ESG | Education Strategy Group

REMOVING THE STRUCTURAL DIVIDE

APPROACH:
Create a new or merged division to encompass non-credit and credit departments. Facilitate pathway development and student progression between non-credit certificate and degree programs. Act as one unit through coordination, communication, and collaboration.

TOOLS:
Focus on the policies, procedures, systems, software, job descriptions, administrative functions, and supporting infrastructure required to align non-credit and credit departments.

TIPS:
Transformational leadership is essential to guide change.

CASE STUDY: THE NEW DIVISION OF TEACHING, LEARNING, AND STUDENT SUCCESS AT PRINCE GEORGE'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Location/ Type:
Largo, MD; Large suburban

Student Enrollment by Program:
Non-credit*: 18,000
Credit: 12,000

Student Age by Program:
Non-credit: 72% 25 and older
Credit: 60% 24 or younger

Student Ethnicity by Program:
Non-credit: 49% African-American, 22% Latino, 3% Asian, 0% Native American, 9% White
Credit: 71% African-American, 12% Latino, 4% Asian, 0% Native American, 4% White

Accreditation:
Middle States Commission of Higher Education

From College Navigator and MD Community College Databook (https://mdacc.org/wp-content/uploads/1-Enrollment_r2.pdf)
From PGCC IR Office
* non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

Background

In 2018, Prince George's Community College (PGCC) created a new division called *Teaching, Learning, and Student Success*. This originated through the president's vision, which prioritized competitiveness and agility in the marketplace over historical institutional structures. These efforts built upon the college's participation in guided pathways, a national initiative to create program pathways mapped to careers and to support student progression on those pathways. The new division sought to foster a mindset across the college that "all education is workforce education," as Clayton Railey, the executive vice president and provost overseeing the new division, shared.

Structural Alignment

The *Teaching, Learning, and Student Success* division brought together credit programs, non-credit programs, and student services. Guided pathways provided the initial impetus for alignment, while the prioritization of agility in the marketplace drove a deeper and broader approach to alignment efforts. Additionally, PGCC realized that the distinctions between non-credit and credit programs led to inequitable opportunities for students.

"We set up silos that had an unintended consequence that made it difficult for students to continue on the path," shared Christine Barrow, Dean of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. While non-credit and credit programs remained distinct, they restructured themselves to improve coordination across all facets of the departments. Administrators and faculty sought to remove programmatic duplication across non-credit and credit programs, such as in culinary arts. Faculty from non-credit and credit programs began working together to analyze labor market data, plan new offerings, launch them in non-credit programs, and expand them to credit programs. Faculty and curriculum are shared across programs. "It's a true partnership," noted Michael Smith, Department Chair, Technology, Engineering, and Construction.

PGCC had to address policy and operations at all levels to effect this alignment, which has been an enormous undertaking. The effort included examining how they collect data, how they register students, and how they structure position descriptions to incorporate alignment. *"We did not anticipate how this effort would affect every business function and process at the college, including those which we did not initially consider related to the effort,"* remarked Railey. Their work in this area is an ongoing process.

Pathway Development
Pathway development began informally at the departmental level. For instance, students in credit programs are encouraged, but not required, to pursue relevant industry certificates. Students in pharmacy, biology, and chemistry degree programs take the pharmacy technician non-credit credential to gain work experience and a competitive edge. Likewise, students in non-credit programs are encouraged to take certain modules in credit courses to enhance their theoretical understanding. Approximately 70 percent of IT courses are cross-listed in non-credit and credit programs, enabling students from both programs to take courses together.

With no pre-existing connections between many of the non-credit and credit programs, PGCC uses credit by exam, a type of prior learning assessment (PLA) through which students take a test to determine how much credit they will receive for their learning, as the bridge tool to initiate more formal pathways. They plan to expand on their stackable credential model as an improved pathway. PGCC also expects to formally embed non-credit modules or certificates into degree programs as a future step.

Credit Determination
Credit by exam was chosen to determine credit-worthiness and award credit since the majority of programs retained their non-credit and credit distinctions and since courses were different between these programs. PGCC developed a credit matrix to show the potential credit award based on the exam. (Note: While PLA is often used as a bridge tool in community colleges to award credit, it does place the onus on students to prove credit-worthiness.) Additionally, a model for course articulation to credit, rather than PLA, exists at PGCC through their high school career and technical education (CTE) programs and could potentially serve as an example or framework of how to switch from credit by exam to articulation agreements.

Student Equity
PGCC is taking a student-centric and equity-minded approach in their work. "The equity rationale is something that everyone really connects to," reflected Yvette Snowden, Associate Vice President Workforce Development and Continuing Education. Although student services have not yet been integrated across non-credit and credit programs, students in non-credit programs have been given student IDs, which gives them access to resources such as the computer lab, printing services, the library, and the gym. Additionally, PGCC sought to remove the "credit" and "non-credit" labels on students. *"All students must mean everyone,"* commented Barbar Denman, Dean of Business, Health, and Public Service. There is more to do, such as improving advising across programs and improving their ability to better see student progression and completion patterns across programs.

Results and Next Steps
While it is too early in the initiative to have outcomes on students continuing from non-credit to credit programs, PGCC has seen initial gains. For example, cross-listing courses across non-credit and credit programs resulted in increased demand by students in credit programs, leading to more course sections. Similarly, faculty in non-credit programs experienced gains as they were able to offer more courses through the cross-listing than they could have on their own. With industry partners, they were able to eliminate the unnecessary duplication of separate clinical agreements and separate advisory boards across non-credit and credit programs.

PGCC is continuing to put the structures in place to radically re-envision their approach to serving students. *"We have an opportunity to do something together that is new...building together as an integrated team from the ground up,"* noted Barrow. In addition, PGCC is launching a new center, called Business Solutions, that will optimize their ability to innovate and respond quickly to industry needs through a consultative approach.

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES

THE EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING UNIT AT THE LOUISIANA COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

System:
Manages 13 public two-year colleges across Louisiana

Student Enrollment:
161,600

Accreditation:
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

From Guidry, L. (2019, Sept 8). "With one year to go, here's where LCTCS stands with its six-year 'audacious' goal" The Daily Advertiser. https://www.theadvertiser.com/story/news/local/education/2019/09/18/louisiana-community-technical-college-lctcs-stands-its-six-year-auda-cious-goals/2312918001/

Last year, the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) brought together non-credit and credit programs into a single unit at the system office. The merger was supposed to be a temporary move to cover an open staff position; however, leadership quickly saw the benefit of the integrated unit, made the merger permanent, and began to move forward with intentionality in removing the structural divide. They added adult education and named the unit, Education and Training.

The goal of the new unit was to eliminate silos and duplication and improve efficiency. A first step was to reorient responsibilities in the unit around subject matter expertise. This meant, for instance, that the staff member overseeing health programs would oversee them for all health non-credit, credit, and adult education programs, as opposed to having one staff member oversee health programs in non-credit programs and another staff member oversee health programs in credit programs. LCTCS is exploring programming format changes, such as year-round offerings and eight-week courses to better align to student and industry needs. René Cintrón, Chief Education and Training Officer for LCTCS noted that, "academic programs have flexibility to learn from workforce programs and workforce programs have structure to learn from academics. The answer is somewhere in the middle."

LCTCS infused transparency in their work to spur collaboration, as *"sharing doesn't happen when everyone is in their own corner,"* commented Cintrón. They began modeling their new approach of working together, hoping institutions would embrace such transparency and collaboration. The unit next plans to focus on a single admissions application and will continue to integrate across sectors.

The merger was also about improving educational attainment, equity, diversity, and inclusion. While 50 percent of their students are in degree programs, 25 percent are in non-credit programs and 25 percent are in adult education programs. Their aim is to better serve all students by seeing and focusing on all students.

This change has been a part of a broader work within LCTCS to create more on-ramps and pathways to degree completion. They removed the high school diploma requirement for entry, which allows students to take courses side by side rather than sequentially, to accelerate time to completion. They determined a definition for a credential of value. They grant credit at no cost for over 100 industry-based credentials using a credit matrix, which is coded in the system to count as credit for prior learning (CPL). It has led to an additional 3,000 students a year coming into LCTCS since it was implemented three years ago.

BUDGET AND STAFFING AT AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

Location/Type:
Central TX, urban

Student Enrollment in programs:
Non-credit*: 12,000
Credit: 41,000

Accreditation:
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

From College Navigator, National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=Austin+Community+college&s=all&id=222992
* non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

Austin Community College District (ACC) is approaching its alignment work from an operational lens. "Interest in alignment has always been there," said Garrett Groves, Vice President of Business and Industry Partnerships. He noted, however, that a charge from the college to focus on processes to align non-credit programs to credit pathways and a priority from the mayor to move 10,000 people out of poverty is what enabled alignment efforts to move forward.

ACC started by focusing on staffing and budget. *"We wanted to determine where to prioritize our own funding and resources as a public college serving low-income individuals,"* shared Groves. Their first step toward removing the structural divide was to move the non-credit program manager into the role of department

chair for manufacturing, which would oversee the development of a new set of degree programs to identify opportunities for alignment. This approach averted the potential for future redundancies in the division or friction over developing employer relationships. Since the college's data showed that few students historically transitioned from non-credit to credit programs, they focused on facilitating the transition. The college designed customized rapid re-employment workforce programs that articulate into earn and learn credit programs with the same employers, whereby employees continue their education while working in order to help them advance. They also plan to launch a two-year scholarship to encourage students in non-credit programs to transition to credit programs. "We are interested to see how far we can scale our efforts by doing these structural changes, by better leveraging our budget, aligning our articulation and prior learning assessment efforts, and using our data to evaluate and scale what is working," noted Groves.

MERGED DEPARTMENTS AT HARFORD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Location/Type:
Bel Air, MD; rural/fringe

Student Enrollment:
Non-credit*: 9,200
Credit: 8,100

Accreditation:
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

From Facts and Figures, Harford Community College website.
https://www.harford.edu/about/facts-and-figures.aspx
* non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

Harford Community College is in the early stages of bringing non-credit and credit programs together to remove the structural divide. *"It began by asking how do we conduct business in a way that either contributes to student success or hinders it,"* shared Jacqueline Jackson, interim president. Over the course of one year, teams of internal stakeholders did research on these issues, identified synergies across departments, and provided recommendations for action.

Initial implementation targeted organizational structure and curriculum. They began by merging healthcare programs across non-credit and credit departments. A second merger brought together relevant non-credit and credit programs in the division of Community Education, Business & Applied Technology, led by Kelly Koermer, a dean with workforce experience. While some of the curriculum was already aligned, due to statewide

efforts and a focus on pathways to careers, Harford Community College sought further alignment. They had their electrical apprenticeship articulate into 21 credits in the professional services degree. Their credit welding program began integrating non-credit welding courses and other related CPL. Eventually, some non-credit welding courses were formally moved into the degree program. "From the employer point of view, it is not about a certificate or degree, but about skill mastery," noted Koermer.

As faculty in non-credit programs began teaching courses with a credit component, faculty in degree programs served as mentors for the courses to foster understanding and collaboration. Assistant Dean of Continuing Education and Training Sherry Massoni shared, "We have had a dozen degree faculty say, 'I've always wanted to do something with continuing education and now I can.' It is so positive." Integrating non-credit and credit programs started in the programs that had the greatest overlap or industry need and where faculty were most open to alignment efforts.

Students also identified their interest in greater alignment and noted the challenges that come without that alignment. They shared the need for clear pathways, sufficient funding, and additional advising and support to transition from non-credit to credit programs. The institution plans to expand alignment to other programs as well as to advising, registration, and student services. statewide efforts and a focus on pathways to careers, Harford Community College sought further alignment. They had their electrical apprenticeship articulate into 21 credits in the professional services degree. Their credit welding program began integrating non-credit welding courses and other related CPL. Eventually, some non-credit welding courses were formally moved into the degree program. "From the employer point of view, it is not about a certificate or degree, but about skill mastery," noted Koermer.

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