

# Action Guide for Adult-Ready Transformation Program Change

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## »» Need for Program Change

Several areas within postsecondary programs are not currently tailored to meet the needs of post-traditional learners but hold the potential to better serve these learners if they can be changed. These areas include the structure, content, and delivery approach of the program.

The structure of the course schedule has a direct impact on post-traditional learners' ability to engage, persist, and complete. Many programs offered today were designed and structured for full-time traditional learners and do not take into account the limited availability of post-traditional learners who are juggling multiple obligations and already busy schedules.<sup>1</sup> For instance, courses may only be offered during the day or at times that change from term to term. Courses may only be offered in person rather than online or in a hybrid format. Additionally, the traditional length of time that is required to complete a credential may not support post-traditional learners who need to quickly upskill or reskill to get into the workforce. Finding ways to accelerate programs, including building off of existing knowledge and skills, yet still fully prepare learners to succeed in the workplace is essential.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, faculty have a key role to play at every level of program design and delivery. Effective teaching for post-traditional learners requires faculty to understand these students' unique needs so they can structure the classroom environment and content around who these students are as learners. Regular professional development is essential for faculty to increase their cultural competency, to help them understand their post-traditional students' unique needs, and to provide them with the tools and resources they will require to recognize and support the needs of post-traditional learners.

## »» Value of Program Change

Post-traditional learners who go through programs that are structured and taught with their needs in mind are better positioned to persist and complete. They are more likely to find courses relevant and aligned to their goals. They are able to see how their past experiences and learning connect with their current program. They feel seen by faculty and supported by the institution when there is predictability and flexibility in the program schedule and delivery options.

<sup>1</sup> Soares, L., Bush, A., Sheffer, H., Steele, P., Johnson, N., Ford, R., & Gibson, J. (2020). Adult promise programs. In C. M. Millett (Ed.), *Depicting the ecosystems of support and financial sustainability for five college promise populations* (Research Report No. RR-20-17, pp. 36–48). Educational Testing Service. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12299>

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, V., McDonnell, R. P., & Lee, S. (2020). Redesigning training programs for the COVID-19 era and beyond. *Jobs for the Future*. <https://www.jff.org/resources/redesigning-training-programs-covid-19-era-and-beyond/>



## »» Equity in Program Change

A 'Culture of Care' in education promotes an inclusive learning environment where faculty and staff develop intentional relationships with students, integrate culturally responsive pedagogies, and actively work to uplift traditionally underserved and minority students, rather than view such students as classroom deficits.<sup>3</sup> Building a culture of caring means providing a supportive environment that is focused on the student; it means the system is designed to take care of them. To achieve equity for post-traditional learners, many of whom have been told college is not for them, a culture of care is especially important to emphasize that they belong on campus. Institutions must put a premium on making sure courses and programs are designed to make post-traditional students feel welcome, included, trusted and challenged.

<sup>3</sup> Cavanagh, T., Macfarlane, A., Glynn, T., & Macfarlane, S. (2012). Creating peaceful and effective schools through a culture of care. *Discourse*, 33(3). 443-445. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2012.681902>



# Strategies & Actions: Program Change

Addressing what happens inside the classroom, with faculty, and at the program level are all needed. Institutions, systems, and states should implement the following strategies, in accordance with the iterative approach laid out in the user's guide and the findings of the self-assessment. The strategies and actions to implement, to improve, and to go next level are as follows:




## STRATEGY #1:

### Deliver program content in adult-friendly ways

 TO IMPLEMENT	 TO IMPROVE	 TO GO NEXT LEVEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Promote active learning among faculty</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Support and incentivize faculty professional development opportunities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Create culturally inclusive classrooms</li><li>Make learning assessments equitable</li></ul>




## STRATEGY #2:

### Design programs for flexibility and convenience

 TO IMPLEMENT	 TO IMPROVE	 TO GO NEXT LEVEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Modify course pace, frequency, and schedules</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Go hybrid or hyflex with online instruction</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Infuse competencies and skills into the curriculum</li></ul>

## STRATEGY #3:

### Develop pathways that leverage and support all skill and preparation levels

 TO IMPLEMENT	 TO IMPROVE	 TO GO NEXT LEVEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Maximize integrated education and training</li><li>Systematize credit for prior learning</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Accelerate to credit-bearing gateway coursework</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Bridge non-credit training to credit programs</li></ul>





# Strategy #1

Deliver program content  
in adult-friendly ways



## TO IMPLEMENT

## Promote active learning among faculty

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, Faculty

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

Active learning is a student-centered strategy that is highly applicable to post-traditional learners. It is about engaging learners in knowledge creation and understanding.<sup>4</sup> Active learning requires students' direct participation in the learning process. It prioritizes skill development and helping the learners see themselves - their experiences and perspectives - in the content. It pushes students to higher order thinking and helps students reflect on their own learning process.<sup>5</sup> Research finds that students in active learning classrooms outperform students in traditional classrooms and have better outcomes overall.<sup>6</sup>

Active learning can be incorporated into the post-traditional student experience in many ways. CAEL suggests incorporating active learning principles, such as problem-based learning and experiential learning, to help learners connect content to useful knowledge and skills.<sup>7</sup> Others encourage learner engagement with material via reflection and scaffolding, which is breaking lessons into smaller components and building incrementally on learners' existing knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Davidson's *10 key points about active learning* shares how scaffolding helps learners form better understanding by knowing where they are going with the lesson and taking responsibility for their learning through interactive experiments and activities.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Barkley's *Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty* highlights setting expectations for students' participation and success, enabling student autonomy in learning, and showing connection and relevance of content.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Brame, C. (2016). Active learning. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/active-learning/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Cormier, M. S. & Bickerstaff, S. (2020). *How can we improve teaching in higher education? Learning from CUNY Start*. Community College Research Center. <https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/improving-teaching-cuny-start.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> CAEL. (2018). *Adept at adapting: Adult learner 360 case studies: how institutions listen to students, faculty, and staff to redesign services for adult learners*. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. <https://www.cael.org/publication/adultlearner360caseStudies?hsCtaTracking=e6a57240-5f8d-4ba9-813e-f2acc88e7d0%7C19097471-4000-4782-ac5c-bb903feddbfd>

<sup>8</sup> Carlson McCall, R., Padron, K., & Andrews, C. (2018). Evidence-based instructional strategies for adult learners: A review of the literature. *CUNY Academic Works*. [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1048&context=bx\\_pubs](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1048&context=bx_pubs)

<sup>9</sup> Davidson, C. (2018, January 25). *10 key points about active learning*. Inside Higher Education. <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2018/01/25/how-think-about-active-learning-and-its-benefits-opinion>

<sup>10</sup> Barkley, E. (2010). *Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. Jossey-Bass.

## CASE STUDY

# Scaling Active Learning: the FOCUS Academy at South Texas College

## BACKGROUND

South Texas College is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) serving a student body that is 94 percent Hispanic with more than 70 percent qualifying for some level of financial aid and being first in their family to attend college. For many years, active learning had been part of faculty professional development at South Texas College (STC), and had proven to be successful in increasing student outcomes. As a result, the leadership at the college committed to supporting active learning as a way to improve student engagement and success.

Under Title V of the Higher Education Act, HSIs can apply for [competitive institutional grants](#) awarded by the U.S. Department of Education. Leadership at STC saw the grant as an opportunity to expand the work on active learning beyond the faculty development component, given that grant funding could be used to invest in equipment for teaching, and construction or renovation of instructional facilities, among others. The leadership team envisioned an active learning initiative encompassing three main components: 1) a faculty training and learning community via the college's FOCUS Academy; 2) updated classroom technology to support active learning and 3) specially designated active learning classrooms. To implement this plan, South Texas College was awarded a 2.5 million grant from the Department of Education in 2014 for a period of five years.

## GETTING STARTED

**The FOCUS Academy.** The grant allowed the professional development team at STC to make changes to the active learning curriculum based on feedback from the faculty. The FOCUS Academy trains faculty on active learning using a Common Instructional Framework. This framework relies on six main strategies for student engagement including collaborative group work, scaffolding, questioning, literacy groups, classroom talk, and writing to learn (For more detail, please see [South Texas College Academies](#), FOCUS Academy). The grant also allowed the college to provide a stipend of \$300 to each faculty member completing the training. In addition to completing a one-semester training program, faculty members commit to conducting peer classroom observations to provide feedback to colleagues in their use of active learning principles.

**Active Learning Classrooms & Technology.** To design the active learning classrooms, college staff examined the practices of other colleges, and conducted interviews and focus groups with students and faculty at STC to understand their needs. The sixteen active learning classrooms at STC were designed to be collaborative spaces, without a front of classroom, and with mobile furniture, and technology. The Educational Technology team troubleshooted different ideas, and created what they call “pods,” which are flexible workspaces for up to six students. The pods have a computer and a 55-inch display. The instructor can share content onto the screens of the pods, and each pod can share out onto all the other pods in the room. To avoid a fixed front of classroom, the instructor's podium is also mobile.

With five different campuses, STC made sure that access to the sixteen active learning classrooms was equitable across campuses and departments. Because they are flexible spaces, the rooms are also available to be used for events and trainings, which further maximizes the investment.



## GETTING TO SCALE

Currently, 50% of faculty at STC have completed the active learning curriculum through the FOCUS Academy. For each cohort of the FOCUS Academy, the college requires representation from faculty teaching in all five campuses. Buy-in from faculty is the result of a number of factors. Perhaps the most important factor is that the college has a strong history of engaging faculty in professional development, both as experts in their disciplines and as thought-partners in the adaptation of the curriculum to their disciplines and teaching styles. Moreover, interest in using the active learning classrooms was high among faculty, but the classrooms were only available to those who had been through the FOCUS Academy. The requirement to observe peers has also resulted in a cross-department and cross-discipline community that further accelerated buy-in across the institution. Because of this support, STC has moved to require all new faculty to complete the FOCUS Academy as part of their onboarding.

Barriers to scale include access to active learning classrooms, and reluctance from some faculty and disciplines to use the whole pedagogical approach. Sixteen active learning classrooms across five campuses are not enough to meet the demand from faculty. Nonetheless, STC works to provide equitable access to classrooms by setting up caps across departments. Faculty teaching courses in biology, chemistry, and physics, for example, are reluctant to use the active learning classrooms because they teach in labs where the equipment is not mobile. Although faculty in these disciplines continue to teach in labs, they have been creative and adapted the active learning curriculum to the lab space with good results. Some departments created their own active learning classrooms using their own funding. While data on the effect of active learning on student outcomes are not publicly available yet, the institution reports positive results, which is consistent with the literature.

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Identify the unique needs and priorities of the institution centered around active learning via focus groups and interviews with students and faculty.
- 2 Seek institution-wide support prior to the adoption and expansion of active learning;
- 3 Research grant funding options, including federal stimulus funding, to introduce/expand active learning at your institution. Active learning classrooms are better suited for social distancing than traditional classrooms;
- 4 Engage early adopters in faculty recruitment and training. Having peers share their experiences with active learning during the training increases faculty engagement with the curriculum; and
- 5 Consider the interplay of active learning and accelerated pathways. See case study on University of Hawaii System's 5-week courses in this Action Guide.





## Support and incentivize faculty professional development opportunities

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, Faculty

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

More faculty and stakeholders are recognizing the importance of pedagogical and andragogical training to better serve students. Faculty professional development claimed the top spot in the Educause Learning Initiative (ELI) 2019 survey on learning and student success. The survey captured feedback from 1,400 teaching and learning stakeholders in the postsecondary realm. While faculty development had been the #1 teaching and learning issue in 2017 and in the top three slots since 2014, it outpaced the #2 slot by 25% more votes, indicating that faculty and staff saw professional development as both necessary and needed.<sup>11</sup>

Faculty professional development is an integral part of delivering instruction in adult-friendly ways. It also provides opportunities to take active learning approaches to scale. Moving from a faculty-centered instructional model to a student-centered instructional model that prioritizes active learning is neither easy nor automatic. It demands institutions and systems invest time and resources in faculty professional development to prepare them to improve and adapt their instructional practices.

Unfortunately, faculty professional development has long been on the sidelines of faculty requirements and recognition. Faculty professional development has often been restricted to one or two faculty orientation and development days at the beginning of each academic year. Resources for improving teaching and learning may be found at the Teaching and Learning Center, if the institution has such a center, but are typically voluntary, so only reach instructors who are particularly motivated to access and utilize the resources. Faculty development to improve instructional practice should be built into the faculty experience, prioritized and incentivized by the institution, and considered a professional requirement for faculty.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Brown, M. (2019, February 5). *Learning and student success: Presenting the results of the 2019 Key Issues Survey*. Educause Review. [https://er.educause.edu/blogs/2019/2/learning-and-student-success-presenting-the-results-of-the-2019-key-issues-survey?utm\\_source=Informz&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_campaign=ER#\\_zs8x4tg1\\_zITNcW5](https://er.educause.edu/blogs/2019/2/learning-and-student-success-presenting-the-results-of-the-2019-key-issues-survey?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=ER#_zs8x4tg1_zITNcW5)

<sup>12</sup> Mellow, G. O., Woolis, D. D., Dlagas-Bombich, M., & Restler, S. G. (2015). *Taking college teaching seriously: Pedagogy matters!* Stylus Publishing.

## Exemplars

**Ohio College Teaching Consortium (OCTC)**, was launched in the spring of 2020, to respond to increasingly diverse student population enrollment trends and increased demands for remote or hybrid instructional delivery. Housed within the Michael V. Drake Institute for Teacher Learning at Ohio State University and in partnership with other Ohio colleges and universities, the Ohio Department of Higher Education, the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, and the Inter-University Council of Ohio, OCTC provides professional development opportunities to college instructors across the state of Ohio. OCTC began the [Inclusive Teaching in Higher Education Endorsement](#) to support teachers in creating an inclusive and transformative learning environment for all students, especially diverse and underserved student populations, including post-traditional learners. In its pilot year, OCTC received interest from over 600 instructors, hosted 22 professional development workshops, and awarded 90 inclusive teaching endorsements.

**CUNY Start**, a developmental education program for learners with a high need of support in literacy and mathematics, embedded a comprehensive approach to faculty development in its model. The CUNY Start program was student centered and wanted to prepare instructors for this orientation. To become an instructor in CUNY Start, faculty must first go through a paid semester-long apprenticeship program to learn directly in the classroom from experienced CUNY Start faculty. The apprenticeship program begins after an intensive, multi-day orientation for new faculty to understand the components and foundation of the CUNY Start model. Faculty attribute the program's success to the apprenticeship requirement. Following the apprenticeship, instructors then receive coaching through classroom observations to improve and refine their instructional approach. Finally, instructors participate in cross-college meetings to connect with and learn from and with CUNY Start instructors at other CUNY schools (Cormier & Bickerstaff, 2020).

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Consider allocating Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) to provide monetary incentives, both in terms of bonuses and increases in base pay, to encourage faculty participation in professional development
- 2 Create regional and/or statewide databases for professional development opportunities by topic area (e.g., active learning, culturally responsive classrooms, andragogy for post-traditional learners, etc.).



TO GO NEXT LEVEL

## Create culturally inclusive classrooms

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, Faculty

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

Low-income, people of color,  
parenting, justice-involved, veterans

A culturally inclusive classroom is one that honors the diversity students bring with them to the classroom and reflects that diversity in the curriculum, teaching, and classroom environment. Inclusive teaching is about recognizing that traditional teaching has not served all learners well nor equitably and moving towards a more culturally-inclusive model that increases equity.<sup>13</sup>

For specific populations, an inclusive classroom is about understanding what they bring to the classroom. Veterans, for instance, may come with a disability, a strong sense of cultural difference, or otherness compared to the rest of the class.<sup>14</sup> For justice-involved learners and others who have gone through difficult experiences, trauma-informed teaching helps re-orient the learning around the whole person to ensure the well-being of the learners first. Faculty should consider incorporating a trauma-informed approach to instruction. This means prioritizing student well-being and relationship over instruction, when needed, and ensuring that the learning space conveys a sense of safety and connection.<sup>15</sup>

Culturally inclusive teaching includes establishing and supporting a classroom climate that fosters belonging and clear expectations for all students.<sup>16</sup> It focuses on developing relationships between faculty and students and across peer learners. It is about avoiding assumptions based on stereotypes and showing the same level of confidence in all learners. Researchers recommend selecting course content that recognizes diversity and acknowledges barriers to inclusion. This pertains to authors, ideas, and content. Ensuring accessibility for all learners is a priority. This is achieved through elements of Universal Design for Learning, which includes having multiple means of engagement, expression, and representation. Reflection on one's beliefs to maximize self awareness and commitment to inclusion are a part of this process.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Gannon, K. (2018). *The case for inclusive teaching*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Case-for-Inclusive/242636>

<sup>14</sup> Morgan, B. E., Cloud, R., Kurtinitis, S., Illowsky, B., & Aldridge, S. (2020). Enhancing college access and success for student veterans: Providing economic opportunity and supports beyond the GI Bill through college promise. In C. M. Millett (Ed.), *Depicting the ecosystems of support and financial sustainability for five college promise populations* (Research Report No. RR-20-17, pp. 59–69). Educational Testing Service. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12299>

<sup>15</sup> Stommel, J. (2020, June 19). *Designing for care: Inclusive pedagogies for online learning*. Keynote speech. Jesse Stommel website. <https://www.jessestommel.com/designing-for-care/>

<sup>16</sup> Appert, L., Simonian Bean, C., Irvin, A., Jungels, A., Klaf, S., & Phillipson, M. (2020). *Guide for inclusive teaching at Columbia*. Columbia University. <https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-technology/resources/inclusive-teaching-guide/>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



## Exemplars

**Community College of Aurora** in Colorado developed an Inclusive Excellence strategic plan. Their first goal is to assess and evaluate policies, practices, curriculum, learning, and outcomes for equity and inclusion. The college made an inclusive pedagogy professional development mandatory for full-time faculty and open to adjunct faculty. In the training, which occurs twice a semester, faculty engage in interactive lessons on inclusive teaching and curriculum.<sup>18</sup>

**Morgan State University** in Maryland infused a culturally inclusive curriculum into their college-level history course by adding a textbook on the African diaspora. The intent was to support positive identity development and increase self-efficacy and confidence. Research found that students with the culturally inclusive curriculum outperformed students without the curriculum in most cases.<sup>19</sup>

**Towson University**, a public institution in Maryland developed the Diversity & Inclusion Faculty Fellows program to spur faculty to create more culturally inclusive classrooms. Selected faculty members participate in monthly workshops across a full academic year, implement a diversity initiative in their courses, assess and evaluate the initiative, and present the initiative. Areas of focus include developing curricular practices to support inclusive and diverse classroom environments - which may include methods of universal design or techniques that value difference and inclusion, redesign courses to enhance understanding of others, develop research, collaborate with other faculty, create mentorship opportunities, or identify new areas of engagement. Participating faculty receive a \$1,500 stipend or course release.

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Include a statement on the course syllabus about the value of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and experiences that each learner brings with them to class;<sup>20</sup>
- 2 Notice the diversity of learners in the classroom and monitor participation patterns to understand how groups engage differently<sup>21</sup>; and
- 3 Attend to how language is used within learning environments, whether online or in-person, and the extent to which that language communicates student safety and belonging or lack thereof.

<sup>18</sup> Community College of Aurora. (n.d.) Inclusive excellence. <https://www.ccaurora.edu/about-cca/inclusive-excellence>

<sup>19</sup> Preston, D. C. (2017). *Untold barriers for black students in higher education: Placing race at the center of developmental education*. Southern Education Foundation. <https://www.southerneducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Untold-Barriers-for-Black-Students-in-Higher-ED.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> McNair, T. B., Bensimon, E. M., & Malcom-Piqueux. (2020). From equity talk to equity walk: Expanding practitioner knowledge for racial justice in higher education. Jossey-Bass

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



TO GO NEXT LEVEL

## Make learning assessments equitable

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, Faculty

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

Low-income, people of color,  
parenting, justice-involved, veterans

Delivering program content in adult-friendly ways must incorporate not just teaching strategies, but also assessment that is aligned to principles of andragogy, active learning, and equity. Summative assessments, in particular, must be transformed in order to provide quality learning experiences that meet the needs of post-traditional learners. These assessments, which occur once or twice during a semester and result in a definitive grade or score, can be high stakes for any learner, but especially those from minoritized groups. Further, summative assessments may not properly account for who learners are, what they bring, and what they hope to achieve in their education.

Orienting learning assessment around equity and the specific needs of post-traditional learners requires faculty to move away from traditional models of assessment and change how value is communicated to learners, focusing more on the learning than the grade. To begin, focus more on formative rather than summative learning assessments. Formative assessments are low stakes -- they allow faculty to see where students are in the learning process and provide feedback, which the students can then use to improve their skills and knowledge. Further, formative assessment help learners deepen their understanding and refine their skills.<sup>22</sup> Findings revealed that courses that used formative assessments resulted in students showing greater gains in course outcomes and longer-term knowledge acquisition.<sup>23</sup> For two year institutions, it's important to work closely with four-year transfer partners from the start to ensure there is mutual understanding of why and how assessments will be altered.

<sup>22</sup> Davidson, C. (2018, January 25). 10 key points about active learning. Inside Higher Education.  
<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2018/01/25/how-think-about-active-learning-and-its-benefits-opinion>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

## Exemplar

**National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)** encourages faculty and institutions to identify their assumptions regarding legacy assessment structures and ask themselves the following questions: 1.) What is the purpose of the assessment?, 2.) Who is being served by the assessment?, and 3.) How have approaches to assessment changed over time to reflect who today's students are? NILOA also encourages more reliance on formative assessments over summative assessments.

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Promote individual and group reflection on the department's or institution's culture of assessment.<sup>24</sup> Use the NILOA reflection questions and consider ways assessments can be improved at your institution; and
- 2 Encourage faculty to embed the institution's values into the assessment process;
- 3 Help faculty understand that assessment is about student learning, not teaching, and that assessment can be used to support equity-mindedness.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Hong, R. C., & Moloney, K. (2020). There is no return to normal: Harnessing chaos to create our new assessment future. (Occasional Paper No. 49). University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. <https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/OccasionalPaper49.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.





# Strategy #2

Design programs for flexibility  
and convenience



## TO IMPLEMENT

## Modify course pace, frequency, and schedules

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, States, Faculty

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

A program's pace, frequency and schedule of courses has a direct impact on post-traditional learners' ability to engage, persist, and complete. Courses and programs that follow a traditional pace and schedule are less likely to meet the needs of post-traditional learners who are balancing multiple demands on their time and who face greater urgency to get into or move up through the workforce.

Instead, many post-traditional learners look for accelerated programs that will help them attain a credential more quickly and move into the workforce. Modifications such as shortened course terms and/or year-round course offerings help learners progress and complete their program in a shorter amount of time.<sup>26</sup> Multiple start dates are also an important means of helping post-traditional learners maintain momentum in their education goals. When life, work, family, or other obligations cause learners to pause their program, knowing there are multiple other opportunities not too far off can help learners make plans to return to their program quickly and not be deterred by having to wait a full semester.<sup>27</sup>

Post-traditional learners need consistent, predictable, and/or condensed schedules that make it easier to fit education into their busy lives. This could mean knowing that their courses will be at the same time for the duration of their credential program so that they can plan their work, childcare, and transportation needs around the course schedule. One study noted that courses at most institutions are not aligned to learners' needs and therefore negatively impact learners' abilities to persist and complete their programs.<sup>28</sup> A national student satisfaction survey showed that post-traditional learners listed course availability as a primary need and point of concern, yet most institutions have traditionally built schedules around faculty availability and schedules used in the past.<sup>29</sup> This approach is not student centered and unworkable for many post-traditional learners. One recommendation is to identify the target student population within each program and tailor the schedule options to the needs of that specific demographic.<sup>30</sup>

While changing the pace and schedule of programs benefits learners, it goes against the historical approach to scheduling and the way in which faculty typically interact with the scheduling process. Consequently, making these changes may require modifications to registration systems and asking faculty to teach at new times, in new formats, and with new pedagogies, which may need to be approved through faculty committees and union agreements.

<sup>26</sup> Sheffer, H., Palmer, I. & Mattei, A. (2020). *The comeback story: How adults return to school to complete their degree*. Center on Education, Labor, and Skills. [https://dly8sb8igg2f8e.cloudfront.net/documents/The\\_Comeback\\_Story\\_.pdf](https://dly8sb8igg2f8e.cloudfront.net/documents/The_Comeback_Story_.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> G. Reagan & B. Barnes, personal communication, December 3, 2020

<sup>28</sup> Ad Astra. (2018). Bending the curve: How colleges and universities can rethink the course schedule to graduate more students, faster. <https://www.aais.com/hesi-media-download-bending-the-curve-04568>

<sup>29</sup> Hanover Research. (2018). Best practices in course scheduling. <https://www.cmich.edu/colleges/se/Documents/Hanover%20Research%20-%20Best%20Practices%20in%20Course%20Scheduling.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

## CASE STUDY

# Toward a Systemwide Accelerated Pathway for Adults: University of Hawaii System 5-week courses

## BACKGROUND

Even before the internet expanded distance learning opportunities, the University of Hawaii (UH) System had been a remote learning pioneer due to its mission to reach and serve students living on completely different islands. However, when system-level leadership looked at the data, they found that students pursuing online programs on a part-time basis, mostly working adults, were withdrawing classes at a high rate after having completed 60% of the class. Further, although robust transfer pathways were in place, additional data showed that students who were eligible to transfer from community college to a four-year institution were enrolling in online programs at the University of Phoenix and other similar institutions, rather than within the UH System. Leaders knew it was time for a change.

So, the UH System examined practices of online institutions across the country, particularly those that offer classes in a shorter time-frame. They proposed changing to 5-week online courses. These courses were designed for students to focus on one class at a time, and ideally complete three classes in a 16-week semester, thus moving faster toward a degree.

## LEVERAGING RESOURCES

The plan was to create a 2+2 online pathway that allowed students to start at a community college and transfer to a 4-year institution in the system, with all courses up to a bachelor's degree offered in a 5-week modality. Due to leadership support in the UH System, the 5-week program was included in the priority list of the budget request sent to the legislature. In order to make a case for the program and secure funding, system-level leadership showed the data and presented the 5-week program as a way to 1) increase success and completion by offering courses in a shorter time frame, and 2) retain students in the system who would otherwise continue their education at an online institution.

After two requests to the legislature, funding was allocated for four instructional designers and one navigational coach to provide support services for students. The original funding also allowed institutions to give stipends to faculty that received training on the 5-week courses.

## GETTING STARTED

Although the plan was to launch the 5-week online associate's degree in Liberal Arts cohort program in the Fall of 2019, Leeward Community College decided to start offering 5-week courses in the Spring of 2018, as a way to: 1) pilot the courses, 2) allow faculty to have the experience of teaching in 5-weeks, and 3) test the administrative processes that had to be put in place.

The next step was to recruit and train faculty for the online program. The Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs reached out to Department Chairs to help identify faculty interested in teaching in this new modality. For example, faculty teaching summer classes in a 6-week period already had experience with short-term courses and were more open to the 5-week courses. Finally, faculty who expressed interest were trained in-house using design principles from Quality Matters during the summer of 2018. This training, which has since been refined and formalized, is now consistently offered through the UH system.



For the launch of the program, staff at the UH Community College (UHCC) System Office worked on an outreach and advertising campaign. Although they successfully recruited the first cohort for the online 5-week program, courses in the program were also offered to the general student population interested in taking online courses. Program administrators reported that a great deal of coordination was involved in aligning practices with staff in the offices of financial aid and the registrar to streamline the process and minimize barriers for students.

## GETTING TO SCALE

The vision was for the 5-week courses to be adopted by both the two-year and four-year institutions in the UH system to allow for transfer opportunities. However, with the exception of UH-Mānoa, four-year institutions were resistant to move away from a 16-week model. In the UHCC System, Leeward Community College continues to be the only institution awarding the degree for the 5-week online associate's degree program, although other institutions also offer 5-week courses and/or allow students to take courses offered by Leeward.

Data on the first cohort of students in the online program show positive outcomes. For example, students in the 5-week courses have higher rates of success<sup>31</sup> compared to students who take the same class in 16 weeks, either online or in person. Despite these promising results, the program faces barriers to scale including:

- ① Resistance from department chairs and faculty remains despite a strong culture for online learning within the system.
- ② Disbursement of financial aid for courses that do not fit the 16-week semester vary by institution. For example, while some institutions disburse financial aid for all courses at the beginning of a semester, others only disburse aid at the start of each 5-week course even if a student is registered for multiple courses.

## TIPS FOR LEADERS

- ① Use data (e.g. SLDS, NSC) to make a case for your program and build buy-in;
- ② Recruit faculty who have experience teaching online and summer or shorter courses;
- ③ Adapt your program to your semester and campus culture. For example, 8-week courses may be a good way to start with faculty who only teach 16-week courses;
- ④ At the institutional level, negotiate processes with multiple departments, including financial aid, admissions, and student services; and
- ⑤ Ensure there is buy-in from both administrative leadership and department chairs in both the two-year and four-year sector.
- ⑥ To the extent possible, align schedule changes to other initiatives at the college, such as guided pathways, in order to reduce initiative fatigue and promote mission-alignment.

<sup>31</sup> Success is defined as obtaining a passing grade of C or better.



## Go hybrid or hyflex with online instruction

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, Faculty

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

In addition to in-person and online instruction, more institutions are offering hybrid and hyflex formats. These formats provide post-traditional learners with instruction in a way that better adapts to learners' needs. Options and flexibility, with structure and support built in, have been found to improve student learning.

Hybrid instruction, also known as blended learning, consists of courses that have in-person and online components. Learners are required to engage in both components. An Educause study conducted in 2015 found that among 13,000 faculty respondents, more than half had taught a blended course in the past year and a 2017 study found that students preferred blended instruction to purely in-person instruction.<sup>32</sup>

Hyflex, or hybrid-flexible, creates a multi-modal approach to instruction. Learners in one course have the option to choose in-person instruction, online synchronous instruction, or online asynchronous instruction. All three modalities are made available to all students and learners can move between modalities based on their needs and what works best for them week to week. The intent of this model is to be highly flexible and student-directed. Equity undergirds this model in that all learners must have full access to the instructor, each other, and the learning resources.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Anthony, M., Jacobson, Jacobson, J., & Snare, J. (2018). *Innovating with purpose: The blended flow toolkit for designing blended/hybrid courses*. Educause Learning Initiative brief, Educause. <https://library.educause.edu/-/media/files/library/2018/1/elib1801.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Milman, N., Irvine, V., Kelly, K., Miller, J., & Saichaie, K. (2020, July 7). *7 things you should know about the hyflex course model*. Educause Learning Initiative. <https://library.educause.edu/-/media/files/library/2020/7/eli7173.pdf>

## Exemplars

**Delgado Community College**, part of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, began offering hyflex courses in 2015 as a way to serve post-traditional learners by adapting to their demanding schedules. The model was also a helpful means to enroll more students beyond the physical limitations of a classroom size. A hyflex model could easily enroll 50 students for a classroom that typically fits 25 students. Hyflex also became an important part of the college's disaster recovery plan in terms of how to provide continuity of service in the aftermath of a hurricane or flood. College and system leaders knew that students who attended fully online did not persist and complete at the same rate as students who attended fully in person. Hyflex, then, offered the best of both online and in-person courses. Post-traditional learners have found the hyflex model beneficial and noted how it allowed them to learn while maintaining their work schedule or allowed them to make gains in the course even when illness or other factors prevented them from engaging in-person or in a synchronous mode.<sup>34</sup>

**Seattle University** has a Center for Digital Learning and Innovation (CDLI) that has offered a 10-week training program since 2013 to help faculty turn their in-person courses into blended courses. Instructional designers provide minimal assistance, as the goal is to empower faculty to lead the redesign. The program focuses on how to improve learner engagement and orient the course around the learner. CDLI has created a blended flow toolkit to support faculty in the transition to blended courses.<sup>35</sup>

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 For programs serving post-traditional learners looking to reskill during the recovery, consider which instructional mode will provide the most support and flexibility to allow learners to complete the education and training; and
- 2 Engage faculty who are familiar with the selected instructional mode and comfortable applying it to reskilling courses.

<sup>35</sup> Anthoney, M., Jacobson, J., & Snare, J. (2018). *Innovating with purpose: The blended flow toolkit for designing blended/hybrid courses*. Educause Learning Initiative brief, Educause. <https://library.educause.edu/-/media/files/library/2018/1/elib1801.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Bennett, V., McDonnell, R. P., Lee, S., & Ostrye, M. (2020). *Redesigning training programs for the COVID-19 era and beyond*. Jobs for the Future. <https://www.jff.org/resources/redesigning-training-programs-covid-19-era-and-beyond/>; Long, C. & McIntyre-Hite, L. (2020). *Gearing up: How competencies enable the work-learn model*. Competency Based Education Network and Guild Education. <https://www.cbenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Gearing-Up-How-Competencies-Enable-the-Agile-Work-Learn-Model-FINAL.pdf>



TO GO NEXT LEVEL

## Infuse competencies and skill into the curriculum

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, States

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

Employers speak in the language of competencies and skills. Hiring is becoming more focused on competencies and skills, and employers are concerned degree programs are not representing the skills and knowledge needed for the workplace.<sup>36</sup> The value of understanding competencies and skills extends beyond a single program's outcomes, it also gives the learner, particularly post-traditional learners, a clearer understanding of what they know and can do. This enables learners to articulate their value to employers and gives them a foundation to understand their abilities if career transitions occur.

Adding an intentional focus on the competencies and skills that learners are expected to acquire during a program does not necessarily have to be about making a wholesale switch to competency-based education (CBE). True CBE is an assessment-based approach that removes the element of time, which most courses and financial aid are structured around. Adding an emphasis on competencies and skills can be accomplished without changing the entire educational model. Rather, it can be accomplished within existing structures by intentionally defining the competencies and skills taught in courses and programs and making those competencies and skills clear to students and employers. Matching program outcomes to in-demand competencies and skills can go far in supporting post-traditional student success. Not only can it aid in facilitating prior learning assessment, by more clearly articulating the relevance of coursework to real world skills, but also helps learners feel the relevance of the program to their career pathway.

<sup>36</sup> Bennett, V., McDonnell, R. P., Lee, S., & Ostrye, M. (2020). *Redesigning training programs for the COVID-19 era and beyond*. Jobs for the Future. <https://www.jff.org/resources/redesigning-training-programs-covid-19-era-and-beyond/>; Long, C. & McIntyre-Hite, L. (2020). *Gearing up: How competencies enable the work-learn model*. Competency Based Education Network and Guild Education. <https://www.cbenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Gearing-Up-How-Competencies-Enable-the-Agile-Work-Learn-Model-FINAL.pdf>

## Exemplars

**Kentucky Community and Technical College System** is working with the Competency Based Education Network (CBEN) to develop a work-aligned higher education model. The 12-month Align Project will engage faculty and staff in all 16 colleges in the system to align all general education, technical and workforce solutions programs to the skills and competencies that are needed for learners to succeed in the current and future workforce.

**California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO)** spent Summer 2020 bringing faculty groups together to discuss how to build competencies into their programs. The system of 117 community colleges is working to bring competency based education to both non-credit and credit-based programs. The system views this work as being about economic mobility, career preparation, and equity.

### TIP FOR LEADERS

- 1 Start by evaluating courses and being able to communicate what competencies learners come away with after the course. Competencies employers seek are often already a part of the course, just in slightly different language than faculty and administrators might use.

<sup>35</sup> Anthoney, M., Jacobson, J., & Snare, J. (2018). *Innovating with purpose: The blended flow toolkit for designing blended/hybrid courses*. Educause Learning Initiative brief, Educause. <https://library.educause.edu/-/media/files/library/2018/1/elib1801.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Bennett, V., McDonnell, R. P., Lee, S., & Ostrye, M. (2020). *Redesigning training programs for the COVID-19 era and beyond*. Jobs for the Future. <https://www.jff.org/resources/redesigning-training-programs-covid-19-era-and-beyond/>; Long, C. & McIntyre-Hite, L. (2020). *Gearing up: How competencies enable the work-learn model*. Competency Based Education Network and Guild Education. <https://www.cbenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Gearing-Up-How-Competencies-Enable-the-Agile-Work-Learn-Model-FINAL.pdf>





# Strategy #3

Develop pathways that leverage and support all skill and preparation levels



## TO IMPLEMENT

## Systematize credit for prior learning

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, States

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

Post-traditional learners need to have all of their learning count. We know that post-traditional learners step into and out of education over the course of their lives and may attend multiple institutions.<sup>37</sup> In addition, post-traditional learners often bring relevant college-level learning that they have gained through work and other non-traditional educational experiences.<sup>38</sup> Such skills and knowledge should be considered part of their education and should be both captured and leveraged.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) programs can be used to leverage the college-level learning that post-traditional learners bring to the table. Recent reports from the Center for Adult Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) provide rigorous analysis and data to demonstrate PLA's potential.<sup>39</sup> Their analyses show higher completion rates across all credential levels for post-traditional students who earned PLA credits compared to those who did not. They further found PLA increased a post-traditional student's chance of completion by 17 percent (24 percent for Hispanic students, 14 percent for black students, and 25 percent among community college students).

Institutions should create a standardized, transparent and systematic process for all post-traditional learners to gain credit for college-level prior learning and work experience. Institutions should make it much easier for learners to document and get credit for such learning. Portfolios, standardized or institution departmental exams, and other forms of assessment are seen as a mainstay of awarding credit for prior learning.<sup>40</sup> However, the processes in place at many institutions place the onus on students to document and prove their learning. Institutions, systems and states need to take into account the needs of different learners and consider multiple forms of prior learning assessment or evaluation to meet the needs of varying populations.<sup>41</sup> This is achieved through professional learning evaluations and articulation agreements or internal equivalency agreements. Institutions should automate these processes to ensure standardized approach and service to all students.<sup>42</sup>

At the state level, policymakers should address the upfront costs associated with assessment and coordinate consistent policies and procedures across state institutions. At the federal level, the Department of Education's Experimental Sites Initiative has allowed federal financial aid to cover these costs at a small number of institutions. Interim analyses of these programs show students are more likely to attempt PLA when financial aid covers the costs.<sup>43</sup> Leveraging other learning should also be seen as an acceleration and affordability strategy, one that intentionally attracts post-traditional learners to additional education and training.

<sup>37</sup> Sheffer, H., Palmer, I. & Mattei, A. (2020). *The comeback story: How adults return to school to complete their degree*. Center on Education, Labor, and Skills. [https://dly8sb8igg2f8e.cloudfront.net/documents/The\\_Comeback\\_Story\\_.pdf](https://dly8sb8igg2f8e.cloudfront.net/documents/The_Comeback_Story_.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. (2020). *Recognition of learning: A research initiative to inform policy and practice*. [https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/#\\_About](https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/#_About)

<sup>40</sup> Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes*. <https://www.wiche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PLA-Boost-Full-Report-CAEL-WICHE-Oct-2020-web.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> McKay, H., and Douglas, D., *Credit for Prior Learning in the Community College: A Case from Colorado*. Rutgers Ed and Emp Research Center. August 2019. <https://www.wiche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Rutgers-brief-102620.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Plumlee, T. and Klein-Collins, R. (2017). *Financial aid for prior learning assessment: Early successes and lessons from the U.S. Department of Education's experimental sites initiative*. CAEL. <https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20ESI%20Policy%20Brief.pdf>

## CASE STUDY

# Leveraging Statewide, Cross-sector Partnerships, and Institutional Initiatives to Advance Prior Learning Assessment

## BACKGROUND

In 2013, the Ohio Department of Higher Education (OHDE) convened a group of stakeholders to examine institutional policy and practice and provide recommendations to improve prior learning assessment in the state. The group produced a framework, a set of resources, and a rubric that any institution could use to standardize their portfolio review process. This initiative was called [PLA with a Purpose](#).

A year later, Lorain County Community College, on behalf of a consortium of 11 community colleges, was awarded a U.S. Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant. The goal of the grant was to improve programming that offered accelerated education and skills training for post-traditional learners pursuing careers in advanced manufacturing. Work to be carried out by the consortium - [Ohio TechNet](#) - included a component to expand prior learning assessment (PLA). As part of the grant, they launched [FastPathOhio](#) in 2017, an online tool for portfolio assessment that was intended to scale PLA in the state.

## GETTING STARTED

The statewide rubric created by PLA with a Purpose provided the foundation for Ohio TechNet's work. With funding from the TAACCCT grant, Ohio TechNet hired a curriculum designer to create training material on how to use the rubric in portfolio review. Materials were then distributed among PLA coordinators at each college so they could train faculty accordingly. Finally, a vendor was selected through a request for proposals to create the online tool, FastPathOhio, to streamline the portfolio review process. The consortium chose AcademyOne, a company that had created [College Credit Fast Track](#), the PLA tool for the Pennsylvania Community College System.

The developers of FastPathOhio embedded the statewide rubric in the tool. In this way, the students become aware of the criteria that will be used for assessment of their portfolio(s). In addition to the rubric, all course information from participating institutions was uploaded to the tool.

With regards to student outreach, the consortium created a series of short videos to make current and prospective students aware of PLA and FastPathOhio. These videos were advertised on YouTube and at movie theaters.

## GETTING TO SCALE

At the institutional level, leaders needed to devise a process to award PLA credit. Staff at Lorain County Community College reported that the implementation process at the college was one of trial and error. Initially, academic advisors were tasked with the responsibility of processing PLA, using an external contract for portfolio assessment. But faculty had a strong reaction to the use of an external contractor, because they no longer had control over how credit for their courses was awarded. Early adopters of PLA such as Lorain County, were advancing PLA with very limited resources. For institutions like them, FastPathOhio, the materials to train faculty, and the marketing campaign supported by the grant boosted existing efforts and took PLA to the next level. While portfolio review is one of many avenues to award PLA credit, PLA with a Purpose and OhioFastTrack standardized that process and helped facilitate scaling of PLA.

Early adopters of PLA such as Lorain County Community College, were advancing PLA with very limited resources. For institutions like them, FastPathOhio, the materials to train faculty, and the outreach campaign supported by the grant boosted existing efforts and took PLA to the next level. While portfolio assessment is one of many avenues to award PLA credit, PLA with a Purpose and FastPathOhio standardized that process and helped facilitate scaling of PLA.

The Ohio TechNet consortium has more than doubled in size since it started. Now, four-year institutions, community colleges and career technical centers as well as state agencies and industry partners collaborate with the consortium and assist in scaling PLA. Nonetheless, getting to scale was challenging for a number of reasons including limited funding, capacity, and lack of statewide messaging. For example, FastPathOhio has a per-institution licensing fee which has been covered by grants since 2017. However, sustainability of funding is not guaranteed which means that some institutions will not have external funding to cover the licensing fee once grant funding ceases. Institutions that have not engaged with PLA systematically, built faculty buy-in or set up internal processes are less likely to commit to that investment.

Another barrier to scale is capacity at the institutional level. To implement PLA, colleges must dedicate a person to process applications and work with students and faculty. While staff committed half-time would suffice, the college must coordinate faculty across departments, as well as promote collaborations across the enrollment and advising teams for messaging. Currently, messaging on PLA is embedded in student recruitment materials and in academic advising. Staff involved in implementation believe that a statewide messaging campaign could be more impactful to increase student awareness of PLA.

Part of the success of PLA at the institutional level in Ohio is due to the conditions established by a suite of statewide policies that ensures transferability of credits awarded through PLA. Notably, there is [statewide policy](#) through the ODHE-led [Ohio Articulation and Transfer Network](#) that has developed statewide transfer and articulation agreements, industry-recognized transfer assurance, [guidance on awarding credit for military training](#), and the [One-Year Option](#), a statewide agreement for awarding technical credit. These efforts not only created mechanisms for effective credit transfer for credit for prior learning, but also helped strengthen the culture and receptivity among faculty for prior learning assessment.

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Engage faculty from the outset, reinforcing their role in assessing learning and the curriculum;
- 2 Develop front-end agreements with departments and faculty as to what courses are eligible for credit for prior learning;
- 3 Create faculty review panels for common certifications to determine what credits can be awarded for students who enroll with that certification;
- 4 Complement PLA with statewide agreements to recognize credit across institutions and sectors; and
- 5 Use PLA to advance partnerships between colleges and employers. PLA can save companies money in tuition assistance programs. See case study on Columbus State's industry partnerships in the [Partnerships Action Guide](#).



## TO IMPLEMENT

## Maximize integrated education and training

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, Faculty

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

Adults seeking a high school credential; English language learners; justice-involved

Some post-traditional learners start their postsecondary pathways still needing basic education, however requiring learners to start at the bottom with foundational learning and slowly progress to program-specific content with no clear path or relevant connection to their interest area can be a disincentive. Adults with a need for basic education can be well served in an integrated education and training (IET) model.

IET combines adult basic education with workforce preparation and workforce training. This approach acknowledges how many post-traditional learners learn and provides education contextualized in training. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) notes that workforce preparation is about gaining the skills needed to enter and complete postsecondary education or training or employment. Workforce training may include anything from on-the job training to skill upgrading and retraining to job readiness skills.<sup>44</sup> IET has been built into bridge programs, pre-apprenticeship programs, corrections education, and more. Effectiveness of IETs can be enhanced by implementing policies to leverage Ability to Benefit. See the Accessibility Action Guide on Ability to Benefit.

The most recognizable model of IET is the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) that was first adopted by the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges. I-BEST is an evidence-based instructional model that boosts students' basic skills in reading, writing and math while they pursue a certificate in a career/technical program. I-BEST moves away from a multi-year sequence that starts with basic skills instruction, continues with developmental education and into college-level courses. Instead, in an I-BEST program, two instructors are paired in the classroom, one to teach technical or academic content, and the other to teach basic skills in reading, math, writing or English language. In that way, students can move through school and into jobs faster. Models of IETs have been expanded or modified beyond that of I-BEST, most notably in conjunction with Jobs For the Future's [Accelerating Opportunity](#) initiative.

By combining basic skills training with workforce relevant education, IET benefits post-traditional students seeking a high school credential, English language learners seeking a pathway to additional learning, and justice-involved learners looking to accelerate and apply their learning, with models and targeted support specific to each population.

<sup>44</sup> CLASP. (n.d.). *Opportunities for action: Integrated education and training: Model programs for building career pathways for participants at every skill level.* <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/WIOA-IET-Model-Programs.pdf>



## CASE STUDY

# Integrated Education and Training at Pima Community College's I-BEST

## BACKGROUND

Pima Community College's (PCC) I-BEST model was recognized as [one of the best in the country](#) by the U.S. Department of Education. The leadership at Pima considered the I-BEST model when the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 set new expectations for Adult Education programs nationwide to include workforce preparation and training and provide post-traditional learners with a pathway to a family-sustaining career. To support the goals of WIOA, the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) challenged Adult Education programs to develop Integrated Education and Training programs to include the following three components together in one educational model: 1) Adult education and literacy; 2) workforce preparation; and 3) workforce training.

Pima's I-BEST model merged the foundations of Washington's IBEST model with the integrated goals of WIOA to create an innovative program design that leverages multiple partners (e.g. WIOA partners, career and technical education (CTE) programs at PCC, Pima County One-Stop, and employers) to meet the needs of post-traditional learners in their unique context. A new chancellor that came from Washington state provided strong support for the initiative.

## GETTING STARTED

The leadership team started by raising awareness and building buy-in with internal and external partners. The adult education team approached staff running CTE programs and asked them to form an integrated cohort of adult basic education students and developmental education students. To make the case, the team used research on the positive peer effects that result from integrating students with different levels of preparedness as a way to tackle challenges to student success in CTE programs. For additional case-making, program developers showed research by the [Community College Research Center \(CCRC\) on Washington's I-BEST model](#) to argue in favor of adoption. In addition, the adult education leadership team invited leaders from Washington to provide additional training to Pima leadership, staff and faculty. The team benefited from a state requirement to spend 10% of the budget on professional development, to fund training for faculty and staff.

A key part of the program's early success was the partnership with workforce entities and leaders. While the college had been working with workforce partners for years, WIOA's new expectations pushed them to align performance measures. In doing so, leadership was able to leverage existing funding to provide the program at no cost to students. To be specific, leadership cross-referenced CTE pathways and programs that were financial aid eligible with the eligible training providers list, so that WIOA dollars could also be applied. In addition, they braided financial aid and Ability to Benefit and, critically, provided support for students to navigate the complexity of applying for these different funding opportunities.

## GETTING TO SCALE & OUTCOMES

The program at scale would offer pathways leading into every one of PCC's nine areas of interest. At the start, I-BEST offered pathways into three of the nine areas, and next year the college will offer pathways into six areas. The college is currently serving approximately thirty students per I-BEST pathway, one hundred in total, and the goal is to double that number each year.

Early I-BEST is another program PCC is looking to scale in the coming years. Early I-BEST is targeted at post-traditional learners who are below 8th grade proficiency and offers career contextualization, career exploration, and general employability skills mapped to entry level training (e.g. coding) to build student awareness of what employability looks like locally and to connect them to in-demand jobs. The college plans to serve 400 students in Early I-BEST next year.

The major challenges with achieving scale in these two programs are related to funding and resistance from some sectors of the college to change their practices. While funding for integrated education and training models has been a priority at PCC, support from the state is minimal.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the program's collaborative model, as well as the coordination needed to leverage existing funding sources increases workload.

CCRC's research on Washington state's model shows that students in I-BEST programs are three times more likely to earn college credit and nine times more likely to earn a certificate. At PCC, the team focuses on employability as the final outcome and has seen very positive results. Data show that 75-80% of students complete the program. Of those that complete, 80% are employed a year out with 55% are employed in an industry or sector aligned with their training. In addition, 65% of I-BEST students continue to further education and training after I-BEST.

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Prioritize team teaching training above all other steps in the process to develop an I-BEST model.
- 2 Apply student-centered design principles. I-BEST requires effective collaboration across units and external partners. Make sure to streamline requirements to minimize barriers for students.
- 3 Elevate the voices of adult educators at your institution by including them at decision-making tables (e.g. staff council, faculty senate). This will increase the likelihood of effective cross-sector collaboration.
- 4 Promote collaborative work with a culture of improvement. I-BEST is a collaborative model that brings together CTE, adult education, and WIOA partners. Collaborations are challenging, but bumps in the road can be framed as opportunities for improvement and not as failures in implementation.
- 5 Identify existing gaps in regional labor market data to further improve labor market alignment of I-BEST programs. If needed, advocate for better data to support decision-making around skills training in your region. See Case Study on Dallas College's Labor Market Intelligence Unit in the [Partnerships Action Guide](#).

<sup>45</sup> Note: Pima receives a significant portion of its funding from local property taxes. Their elected board can levy property taxes for the college.



## Accelerate to credit-bearing gateway coursework

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, Faculty

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution to addressing the wide range of skills and levels of academic readiness of post-traditional learners. For those who have been out of the educational sphere for a while, a brief refresher course may be necessary as they jump into their education and training programs. Individuals with basic skills needs who are seeking to upskill or reskill, will need to acquire those basic skills in preparation for the education and training that is ahead. Research by Public Agenda indicated that returning post-traditional learners expect that they will need some refresher courses.<sup>46</sup>

In the US, 18% of adults, or 35 million people, have low literacy skills and 30% of adults, or 58 million people, have low skills in mathematics.<sup>47</sup> In addition, 16% of adults lack basic digital literacy.<sup>48</sup> For those who need upskilling in English and mathematics, institutions and systems can help students by providing this in an accelerated or contextually relevant format.

Offering streamlined foundational skills in parallel to education or training courses has been shown to accelerate learners' progression through programs.<sup>49</sup> Such models are particularly effective for post-traditional learners who are eager to minimize time to completion and cost.<sup>50</sup> Short, intensive refresher courses tailored specifically to post-traditional learners can serve as a critical intervention. Policies that allow these learners to show their skills through multiple measures or by opting straight into educational programs without demonstrating the foundational skills prior to enrolling in the program are also critical to ensure success.

<sup>46</sup> Hagelskamp, C., Schleifer, D., DeStasi, C. (2013) Is College Worth it For Me? How Adults Without Degrees Think About Going (Back) to School. Public Agenda. <https://www.publicagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Is-College-Worth-It-for-Me-2013.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> Freeman, M. (2020, April 27). Why adult foundational skills matter now more than ever. Corporation for a Skilled Workforce. [https://medium.com/@csw\\_63451/why-adult-foundational-skills-matter-now-more-than-ever-6e53dfd133c8](https://medium.com/@csw_63451/why-adult-foundational-skills-matter-now-more-than-ever-6e53dfd133c8)

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Mullins, C. (2020, August 31). *Early progress in developmental ed: Twice the impact, half the time*. Ed Note. Education Commission of the States. <https://ednote.ecs.org/early-progress-in-developmental-ed-twice-the-impact-in-half-the-time/>

<sup>50</sup> Vandal, B. & Todd, R. (2020). Scaling systemwide: *Corequisite support as a cornerstone of a comprehensive student success strategy (Steps to Success series)*. Strong Start to Finish, Education Commission of the States. [https://strongstart.org/sites/default/files/resource-center/pdfs/SSTF-Steps\\_to\\_Success\\_Bruce-Vandal\\_Main%209.25.pdf](https://strongstart.org/sites/default/files/resource-center/pdfs/SSTF-Steps_to_Success_Bruce-Vandal_Main%209.25.pdf)

## Exemplars

**Mt. San Antonio College** (Mt. SAC), a community college in southern California, offers short-term, non-credit mathematics and English courses to prepare learners for college and career readiness. These courses are free, open-entry, open-exit, and competency-based. Learners can take them prior to taking college-level or program-specific courses or can jump into them at any point, if they are struggling in their coursework.<sup>51</sup> Learners who took the non-credit refresher courses outperformed their counterparts in college-level English and mathematics by 12 percentage points.<sup>52</sup> The non-credit format is specifically oriented around post-traditional learner needs through its flexible and condensed format.

**University System of Georgia** found that when it provided foundation courses in mathematics and English in a corequisite model, post-traditional learners made faster progress than those who took such courses in a chronological order, and completed the gateway mathematics and English courses in their first year at a rate of 23-33 percentage points higher than their counterparts who did not use a corequisite model.<sup>53</sup> Adult learners also outperformed the overall student average in both foundation and corequisite courses.<sup>54</sup> An analysis by race/ethnicity indicated that students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds did better using corequisite learning support, with Black students averaging 34 points better in corequisite courses and Hispanic students improving between 27 and 31 percentage points.<sup>55</sup>

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Provide supplemental instruction and make resources, such as tutoring or coaches, available to support foundational learning.
- 2 Remove restrictive readiness assessments that rely on high-stakes exams and broaden to include multiple measures of assessment.
- 3 Opt to make refresher courses as convenient and flexible as possible, incorporating acceleration strategies for students.

<sup>51</sup> Arballo, M.A. (Dec 2019- Jan 2020). Increasing access through non-credit education. *Community College Journal*, 5-6.  
[https://www.mtsac.edu/president/cabinet-notes/2019-20/CC\\_Journal\\_Increasing\\_Access\\_Through\\_Noncredit\\_Education\\_by\\_Madelyn\\_Arballo.pdf](https://www.mtsac.edu/president/cabinet-notes/2019-20/CC_Journal_Increasing_Access_Through_Noncredit_Education_by_Madelyn_Arballo.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Vandal, B. & Todd, R. (2020). *Scaling systemwide: Corequisite support as a cornerstone of a comprehensive student success strategy (Steps to Success series)*. Strong Start to Finish, Education Commission of the States. [https://strongstart.org/sites/default/files/resource-center/pdfs/SSTF-Steps\\_to\\_Success\\_Bruce-Vandal\\_Main%209.25.pdf](https://strongstart.org/sites/default/files/resource-center/pdfs/SSTF-Steps_to_Success_Bruce-Vandal_Main%209.25.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



## Bridge non-credit training with credit programs

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, Faculty

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

Non-credit training that occurs within institutions and across systems should serve as a launching point to further education. By bridging non-credit training to credit programs, institutions help form seamless lifelong learning pathways for post-traditional learners. Doing so also supports the infusion of a skills-based approach to learning through recognizing prior learning.

Colleges should develop clear structures to assess and acknowledge the value of training that occurred outside of the institution. Training that occurs within institutions should also have systems in place to facilitate progression. While many post-traditional learners pursue non-credit training and education at institutions to quickly gain skills so they can enter the workforce, the current pandemic environment may necessitate that such learners upskill via further education. For industry credentials, institutions can draw on existing models of credit matrices and articulation agreements to determine a credit award and pathways to relevant and high-demand degree programs. Institutions that have such offerings available should promote them internally, have a marketing campaign to encourage prospective learners with credentials to consider a degree program aligned to the needs of pandemic recovery in their region, and partner with employers and others in the community to spread the word on this pathway. Institutions can also embed non-credit certificates into degree programs in order to infuse more real-world and work-based skills and knowledge into degree programs. [A More Unified Community College](#) is another resource released by Education Strategy Group that provides a framework and examples for these efforts.

<sup>36</sup> Bennett, V., McDonnell, R. P., Lee, S., & Ostrye, M. (2020). *Redesigning training programs for the COVID-19 era and beyond*. Jobs for the Future. <https://www.jff.org/resources/redesigning-training-programs-covid-19-era-and-beyond/>; Long, C. & McIntyre-Hite, L. (2020). *Gearing up: How competencies enable the work-learn model*. Competency Based Education Network and Guild Education. <https://www.cbenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Gearing-Up-How-Competencies-Enable-the-Agile-Work-Learn-Model-FINAL.pdf>



## Exemplars

**Salt Lake Community College** (SLCC), from 2014-2016, changed 20 non-credit programs to a competency-based education model (CBE), and began a process of drawing up internal equivalency agreements to ensure students would receive credit for completing a CBE program. In 2020, in response to legislation mandating the elimination of duplicative non-credit and credit courses, competency-based programs were selected to replace duplicative credit courses. Students who completed CBE programs were then able to transition into degree programs. (Education Strategy Group, 2020).

**The Ohio Department of Higher Education**, in 2014, launched the One Year Option. The One Year Option created system-wide articulation agreements between Ohio Technical Centers and community colleges. The agreements allowed students, upon completion of an industry-recognized non-credit training program at an Ohio Technical Center, to earn up to 30 credits toward one of five associate of technical studies degrees (Education Strategy Group, 2020).

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Institutions should indicate which non-credit programs lead to credit programs and market these pathways to both current learners and alumni with encouragement to continue their education; and
- 2 Incentivizing students and alumni of non-credit programs to continue on pathways via scholarships or other funding will help more post-traditional learners take advantage of this bridge opportunity.



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