment heavily influenced by the institution's culture and identity.*

*Christy Cheney is a tenured Student Life Skills (SLS) instructor who has taught student success (SLS 1122) at Valencia College for more than 15 years. During Professor Cheney's tenure at the college, she has supported the development of the course outcomes and curriculum, has assumed a leadership role for the course and initiatives related to the curriculum college-wide, and has provided a great deal of influence in the creation of the faculty developed programs for SLS instructors and faculty from other disciplines who have integrated the SLS college success skills into their coursework.*

*Christina Hardin is a tenured English faculty member who was selected to be a member of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) leadership team and later (summer 2013) joined the PRESS for Success faculty leadership team, which was charged with redesigning the Student Success (SLS 1122) course. As a faculty leader, who taught within the general education program with more than six years' experience at the college, Professor Hardin has experience with the development of discipline specific assessment planning and has been actively involved in the college's governance work.*

## **THE CHALLENGE**

*May 2009*

Joyce Romano was attending her college's Achieving the Dream (ATD) data team meeting to review data on the impact of one of three key ATD strategies aimed at closing the achievement gap among students of color. For the first time in the college's history, the student success (SLS 1122) course was required for students who were mandated into developmental education courses in the three academic disciplines of mathematics, writing, and reading.

With a commitment to data informed decisions, the college reviewed success data for students who enrolled in SLS 1122, which was reported by student readiness for college-level course work in reading, English, and mathematics. During that time, all students enrolling at Valencia College were required to complete the state mandated Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT). The PERT placed students into developmental courses in these three academic areas or deemed them college ready. Faculty and staff at the college indicated a general

consensus that students who were most developmentally needy, students' who PERT scores placed them into all three areas of developmental education, a cohort of students who historically have struggled to successfully complete college coursework, would benefit the most from a student success curriculum.

The initial "mandate" required students to concurrently enroll in SLS 1122 if they were placed below the college-level in all three areas. After this mandate was piloted, the promise was made to review the data while mandating the course for students who placed into two developmental courses. The ultimate goal was for students with one developmental course and students who were college-ready would all be mandated to take the college success course. This eased the concerns of some faculty that students shouldn't be "mandated" into a college success course.

The ATD data team had a robust discussion about the data. The team included faculty, staff, and administrators from across the college, each with a unique perspective and a vested interest in student success and learning. Some members of the data team argued that the improvement in course success and persistence, while positive, was not sufficient to expand the mandate to two developmental course students. Others argued that while the overall impact was small (1.2 percent increase), the relatively higher impact on students of color (3 percent increase) warranted a recommendation to expand the mandate. Someone noted during the conversation that "three prep" students are the hardest group to show improvement, so even small gains in their success is meaningful. Others in the room, those who would be directly responsible for the expansion of the course offering, were concerned they would not have sufficient college resources to expand the course. At the end of the discussion, only two members of the team voted that in favor of the course expansion: Joyce and one other member. Joyce left the meeting disappointed and frustrated. The college did not have the momentum necessary to justify the expansion of the student success course, which has been deeply studied and shown to contribute to student success since the early 1990s.

### *March 2013*

Joyce Romano is in a large meeting room that is abuzz with excitement and conversations as colleagues (130+ faculty and staff) gather for the college's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Summit. Here, the college's QEP leadership team will be sharing the proposed idea for the QEP. The presenters include four tenured faculty members. Joyce is one of two administrators who helped lead the work of identifying the QEP. The term "summit" is used by Valencia to describe a meeting where a decision is made about the direction of work at the college. Summits typically are large, college-wide meetings, during which a proposed project or "working theory" is presented and discussed. Presenters invite feedback from the attendees, who are later asked to vote on the next course of action. The QEP summit started with a presentation of a proposed student success pathway model and new student experience (NSE) program that had been developed over the previous 18 months of college-wide and campus-based study, discussion, and collaboration. The proposed NSE program included the requirement of a newly designed new student experience course (a redesign of the existing SLS 1122 course) that would be required of all new degree seeking students, as well as additional co-curricular and curriculum alignment components. After the presentation by the faculty leaders, a "red, yellow, green card" vote was held.

Participants vote by holding up one of three colored cards. Red represents "stop, the fundamental idea is flawed and should be reconsidered." Yellow denotes "caution, the idea is correct, we can move forward with caution as we clarify details left undecided." Green indicates "go, we have the right idea, and there is support of the direction of the work." The final vote included 111 green votes, 11 yellow votes, and zero red votes. The new student experience, and its focus on requiring all new students to take an SLS course, had been approved. The participants who had concerns (yellow votes) shared their questions about the work, and the QEP leaders committed to fold those questions into the advancement of the work. Joyce was thrilled that the college had finally found a

way to commit to a common new student experience, including the student success course, for all degree seeking students. The focus of the work of the QEP was now to develop the components of the NSE, including the redesign of the existing SLS 1122 course and developing plans to expand the course to all new students. Between 2009 and 2013, Joyce witnessed the reinvention of the “student success” discussion and reflected that the college actually arrived at a more comprehensive and thoughtful “student success” solution in 2013 than what was proposed in 2009. The student success pathway, which was voted on and approved at the summit, set a new direction for the college in defining its next “big idea,” and will ensure the continued focus on the goals of ATD.

The practice of identifying “big ideas” that become rallying cries for innovation was introduced by President Sandy Shugart around 2001. It is a way of stating simply a foundational principle or aspirational statement that then becomes a fulcrum for change and extension of professional practice throughout the college. For example, “Start Right” was one of the first big ideas that led to the adoption of new practices with new students, such as an application priority deadline and not allowing students to add a class if it met once. For more, see “Valencia’s Big Ideas: Sustaining Authentic Organizational Change through Shared Purpose and Culture” in *Focus on Learning: A Learning College Reader*, League for Innovation, 2011, page 123-125.

### **THE STORY LEADING UP TO THE PRESS GRANT**

Established in 1967 as Valencia Junior College, Valencia College is a public, comprehensive, urban community college that provides opportunities for academic, technical and life-long learning. Valencia is one of 28 colleges in the Florida College System and is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to award associate and bachelor’s degrees. Valencia offers more than 116 technical certificates, 34 associate in science degrees, three bachelor of science degrees, and an associate in arts degree that guarantees students’ admission to the University of Central Florida (UCF) through DirectConnect, a unique partnership between four Central Florida community colleges and UCF. With six campus locations, Valencia serves 60,022 students (annual unduplicated headcount in 2012-13 academic year) in Osceola and Orange counties (Central Florida). With 18,416 unduplicated Hispanic students enrolled, Valencia College is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).

The work of the PRESS Grant, to redesign the Student Success (SLS 1122) course with the intention to require all new students at Valencia to participate in a coordinated new student experience, has been building at Valencia for more than 20 years. The original course was designed based on a psychology faculty member’s dissertation and implemented through a Title III grant that began in 1988. Through the 1990s, with support from the Title III and Title V grants, Pew Roundtables, and the Vanguard Learning Centered College Initiative (League for Innovation in Community Colleges), Valencia College thoughtfully developed a “working theory” that indicates that students need to “Start Right.” “Start Right” became part of the college’s 2001-2004 strategic plan, and suggests that how students “experience” the college from their earliest encounters is important to their long term success at the institution, and that the college can shape these experiences by intentionally designing the front-door experience for students.

In 2003, the first full-time instructional faculty were hired to teach student success on a four-month contract (semester appointment with benefits). In 2008, the college approved the hire of three full-time tenure earning faculty assigned to the West, East, and Osceola campuses. Together, these faculty assumed the responsibility of the student success curriculum at a time when the college was reviewing data from the ATD initiative (2004-2009). During ATD, the college selected and implemented three student success strategies with the designed intent to eliminate the achievement gap among students from different backgrounds. The strategies included expanding Learning in Communities (LinC) course offerings (paired courses that share the same students and

faculty and integrate assignments), requiring three-prep developmental students to enroll in student success (SLS 1122) during their first semester in college, and expanding supplemental learning (SL) in gateway classes (classes with high enrollment and low success rates). The original intent in designing the ATD proposal was to require all students to enroll in SLS 1122 during their first term in college, regardless of developmental needs. However, lack of consensus among faculty and administration as a whole at the college did not provide the level of support necessary to require all students to enroll in SLS 1122. The compromise was to require all three developmental (math, writing, and reading) students to enroll in SLS 1122 during their first term in college. During this time, the student success course was primarily focused on study skills, time management, career exploration, setting academic and career goals. Work also began to develop a learning portfolio as part of the standard course curriculum.

In 2009, the college participated in the Foundations of Excellence (FoE) self-study on the first-year experience. This was initiated by the learning council, who was the core team for the Achieving the Dream (ATD) initiative, as a next phase of sustaining the work we had begun under ATD. During this process, college-wide collaboration involving faculty across all disciplines and student affairs staff established an institutional definition for a new student. A new student was defined as a student who had earned less than 15 credits at Valencia College.

This definition included transfer students who have not earned 15 credit hours at Valencia. This definition provided the college an opportunity to further discuss the unique needs of new students, with the intent of providing support focused on their success. The FoE self-study provided Valencia an opportunity to thoughtfully review new student data, explore the college's steps to enrollment from a new student's perspective, and discuss how LifeMap, Valencia's brand of developmental advising, supported new students. The most tangible outcome of the self-study was the agreement that Valencia students need a coordinated new student experience. The articulation of a coordinated new student experience, as a result of the FoE work, provided additional support for the momentum of "Start Right" and led to the development of the PRESS for Completion proposal. It was a critical and important step in building the institutional momentum for the next phase of work.

The Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) work furthered the work of the original ATD grant by building on its three strategies. Additionally, DEI engaged student affairs professionals, faculty, and academic affairs leadership across the college with a focus on developmental students' success. The LifeMap: College Success Skills document was developed, which articulated student competencies needed for college success in four categories (key cognitive strategies, academic knowledge and skills, academic behaviors, and planning and decision making; informed by Conley's College Knowledge). Developmental education faculty integrated these college success skills into the developmental course curriculum and student success faculty did the same for SLS 1122 in an effort to create a complementary educational experience for new students. Another component of DEI was the development of a fully integrated first-year experience for "three prep" students. The program was named REACH (Reaching Each Academic Challenge Head-On), and was piloted at the Osceola campus in 2012-13. In REACH, students experience an integrated curricular and co-curricular program, which includes LinC courses each term over three semesters, and complete 21 college-level credits in their first year at Valencia. Student success (SLS 1122) was included in the first term LinC for the REACH program.

The college's continued commitment to collecting and reviewing data on student performance provided further support to the PRESS grant. The FoE self-study and the curriculum integration work, led by DEI, gained wider faculty support for the infusion of college success skills across disciplines and promoted a general awareness and greater acceptance of the value of the SLS 1122 course curriculum.

In the spring of 2012, Kurt Ewen and Joyce Romano, admittedly long-term supporters of the student success

(SLS 1122) course curriculum, learned about the PRESS for Completion grant at the Achieving the Dream Strategy Institute. Joyce and Kurt championed the development of the PRESS grant proposal, which was selected and awarded for funding in the summer of 2012. The PRESS grant proved to be the solution to the institution's struggle to require all students to enroll in SLS 1122 during their first term in college.

*Our president has often observed that faculty are sometimes cast as “the problem” within a college when in fact they are “the solution.” The investment in a formal faculty development program as part of our learning-centered initiative has no doubt been a key to the improvements we have seen in student success. A former vice president of academic affairs at Valencia had begun involving discipline-based faculty in the development of the SLS 1122 curriculum by sponsoring stipend-supported teaching of the course, as well as faculty learning about developmental advising (LifeMap). The focus of the PRESS opportunity on faculty engagement was the perfect next step to continue the student success conversation at Valencia in an authentic way. The alignment of that work with the QEP development and the general education changes we were discussing was the “perfect storm” (in a good way).*

- Joyce

In late 2011, based on design principles that were developed and endorsed by the learning council and the college's senior team, Kurt and Joyce initiated a conversation to identify the next “Big Idea” at Valencia, which was to become the focus of the college's QEP. As with all large projects at the college, a QEP leadership team was named and began meeting in early 2012 to explore the foundations of the college's work (e.g. ATD, FoE, DEI), review literature and best practices across the nation, and design a collaborative discussion model that would eventually lead to the development of the college's QEP. As part of the design work discussions of the QEP, the leadership team utilized the college's annual big meeting in June 2012 to review data on student progression and completion, and to discuss common themes of innovation with the more than 200 Valencia faculty, staff, and administrators gathered. The big meeting agenda included a review of data and reports on the DEI grant, the Foundations of Excellence's self-study on the first-year experience, and the Achieving the Dream work. Joyce participated in the college-wide discussion and review of the data and reports.

*There was a lot of information to review, so conversations were robust and animated. The day was designed to maximize interaction among colleagues while also moving us into consensus on direction. The faculty leaders of the QEP led much of the presentation as they had been growing into their roles as leaders of this work. We also celebrated the accomplishments and leaders of DEI. It was an exciting day as we all felt that the momentum was continuing to build toward a terrific QEP that would set our focus and direction for the next five years.*

- Joyce

At the conclusion of the June 2012 big meeting, four broad areas of interest were identified for the next set of college-wide conversations. These four themes launched the exploration phase of the QEP and, over the next 18 months, faculty, staff, students, and administrators at Valencia would discuss, investigate, and further unpack these ideas.

### **Student purpose**

Emerging idea - Students with some sense of their purpose in life and in college are more likely to be engaged, learn, and succeed in college.

### **Student learning**

Emerging idea - More than any other time in history, student learning can happen anywhere and at any time. Changes in the conditions for student learning require that we think differently about how we engage students in the learning process.

**Students need navigation**

Emerging idea - To be successful, Valencia students not only need an educational plan, but also clear and specific directions for navigating the demands of college.

**The new student experience**

Emerging idea - To support learning, students need a holistic first-year experience that is academically and socially engaging while providing connection and direction.

**PRESS AT VALENCIA**

*When we attended the PRESS kick-off workshop in Reston, we more fully understood the opportunity to align the focus on faculty engagement and development with the QEP conversation by focusing the PRESS work on the new student experience discussion teams. We added more faculty leadership to the PRESS team in summer 2012. During the 2012-13 year, PRESS provided the support for the new student experience discussions on each campus and the college-wide coordination of what was emerging from those campus discussions. It was exciting to see the expression of our new campus based administrative model through the PRESS work. The campus deans of learning support were making it happen.*

*- Joyce*

While attending the PRESS grant kick-off workshop in Reston, Virginia, the original PRESS leadership team, which was comprised primarily of administrators, learned that the primary focus of the grant activities was to engage faculty in the ATD work. With a clearer understanding of the grant goals and in the interest of advancing the work, the PRESS leadership team was expanded to include three tenure-track faculty in the student life skills department and faculty from other academic disciplines (e.g., science, English, reading, and theater).

Valencia hosted our own kick-off event, which served dual purposes—to kick-off the PRESS for Completion grant work and the QEP work. The event was held on the East campus on Friday September 7, 2012, with keynote speaker Josh Wyner of the Aspen Institute. Mr. Wyner discussed the criteria for the Aspen Prize and how Valencia was selected as the inaugural winner of the award. Wyner challenged the college to consider innovative strategies that had proven successful at other institutions. Strategies such as building a learning community, requiring a first-year experience for all students, and offering guaranteed student schedules were among those that had helped other institutions foster their students' success. The discussion demonstrated how existing ideas within Valencia were being developed and implemented across the country.

*More than 200 faculty, staff, and senior administrators attended the September 2012 kick-off event. Most of the faculty were full time although some were full-time staff who also teach part time. It was exciting to see so many interested colleagues gathered to discuss the work ahead and to see how the QEP and PRESS grant work were going to intersect. Everyone was genuinely interested in the initiatives and there to find out how they could get involved. At the end of the meeting we [the QEP Leaders] invited faculty and staff to join one of four big idea discussion groups (BIGs) that would meet and discuss the four emerging themes during the fall term. Over 50 faculty signed up for a BIG before they left the meeting!*

*- Christina*

During the fall of 2012, the campus-based BIGs met to discuss the four emerging themes of the QEP and PRESS grant. Student focus groups were also held across the college to ensure that student input and discussion of the four emerging themes were part of the college's conversations. Each group followed a set of guided discussion questions and prompts, and reviewed and edited the draft description of the emerging ideas within each theme. The BIGs also reviewed relevant college data and best practices in support of the emerging ideas. In November 2012, a wrap-up event was held at which all of the BIGs gathered to share their findings. There was consistency among the reports of the college-wide BIGs about where the college needed to go with the



work of PRESS and QEP. More interesting was that the findings of the faculty/staff BIGs supported what the students expressed in their own focus groups. A clear student success pathway and new student experience model began to emerge.

*The idea of a common curricular experience for all new students emerged as a central idea of these campus-based groups, but came from faculty of different disciplines who saw such an experience as an opportunity to prepare new students for study in their discipline. The idea of discipline “flavored” student success courses gained momentum. The idea of how students in associate in science programs, who often have limited course electives, could benefit from an integrated experience was expressed. The possibilities of how agreed-upon learning outcomes could be experienced by all students began to emerge as something we could agree on.*

- Joyce

In spring 2013, the formal adoption of the QEP student success pathway and new student experience model, including the required student success course for all degree-seeking students, occurred. Faculty leaders and wide faculty engagement were essential to this process. The decision for the college to adopt the new student experience as the QEP was made at the March 22, 2013, QEP Summit.

In the summer of 2013, the formal QEP was written and endorsed by the senior team and the district board of trustees. PRESS provided the fulcrum for this development. The PRESS leadership team had the support of the college and the necessary momentum to redesign SLS112 into a new student experience course as part of the QEP work.

The PRESS grant supported faculty-driven conversations during the summer that produced six learning outcomes (referred to as the 6Ps at the College) that would become the foundation for the redesigned student success course. As the outcomes were being developed by a college-wide team, a smaller group of faculty were being assembled to serve as the faculty work team who would be responsible for redesigning the course. The three recently tenured SLS faculty, along with three additional faculty members from different campuses and academic disciplines (science, English, and theater), were selected to be part of the PRESS faculty leadership team. “=

The team was charged with designing a process by which the outcomes (the 6Ps) produced by the college-wide team would be used to redesign the course. The inclusiveness of the faculty from across the college and from different disciplines proved to be helpful. The variety of perspectives added to the conversations in very meaningful ways.

Dr. Sandy Shugart, Valencia’s president, expressed, “Sometimes you have to slow down to speed up.” This idea that one should “slow down to speed up” became a common theme in the PRESS grant work. Because the new student experience became a focus of the QEP, there were times that the PRESS work was placed on hold to ensure that the institution thoroughly investigated the scope of the work.

Byron McClenney, while visiting Valencia during the QEP conversations in November 2012, shared something he had observed at Valencia as a result of his work during the ATD grant. Byron observed that Valencia’s culture nurtured ideas through what seemed like an exhaustive and long process of discussions. While many institutions may move quickly to define an innovative strategy, Valencia has a tendency to move more slowly in the strategy development process. This seemed to initially slow down the progress of the work. Although Valencia had a tendency to take longer discussing the strategy, this thorough discussion accelerated the strategy.

For example, while other institutions are quick to decide on an idea, they are much slower to ensure “buy in” and establish the logistics to employ the strategy. Valencia’s culture results in a slower idea development process.

However, by the time the idea is clear, many of the logistics have already been worked out, making the execution of the strategy much quicker. This was the case for the PRESS grant work. Much of the first year of the PRESS grant was spent listening and further developing, and at times nurturing, the details of NSE, and waiting for the work of the college to align between the QEP and the PRESS grant. Once aligned, the college had the momentum, energy, and conviction to move on the NSE strategy.

The PRESS faculty leadership team met for the first time in late July 2013 and began work designing a process which would encourage faculty from across the college to participate in the redesign efforts of SLS 1122. Added to the team was a faculty development fellow, who would support the work of the team as needed with faculty development and training support. The group was charged with designing a process for how the course would be redesigned.

In September 2013, the PRESS leadership team invited all full-time and part-time faculty at the college to submit lesson plan ideas focused on the 6Ps to be considered for the redesigned SLS 1122 course. More than 50 faculty members expressed interest in the work and attended a half-day workshop focused on curriculum development and a thorough explanation of the new course outcomes. The faculty who attended this meeting and elected to participate in the work were each paired with one of the PRESS faculty leadership members for mentoring and support while developing their lesson plans. At the conclusion of the five-week series, all participating faculty were asked to present their lesson plan(s) during the NSE showcase held in October 2013. Faculty and staff were invited to attend the NSE Showcase to see the lesson demonstrations and to provide feedback about the lessons. Thirty-four lessons were presented. Qualitative and quantitative feedback was gathered from all participants attending the NSE showcase regarding the lesson plans presented. The feedback was later used by the PRESS faculty leadership to make decisions about the new course.

Immediately following the showcase, the PRESS leadership team met to discuss the day and the lessons. Originally the faculty leaders were scheduled to spend the afternoon discussing the lesson plans and begin the selection process for which lessons would be included in the redesigned course. However, the team agreed that they needed time to reflect on what was shared and read the feedback from the participants. The team agreed to end the meeting early with a promise to collect their thoughts, review the lesson plans that were all submitted electronically to Black Board, and reflect on the feedback shared by the faculty who attended the NSE showcase. The following week, the PRESS faculty leadership team gathered for a day-long retreat in the college's Collaborative Design Center to prepare for the next phase.

*I was tremendously impressed by the PRESS leadership team and the heavy lifting they did from July to December. Every aspect of the faculty engagement and training program in fall was carefully designed and intentionally planned to maximize the outcome for the faculty and the course we were creating. There was an incredible amount of work to be accomplished in order to be ready for the spring 2014 pilot of the new student experience course. I was honored to be a part of the process and so impressed by the honest, sometimes prickly, but always authentic conversations the PRESS leadership team had in order to complete the goal. The stress of the campus based versus college wide was often felt in the dynamics of the conversations. We continued to work through those issues, and successfully launched the pilot course with more sections than were first promised because there was so much interest in getting it started right.*

*- Joyce*

At the Collaborative Design Center on October 25, 2013, the seven PRESS faculty leaders spent the first 30 minutes of the meeting creating a visualization of a 16-week NSE course based on the six NSE outcomes and the lesson plans shared at the showcase. Themes for the course emerged that morning. By lunch time, the team had a general sketch for the 16-week course, and several key lesson plans emerged as favorites of the seven

faculty. For the remainder of the day, the faculty systematically reviewed the submitted lesson plans and made connections between ideas and activities. In several cases, several faculty submitted similar ideas. At the end of the day, the faculty leaders agreed to continue working to combine lesson plan ideas and strategies. November was a time for fine tuning the lesson plans and crafting a 16-week course that would meet the course outcomes (the 6Ps).

*The day started with a general idea of where we needed to go with our work. But, it quickly became apparent that the 34 lessons were all so good that we could have designed a 12-month course! We left the meeting in agreement that we would need to work with those faculty who had submitted their lessons to ask if we could combine lessons and/or shorten lessons in order to fit everything within the 16-week allotted course time.*

- Christina

*I felt a little awkward that so many faculty from other disciplines were working on our course. I needed to let go of the old course, something I spent so many years developing and nurturing, now that other faculty were developing it. I stayed after to talk with my SLS faculty peers and we were having a hard time trusting that the new course would be as effective as the original student success course. We knew we needed to change the course, but I was struggling with letting go of the old course. When we were in the collaborative studio, we didn't realize that this was the moment when the old student success was going to be changed, and the relief I felt was tremendous. I realized that the new course was in a good hands, and that this was going to be great, and the ideas which were emerging were going to take student success to the next level and serve as the new student experience... When we made the choice to not have a textbook, I felt very relieved that we were finally making a decision that we had been talking about for years. In the end, I felt relieved that we were creating something great and I had the confidence this group could do it"*

- Christy

November was a busy month for the PRESS leadership team. The faculty were tasked with redesigning the SLS 1122 course in time to train the faculty who would teach the spring 2014 pilot. The team committed to redesigning the new course in time for a December 6, 2013, training date. According to the QEP, the college was committed to pilot six sections of the new course in the spring. The faculty worked long and hard hours as a team to redesign the course. At times, the seven faculty found success in splitting into smaller work teams to work out specific details regarding the course or to prepare for the fast-approaching spring pilot. For example, while the three SLS faculty took ownership of the NSE course curriculum, several other members of the team created the faculty development plans to train the faculty who would teach the new course during the spring pilot.

*November was kind of a blur. The PRESS team had a huge task ahead of them, but the team members all fell into a groove and seemed to take ownership for the tasks they felt most comfortable with. It seemed natural, for example, that the three tenured SLS faculty on the leadership team would take the lead on the actual redesign of a course they had been teaching for years. The rest of us found our niche in working to develop the faculty development piece for the course.*

- Christina

Another alignment opportunity occurred in September 2013 as the college's curriculum committee was discussing a final recommendation involving the college's general education program. Due to state legislative changes from the previous year, the general education program for the associate in arts degree was redesigned, and an opportunity to add additional courses to the program was open. After a college-wide team spent a year identifying which courses would be included in the 30 hours to be shared among each of five academic areas, the state revised the requirement for the general education total credits back to the original 36 credit hours. Since the 30 hours were already divided evenly among the five areas, a recommendation to add the redesigned student success course to the general education core as the new student experience course was made and approved.

*Frankly, it was nothing short of miraculous that the student success course was included in general education. There was support*

*for this recommendation due to the significant discussion led by PRESS leadership about the content and value of a new student experience course and the commitment to significantly revise its content and integrate different discipline “flavors.” I was thrilled that it had occurred, but also realized the tremendous responsibility we had to fulfill the expectations for the new course.*

*-Joyce*

The PRESS leadership team felt that since the course would eventually be required of all new students to Valencia and was to become the center of the new student experience that it needed a new kind of faculty development focus. So, on December 6, 2013, and January 3, 2014, the PRESS faculty leadership team facilitated full-day training sessions in preparation for the spring pilot. It was important to the team that the faculty who would teach the new course had a full understanding of the new course outcomes and the saw the connection to the QEP. The newly redesigned course was eventually renamed the new student experience course with help from the college’s marketing department and the QEP core team. The course is truly a new type of student success course focused on providing students with the tools to help them navigate their way through their college experience.

College wide, a variety of faculty, both full-time and part-time, some who were seasoned SLS instructors and others who would teach SLS for the first time, participated in the first offerings of the NSE course. Ultimately, 21 sections of the newly redesigned NSE course were offered college wide during the spring term. The group of faculty teaching the course, along with members of the PRESS leadership team, met twice monthly during the spring to discuss the progress of the new course. Meeting minutes were recorded and compiled for program-level assessment efforts.

The course pilot provided the team the opportunity to closely examine the effectiveness of the new curriculum and lesson plans and to assess how well the outcomes were achieved. Student and faculty feedback was very positive. Faculty teaching the new course received very positive feedback from students who were excited about the new curriculum.

Students shared their enthusiasm over a course developed to introduce them to important college skills that would help them find their purpose. While the course felt “heavy” to some students, others expressed their appreciation in learning how to plan for their futures. Students were excited about the new course and even loved the book selected for the course—a common read focused on helping students find their purpose and passion. Students reportedly asked if they could read ahead of the scheduled reading agenda! As with any new course, there were some kinks to work out, too. Specifically, the students expressed feelings of frustration over the volume of work in the course. With the feedback from faculty and students in hand, the three tenured SLS faculty worked during summer 2014 to make adjustments to the course lessons, syllabus, and course schedule to better support the student learning outcomes and the needs of our students.

*Overall, the pilot was a success. Students were energized with the common read, and motivated by the final story project. Some of the lesson plans were a little challenging to put into practice, and our bi-weekly meetings gave us the opportunity to discuss what was working and review the lessons that needed to be modified. They were well developed with great assessment plans, but in practice were difficult and not realistic. For example, one of the lesson plans required students to interview two to three people who are already in the occupation or career they were interested in, and we realized that this was not feasible for some students in the NSE course. Students didn’t have time to find and interview three people in their career. We had to make changes to this lesson and several others. Some students were interested in very unique and specialized careers. We needed to rethink many of the lesson plans. We learned a lot from the pilot and realized how much of the course would need to be modified before it was scaled to all students as part of the QEP.*

*-Christy*

The New Student Experience course will be required in fall 2014 for half of Valencia's new degree-seeking students. Approximately 221 sections of the NSE course are planned to run in fall 2014. By fall 2015, when the course becomes a required general education course, all new degree seeking students will be required to enroll in the course as part of the new student experience program that is the college's QEP focus.

## HOW WE DID IT

As they say, hindsight is always "20-20." What was the difference between 2009 and 2013 that led Valencia to a different conclusion about the possibility of a required course for all new students? Certainly, there are many other colleges that have established such courses by administrative feat and moved on. But that is not the way we do things at Valencia. It is not acceptable in our culture to force such decisions, as previous attempts to reach this point demonstrate. What was different this time can be summarized in a few observations. It is likely the combination of these things, and other factors too, nuanced to be able to name made the difference this time.

**History** – There was 20 years of data, effort, and conversation responsible for forming the foundation for the idea. There were people at the college who had been a part of that history and many new leaders who were not.

**Big ideas** – The habit of discussing and identifying big ideas at the college creates the foundation of discussion and collaboration that builds common understanding and trust. This is an essential part of institutional culture. Any large initiative must be connected to a big idea in order to make sense within organizational life. Valencia happens to have lots of big ideas. And the concept and habit of big ideas was introduced and is continually supported by our very talented president.

**Campus-based leadership** – Like history, there were aspects of this dynamic that were helpful and some that were challenging. PRESS provided a structure by which we had to practice what campus based leadership meant. It was painful at times (and still is) but we pushed through and accomplished more than could have been imagined when we started.

**Aligning institutional momentum** – The intentional alignment of the changes and initiatives underway at the college definitely added to the momentum of the QEP and the PRESS work. PRESS provided the perfect opportunity to practice the new campus-based leadership by focusing new leaders on work that had to be completed, and also contributed importantly to the re-accreditation process through the development of the QEP and the state changes in general education. It was a living process that had to be nurtured and carefully considered, particularly at key decision-making points. The deliberate conversations that took place during the time of the PRESS grant work enhanced the intentionality and alignment with both the college's history and the direction of its future.

**Talented and dedicated professionals** – We greatly benefitted from the tremendous leadership of the new deans of learning support who were willing to step into the abyss and figure out how they were going to work together in the real time of getting the work done. They were supported by the new campus presidents who were equally willing to offer support and guidance as needed to contribute and align PRESS with other college developments. The design structure provided by the QEP leadership team created the organizational space for the PRESS initiative to do ground breaking work to benefit the entire college. Faculty leaders who were willing to invest their time and talent to the process and products of PRESS were the core to what was able to be accomplished.

*I am reminded of the famous quote from Margaret Mead. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

*- Joyce*

