Achieving the Dream™

IMPLEMENTING A HOLISTIC STUDENT SUPPORTS APPROACH:

FOUR CASE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

Over the last several years, Achieving the Dream (ATD) has engaged in a number of initiatives to help community colleges build their capacity to ensure that more students can reach their education and career goals. During the course of that work, we have come to see clearly that enhancing and integrating student support services is central to student success. Helping more students achieve their dreams involves identifying a wider set of student needs—including financial challenges and family responsibilities—and offering redesigned support services to meet them holistically. To do this colleges must (1) review their advising and student support model; (2) develop a sustainable and scalable case management model; (3) implement visionary change leadership to spur cross-campus buy-in and engagement; and (4) assess and improve their use of data and technology.

As ATD looks to the future, we recognize the need to provide new coaching and training services to help colleges implement this new approach, but first we want to clarify the practices and research that informs it. In the following pages, we introduce the theory and practice behind holistic student services along with four case studies of colleges that are well along in moving to adopt it. The colleges were part of a recently concluded learning initiative, ATD's Working Student Success Network, that, among other strategies, targeted lower-income students at 19 colleges with integrated services. Their experiences moved us forward in framing the holistic student services approach.

We understand that the best resources college leaders, staff, and faculty have for innovation are their peers at other institutions. Our hope is that these case studies provide concrete examples of how other colleges have approached this work and will generate discussion about how to engage in the support services redesign process.

At the end of the document, you will find information about ATD resources and support for implementing holistic student supports redesign on your campus.

HOLISTIC STUDENT SUPPORTS APPROACH

With a growing emphasis on guided pathways and creating more student-centric institutions, colleges are increasingly looking to redesign the student experience. Institutions have begun reemphasizing the vital role of a seamless, personalized experience for students that holistically connects them to the supports they need to reach their educational and career goals. However, while student services often seem logically organized to those who work within those systems on a regular basis, students—particularly first-time students with little knowledge of what to expect at college—often encounter what appears to be a maze of disconnected services and technologies they have to navigate to find the supports they need.
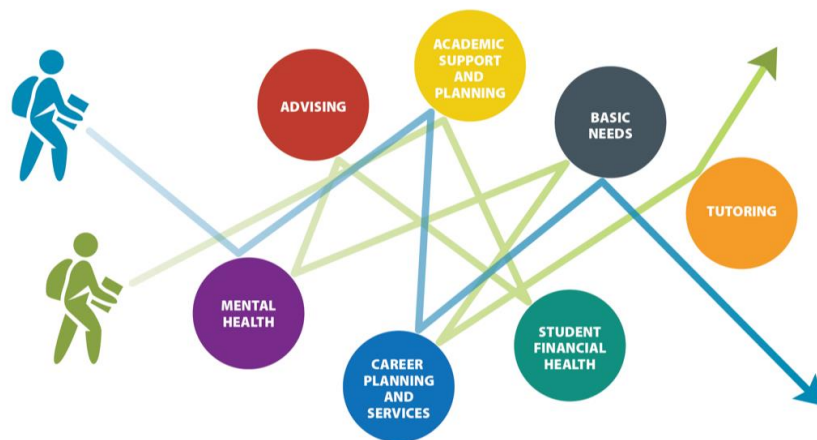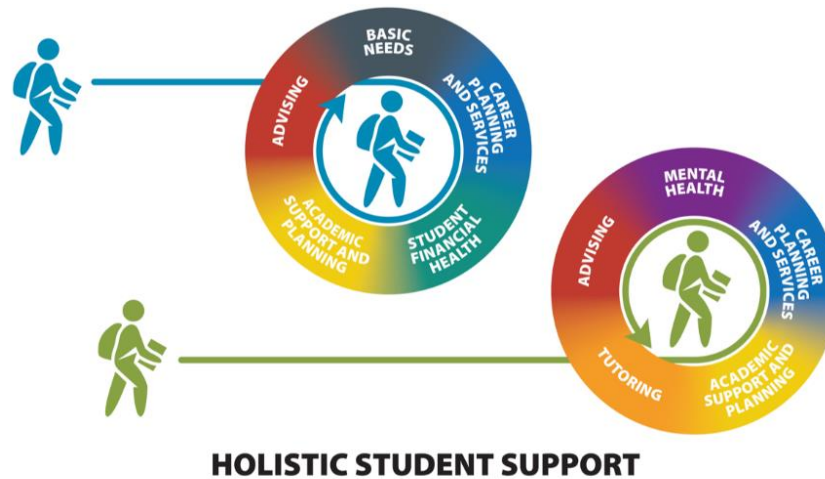

TYPICAL STUDENT SUPPORT

Through Achieving the Dream's work with institutions across the country, we've found colleges that see the greatest gains in student outcomes strive to ensure all students:

- Are supported in achieving their personal career and academic goals through intentional and early development of academic, career, *and* financial plans.
- Only have to tell their "story" once and are not running from office to office to get the answers or support they need.
- Are connected with effective supports targeted to their individual needs during the enrollment and intake process so they enter the classroom in the best condition to learn.
- Feel confident that faculty, staff, and administrators are invested in _their_ success.

In a holistic student supports approach services are personalized to each student's particular needs, integrated, and timed to the student's needs and ongoing throughout the student's college experience.

HOLISTIC STUDENT SUPPORT

DRIVERS OF CHANGE: REDESIGNING TOWARD HOLISTIC STUDENT SUPPORTS

Redesigning services using a holistic student supports approach requires a careful assessment of what the college is currently doing and identifying what is working and what changes can be made to expand and integrate those services to better serve students. That assessment should be based on a set of key design principles and underlying institutional practices.

Design Principles

Research into the student support redesign efforts of two- and four- year institutions through a learning initiative led by Achieving the Dream as well as with extensive research conducted by the Community College Research Center[1] has identified five underlying principles of designing effective student supports. These principles—known as SSIPP for Sustained, Strategic, Integrated, Proactive, and Personalized—provide standards and a guideline for the design of student supports. While institutions can apply them differently to meet their needs, holistic student support services are:

Sustained: Institutions support students consistently and for the long haul through their full journey at an institution. This typically involves an informative intake process to ensure a student's needs—both academic and nonacademic—are known from the outset, ongoing interaction with the student particularly at key momentum points, and monitoring to ensure early awareness of a student who is facing a significant challenge that is becoming a barrier to their educational success.

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[1] Karp, M. and Stacey, G. (2013). *What We Know About Nonacademic Student Supports*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

Strategic: Through research and experience, colleges know the key points at which students' needs arise in their educational careers and strategically allocate time, energy, and resources to meet those needs in ways they are most likely to use. In addition, the college provides more resource-intensive support to students who need it most.

Integrated: Services function as interconnected tools rather than as stand-alone interventions, that when used together create a strong support structure. Colleges knock down siloes and build bridges connecting disparate departments and services to promote more equitable and stable college experiences. Critical to designing integrated services is to operate with the student perspective as guide rather than relying on staff perceptions of what appears to be a logical integration.

Proactive: Support is provided at the first sign of trouble rather than after a situation builds to a crisis. Key to being able to intervene is an institution's data systems, designed to capture information for the student support system. This allows staff to monitor student progress and know when to target specific, just-in-time supports to students in tactical ways.

Personalized: Based on the insights emerging from meaningful staff-student relationships, each student receives the type and intensity of support appropriate to his or her unique and diverse needs. This requires staff and faculty to have a deep understanding of who their students are, particularly those students who come to campus with needs that might be considered nonacademic, but that have significant impact on academic performance.

Institutional Practices

The best designed student support systems are only effective if an institution is able to embed practices within its organizational culture that translate those design principles into meaningful services for students. Through research findings and the redesign experiences of institutions with which Achieving the Dream has worked, ATD has identified key institutional practices and underlying conditions necessary for holistic student supports to take hold and affect students' success. These practices are:

Establishing shared personal and institutional responsibility for collective success.

➢ Staff and faculty members clearly understand their individual roles in enhancing the student experience.
➢ There is no wrong door through which a student can enter to get the support they need. Every staff and faculty member can respond to student situations and/or refer students to the appropriate place to get assistance.
➢ Job descriptions include language indicating the clear role staff and faculty have in providing student supports.
➢ The institution's strategic plan includes offering and monitoring holistic student supports.

Building meaningful relationships.

- ➤ Students positively identify with at least one person who will support and encourage them.
- ➤ Students feel like they belong on campus.
- ➤ Personnel collaborate across functional areas to ensure students' needs are addressed in a timely manner.
- ➤ In each interaction with students, faculty and staff take a developmental, coaching approach to understanding what the student is going through and what he or she needs to be successful.
- ➤ The institution cultivates external partnerships to provide and deliver services.

Monitoring student progress.

- ➤ The college does frequent and consistent checks on student progress to ensure students are connected to supports before they reach a crisis point.
- ➤ The college carries out ongoing assessment of services offered and areas of unmet need.
- ➤ Staff and faculty engage students by arranging ongoing counseling and coaching check-ins rather than waiting for students to need something.
- ➤ Staff and faculty regularly follow up on referrals and use of services.

Using targeted data and technology across the institution.

- ➤ Faculty, staff, and students make broad, routine use of data and technology to monitor students' progress toward their goals.
- ➤ Faculty and staff leverage technology to identify students' individual needs and connect them to appropriate services.
- ➤ Technology connects students with supports (including public services) and tracks how and when each student uses them.
- ➤ Technology is deployed to empower students to complete routine tasks and access certain services electronically.

Reimagining policy and practice.

- ➤ Policies ensure the college delivers services proactively and seamlessly, rather than expecting students to find services when they need them.
- ➤ Protocols ensure faculty and staff know which supports each student receives and any outcomes.
- ➤ Student learning outcomes clearly define the value and purpose of each support.

- ➢ Hiring and promotion policies provide accountability and demonstrate the value of each employee having a role in student success.
- ➢ Policies are routinely reviewed to ensure they facilitate the desired student experience and do not produce unintended barriers for students.

LAUNCHING HOLISTIC STUDENT SUPPORTS

Making the institutional changes to implement a holistic student supports approach is no small task. It has to be a deliberate, concerted, and institution-wide effort that involves leadership, staff, faculty, and ultimately the students themselves. However, that does not mean that this work is done in a vacuum. Institutions can often connect holistic supports to other efforts already occurring on campus—for instance, implementing guided pathways, or revamping an institution's strategic plan, or responding to a system or statewide initiative on improving student success, or preparing for an accreditation review, or being involved in another grant-funded initiative.

The following case studies look at four colleges that were involved in the Working Students Success Network (WSSN), one of several ATD initiatives that informed the evolution of the holistic student supports approach. The essence of the WSSN approach was a culture shift in which the colleges intentionally designed and implemented student services that integrated the academic and non-academic supports many low-income students require to achieve academic and financial success. As such, it served as a natural launch pad for completely rethinking how to best design student services to address individual student needs holistically and in a sustained fashion.

This work involved significant and wide-ranging institutional changes. The following case studies provide a snapshot of some of the most important aspects of this approach at these colleges:

- North Arkansas College (AR)
- Clark College (WA)
- Northern Virginia Community College (VA)
- Porterville College (CA)

For those interested in more detailed information about the WSSN initiative, please visit the ATD website at:
http://www.achievingthedream.org/resources/initiatives/working-students-success-network

The case studies detail the changes each college made that align with the design principles and institutional practices of the holistic student supports approach. The intention is to provide a starting point for a discussion about how community colleges can make these types of changes to better help students achieve their academic, career, and life goals.

NORTHARK CARES: CREATING A CULTURE OF CARE AT NORTH ARKANSAS COLLEGE

Community colleges are seeking strategies to improve student persistence and completion and help more students achieve success academically, in their careers, and in their financial lives. While some might view achieving financial stability as an end result of earning a college credential, research is pointing to the pressing need for colleges to help students—and especially those at community colleges—ground their college experience in immediate and ongoing support on financial matters beyond how they will pay for books and tuition.

Such was the case at North Arkansas College (Northark), located in one of the poorest areas of the state and serving students with an average age of 27, nearly 70 percent of whom have family incomes that qualify them for Pell grants. Most work, or have families, or carry financial burdens that make being in college part of a juggling act. But while academics can be challenging, Northark officials say that the most significant barriers to student completion and retention are financial obligations or the lack of money to stay in college.

Like most community colleges, Northark used advisors to provide traditional academic advising support to students, but it didn't have an institutionalized way of engaging students about financial challenges that were affecting their ability to be successful in school. Nor was it providing them with access to public benefits that could assist them with issues such as food insecurity, housing needs, and the like. Likewise, Northark had not worked with its faculty and staff in a deliberate way to understand the needs and challenges of low-income students and determine how, as an institution, the college could better meet those needs.

Back in 2014, "we needed an avenue to create a culture change on campus," says Dean of Students Tavonda Brown, "to spark a reason for faculty and staff to look at student needs through a different lens and on a greater holistic level." That avenue was the Working Students Success Network (WSSN). The initiative offered an opportunity for the college to reorient and strengthen student services and change the culture to be more caring and focused on meeting students' needs in a holistic way.

Northark had two other student success efforts underway. One was "guided pathways," a logical course of study that puts students on an academic pathway, helps them stay on it, and prepares them to enter the workforce or continue their studies. The second was a new advising model that uses technology and student-staff relationships to offer proactive, personalized, and holistic supports, tailored to the individual needs of each student. All three approaches rely upon a campus culture change. They require staff and faculty to look differently at their traditional work and share responsibility for upgrading services that boost student success.

Northark's leadership team recognized that to get staff and faculty buy-in, the student support system redesign had to address a syndrome common to scrappy, underfunded public colleges: "grant fatigue." A college secures a grant, implements changes based on the grant, but then finds itself unable to continue the work when the grant ends. To change that scenario, the leadership team approached the three-year WSSN initiative as an opportunity to change the culture of the institution in an intentional, enduring way. It worked to integrate and embed a diverse set of services to provide maximum student support to low-income students and their families throughout the college experience.

The college adopted the slogan "Northark Cares," reflecting its commitment to weave the new services into every aspect of the institution's standard operations and create a culture of caring focused on helping each student succeed in the classroom and beyond. Efforts to change the culture ranged from retraining faculty and staff for more personalized advising, to instituting mandatory success courses, to collecting and using better data to creating a food pantry and associated interventions to ensure students' financial struggles come to light and are addressed.

Underlying the work was a commitment to understanding each point of contact along the continuum of a student's experience as an opportunity to strengthen and personalize connections, offer services, and deliver them in timely and effective ways.

Toward a Personalized and Collaborative Approach

Because Northark is a small institution operating in a tight state budgetary environment, it had to be especially strategic in how it allocated resources to best reach students and be sustainable over the long run. Consequently, Northark set about to build on existing structures and integrate new practices and services into current staff job descriptions, knowing that they were not likely to be able to hire more staff.

Northark centered its design on transforming the Student Services division through upgraded or enhanced services. This involved providing significant professional development to train the advising staff and faculty advisors in new methods of one-on-one student coaching for success, identifying students' changing needs, using that information to guide advising and student support overhauls, and changing outdated practices. To ensure that staff could monitor and manage student needs and services in a holistic way, the design included a tracking software upgrade to collect sign-in information in all offices offering academic, career, and financial support services.

These changes produced a distributed yet aligned student services model with students receiving services via multiple points of contact sustained over the course of their college careers. While some colleges have created one-stop student service locations, Northark's

model requires more cross-departmental collaboration. It strategically integrates services into college functions and processes.

Northark uses multiple methods to deliver these services. Some are designed to reach a large percentage of students, such as mandatory student orientation for new students and College Success Skills courses that embed financial and career planning elements. Other services are more personalized and targeted to meet the needs of individual students. For example, advisors have initial one-on-one meetings to determine each student's concerns and complete a "Welcome Form" that drives the types of services targeted to each student. Through this initial meeting and form, students can be connected to needed services ranging from tutoring to career and financial coaching; from financial literacy education to referrals to the college's food pantry and assistance in attaining SNAP benefits. The intent is to serve each student personally and to serve the whole student.

Institutional Practices: "It's What We Do"

The best design ideas are only as good as an institution's ability to implement them. "Northark Cares" would be little more than a slogan, if institutional practices did not put that sentiment into action in concrete ways. To use the holistic student support lens, fundamental to implementing Northark's redesign was reimagining policies and making the initiative's implementation a shared, college-wide responsibility—not just something one particular department was responsible for or that was seen as "the next new thing" that would disappear soon. Northark took pains to articulate the cultural issue of student poverty as an institutional priority and thereby destigmatize students' need to access benefits and services on a temporary basis. Northark Cares represents an institutional commitment to meeting the needs of students, whatever those might be, on a daily basis and over the long-term.

Implementing financial support services aspects at the same time the college was adopting guided pathways and an expanded advising model sent an inescapable message. These new efforts meant that a wider set of faculty and staff were sharing the responsibility of helping students plan, persist, and succeed. Or, as Brown says: "It's what we do."

Prior to this work, students' daily financial realities were not typically on the radar screen of college faculty and staff even though they can directly impact students' academic focus. These challenges can include the need for childcare, food security, reliable transportation, assistance with managing finances, emergency loans, and many others. Northark saw that acknowledging students' complicated financial lives and offering targeted assistance could help keep students on the path to success. But, the college also recognized that it needed to prepare faculty and staff to deal with issues outside their traditional purview.

To begin, Northark sent a team of advisors to Central New Mexico Community College's Financial Coach Training to develop both coaching skills and a better understanding of how to

support students in overcoming financial challenges. This team, in turn, developed a coaching curriculum for Northark and became the college's in-house trainers. They trained the college's advisors and financial aid officers, admissions and registrar staff as well as others to provide financial and career coaching, and help students apply for benefits and coordinate referrals to other services. Faculty also learned to provide coaching services during their individual faculty advising sessions with students.

This strategy encouraged a personal touch, allowing students to build relationships with a variety of faculty and staff who were prepared to help, or find someone who could. And because each student's first experiences at the college featured a personal outreach to assess his or her range of academic, personal, and financial needs, staff found students would be more likely to seek out assistance should unforeseen problems arise.

In addition, the college implemented a "Go-To Person Campaign" where faculty and staff were assigned several students who, based on their needs assessments, were deemed high-risk of dropping out. The faculty or staff member would be responsible for communicating one-on-one with each student at regular intervals, providing reminders, just-in-time information, and tips for success.

Being there for students in these ways relies upon strategic use of data, and a process for pulling simple and detailed reports about individual students, the services they accessed, and the duration of their appointments. The college then can use the information to evaluate the impact of services on academic performance and student progress. Northark's tracking system combined with an improved early alert system allowed the college to monitor student progress and identify students who may be struggling for any number of reasons and who would need to see their go-to person.

Making it All Visible

Northark worked to better integrate student services and normalize them as a natural part of the student experience. It made the services more visible, showing all the ways that Northark was prepared and committed to help.

Fundamentally, Northark has shifted its culture to meet students where they are at the start of their educational journey and ensure that there are multiple touchpoints throughout their journey for the student based on both their academic and nonacademic needs. Many of those interactions are mandatory to make explicit that these are a regular part of the college-going experience. These start with student orientations where students are made aware of the various wrap-around services the college provides and an initial one-on-one advising appointment takes place to identify each student's needs. Students are then assigned a faculty advisor to continue that advising and coaching relationship.

Northark targets another mandatory support to students who place into two or more college preparatory courses. It requires them to take the college's Student Success course where the curriculum is not only designed to help with academic skills but also includes financial and career coaching, budgeting, and financial literacy components. This is also another opportunity for the college staff and faculty to identify particular needs individual students may have for services and target resource-intensive support to the students who need it most.

Not all student supports must be mandatory, of course. Good data collection and analysis allows the college to individualize services. For example, the college identified as a particular challenge the number of students who were borrowing large amounts of money to help cover college costs and living expenses. It was concerned that students were borrowing too much—often, the maximum amount rather than what was needed—and putting themselves in a precarious financial situation for the long term. So, the college began mandatory counseling for those students who had already reached a certain level of borrowing or were in danger of default. Now, students first must create a budget to determine their needs as a basis for how much they will borrow, if they borrow at all. To date, the college has reduced student loan borrowing by nearly two million dollars.

Food Pantry becomes a Symbol of the New Commitment

A prime example of Northark's commitment to change the culture around poverty in the community and use services to help students help themselves was the establishment of Pete's Pantry for those dealing with hunger and food insecurity.

The pantry provided over $10,000 worth of food to hundreds of Northark students and their families in the first year alone. It became something the college community could rally around and a tangible example of the college's efforts to offer support beyond the classroom. Also, the college designed the pantry to be more than a short-term solution to a basic need. It became an entry point that opened the door to wrap-around services. A visit to the food pantry might lead to a student receiving assistance in applying for SNAP benefits, housing, or transportation. The pantry also helped create community on campus. Faculty and staff were more than happy to provide donations and assistance for the pantry, student government leaders helped to staff the pantry, and word of mouth on campus quickly made this an invaluable resource to the community at large.

Ultimately, college officials say, the key to Northark's success in providing a more holistic support experience for students has been an all-hands-on-deck approach to serving students, coupled with constant communication about how to access services and what the benefits of those services are. "We talk about it everywhere and every chance we get," says Brown. "We talk about what we are doing at every board meeting, in our college-wide functions such as convocation, at all of our orientations, at meetings with community groups who we have involved in providing services for students, on social media—everywhere."

Continuing to Improve by Addressing Challenges

Northark's exemplary efforts demonstrate the benefits of having a strategic and intentional plan for integrating a diverse set of services designed to reach a significant percentage of students, but also being flexible enough to meet individual student needs. However, the college still views it as a work in progress and continues to address ongoing challenges.

As with most community colleges, particularly small rural colleges, budgetary constraints and staff capacity are the most significant and pervasive challenges the college faces. Staff turnover can be particularly disruptive, as responsibility for a certain set of services might rest with only one or two staff members and finding new candidates with the right experience can take time in remote places. Northark has worked hard to address these challenges by engaging the whole campus and distributing the work, but it will be an issue that will require continual attention.

Managing time is the other big challenge for community college students. Northark students' time on campus is limited, particularly as many have a long commute between their homes or jobs and campus. When the college adds additional requirements to their schedules, students may not always find it feasible to get to or stay on campus to fulfill them. In addition, says Rachel Nelson, career services coordinator, "students do not participate on a voluntary basis. As faculty and staff, we have to be proactive in reaching out and grabbing students every semester.

Northark has tried to balance what services and activities are mandatory (or that students would have to proactively opt out of) with those that they allow students to opt in to. The goal is to ensure that students have exposure to services without creating additional burdens. For example, initially students in the Student Success course were required to make an additional appointment to get financial coaching outside of the course. Northark changed that model to embed individual financial coaching during class time to ensure they reach students without requiring extra time on campus.

Conclusion

Making procedural and structural changes within the existing staff rather than adding new staff was a necessity for small, rural Northark and has allowed the college to plan ahead and sustain the scope of its work. But for culture change to take hold, Brown warns, "be prepared to communicate, communicate, communicate—plans, implementation updates, and results.

"There will always be those people who don't want to get on board, so you have to be creative in how you show the benefits of what you are trying to do. Personal stories are hard to ignore. Getting students to share how their experiences changed them or made a difference is a valuable and important exercise. Combining stories with your data and a call to action is how you keep the work energized."

Northark has seen a 10 percentage point increase in student retention over the two years it implemented its new student services model. That is certainly notable given all of the challenges community college students face, but as Nelson adds, it's not just about retention. "Yes, we want to retain students and help them reach their academic goals, but our commitment is to help them be productive members of our community." The college continues to push toward this North Star.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

The following questions are to help you think about what lessons to learn from the Northark experience that could inform how your institution could move to a more holistic student support model.

1. Northark intentionally chose to use a distributed model for providing student services. How does this differ from your institution's model and are there lessons to be learned from Northark's experience that could be applied to your institution?

2. A key to Northark's model is buy-in from faculty and staff to coach students and help identify additional services they need. Does your institution's culture promote that type of campus-wide involvement? If not, how do you think your institution could move in that direction?

3. Addressing the issue of hunger and food insecurity became a key touchpoint for Northark. What do you believe are the most pressing issues for your students outside the classroom that your institution could address?

4. Northark's data system allowed staff to monitor student progress and identify students who may be at risk (and, in fact, they are currently in the process of implementing a new Student Information System to improve on this ability). Does your institution have the ability to monitor students in a proactive way? How could your use of data be improved?

5. What was the most valuable lesson you learned from the Northark experience?

6. What do you believe would not translate to your institution as you think about strengthening your student services and why?

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES: TRANSFORMING STUDENT SERVICES AT CLARK COLLEGE

I don't know that I have ever been anywhere where I felt like somebody's on my team so much. Like, you want success for me as much as I want success for me and that was an amazing feeling.

--Terra, Nursing student and single mother at Clark College

Clark College's guiding theme as an institution is transformation. Central to that theme has been creating a campus environment in which students see the college as a comprehensive resource to help them achieve their academic, career, and life aspirations. Clark supports those aspirations with holistic and integrated student support services.

As one of 19 colleges that participated in Achieving the Dream's Working Students Success Network (WSSN), Clark set out to re-envision their student services in a way that was less "siloed," more intentionally collaborative, and designed to reach significantly more students, particularly low-income, working students, student parents, and students from historically underserved groups. The WSSN's focus on intentional combinations of supports for each student aligned with the college's vision and strategic plan for integrating student services and provided the college with the opportunity to infuse resources into that work.

Specifically, Clark aimed to:
- strengthen the integration of career exploration and coaching into every aspect of the college's wraparound support services;
- expand the Workforce Education Services staff to provide more intensive, one-on-one support for students;
- develop a financial literacy program to support student knowledge and skills to make informed financial management decisions; and,
- normalize access to public benefits as a tool students can use to be successful in their educational and professional goals.

Clark's efforts to redesign its student services were systematic and aimed at a long-term transformation that increases student completion rates. It began by forming a cross-functional leadership team that included the high-level leadership of the vice president of student affairs, the director of workforce education programs, the director of career services, and the decision support specialist for continuous improvement & analytics. The makeup of this team ensured that a variety of perspectives guided the work and that the effort to strengthen and integrate the college's student services was a collaborative campus-wide initiative.

Individualizing and Integrating Support

One of Clark's first decisions was to use some initiative funds to hire four resource coaches to lead the implementation of more integrated services at the college and provide students with the focused services they needed in different program areas. The new personnel included a:

- **Workforce Education Services (WES) Coach** who works directly with students enrolled in WES for retention and student support purposes.

- **Transitional Studies Coach** who works directly with students enrolled in Transitional Studies, a program for students who are advancing to credit bearing coursework for retention and support purposes.

- **Financial Literacy Coach** who provides individual financial coaching for students, assisting them with developing short- and long-term financial goals, budgeting, managing credit, making loan repayment plans, and asset building. The coach also develops and implements financial literacy workshops.

- **Retention/Career Coach** who provides individual assistance with career goal-setting, planning, research to select a major, career preparation, and developing student success plans.

The coaches work directly with students in each of the four areas to provide one-on-one coaching and support, to refer students to other resources—both internal and external to the college—and to provide intensive follow-up to make sure students get the services they need to be successful. For Clark, a key part of the design was to promote a high degree of collaboration among the coaches through regular meetings and case management note-sharing, so they would routinely exchange knowledge and coordinate service delivery. "We were trying to eliminate the situation where students were having to tell their stories again and again to different people in different offices," says Armetta Burney, director of workforce education services.

Another area of focus for Clark was to design multiple ways to connect with students, identify their needs, and refer them to the appropriate services. For example:

- The college embedded information about a wide variety of services, including financial literacy and management skills, career education, and access to public benefits, into their College 101: College Essentials course. This is required of all transfer students but not limited to those students.

- Students in Workforce Education Services—which serves those who are pursuing vocational, professional, and technical non-transfer degree programs and certificates—go through an intensive intake process and have access to an array of academic and nonacademic supports. These include assistance with tuition, fees, and books as well as

help in accessing other supports that include public benefits such as Basic Food, Employment, and Training (BFET). These supports are important to help low-income students succeed.

- To make strategic use of their limited resources, the college developed some more targeted programs to help low-income students with short- term obstacles in a way that ultimately connects them with longer-term solutions. For example, the college's Emergency Grant Program helps students who encounter extraordinary events or circumstances that could hinder their ability to continue their education. The newly launched food pantry addresses immediate food insecurity issues and connects students to additional benefits. In addition to these emergency support programs, these students receive coaching from the financial literacy coach to build longer term financial management skills.

Clark redesigned its student entry and onboarding process to include a comprehensive intake survey every student must take in order to be able to register for classes. This survey asks students questions about academic readiness and the need for student support services, such as childcare, transport or food assistance, financial literacy or coaching, or technology assistance. Their responses lead to direct follow-up from relevant departments to ensure students have the resources they need from day one of their college experience.

To support students as they enroll at Clark, the college is using internal funds to hire enrollment navigators who will serve as the main connection point for new students. These navigators will assist students with the enrollment process and help connect them to the needed resources gleaned from their student survey answers. Students are then assigned to the advising services office, which is now using a caseload model. This approach gives advisors the ability to build meaningful relationships with their assigned students that will ultimately result in students being served in a more holistic and personal manner.

Underpinning this new approach to supporting students is the college's robust data system. Clark was already capturing student utilization of services through transcripts, a tracking system, and notes; however, the college did not have a caseload management or referral system. As part of its work, Clark expanded its use of AdvisorTrac to allow enhanced tracking and communications about student needs and progress, provide early alerts on student needs, and allowed for effective referrals between the four coaches at the college. These new capabilities enabled the college to scale this more personalized and sustained approach to support every student.

Seeing Student Services as a Path to Success

To truly achieve its goal of transformation, Clark did several things to ensure that its new approach became a central part of the college's culture. First, it recognized that creating a

leadership team and hiring the coaches wasn't enough to transform the college. In practice, it would take significant education and buy-in from faculty and staff to make the approach work.

To address this need, the college implemented a two-day training for staff at the end of the summer term, during which the college is closed to the public. During these annual trainings, staff are introduced to a variety of student services topics, including understanding barriers to student's success. Devoting work time to these matters and making clear to staff the college's expectation that they will participate emphasizes the importance of helping students succeed and conveys the priority of student service to the college's mission.

In addition, Clark provides college-wide training on understanding poverty to help staff and faculty better recognize the lived experiences of their students. Being able to see certain student issues through a different lens helps faculty and staff feel better equipped to recognize when support is needed and step in to connect students with services. The trainings prepare them to ask students the kind of questions that can lead to getting them the right help rather than making assumptions about the reasons for behaviors such as being late or falling asleep in class.

These measures have helped to break down service silos and led to a more collaborative approach to serving students. "One of the strongest outcomes of this work has been the collaboration across departments that had not previously worked together closely," notes William Belden, vice-president of student affairs. "Cross-departmental work has now become the regular way we do business."

Just as important to working with faculty and staff to prepare them to better address student needs was getting students to see student services and access to benefits as a normal part of college life—to destigmatize the act of seeking these services and benefits as a sign of weakness or failure on the student's part. To do this, Clark created an online campaign using social media to promote access to benefits. Specifically, Clark produced a powerful set of videos with students speaking sincerely about their own lives, the help they needed, and how Clark was able to provide them with the services and access to benefits that helped them succeed in college.

Overcoming negative perceptions was critical, according to Julie Robertson, decision support specialist for continuous improvement & analytics. "We surveyed one-third of our students to gain a better understanding of the challenges they were facing and found that at least a quarter of our students were routinely dealing both with food insecurity and housing insecurity. It was important for students to see that their individual challenges were shared by many of their peers." The online campaign, particularly where students could hear from other students, was central in getting that message out.

At the same time, Clark worked to make sure that the services were available to address these issues when it became clear that they were barriers to student success. Key to being able to respond was the college's partnerships with other agencies. The college partnered with a local housing agency to directly refer homeless students to housing services to supplement the housing resource navigation it was already providing through the resource coaches. It worked with the Department of Social and Health Services to become an assisting agency, which allows the college staff to complete public benefit applications on behalf of students. And it established the Penguin Food Pantry on campus to help address student food insecurity.

Ultimately, Clark transformed its campus into a hub of services, both academic and nonacademic, and normalized all of those services as a regular part of the college-going experience.

Conclusion

Like many colleges, Clark College has been deeply involved in the implementation of guided pathways. Moving to a holistic student supports approach along with that work has allowed Clark to transform in such a way that it is now poised to truly meet the full range of needs of each of its students. "It can feel overwhelming," says Belden, "but we are committed to thinking differently about how we serve students to ensure we are giving them the best chance to succeed at our institution, in our community and beyond." Early evidence is suggesting positive results as students who have intensive and integrated interactions with student services are much more likely to persist from term to term.

Questions for Reflection

The following questions are to help you think about what lessons to learn from the Clark College experience that could inform how your institution could move to a more holistic student support model.

1. Clark initially targeted certain programmatic and student service areas to connect with low-income students. Can you identify similar areas at your college where you would have significant opportunities to intervene in students' lives and refer them to services and access to benefits?

2. A key to Clark's success was an intentional effort to educate, train, and engage the staff and faculty at the college. Specifically, it tackled the issue of poverty directly. Does your institution's culture promote that type of campus-wide involvement and discussions about tough issues such as poverty and the challenges that low-income students face? If not, how do you think your institution could move in that direction?

3. Clark has ultimately designed an ambitious student service model intended to capture holistic information about each student's needs from the minute they step on campus

with on-going monitoring and follow-up throughout that student's college career. Does your institution have the organizational and technological capacity to deliver, support and track student services in this sustained way?

4. Clark used student survey data to identify key needs of its students and respond with the appropriate services. What do you believe are the most pressing issues for your students outside the classroom that your institution could address? How do you know?

5. What was the most valuable lesson you learned from the Clark College experience?

6. What do you believe would not translate to your institution as you think about strengthening your student services and why?

ONE NOVA: STRENGTHENING AND SCALING STUDENT SERVICES AT A LARGE INSTITUTION

Since receiving the $500 emergency grant I have managed to slowly get on my feet. As of today my rent is paid, my utilities are up to date, and I have received my first check from my work-study employment! I can honestly say without the help of that grant my situation would have spiraled out of control affecting all of the very important areas of my life!

--NOVA Student

As the second largest multi-campus community college in the United States, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) has what appears to be an enviable set of financial and staffing resources for serving students. The college's end goal was similar to other colleges participating in ATD's Working Student Success Network (WSSN) initiative; to develop a set of services that wouldn't serve just a small population of "low-income" students, but would provide financially empowering wraparound services for all NOVA students. Yet, NOVA's size and organizational complexity presented a unique set of challenges, somewhat different from those other participating colleges encountered.

Located in Northern Virginia, in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, NOVA annually serves approximately 72,000 students in credit courses and over 20,000 in noncredit courses across six campuses, three educational centers, and an online college spread out across nearly 400 square miles. Its student body is diverse: just over one-third of students are white, and two-thirds are students of color. NOVA also has a significant international student population with 20 percent of their students coming from more than 180 foreign countries.

NOVA's students also are economically diverse. Northern Virginia is an affluent region, but the college also serves "islands of disadvantage," as NOVA calls them. Many of its students deal with financial hardships. In 2016-17, 39 percent didn't have enough money for food, 38 percent had trouble paying rent, 49 percent had to borrow money from friends, and 15 percent experienced homelessness.

To serve this incredibly large and diverse student body, NOVA employs thousands of faculty and staff with nearly 900 full-time faculty and administrators, 900 staff members and approximately 1,700 part-time faculty. Coordinating and communicating with this many people, particularly about college-wide initiatives, is a challenge. Given the size of each NOVA campus, the temptation to operate as independent units is great, but in the end, not productive. It can lead to service silos, perceptions that certain key services are only available at certain locations, or, alternatively, to redundancies in services.

On the other hand, shifting gears to bring all the moving parts of a large system like NOVA into alignment is no small task. It takes planning and collaboration to redesign and implement change on one campus. Bringing about integrated service delivery at a college the size of NOVA is a major undertaking. Therefore, NOVA knew its approach to system change had to be strategic, inclusive, and slower paced than smaller colleges', with staff roles and services intentionally designed to position them for a move in a new direction.

When President Scott Ralls took the helm in 2016, he and the college launched a campaign titled "One NOVA," specifically to decrease campus- and program-specific silos and focus the college's strategic priorities on college-wide rather than campus-centered goals. NOVA's new strategic plan was based on three key concepts: 1) every student succeeds; 2) every program achieves; and 3) every community prospers. The objective was for NOVA to have its greatest impact on the socio-economic mobility of its students and the prosperity of the region. Ensuring equitable outcomes for all students was critical to this mission, says Ralls. "We recognized how many of our students struggled each semester to meet basic needs. We could not ignore how negatively this reality impacted their academics."

The goals of the WSSN initiative, which NOVA undertook before Ralls took office, aligned with that strategic plan. NOVA targeted 25 percent of its Pell grant recipients—approximately 4,100 students—to receive services and support under the holistic approach to supporting low-income and working students embodied in WSSN. The leadership's underlying intention was to scale the approach systematically to the entire institution. In addition to mitigating students' financial hardship, NOVA aimed to strengthen partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs), improve its case management protocol for supporting financially vulnerable students, introduce comprehensive financial literacy and coaching services, and build its capacity to provide high-touch services.

Designing for Coordination Across a Large System

The first challenge NOVA faced in designing an enhanced and integrated student services approach was how to structure it for a multi-campus environment and align it with other student success initiatives. "We knew from the start that we couldn't just open a 'center' on one of our six campuses and hope that we could eventually duplicate that model five times," observes George Gabriel, vice president for institutional effectiveness and student success. "Picture an umbrella where financial stability services are not kept for one program/cohort of students, but instead available to all NOVA students, along with established collaborations within each of our other initiatives." This led NOVA to make a few crucial strategic decisions.

First, NOVA identified the central Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success (OIESS) to lead the work and used initiative funds to immediately hire a full-time coordinator to oversee program development and implementation. This decision had organizational and strategic benefits for such a large college. Having a coordinator who could devote all her time

to this work allowed NOVA to get integrated services up and running faster. And, being in the centrally located OIESS gave the coordinator easy access both to input from the vice president and leadership team and, logistically, to all campuses spread across Northern Virginia. Most importantly it placed the work under the same roof as other key student service programs, such as the college's career and academic pathway programs and open educational resources, paving the way for a more integrated support experience for all students. This eased the streamlining of services and helped to cultivate an environment of collaboration in keeping with the vision of One NOVA.

Second, to build a presence on each campus and connections among the campuses, NOVA brought on six interns who were working toward their master's degrees in social work at nearby George Mason University. Serving as "resource navigators" for 16 hours per week at their individual sites, the interns were trained to meet with students experiencing financial challenges and address their needs by connecting them to college and community resources. This distributed service model quickly expanded NOVA's ability to reach significantly more students with one-on-one guidance and allowed the program to grow exponentially.

Finally, NOVA recognized that, given the large number of students served in multiple locations, in-person meetings were not always an option for students or staff. In some instances, they were even unnecessary and inefficient. As a result, NOVA honed its communication techniques to best fit with students' needs and lives and make better use of staff time. Staff began to rely more on phone calls and texts (using a guised number through Google Voice to protect mobile phone information) to reach out to students.

"We learned that communicating regularly with students through *their* preferred communication vehicles was the best way to engage with them," says Rachelle Thompson, NOVA's financial stability program coordinator, "and keep them connected to the college over the course of a semester, year, and ultimately their entire career at NOVA."

Starting Slow and Building Momentum

As with the other colleges implementing the WSSN approach, NOVA had a list of obstacles to student learning and completion, some of which were exacerbated by the college's own policies and processes. For students, these included food and housing insecurity, the lack of a financial cushion to deal with emergencies, lack of financial knowledge and education, and issues resulting from unmet financial need. For the college, the challenges included the lack of a centralized process for connecting students to community resources, the duplication of services offered in various programs/college departments, and a detached sense of responsibility on the part of faculty and staff for assisting financially vulnerable students and sending them to the right place for help.

Due to the multi-campus factor, NOVA made the strategic decision to start small by focusing on two of the highest-need service areas—food insecurity and the lack of a cushion for emergencies—and expand from that base.

The college established food pantries on all six campuses and, to build and sustain them, created partnerships with CBOs and food banks, including the Capital Area Food Bank and Loudon Hunger Relief. With the addition of more services, what was a system of pantries became the Student Food Program and has grown to incorporate a SNAP application project, more community partnerships/collaborations, a robust food collection program called Green NOVA Bag that engages the community to help keep the college's pantries stocked, and more. It is now a centralized program, run by a cross-functional group of staff, faculty, and students, and paid for out of college operating funds.

The Student Emergency Grant program offers one-time grants to students experiencing a major financial emergency, such as job loss, homelessness, medical or dental emergencies, theft, or loss of child care. Along with the grant, however, comes something more valuable: a chance to explore a longer-term solution and the route to financial stability. When students apply for the grant, they must complete an online financial assessment module and meet one-on-one with a financial coach to consider whether additional NOVA and community resources are needed.

Started with $10,000 in WSSN initiative funds, the emergency grant program proved its worth as a meaningful, deeper intervention. It brought college-wide visibility to the impact of holistic student supports on low-income student success. "It's not just about providing immediate aid as needed," Ralls told a CCNewsNow reporter this year. "One of the things we've tried to be very deliberate about is the financial literacy part…to help students plan in ways that will alleviate future emergencies. That's also where connections with community resources come in—leverage systems that allow students to tap into resources where they need it that will prevent that emergency." In fact, preliminary data shows retention rates of 86 to 87 percent for the students who connected with the college through the Emergency Grant program—much higher than the college's average retention rate of around 60 percent.

Taking a holistic approach to supporting students led NOVA to realize that some of its official student intake and monitoring practices had created barriers to student access in the past. So instead of relying on students to complete intake forms, staff use phone calls to learn the needs of the student and develop an action plan for moving forward. Students respond at a better rate when the request is for a simple 10-15 minute call that they can schedule between classes.

The staff member documents the recommended action plan on a template that serves as a to-do list, so the student and staff have a good idea of who is responsible for what. The template includes community resource and NOVA contact information and becomes a tool to empower students with information to help themselves. It also shows when the staff member will be back in touch with them and about what. Staff are persistent in following up with students

during the intake and case management process, even when students aren't responsive to calls or emails. The template is helpful for documentation purposes to verify what services where provided to a certain student during a given semester.

To be able to track students' use of services on campus and in the community, and student outcomes resulting from the holistic support services approach, NOVA had to move beyond Excel sheets and SharePoint for document management. It purchased case management-student data software and contracted with Single Stop USA to use its resource screening technology and case management database. The college also instituted a data and student outcomes assessment at the close of each semester and academic year that compiles rates of course completion, semester completion, persistence, retention, and so on.

These initial projects led to further enhancements of existing service, the building of new services, and the integration of these services into a more holistic support experience for students. Once these programs were established with an infrastructure in place, the redesign team quickly began to expand staff support to ensure students and faculty and staff had college-wide access and campus specific support for high-touch services and student engagement.

Changing Institutional Practices to Change the Game

Bringing a holistic, integrated service approach into the One NOVA ethos and revising institutional practices to incorporate the approach reverberated across all the campuses. When the new approach was first introduced, many faculty and staff were grateful because they had already seen that students needed such services. For others, the inherent sense of the college taking up these issues took some getting used to, while still others were not aware of students' struggles.

To work toward a culture where everyone shared in the responsibility of supporting students in these new ways, staff leading the effort became a consistent presence at college functions, staff meetings, and success conferences. They talked about equity and inclusion and the benefits of a positive, supportive orientation in serving low-income students. They held smaller workshops and webinars and promoted the rationale and services on the college website along with providing information and materials for self-study and the tools to help students. With a college as large as NOVA, and given ongoing turnover among students, staff, and faculty (the majority of whom are part-time/adjunct), the need for clear, regular communication is essential.

In 2017, NOVA renamed and institutionalized the work initially begun as part of the WSSN effort as the Financial Stability Program. It held a Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week, where it introduced the program and its purpose. The NOVA research office published a newsletter on hunger and food insecurity that highlighted student data showing the prevalence

of hunger at NOVA. This opened the eyes of faculty, staff, and students alike, but also showed how everyone at the college could play a role in alleviating it, starting with the administration.

Additionally, staff consciously strove to normalize services as resources all students need, use, and access. The informational flyers they produced showing pantry locations and details were carefully crafted to use inclusive, shame-free messaging, such as "Free Food at NOVA". Another, listing where to get help with the costs of food, housing, medical care, child care, and so on, was titled "Did You Know There is Financial Aid for Life Expenses?"

Marketing staff also helped recast the language and content for valuable workshops that weren't bringing in enough participants, especially low-income students. Thus "Money Management 101 became "Debt: The New Modern Day Slavery". A new workshop, "Side Gigs for Extra Cash," told students where they could learn about work opportunities with places like Lyft, Uber, TaskRabbit, and so on. These opened the door for staff to better connect with students and talk about their needs.

NOVA's size and large geographical area made it especially important to take advantage of community partnerships. In fact, many of the programs it developed within the WSSN initiative were successful because of collaboration with community partners. The partnerships with Loudon Hunger Relief and the Capital Area Food Bank are one example. Not only do they supply food to the campus pantries, they connected the food program to hundreds of other community partners. Other examples: The Enterprise Development Group provides free tax preparation services. A group named Coordinated Services Planning helps with resource management and referrals and the Fairfax County Department of Social Services also provides resource management.

"We cannot be expected to originate and duplicate all these services at the college," says Thompson. "What we can do is become experts at knowing what resources are available and how to help students access these services both on and off campus." The college believes that creating partnerships and working together creatively with community agencies can provide endless opportunities in developing effective programs.

In a nod to the understanding that a shift to a holistic student support approach doesn't happen overnight, NOVA is still working to launch new supports to meet its students' needs. Newer projects include services for homeless students, more robust financial education and counseling, crisis intervention, and the launch of a Single Stop site at NOVA's Annandale Campus (opening in August of 2018). The Single Stop model coordinates anti-poverty resources and wraparound services for students and their families in one convenient place. NOVA's operation will use technology and CBO partnerships to connect students and their families to a pool of nearly $3 billion in potential supports and services that go untapped in the United States every year.

In addition, NOVA is taking steps to enable faculty and staff to make meaningful connections with students and each other. It is increasing the number of financial coaches and academic navigators, and working to ensure there is a go-to person in every program on every campus. It is activating a case management approach to enable students to get the support they need from someone they know and trust. And through training, college employees are learning to engage students in conversations about their needs and be advocates rather than making assumptions about a student's situation and needs.

Finally, NOVA found that program realignment was the biggest and most critical internal policy adjustment that it made in support of making a sustainable program. NOVA has been extremely busy over the last two years introducing initiatives that focus on student success. These initiatives include guided pathways reforms and moving towards more open educational resources to replace expensive textbooks, among other efforts. When the ATD grant ended and the college chose to transition the program into a permanent unit within the college, it sent a strong message: Personalized, holistic support is the experience every student at NOVA can and should expect and it is everyone's responsibility.

Conclusion

For NOVA, the focus on financial stability supports led to implementing services that did not previously exist, such as financial coaching, benefits access, tax preparation, emergency grants, food pantries, navigation of community resources, and more. Knowing that with limited resources it could not provide all services to students themselves, NOVA created new partnerships with local organizations to reach their holistic support vision.

Ultimately, this work significantly changed the perception of what, how, who, and why the college provides support services to students at NOVA. The college has become much more aware of the types of support services it needs to provide in addition to student services like academic advising or tutoring. NOVA has learned that true success of student support services comes from forgetting about "turf" and embracing a "no wrong door" policy, where everyone is essential to, and plays a role in, serving students.

Questions for Discussion

1. There are two mindsets that colleges need to be prepared to address when introducing holistic support services across the campus. One is the view that nonacademic problems are not the concern of faculty and staff. The other is the stigma around use of temporary public assistance. How open are your colleagues to collaborating across departments and programs? What arguments might convince them it's not only worth their effort, it's essential to help students?

2. What are your college community's norms around the use of public services? What kinds of discussions need to take place to de-stigmatize their use?

3. How flexible is your college in regard to doing the hard work of realigning established programs? Would the campus community hold back from committing to a campus-wide holistic student support system as just the latest fad? What strategies would you use to quickly bring people on board?

4. NOVA's size made hiring more staff necessary to implementing the WSSN approach, and it was able to reach out to local graduate students and offer internships. Is staffing up an option for your institution? How would your college deal with the increased work demands of implementing integrated services and campaigning for culture change? What other alternatives can you consider?

5. NOVA relies heavily on adjunct faculty, as do most community colleges. What issues might come up with enlisting their involvement and buy-in to the expectation of cross-departmental collaboration and deeper engagement with students? How would your college address them?

PORTERVILLE COLLEGE: HELPING FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS FIND PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

Porterville educators are just amazing. They put you on the right track. They show you step-by-step how you can succeed. I feel like that road map was the most important thing.

--Julian, Porterville College Student

Porterville College (Porterville) is located in California's Central Valley, an agricultural area made memorable as the setting for *The Grapes of Wrath*. Nearly 100 years later, it continues to support a large farming community, but, like John Steinbeck's characters fleeing the Oklahoma Dust Bowl in hopes of a fresh start, the students of Porterville are leaving the fields that sustained their parents and turning to the local community college to build different kinds of lives.

Porterville is a small, rural college that just celebrated its 90th birthday. Nearly 80 percent of its 3,800 students are Latino, reflecting the demographics of the Tulare County-San Joaquin River area. Many are the first generation in their family to go to college. A significant number come out of the foster care system, and still need extra support and guidance. Half receive Pell grants, but the vast majority of students qualify for state college fee waivers and other financial assistance programs targeted to low-income families. While many are able to reduce their costs by living at home, the average student faces challenges related to housing, transportation, child and family care, work schedules, and more.

Being small, Porterville has always made up with personal attention what it lacks in resources. It built and strengthened its programs organically over time. Yet, in the early part of this decade, Porterville administrators were frustrated that more students were not succeeding in college. "These students came to us to find themselves," says Arlitha Williams-Harmon Ph.D., vice president for finances and administration. "Many were scared. We know that many drove up to the college and couldn't get out of the car. We were losing them before they even came in."

That frustration was shared across the state. In 2012, the California Legislature passed a community college reform law directed at the state's 112-college system. With mandates and new funding, the 2012 Student Success Act sought to increase the share of community college students earning a certificate, an associate degree, or who transfer to above 48 percent within six years. It also set goals and programs for student equity. Based on task force recommendations, the bill calls on colleges to restructure their student support services to

improve delivery at the start of students' educational experience, especially in the areas of orientation, advising, and counseling.

In part to help the college with this work, Porterville joined Achieving the Dream in 2014 and was one of seven state colleges to partner with the California Community College Chancellor's Office on implementing the Working Student Success Network initiative. The college was determined to meet the state's new demands with an all-out, intensive approach, using the best research-based practices to revamp student support services and increase student success.

From the beginning, the initiative helped the college recognize that staff were "working in silos," says Williams-Harmon. "In essence, we weren't helping students. We were sending them all over to different offices to get signatures. WSSN helped us to look at the institution as a whole in light of the student experience. That process brought all our minds together and helped us find champions" across campus and in the community. Since then, by widely engaging faculty and staff in the effort, Porterville was able to knock down unnecessary silos and catalyze important changes in the campus culture.

Embedding Holistic Student Supports into a Success Plan

Going into the initiative, Porterville College was focused on promoting data-driven institutional changes that enhance workforce, education, and support services for its predominantly lower-income, majority Latino community. With the help of some community partners, the college was offering state-funded categorical programs designed to provide low- and high-touch services to foster student success. Still, the college knew from surveys and student feedback that students often felt overwhelmed by the demands of college and the support was not having the intended effect of helping them navigate college and focus on learning. Fixing this was Porterville's challenge.

In the summer of 2014, Porterville sent a team made up of the student support director, an administrator, an institutional researcher, and a developmental English and math faculty member to two weeks of kick-off training organized by ATD. Afterwards, primed for action, the team and college brought faculty and staff together two weeks before the semester started to prepare for a support systems overhaul.

In the first year, Porterville chose to target its redesigned support services on the 10 percent of its students participating in six California Community Colleges categorical grant programs—EOPS, CalWORKS, Cooperative Agency Resources for Education, Disability Resource Center, Foster Youth Success Initiative, and the Veterans Resource Center. These programs exclusively served economically and educationally disadvantaged students, and already featured low- and high-touch services offered with various community partners to foster student success.

The following year, 2015, the college added in career and technical education students in the college's Job Entrepreneur Center. They were familiar with career pathways planning, but the

college believed they could benefit from expanded support in financial areas. For the third year, while Porterville had envisioned expanding its integrated support system to just 25 percent of its low-income students in the initiative's last year, it ended up extending integrated support services to everyone.

The categorical programs provided grants and services in a host of areas, such as counseling, special academic services, basic child care, and transportation. But the timing and personalizing of these services was not something the college had considered in a holistic way. In designing its integrated approach, Porterville reorganized how and when it offered existing services, and added new ones to ensure it had multiple opportunities to make contact, assess needs, and apprise students of what was available to them. This strategic approach would lend itself to being scaled up when it was applied to the whole college.

Porterville's plan was to make more strategic use of low-touch workshops, such as orientation, skills courses, and special events, to convey and collect information. Similarly, the college expected faculty and staff to enhance the academic growth experience by embedding holistic student support awareness into selected certificate/degree courses and student clubs/activities. This approach would be proactive, personalized, and sustainable. The college student services staff would initiate contact with the student before the start of each semester or even as early as high school. And the services would continue to sustain students and draw out progress updates for all the time they were on the path to completing their degree or credential.

The college planned to use the data and information gathered from these events and other sources, such as the state assessment, to better identify individual needs. This would make possible more seamless opportunities to personalize high touch student support sessions and more services, such as book vouchers and meal tickets for those who are eligible.

As a small college, Porterville could enlist the engagement of all staff and faculty to normalize the use of high-touch, wrap-around services, especially for the many first-generation students. As the first in their families to go to college, they often lack a person with college experience to help show the way. Counselors and advisors familiar with community-based benefits can step in and act almost as surrogate family.

Bringing It All Together in Institutional Practices

Porterville changed and enhanced practices based on what ATD research has shown are the key institutional conditions and student support components necessary for student success. In many cases, it used cross-departmental collaborations to make improvements and build a sense of shared responsibility.

The college initiated special events to proactively engage students early and lay the groundwork for meaningful relationships with college personnel. One example is a VIP

Shopping Event, co-hosted with college partner Barnes & Noble and held at the college bookstore within the first two weeks before the fall and spring school semesters. The target audience is EOPS students, who attend an orientation to receive book vouchers and a VIP invitation. At the event, they find advice and support and a streamlined book purchasing process. This knocks down any barriers or stigma associated with use of the vouchers and ensures the students use them.

To help students achieve financial stability, students were encouraged to use CashCourse, an online resource that teaches money management skills and is free for California Community Colleges' students. Reinforced by the counseling sessions, learning how to manage finances helps students make wise use of their EOPS benefits, such as book vouchers and meal tickets. The Student Services staff and the Job Entrepreneur Center collaborated to offer a Benefit Access Workshop to inform students about health and SNAP benefits.

Faculty were a significant part of Porterville's efforts. They created a new Student Success Career Pathways Course, which satisfied a general education requirement and embedded financial coaching into career and technical education. As the work progressed, student services staff interacted more with faculty, who invited them to make presentations during their classes. Faculty, who felt a shared sense of responsibility and a heightened awareness of holistic supports for student success, now are more likely to spot students with unmet needs and refer them for help.

Sustaining Momentum

In numerous ways, the college has woven policies and innovations into its practices to put the student experience first. The College Council's Guided Pathway Committee created student success teams made up of administrators, faculty, staff, and students. They regularly review policies and college structures to see that barriers and silos are knocked down and stay down.

The college provides ongoing professional development training for college employees. They have gotten the message that stepping in to support and understand students' nonacademic lives makes their lives easier, too. Students pick up on the community's commitment to their success.

Porterville's communications staff use social media and old-fashioned flyers posted around campus to remind students of workshops and services always available to help should their situations suddenly change. And the college has become more strategic in building relationships with community organizations, asking for their expertise and offering space on campus for them to work with students.

One relationship with a bank led the college's Child Development Center to offer a cross-generational financial education program, with one money-management class for parents and

another separate class for the preschoolers to teach them about savings. At the end of the classes, the bank brings the families in to open a first account for the child.

To address pervasive food insecurity among students, the college started a food pantry, and provides food boxes to families that use the Porterville College Child Development Center. This creates meaningful connections to students.

These services are seamlessly integrated and provide opportunities to bring the college and local communities together, build caring relationships, and keep an eye on how students are doing.

The college relies upon several approaches to collect data and monitor student progress. An important tool is the Student Success Scorecard, an annual performance measurement system in use at all California community colleges for accountability as well as to monitor progress. It shows how well colleges are doing with remedial education, job training programs, retention, completion, and graduation. A Banner school, Porterville has worked on strengthening its use of integrated student services software to track encounters and services provided. What the college lacks in technology, it makes up for in person-to-person contacts. Since the campus is small, and faculty and staff are likely to walk over to a department to seek out a file or a conversation in order to keep tabs on how students are doing.

Conclusion

Today, there is evidence that the supports are making a difference. Students in the categorical programs are doing better, on average, than the student body in general. The college is now expanding its physical facilities, and part of the plan is to centralize student support services in one place.

Students like 2018 graduate Caelum Peyron, who is transferring to the University of California, credits Porterville College's close-knit community "where faculty and staff really care about you."

The college affirms that when students receive proactive, individualized high-touch services that are sustained over time, it builds confidence in their ability to succeed in college and beyond. In a few short years, Porterville has transformed the support and success culture on its campus and engaged community organizations in advancing students' careers and lives. By integrating ATD's program elements with the state's Student Success and Student Equity initiatives, Porterville has been able to develop synergies between the academic side of the campus and the student services area.

Questions for Reflection

1. Does your state have policies that could enable holistic support services for community college student success? What elements can your state borrow from California's example?

2. How would your faculty react to suggestions that they share responsibility for ensuring students can benefit from holistic student supports?

3. Do your faculty and support service staff have regular meetings to discuss what could help students improve their academic focus?

4. Porterville started upgrading support services for all students by focusing on its most economically and educationally disadvantaged ones. Is that an approach that would be practical at your college? How would your institution approach the challenge?

5. Many students at community colleges could qualify for benefits that could help them keep afloat when challenges arise. Do your students feel safe from stigma when tapping into services and public benefit programs? If not, what could the college do to address that?

6. Do you think your students feel that college staff are checking on their progress regularly and know them as individuals?

WORKING WITH ACHIEVING THE DREAM TO IMPLEMENT HOLISTIC STUDENT SUPPORTS

Achieving the Dream is offering a new service called **Holistic Student Supports Redesign Coaching Program**, to help your college accelerate its learning and integrate its student support redesign efforts.

Our Holistic Student Supports Implementation Support Service is an intensive three-year experience that includes:

➢ Expert on-campus and online coaching
➢ A library of evidence-based practices from across ATD's 230+ colleges
➢ Access to subject-matter experts to provide training across your organization
➢ Access to the nation's premier college reform, including 220 peer institutions in 40 states and the District of Columbia working toward similar goals

OUR EXPERT STAFF WILL WORK WITH YOUR COLLEGE TO:

➢ Conduct a student support diagnostic
➢ Develop a prioritized action plan
➢ Create communication and workflow maps
➢ Improve student success technology use
➢ Implement change leadership and case-making trainings
➢ Conduct student-focused research strategies such as in-depth interviews and secret shopping

LEARN MORE

To learn more about Achieving the Dream's unique approach to Holistic Student Supports and to access practical tools, tips, and worksheets, and download our Holistic Student Supports Redesign toolkit, please visit our website at www.AchievingtheDream.org/HSS.

Please also contact Dr. Mei-Yen Ireland, executive director of holistic student supports, at mireland@achievingthedream.org to set up a free 30-minute consultation.