

BUILDING CAPACITY

EXPANDING STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The nation has made an unprecedented investment in community colleges to simultaneously increase college completion and stimulate economic recovery. One of the most substantial investments was the Trade Adjustment Act Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) program of the United States Department of Labor (U.S.DOL). Beginning October 2011, the TAACCCT program was intended to support the efforts of community colleges to develop training programs and build their capacity to innovate (United States Department of Labor, 2011).

The Transformative Change Initiative (TCI) recognized the potential importance of TAACCCT to enhance community colleges' ability to better serve all students. Through professional development, research, evaluation and networking, TCI invited these colleges to share what they were learning and ways in which they were changing their policies and practices with the goal of improving student outcomes. TCI collaborated with 24 consortia to publish *Strategies for Transformative Change* briefs that describe specific strategies that each consortium implemented. Looking across these briefs, we identified a number of key topical areas under which the grant-funded innovations (strategies) could be organized, including partnerships, career pathways, and intrusive student support, and we examined how the consortia engaged in capacity building to accomplish their goals.

How did TCI think of capacity building? Our thinking went beyond the question of short-term changes and a focus on compliance to long-term change that has the potential to improve performance while sustaining access. We looked for evidence that changes were accompanied by data and other indications that colleges were focusing on activities that would allow them to create structures and processes to engage in deep and collective capacity building necessary to sustain change (Sharratt & Fullan, 2013; Kezar, 2014).

This brief is one in a series that focuses on the capacity building of three TAACCCT funded consortia engaged in expanding student support services to retain students to completion of their academic programs and providing the support necessary to help them transition to employment. While the colleges used various methods to change existing structures and practices related to student support, there were similarities in their approach to building capacity.

Transformative Change Overview

The Transformative Change Initiative (TCI) is dedicated to sustaining and scaling change that closes equity gaps and improves student outcomes in the community college education context.

TRAC-7 Consortium

Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, was awarded a Round One TAACCCT grant and led the Technical Retraining to Achieve Credentials (TRAC-7) Consortium of seven Kansas community and technical colleges. In 2014, Washburn and four Kansas community and technical colleges were awarded a Round Four TAACCCT grant named Kansas Technical Retraining Among Industry-targeted Networks (KanTRAIN). Advanced Manufacturing and Health Care were the targeted industry sectors. The Military Transitions Program was started as part of TRAC-7 to organize a multi-faceted approach to student support and was continued and expanded in KanTRAIN to aid in access, support, and transition to employment for this critical TAACCCT population.

Specifically, the program was designed to address the issues and challenges faced by veterans and service members as they enter college, including navigating college systems, accessing benefits and services due to them, receiving college credits earned in military service, and becoming accustomed to the culture of the college setting.

The Military Transitions Program supported 85 students in the three years of TRAC-7 implementation; eighty-six percent earned a credential. Of the 32 students served in the program who were

unemployed at the time of enrollment, 11 had become employed at the end of the grant, and at least three were still enrolled in college.

Key factors that were critical to building the colleges' capacity to better support veterans included

- hiring a veteran with active duty experience to serve as the Military Transitions Director;
- raising awareness across the Consortium's colleges regarding the growing number of veterans in the state and the rising rates of unemployment and underemployment of this population;
- building partnerships among local agencies, non-profits and other organizations with ties to the veteran population to garner information and access to non-academic support services; and
- gaining support from top military leadership to raise awareness of issues that the target population faces as they enter college, complete programs and transition to the workforce.

Gulf Coast IT Consortium

The Gulf Coast IT Consortium (GCIT) was awarded a Round Two TAACCCT grant to address the demand for information technology workers. GCIT includes nine community and technical colleges in Louisiana and Mississippi. As part of their five strategy initiative to



develop career pathways, each college was to align its approach to student support with that of the I-BEST model, (see <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/programs-services/i-best/>) and the Accelerating Opportunity initiative (see <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/accelerating-opportunity>). Both initiatives were implemented at the Consortium's colleges and together with the TAACCCT grant, served to build a strong foundation of student support that offered comprehensive, wrap-around support for the targeted TAACCCT population. The role of career navigator is a key component of this support system. Due to the time it takes to provide the comprehensive services, GCIT program directors recognized that more navigators were needed, and the colleges determined that a caseload of one navigator to 25 program participants was the ideal ratio.

Ways the navigators increase the colleges' capacity to better serve students:

- Provide one point of contact for prospective students and maintain that relationship throughout the program and into employment. The navigator approaches students proactively, recognizing that students who often need the most assistance do not ask for it or know the services exist.
- Serve as a knowledgeable provider and coordinator of a comprehensive suite of services, some offered at the college (i.e., financial aid, career development, college assessments, program enrollment, study skills and test prep, transition to other two and four year academic programs, etc.) and others within the community (i.e., counseling, housing, transportation, childcare assistance, etc.).
- Co-locate navigators at the colleges and the One-stop centers to better connect students and potential employers.
- Advocate for students gaining credit for prior learning. Before the GCIT grant, prior learning assessment (PLA) policies were non-existent or where present, not consistently utilized.

Colorado Online Energy Training Consortium

The Colorado Online Energy Training Consortium (COETC) is a 15-member, statewide community college consortium that was awarded a Round One TAACCCT grant. The focus of the grant was to redesign developmental education. In doing so, COETC colleges also initiated a parallel strategy, intrusive advising, to build their capacity to improve student persistence.

COETC officials recognized that each of the 13 participating colleges needed to develop their own advising model to reflect the unique needs and resources of the college and its student population. What remained constant among colleges was the frequent communication between navigators and the involvement of faculty from multiple disciplines along with students and administrators who together,

helped establish a shared commitment to student success. Intrusive advisors in COETC have enabled the colleges to increase their capacity to

- frequently contact students enrolled in developmental education so they receive proactive support or at the first signs they are struggling;
- provide both academic and non-academic supports, on and off campus; and
- establish relationships between students and a trusted and knowledgeable staff member who serves as the students' advocate.

What We Learned about Capacity Building

The community and technical colleges in these three consortia adopted and adapted strategies that strengthened their abilities to better serve students. The colleges practiced capacity building efforts such as (a) raising awareness of an important issue related to student success, (b) changing attitudes and practices about what is needed to achieve improved student outcomes, (c) building relationships among partners within and outside of the college who share a commitment toward student success, (d) communicating frequently with partners, and (e) putting student success at the forefront of any college policy or practice that affects students. Indeed, capacity building takes time and the committed partnership of many stakeholders, and any measure of student success is worth the collective effort.

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TCI is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation, and the Joyce Foundation, and this publication was prepared pursuant to a grant from the Lumina Foundation (Grant Agreement Number 8829) to the University of Illinois Board of Trustees.

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Kirby, C. L. (2016). *Building capacity: Expanding student support services*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



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