



Center for Working Families at Community Colleges: Clearing the Financial Barriers to Student Success

cAse studies



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yeAr begAn	cwF students served (2010)	tArget populAtlon	key Focus
2005	2,086	Any CNM student who needs CWF services	Transforming student services and campus culture to more effectively get students “in, through, and out” of the college with a credential.

introduction and background

Central New Mexico Community College (CNM) has a significantly longer history than the rest of the colleges in this study with implementing and refining its CWF program, with the efforts beginning in 2005. Recognizing the great needs that most community college students have, **CNM is moving rapidly to serve not just those students who are most at risk but to offer CWF-style services to all its students located across five campuses in the Albuquerque metropolitan area.**

Dr. Katharine Winograd, the college president, sees the roots of this effort going back a decade when college staff started hard conversations about why half its students weren’t being retained after a year. CNM was an early participant in Achieving the Dream, for example, laying some of the groundwork for CNM Connect, particularly its data focus.

“Life is more complex than ever for our students,” according to Dr. Winograd, “and the traditional model of serving students’ needs wasn’t going to make them succeed.” The old model of academic advising and piece meal, silo-oriented responses to financial aid and registration weren’t sufficient, she said.

Underscoring the college’s emphasis on improving retention and completion rates, according to college leaders, is the fact that there are indications that performance-based funding that rewards student completion may be implemented by New Mexico’s state legislature, following the recent lead of other states such as Arkansas, Washington, and Tennessee.

CNM Connect, the name under which the college’s CWF operates, did not start as a top-down strategy from the college’s administration, however. It started at the grassroots level within the School of Adult and General Education in 2005 and, after some early successes, was recognized and nurtured by college leadership, as it has been ever since. Today it is evident that faculty and staff leadership distributed throughout the college share both an understanding and a unified messaging about this ongoing initiative. Myriad college staff interviewed for this research are able to talk about the CNM Connect approach from their own perspective, while also explaining how efforts in their own programs serve the goals of the larger initiative.

One phrase consistently used by CNM staff is getting students “in, through and out” of the institution. The college president notes this phrase as essential to guiding the change effort, both in targeting specific goals and measuring key outcomes. “In” addresses access to programs, especially for at-risk populations, whom the president said are a key priority for this urban college. “Through,” she

says, emphasizes the critical importance of developing and refining school policies that can help retain students. And “out” makes it clear that completion is more important than mere retention.

Target population

When asked whom CNM Connect seeks to serve, college staff respond, “any student.” That said, the college recognizes that some students at this very large multi-campus college are more in need of the CNM Connect’s services than others. Roughly speaking, college leaders say that about one third of its 30,000 students don’t need the more intensive student services and coaching that the CWF model offers. Another third very much need those services and remaining third are “in the middle,” needing some services but not at a high intensity.

The goal is to end the “bounce system” and create a culture shift on campus to understand what all students really need to be successful and then figure out how to offer those services in an efficient manner.

CNM Connect is the thread to operationalize student success activities at Central New Mexico. A key question, of course, is how does the college plan to scale up from serving about 2000 students a year, as it did in 2010, to identify and serve so many more students? CNM’s answer is by fundamentally reorganizing how the college delivers student services through staff reorganization and re-definition, and by better using technology to respond to students’ needs, as described later. Also underpinning this effort are key policy changes on campus to promote retention and completion, and engaging college faculty and staff in understanding their roles in student success through CNM Connect.

how the CWF approach is implemented at Central New Mexico

There are currently 10 CNM Connect achievement coaches. About half come from academic services background and about half from student services, enabling cross-pollinating and complementary professional expertise. Satellite campus directors have been renamed Student Success Team Leaders in order to emphasize their roles in supporting students rather than just running a campus.

Viewing CNM Connect through the lens of the three CWF pillars, the most frequent services fall, not surprisingly for a college, in the area of education and training. Next the college reports income/work supports, primarily in the form of financial assistance to students, as the second most frequent type of services, followed by financial services. CNM has used a variety of financial education strategies. Initially it offered non-credit workshops for students, but more recently it created a 12-week, three-credit hour financial education course. Called FIN1010, the course was developed by the college’s business department and is now being offered in high schools across the state as well.

Students report learning about CNM Connect through orientation, classroom presentations early in the semester, faculty referrals, and word of mouth. Most self-refer to receive services—there are no criteria regarding who can be helped. Students interviewed for this study suggest a need to make CNM Connect a more obvious part of the college’s web site.

Coaches and students reveal the following as the typical and most frequent CWF services that CNM Connect provides:

- Coaching sessions that help students set goals and develop plans to achieve them.
- Assisting students apply for Rust Scholarships that provide emergency and gap funding, typically at

the level of \$200 to \$300, to support a student's immediate financial need that might lead to them

dropping out. As one coach said, “the Rust Scholarship helps those who hit speed bumps in life.” Achievement coaches also use students’ application process as another avenue to undertake goal setting and personal budgeting.

- Conducting benefits screening through the BEN calculator, a new benefits screening tool that coaches are using to identify government assistance programs for which students are eligible and to reduce paperwork and application processing times for students. In the past, a SNAP representative also came to campus on a regular basis to help students fill out applications, reducing process time by two to three weeks.
- Helping students complete their federal financial assistance form, FAFSA. Coaches report that this is also a tool to broach discussions about budgeting their award funds.
- Establishing about 20 Individual Development Accounts a year through a state program. The college would like to increase this number if it had additional resources.
- Sometimes connecting students to the college’s Job Connection office for job placement assistance.
- Making referrals to counseling, internally at the college or to external community partners, when necessary since most of the achievement coaches are not licensed to provide psychological counseling.
- Some students who’ve been referred by faculty or advisors schedule coaching sessions to create success plans that very specifically lay out their steps to reaching goals. These students typically meet with a coach every couple of weeks. Most students, however, only meet with coaches a few times to focus on a concrete need.

Funding

CNM has successfully garnered substantial external support to augment institutional resources to support its CWF approach. Grants from local and national foundations have come from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, Bank of America Foundation, Citibank Foundation, McCunne Foundation, PNM Foundation, Wells Fargo, MDC, LISC and Don Chalmers Ford.

The funding has supported coach positions, deployed new technologies, and offered financial education services. Support also enables the college to update NewMexico.org, a website that shares information about public benefits and create a banded identify for CNM Connect.

At the end of 2011, just over half of the CNM Connect staff positions were funded from institutional dollars, with the remaining positions being grant-funded.

CNM Connect as the framework to transform student support

There are key organizational changes and tenets in place, or under development, which are enabling the transformation of student services and achievement support at the college through CNM Connect.

Student support services reorganization and staff reclassification

A recent employee retirement incentive at the college was more popular than anticipated with more than 100 college staff leaving employment. Taking advantage of this opportunity, many job positions are being re-purposed to support the CNM Connect model.

Specifically, this organization development endeavor has included creating a call center to answer the most common student questions, including testing, advising, and financial aid. The center also makes outbound calls to remind students of important deadlines. The college has established new “generalist” student services positions to answer somewhat more complicated questions from students in those same areas and is pilot testing them at two of their campuses. Having these cross-trained individuals to respond to the majority of students’ needs leaves the achievement coaches to resolve students’ larger, more complex issues. Traditional financial aid and advising experts are also still available to focus on more intense student needs in those areas.

Budget cuts of 30 percent over the past three years have likely influenced faculty and staff to be more open to this institutional change, according to program leaders. Interviewees, for example, cite a greater openness to programs sharing staff and information, as well as to cross-training, that likely has improved communication among various departments and programs.

Using technology for increased efficiency

Technology is another tool CNM is using to transform student support at CNM. The college is making a concerted effort to use technology to meet many “low level” needs for students so that face-to-face sessions are for high need issues that students face. The college has a web portal, Ask CNM, that uses smart database technology to inform staff when questions arise for which it cannot provide an answer, allowing administrators to add new information. Like the call center, the goal is to handle the easy questions in order to reserve face-to-face sessions for high need students.

CNM also uses advanced communications software and web-cams to connect achievement coaches, faculty, and staff using live video chats, typically with a student sitting in one of the offices and participating as well. Coaches and students report this saves time and travel, and is more personal than just a phone call. Students see the face of the person helping them, making them feeling more engaged and connected to the college.

related policy and program changes

CNM Connect is closely allied with other student success efforts on campus designed to improve student outcomes. The college formed a group of key stakeholders, including faculty, to recommend policy and program changes, for example. Preliminary recommendations from the team include making orientation and student success courses mandatory, eliminating late registration because those students usually aren’t successful, and improving scheduling to make clearer pathways for students.

CNM Connect is also the umbrella under which new Campus Councils operate. These campus-based teams comprise the campus director, students, faculty, a vice president, an achievement coach, and security and maintenance. Their purpose is to shed light on student success barriers and make recommendations for specific campuses.

Leveraging faculty and peers to increase outreach and impact

“Faculty are an important part of CNM Connect,” according to a program leader. “They are the largest resource on campus to support students.” CNM Connect is the way to communicate with and engage faculty, she said. “This initiative allows us to break down barriers across campus to create a situation where all employees see themselves as part of our effort. Our goal is that no one ever says, ‘that’s not in my job description’ when it comes to getting students the assistance they need. “

CNM is also considering creating financial peer mentors to help students with straightforward financial aid questions. **Achievement coaches point out that for every student they assist, they know there’s many more who don’t come to them for help, and this is the challenge they face as they strive to dramatically ramp up. Using students for outreach and basic assistance could significantly increase the number of “touchpoints” at-risk students receive.**

Partnerships

While CNM refers students to mental health professionals and other community organizations that can help students, the program appears to focus mostly on partnerships with respect to internal partnerships across college functions. At the highest leadership levels down to front line workers, the college is focusing on changing campus culture and enacting organizational changes to better support students’ needs.

Data and outcomes tracking

CNM Connect uses Efforts to Outcomes software to track interactions with students. Achievement coaches use a paper-based form to capture what services they provide when they meet with a student, and a work-study student inputs those data into the software.

The college uses Banner as its student information software, and CNM is investigating the use of Banner forms to track a variety of outcomes across the college. In addition, CNM Connect pulls academic outcomes for students who receive services through CNM Connect.

Outcomes

Program leaders and achievement coaches who directly work with students emphasize the immediacy of impact for some services, when compared to others. **Assistance with paying one’s rent results in an immediate, measurable outcome. Achieving significant outcomes with asset-building, on the other hand, can take much longer,** especially since building assets may not be as high a priority while a person is enrolled in a degree or certificate program.

Broadly speaking, CNM coaches define success as helping students meet their particular goals. One coach said, “Success is getting a person to where they can think clearly about their circumstances.”

Unfortunately, another coach reflected, students are often used to seeing education as a punitive system. The CNM coaching model is to give students who have lost their locus of control the tools they need so that they can take control of their future.

In terms of student perceptions about CNM Connect's impact, interviewees in New Mexico place high value upon the program's ability to address and help resolve emergency situations, such as establishing or preventing the loss of living quarters or providing financial assistance in other sorts of emergencies. Other students cite the program's longer-term efforts to provide coaching services that directly address their individual needs. Several cited the college's robust Rust Scholarship, which provides emergency funds, as especially valuable. Students didn't see sufficient awareness among their fellow students of all that CNM Connect can do to help them.

Moving forward

CNM coaches recognize that for every student they have helped so far, there are likely many more who did not come to them for assistance. "There are still students who have the same issues but can't see us," a coach pointed out. This is the guiding principle for the CNM—building an infrastructure and culture on campus that impacts as many of the students who need them as possible.

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year began	CWF students served (2010)	target population	key focus
2009	1,086	Individuals defined as hard to employ due to multiple barriers in education, economics and social behavior.	Creating a data tracking system that drives integrated support for at-risk students, helping lead them to jobs or further education.

introduction and background

Des Moines Area Community Colleges' Community and Workforce Partnerships is committed to increasing access to postsecondary education for at-risk populations, many of whom live in the area around its Urban campus. When the architect and current leader of the division, Dr. Mary Chapman, began discussions with the Annie E. Casey Foundation about the CWF approach in 2008 she realized the college already offered most of the services defined within the three CWF pillars. The missing piece was a data tracking system to understand who was receiving which services and to drive a more connected and supportive environment for at-risk students that could help lead them toward completion and a job.

As the CWF concept moved to reality, the college used the Foundation's grant to connect several parts of this large, six-campus college that serves more than 70,000 students a year. The metaphor program leaders use to describe the CWF approach is "the needle and thread that weaves together" multiple college resources and community partners to create partnerships and form a college retention and completion strategy. The data system, called SuccessNet, is the dedicated system constructed within the college's Banner operating system, both for case management purposes and for outcome tracking.

Target population

Relationships between this arm of DMACC and many urban community-based organizations in the area allow the college to reach out and attract at-risk populations, becoming an on ramp to the college. Frequent groups that refer individuals to the college to participate in training and receive other CWF-model services are United Way, the local one-stop workforce center, and Urban Dreams, a community-based organization that works with young people looking for a new direction for a better and more productive life. Program leaders describe participants as at-risk populations faced with generational poverty and chronic unemployment.

In addition to this urban location, however, the CWF approach at DMACC also encompasses two outlying rural campuses of the college. These participants are more likely to be single parents, typically women. The CWF model services at those locations started under a state effort called Iowa New Choices prior to being folded under the Center for Working Families umbrella. Now those students also participate in the SuccessNet data tracking system and share core principles in how to holistically support students.

how the CWF approach is implemented at DMACC

The primary intake for students currently takes place at the college's Harding Hills location. Now occupying space within a shopping center a few miles north of the Urban Campus, a new facility for the site is being renovated close to the college's Urban campus.

Last year about 1,200 individuals came to this location and completed an intake form. To **connect these students to the right program for them**, there's a clear set of steps.

These are the typical activities for students:

Intake: Potential students complete an intake form and attend an orientation workshop to learn about various programs such as construction (YouthBuild), Certified Nursing Assistants, medical billing, sterile processing, and welding. A CASAS placement test is given to determine if students are academically prepared to take the vocational training. Those who score 226 or higher in reading and 236 or higher in math are eligible to enroll. Those who score below the CASAS requirements are referred to an achievement coach for onsite remediation or referral to a college or community support service. A half-time achievement coach oversees the intake, orientation and remediation activities.

education/employment support:

education: About half the students who complete an initial form enroll in one of the college's Workforce Training Academy (WTA) offerings. These are short-term, non-credit certificates, some of which include state or industry certifications, e.g., certified nurse assistant. The programs align with the region's sector priorities as determined by the workforce system. The length varies from a two and a half week basic Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) course to a seven-month pre-apprentice YouthBuild program.

The classes themselves are located at various DMACC campuses around the metropolitan region. The classes are taught contextually with employability and life skills competencies taught at the same time as the vocational training. These include, among other things, resume building, dressing for success, and mock interviews with local employers.

A full-time employment specialist sets up the training courses and functions as an advisor and liaison between students and instructors. She intervenes when students aren't doing well to help identify necessary resources to support student success. The college emphasizes that the short-term training programs are the first educational rung that can lead to stronger economic security. A DMACC educational/career pathway map illustrates how the certificates feed into credit-bearing related one-year diplomas and two-year degree programs.

Through Department of Labor funding and several other public and private funding streams, about 75 percent of students receive some additional funds to pay for books, bus passes, and training supplies (e.g., scrubs and a stethoscope for CNA or protective boots for welding) that they need to be successful in training. In addition, DMACC provides students' access to an online portal, OASIS, with the state's Department of Human Services to help them apply for public benefits such as food stamps and child health care. However, with the support of DHS, DMACC continues to look for new and effective tools to improve access to public benefits for students.

employment: DMACC's CWF model places a strong emphasis on job placement. A full-time transition coach works with students to prepare them for interviews and has myriad connections with employers to help with job placement. All students are encouraged to participate in a mock interview with an employer.

Staff report that Iowa is one of the most aged states in the nation, and, consequently, health care jobs are most in demand. Welding is also an in-demand field in the region. DMACC is required by several funders to track student outcomes for an additional 12 to 18 months after course completion. The biggest stumbling block to the tracking is the transiency of many students resulting in changing cell phone numbers. DMACC collects phone numbers from close family members during the intake process and will often contact them to update a student's contact number. Staff reports that Facebook is becoming a resourceful communications tool as well.

Financial education/Asset Building

Providing financial education to students has been one of the hardest challenges within DMACC's CWF approach. "Until we can get students to thinking beyond short-term, day-to-day survival, they cannot be as successful as we'd like," said one DMACC program leader, "but we are learning that if we don't better integrate the financial education, many students will say, 'no thank you.'"

DMACC uses an outside contractor, Iowans for Social and Economic Development (ISED) to provide financial education services, including asset-building information around budgets, savings, and Individual Development Accounts. As part of applying for training in the Workforce Training Academy, students complete a needs assessment and they receive a follow-up call from ISED offering financial coaching. New requirements effective 2012 will require that students enrolling in the training receive at least one financial coaching session.

Data and outcome tracking

CWF leaders at DMACC refer to its data tracking system, SuccessNet, as the "heart and soul" of the college's CWF approach because it allows them to monitor and document the core services students receive, what they call "touchpoints." Through the Workforce Training Academy and other supporting services, program leaders say the college was already offering many of the services identified in the CWF approach. The Annie E. Casey support helped format the data tracking system within the college that allowed them to better track and understand whether the holistic approaches were working as part of the college's overall emphasis on retention and completion.

SuccessNet comprises a set of forms and screens within the college's Banner student information system, created by the college's IT division. SuccessNet allows a dedicated staff person to input the approximately 20 or so identified CWF services offered through the college's CWF effort. Previously Banner was not used to track student support service activities at the college so this was the substantial augmentation for the system.

More specifically, students are entered into the system when they go through the intake process. Their CASAS test score is entered, including whether they are referred for remediation. Attendance at orientation sessions are another input, along with whether a student chooses a training program. Other service codes include academic advising, career planning sessions, and many others.

A key emphasis is making sure the coaches understand all the codes and what they mean so that there is consistent interpretation.

Designed in 2008 and implemented in 2009, DMACC staff report that now that the system is up and running, better mining the robust data at their fingertips is an area of emphasis. DMACC staff said that Banner had all the capabilities necessary to build out this tracking system. They report using a “top programmer” in the college and that a substantial number of hours of staff time were used to develop the system.

In retrospect, college leaders report, they may have started constructing the data system a little too soon, however.

“We were still learning so much about how to define our integrated approach and had to go back to SuccessNet later and simplify certain aspects to make it work for practitioners,” according to a college administrator.

The SuccessNet data tracking system has attracted positive attention from the rest of the college. A separate system to track other student populations in the college patterned after SuccessNet is being developed. As the CWF student retention strategy expands to other campuses, the service priorities and codes will standardize across the district, at which point the two tracking systems will be able to integrate because both are within Banner.

DMACC’s IT staff, who created SuccessNet, point out that while they are fully integrated with their college software system, Banner, there are lower-effort resources that could produce much of the same data. “You could house this case management data in Access or Excel, and as long as each student has the same identifier in the college’s data system, you could produce meaningful outcomes data,” an IT specialist said.

Funding

Program leaders report that the coaches who support the low-income students in their Workforce Training Program have become an important part of how the center conducts its work. They have not received substantial funds outside of the \$35,000-a-year, three-year grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Tight resources mean more of their coaches are part-time than they would like, given the labor-intensive aspect of providing wrap-around services to at-risk students.

DMACC participates in the federal government’s SNAP outreach program. The college dedicates funds that the federal government reimburses 50 percent. For example, if DMACC pays \$100 in tuition for the education of an eligible food stamps recipient, the college receives \$50 back through the SNAP program.

Partnerships

DMACC is well connected with many community-based organizations in the college district. Community partners refer most of the students to DMACC, and the Workforce Training Academy is a larger provider of training for low-income job seekers in the community. In turn, the college refers many students who have special needs that are better met by the additional support of a community-based partner, e.g., substance abuse.

Outcomes

When asked how SuccessNet data is being used by the CWF effort at DMACC, program leaders point toward the in-house remediation that now takes place in conjunction with the Workforce Training Academy. They said that looking at the data they saw that “initially we were training and placing fewer than half of the students who came in.” So they implemented the adult basic skills test and created “brush up” remediation for those scoring near the cut-off scores. They established and implemented computer-based and hybrid classes. By addressing these students’ remediation needs “in house,” they’ve seen increased entry into the training programs and better completion rates.

Other data analysis requests include percentages receiving services in the three CWF area, retention rates, advisor-to-student loads, and the average number of times coaches are seeing clients, according to DMACC IT staff.

Moving forward

DMACC is planning to implement Efforts to Outcome (ETO) case management software in the near future through financial support from United Way. This will allow the college to link with community-based partners who will also be using the software. The fact that community members who are not students are coming into the center for services is a driving force behind this move. DMACC sees itself as part of a referral web; education may not be what brings some people in but it still could provide some assistance or referrals and using this software will link the college to other community partners and the services they have or could provide. The plan is that each ETO community site supported by the United Way offer the same core set of intake services.

This initiative will accelerate with the college’s forthcoming Evelyn Davis Center for Working Families (EDCWF) opening that will integrate both human service and educational delivery systems. The details of EDCWF are still in development. One of the facets to be determined is the line between a college CWF participant and a community member who comes to DMACC for a service but is not a student. The plan is that community members who come to the site will be solely tracked by Efforts to Outcome. They will be entered into the Banner-driven SuccessNet system if they intend to enroll in a training program and go through the college’s intake process.

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yeAr begAn	cwF students served (2010)	tArget populAtIon	key Focus
2009	186	Primarily Basic Skills students at an urban campus of GTCC	CWF services are supporting a new initiative, Basic Skills Plus, which integrates vocational and basic skills in free, cohort-based training.

introduction and background

The Center for Working Families program at Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) is a newer, **smaller, tightly focused CWF program**. It is located on the college's High Point campus, a North Carolina city still best known for furniture, although today more as a display and distribution center than the industry-dominant manufacturing city it once was.

The High Point campus, one of GTCC's three campuses in NC's Piedmont Triad region, serves about 7,500 students. It features five curriculum programs, including Entertainment Technology, Simulation and Gaming, Human Services Technology, Pharmacy Technology, and Upholstery. In addition to its Continuing Education and Community Service programs, the campus also hosts five Basic Skills programs. Basic Skills classes reach 3,000 students, about 40 percent of the campus' total enrollment.

This urban campus also hosts a Center for Working Families with two full-time staff and a number of achievement coaches, many of whom are faculty. In fact, the campus dean also serves as an achievement coach. The CWF program is the first of its kind in North Carolina.

Target population

GTCC's CWF program focuses upon serving Basic Skills students, although a long-term goal of the program will be also to serve students enrolled in the campus' curriculum program offerings. In fact, some curriculum students already have attended CWF-sponsored financial education workshops.

The Center's explicit mission is **"help and guide students and their families with life skills and empower those who are: 1) moving from homelessness; 2) recovering from a major setback; 3) fleeing domestic violence; or 4) dealing with incomes that cannot provide basic needs."** Because staff and other resources are limited, a priority is placed upon helping those students who are most at-risk.

A student must have consistently attended classes for two weeks before they are eligible for CWF services. The rule applies both to Basic Skills and curriculum students. In actual practice, the CWF staff will strive to help almost any student even prior to their fulfilling that two-week mandate, but the Center doesn't count these kinds of drop-ins as formally having been served.

In Summer 2011, all of the students enrolled in a 10-month Basic Skills Plus training program at GTCC were female. This particular track prepares the women to seek employment as medical receptionists. Acknowledging that it is "harder to keep males engaged" with long-term training programs, the campus dean said the next Basic Skills Plus class likely will focus on HVAC or EMT training, specifically to encourage men to sign up.

how the CWF approach is implemented at GTCC

GTCC's CWF approach best may be described as akin to a "social worker on campus" model.

It is built upon the students' personal connections with CWF staff who see their roles as clearly distinct from traditional student support services. In fact, their main objective is to encourage students and their families to attain higher degrees of self-sufficiency. They also emphasize the importance of meeting students' basic needs: housing, transportation, and food.

The CWF office certainly provides a safe haven for many students who drop in throughout the day. In fact, even non-participants sometimes come around to say hello or just to have a good cry, if it's a bad day. Even so, the staff are very mission-focused, set upon helping the students with the greatest need who also demonstrate a commitment to completing their education.

In their continuing interactions with students, CWF staff and achievement coaches seek to address all three facets of the AECF model. However, the coaches don't appear to think of the three strands separately and naturally address them in an integrated fashion. With the Basic Skills students, the coaches weave seamlessly from career readiness to household budgeting to income supports.

Typical services offered to Basic Skills students who come to the CWF office might include a free bus pass, a Benefits Banks analysis to help them access any additional public assistance monies for which they are eligible, access to financial assistance to address life emergencies, coaching on how best to earn the Career Readiness Certificate, and full access to financial education workshops. In fact, those are open to all students on the High Point campus).

The CWF program currently has one full-time program leader and two part-time staff. One of the part-time employees previously worked at the county social services agency and has helped developed GTCC's evolving case management approach to working with its student clients. Eventually, the program would like to employ three full-time staff and three part-time coaches in order to serve more students with more services.

With each new student who seeks assistance from the program, CWF staff conduct an intake assessment. They set up a profile that will enable them to follow a standard protocol: 1) ask the student what their educational and career goals are; 2) set up a plan to help them accomplish those goals; 3) check with the student on a regular basis; and 4) refer them as needed to the right coaching, appropriate counseling (available at the college), or community-based support services that will help them reach their goals.

As the protocol infers, the CWF program staff at GTCC typically have sustained, frequent interaction with individual students. This is possible in part because the overall cohort of Basic Skills students taking part in the program is relatively small. The staff recruit coaches chiefly among instructors at the college who understand the needs of Basic Skills students and who have expertise in the knowledge base required to teach the required subject area.

The college places a premium on accountability for all students who seek coaching or other services through the CWF program. Staff understand that retention and completion are related to continuing engagement. They even refer to the CWF offices as a "check-in hub." Faculty will call in and report when students are absent from class. In fact, they're supposed to do that. First, of course, they have to know about the problems, but once they do, then they can help.

Even so, staff affirm that they want to coach, not counsel. The students need to identify their own vision and claim their own future. "Left to their own devices, students can turn issues into problems," one CWF coach said. "We need to help students understand that they can't just expect to be receiving. They have to do."

Both the campus dean, who also participates in the CWF program as a coach by teaching financial education workshops, and the CWF program leader told us that the program is most often successful in retaining students to the degree that it can foster among students a deeply felt sense of connection to the college. In effect, this is a feeling that "someone at the college actually cares about me."

Such a perception appeared to be widely shared among CWF students. Most appear not to think of the CWF services offered as a discrete program, per se, but rather as personal, heartfelt support and encouragement offered by "Miss Sybil" and "Miss Stephanie," who are the two key CWF staff members engaged with coaching students.

One of the biggest benefits of the CWF program is that it provides GTCC faculty with a viable alternative to academic coaching that can address pressing, potentially overwhelming "real-life" challenges. Previously, staff said, faculty at the High Point campus felt completely at a loss to know what to do when students encountered non-academic hurdles, other than to somewhat haphazardly refer students to outside community-based service organizations.

At this stage in its development, marketing the CWF program within the college has been mostly word-of-mouth. Staff also has presented a PowerPoint presentation at orientation sessions for new students.

Financial education/asset building

One-on-one financial coaching is not yet taking place to the extent GTCC would like, but beginning with the fall semester 2011, there were plans to train additional coaches to do more financial education. This is a new focus, chiefly because funds have not been available

The primary focus of financial education has been workshops on financial topics offered throughout the semester, but enrollment growth has restricted space on campus available to hold the workshops. Prior to that time, GTCC sometimes offered three workshops a week with 15-20 participants attending each one.

Today, when students come to CWF staff with financial problems, they work on budgets and financial accountability. Judging from anecdotal reports gleaned in conversation with college administrators and coaches, it appears likely the financial education component may be a little more prevalent on the GTCC campus than staff actually realize. Nonetheless, they affirm the need to augment this activity.

Data and outcome tracking

For the CWF program to achieve successful outcomes, the college dean said it has been important to "have the right people in the room," to start small, and to put the resources where they are needed most. The four-person CWF leadership team appears to be a cohesive, tightly knit group, with each member enthusiastic about implementing, refining, and sustaining the program.

GTCC has been tracking student retention outcomes, but accessing and analyzing data have been a difficult task because it's all done manually right now.

GTCC is not currently using Efforts to Outcomes software, which staff said is prohibitively expensive. Instead, they are partnering with a college IT staff person to develop their own software for tracking student outcomes and, eventually, for managing their student case management information. A shortage of institutional research capacity and other campus priorities has delayed the development of this internal software. It has recently risen higher in the queue of IT projects scheduled at the campus.

Currently the CWF program staff keep a written record of all interactions with a particular student and organizes this data in a paper folder but also uses an Excel spreadsheet to track student interactions with CWF staff. A part-time office assistant keeps the files up to date. In fact, if a student moves from Basic Skills to a Curriculum program, the CWF program will continue to work with them. Moreover, if a student transfers to another program at the nearby Jamestown campus, staff will continue to work with them there, as well.

Funding

The Annie E. Casey Foundation supported the launch and initial development of the CWF program at GTCC with a modest three-year grant. It has also received support from the college's foundation. The college has made a decision, however, not to pursue federal SNAP and TANF funds to support the ongoing initiative.

Remarkably, long-term sustainability for the CWF program likely is assured, according to the campus dean. Salaries for the CWF program leader and a part-time assistant director already have been absorbed within the college's Basic Skills program. The dean currently is working with the college's foundation to raise additional funds needed to provide additional staff in High Point and to expand the CWF approach to other GTCC campuses. She says that GTCC's foundation sees this program as having significant potential to attract additional philanthropic support.

Partnerships

The CWF program at GTCC works informally to eliminate silos and build bridges within and across the campus. At the beginning of each term, for example, the CWF staff and some of the coaches introduce themselves to new High Point faculty.

Faculty and staff support for CWF is very important. Faculty supports the food bank. They also donate clothes, testing fees, and identification badges. As noted earlier, the GTCC Foundation has been a big supporter too. It understands the CWF staff and volunteers accomplish a lot with very little.

The CWF team also has established a working partnership with GTCC's Counseling and Advising staff. These counselors serve all students but only when they get to curriculum level. Because CWF staff are not certified counselors, however, the counseling staff will work with CWF students' more emotional issues.

Beyond the campus, the CWF program works closely with community-based organizations to leverage assistance to students. In return, community partners refer their own clients to the CWF program at GTCC for certain types of services. The college permits these clients to come onto the campus.

Rendering such service is considered community outreach.

It has been a big plus for the CWF program to have hired one part-time staff person who had a lengthy social service background with a public agency. As a result, she has detailed knowledge about how the system works, including a lengthy contact list, and can call in assistance on an as-needed basis to work with students.

Moving forward

High enrollment anticipated for Fall 2011 may result in modest expansion of the High Point campus' CWF program. The program director said she hopes to expand to two full-time staff at some point and that eventually she also would like to have three part-time coaches. Meanwhile, as the fall semester approached, she also knew she would have to cope with the temporary absence of one of her key part-time colleagues who would soon be taking maternity leave.

The college is in the early stages of expanding CWF services to the nearby Greensboro campus by working with a staff person there who plans to use the CWF model to launch a matrix of interrelated services that can support students.

CWF staff at GTCC anticipate this new center will be very different from their own. Greensboro is a much larger city. Student needs are very different in that environment, especially regarding transportation and child care. Staff also have heard that the Greensboro CWF program plans to start a community garden. There also are many more community organizations and public agencies in Greensboro around which to coalesce a network of support.

Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas

Year Begun	CWF students served (2010)	Target Population	Key Focus
2009	600	Low-income, under-resourced students	Highly integrated with the college's TANF-supported Career Pathways program, CWF allows the colleges to extend services to a broader set of at-risk students at the college

Introduction and Background

Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas (PCCUA) is located in Helena-West Helena, Arkansas, a small, consolidated rural town located on the Mississippi River about 90 minutes south of Memphis and a little more than two hours east of Little Rock.

In the early 19th century, about the time that steamboats began plying the Mississippi River, Helena was a major port. Later it would play a leading role in the development of the Delta's blues heritage. Helena is well known as the home of the long-running blues radio program, *King Biscuit Time*. In fact, many well-known blues and country artists have been associated with the town, including Sonny Boy Williamson, Conway Twitty, and Levon Helm.

The town thrived throughout the mid-20th century but lost momentum in 1979 when its high-production Mohawk rubber tire factory closed down. Helena and West Helena merged into a single municipal government in 2006. The consolidated city is the county seat of Phillips County, which is one of the poorest counties in Arkansas.

Today, Helena-West Helena has a population of just over 12,000 people. Like much of the Mississippi Delta, it faces unremittingly difficult economic hard times. Unemployment hovers in the double digits, per capita income is just barely above \$12,000 per year, and less than 21 percent of the county's residents in 2009 had earned a degree past high school.

In the midst of this pervasive economic deprivation, PCCUA and its Center for Working Families (CWF) strive to help local residents earn their GED; provide remedial education (post-GED), postsecondary certificate, and degree-granting educational opportunities; and work closely with local firms to provide training for entry-level and mid-career workers.

PCCUA has worked diligently to integrate all three core components of the CWF model into its curriculum, coaching, and workshops. It also is focusing upon offering students the financial management education they need to find a job in a contracting economy. **Across-the-board, PCCUA seeks to nurture and develop an institutional culture among faculty and staff that better understands and is better equipped to address the challenges faced by students emerging from a background of chronic poverty.**

Target population

PCCUA defines the primary target population for its CWF support services as vulnerable, low-income, under-resourced students. Since 2009, the CWF program has served an average yearly total enrollment of about 600 students.

Almost all of these at-risk students have been enrolled in the college's Student Success classes, a two-semester curriculum that accompanies Freshman English 1. In these classes, students explore the basics of financial education and money management before moving on to building assets and increasing their personal and family wealth.

In many respects, these are the same students targeted by the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative, a comprehensive project that seeks to raise incomes and improve postsecondary educational attainment of low-income adults in Arkansas who are eligible for TANF (Temporary Assistance for Need Families) benefits.

Project funds from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, however, permit the college to serve at-risk students who do not meet the specific eligibility requirements for Career Pathways. As one staff person observed, "CWF tends to be a catch-all. If someone doesn't know how to help resolve a student's issue, you send them here."

Even so, while college administrators and staff express the desire to extend CWF support services to all students on campus, that broader access is not yet available. The first priority remains at-risk students.

The CWF program at PCCUA does, however, serve a small cohort of non-student community participants, most of whom are referred to the college by community-based institutions and public agencies. Most of these community residents are seeking to upgrade their job-seeking skills, including procuring help with developing a professional resume, as well as securing an employability certificate that attests to their ability to hold a job once they have been hired.

how the CWF approach is implemented at PCCUA

As with the other three Arkansas colleges in our study, the CWF approach at PCCUA is closely aligned with the college's Career Pathways program. The two programs share a full-time director, three counselor/advisor positions, 12-16 Student Success coaches, and a physical location, including a computer lab, on the campus.

Every student at PCCUA also has an academic advisor, but the Student Success coaches are there to help students access and use resources both at the college and in the community. Coaching also helps students develop the soft skills that are requisite for developing and sustaining a career.

"We have to make them realize that they can be successful," said one Career Pathways staff person. "That I [the coach] am your 'go-to' person." The director of the college's Career Pathways program agrees: "The quality of the [coaching] relationship is what really matters."

Student Success coaches maintain an open-door policy with students, encouraging them to drop by outside of formal class time. This approach is essential for serving non-traditional students who likely are older, already have families, and may be working a job in addition to attending classes.

"We want students to succeed with their life goals," said one administrator at PCCUA. "We want to help them decide what their own goals are. Before it was a template. Now we realize there are multiple pathways. We just try to help them develop realistic expectations about what it takes to get there."

Beginning with an initial consultation, the coaches look carefully at the intake forms that they collect from students in order to assess the barriers the students face and to decide what sorts of coaching they will need. One of the biggest barriers for many students is the lack of public transportation, especially when they need to coordinate their children's needs with their own daily schedules.

The coaches also provide strategies and tools to help students become more efficient with balancing their coursework assignments with their responsibilities around child care and part-time employment. One such approach recently involved the distribution of free daily planners to participants in all of the Student Success classes. The coaches help students use the planners to organize their daily and weekly activities. They have become a popular item among many students, who now carry them along everywhere they go.

In addition to addressing remedial needs in reading, writing, and math, the Student Success instructors and coaches strive to help students learn and master social mobility skills. "When we work with students, we help them understand how things really work with interviewing with an employer or keeping a job," said a college official. "We show them the hidden rules made obvious. We have to teach them to navigate the system."

Through embracing a hybrid of academic and financial coaching, PCCUA believes that its faculty members are getting better at helping students learn how to learn. "It's a learning emphasis rather than a teaching emphasis," a program administrator remarked.

Faculty who are not formally trained as coaches are encouraged to make referrals. Students have told instructors, for example, that they are homeless. Within the CWF model, teachers now have a good idea how to assist the student in resolving an issue that formerly might have disrupted coursework and impeded their path toward earning a certificate or degree.

Faculty also submit monitoring forms to the Career Pathways/CWF staff, reporting when students inexplicably have been absent or when they are not performing well in their work. "[Two of us] will make home visits if we haven't seen them in awhile, especially if they are Career Pathways students," said one coach. "We're going to go and find them."

Students and community residents, too, find ways to support one another in their progress toward accomplishing their educational goals. Those who frequent the CWF computer lab agree that there is a collaborative, supportive environment among its users. Everyone strives to help everyone else. "Once students have been over to the Center," remarked a CWF staff member, "they usually come back!"

Financial education/asset building

"Financial aid students think they are rich at first, when they get that check," a student success coach said. The immediate temptation, she explained, is to spend part of that money on some goods and services that may feel good but which aren't really necessary."

"Students often have no idea that they need financial education," reported an employability coordinator who works with the college's Career Pathways program. "Many times they say, 'I never have any money, so I don't need to think about how to keep track of it.'"

Even so, according to student surveys, financial literacy often turns out to be their favorite part of the Student Success curriculum.

When AECF made its CWF award to PCCUA three years ago, administrators and staff took stock of the college's overall support services and determined that existing programs already were addressing two of the three core components of the CWF model. The missing piece was financial education and asset building.

As a result, PCCUA used a portion of the AECF money to overhaul the Student Success curriculum. The college's Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) data indicated students felt that financial stability was their biggest barrier. Follow-up focus groups conducted by the college affirmed that many students knew little about financial management.

"Our students struggle financially," reported the PCCUA instructor who developed PCCUA's financial education curriculum. "They depend upon student aid. They come from poverty-based homes. They never have had people show them what to do with money. They can't think about tomorrow, because they are thinking about today. Most of our drop-out problems were related to money."

Today, most newly entering at-risk students are enrolled in the college's Student Success classes, a two-semester curriculum that accompanies Basic Writing I (the highest remedial English course) and Freshman English 1. In these classes, students first explore the basics of financial education and money management before moving on to the second semester, to building assets and increasing their personal and family wealth.

"In Success One, I teach money management," one instructor told us. "We talk about how much money you need to maintain a particular lifestyle. We talk about the difference between wants and needs. One of my students said, 'I got to get married!' I explained that she needs to think in terms of getting a job, too!" Upon hearing that anecdote, however, yet another financial coach promptly added, "We also try to tell them that they want a career, not just a job."

The CWF approach to financial education at PCCUA is not based solely upon classroom training. Staff at the college also work intensively one-on-one with students to offer advice and guidance on how to manage their money. In fact, four instructors at PCCUA have completed formal training for such intensive financial coaching.

Data and outcome tracking

PCCUA currently uses both handwritten and digital methods to track student progress and outcomes. In fact, both Career Pathways and CWF activities employ a case management approach. The college also uses surveys to assess the value that students place on their curricular, coaching, and workshop experiences.

Inspired in part by data tracking approaches developed by Central New Mexico Community College and shared by CNM at a statewide meeting among CWF colleges held at Southeast Arkansas College in Pine Bluff, PCCUA is now implementing Efforts to Outcomes software that can streamline case management as well as effectively track student and program outcomes.

Training in the application and use of Efforts to Outcome (ETO) software took place in 2010. The college would like all Student Success coaches to have access to ETO, but currently they are still hand counting and writing up most of their summaries about student interactions.

One speed bump that slows down progress toward effective data-gathering, CWF staff said, is that it can be daunting for a Student Success coach who also has a full-time teaching position to keep up with rising demands to gather more data about student engagement and outcomes. Even so, one college official observed that, “We share far more information now than we’ve ever shared.”

Funding

As with most of the 10 colleges in this study, PCCUA has pieced together its full array of CWF support services from among various programs and activities underwritten by a wide-ranging complement of funding sources. The key to success, the college reports, is “blending the initiatives.”

The primary funders include the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Career Pathways, Achieving the Dream, and TRIO (a federal program). Since 2009, the AECF has disbursed \$35,000 a year to the college for its CWF program. This allocation differs from the other three CWF colleges in Arkansas, for which the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation has provided the primary CWF underwriting.

One college administrator expressed her appreciation for AECF’s flexibility around how the funds are applied. “AECF lets us determine how best to use the money,” she said. “They understand that the colleges and then needs of students vary considerably from region to region.” Specifically, the AECF money has allowed PCCUA to extend the reach and scope of what Career Pathways can do.

The college did express concern, however, about the long-term sustainability of Career Pathways funding. “We are on a year-to-grant,” a CWF staff member said. “So any cutbacks in that program definitely could affect us.”

College personnel also express concern about recently enacted state legislation that will introduce performance-based budgeting for postsecondary education. The Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) acted in December 2011 to approve a funding formula that requires a portion of each college’s funding to be linked to outcomes such as courses completed and degrees awarded.

It appears unlikely that PCCUA will receive any new funds with this formula, a senior administrator said. Small rural colleges are expensive to operate, and there is an even greater expense when the population being served faces multiple obstacles to social mobility, including poverty or race.

Partnerships

PCCUA has taken a proactive approach to developing community partnerships in support of its CWF program.

This is largely the ongoing legacy of intensive partnership-building work invested in the creation of the college’s Career Pathways program, which sought to meet two important economic and workforce development needs in the region: 1) businesses need skilled workers to hire; and 2) low-income adults need employment that is gratifying and pays enough to support their families.

To ensure that Career Pathways students develop appropriate job skills that genuinely are marketable in the region, the college worked closely with local employers to target high-demand jobs. It then created a “career pathway” for each of the following fields: Business, Education, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)/First Responders, Manufacturing, Nursing and Allied Health, and Welding.

As PCCUA has followed up these consultations with its CWF-inspired financial education curriculum and workshops, it has found a warm reception among local businesses, civic and nonprofit organizations, and public agencies. For example, AECF funds have been used to support a Resource Fair where community partners visit the campus for a half-day event. Students take advantage of the opportunity to meet with and learn more about community-based resource providers and prospective employers. The CWF program also refers students to community partners to set up and manage Individual Development Accounts (IDAs).

Leadership at PCCUA also participates in a local economic development effort coordinated by Southern Bancorp. The Delta Bridge Project has created multidisciplinary teams that seek to make improvements in several key areas: jobs and economic development, tourism, recreation and quality of life, and education.

encouraging a culture shift

A small cohort of senior administrators and faculty at PCCUA has served the college in various positions for more than 20 years. They have risen through the ranks and now hold key leadership positions. Because they have worked together for so long, they genuinely understand one another’s personalities and leadership styles. They also have learned that they share a deep commitment to facilitating student success and improving student outcomes.

The Foundations of Excellence initiative, launched in 2005 with funding from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, asked PCCUA to look closely at hard data about student outcomes. According to several interviewees, this was a painful process, because they realized that the college’s retention and completion rates were not what they should be.

In response, they formed a committee to identify and discuss the reasons why this was the case. “We based our discussions on data and focus groups, not just our gut feelings,” one senior leader said. Even so, the college president told us that he always knew when this committee was meeting because he could hear the animated discussion, the moans and groans, all the way down the hall.

Even so, talking so openly about what needed to be improved set the stage for the college administration’s willingness to embrace new opportunities presented by a series of initiatives that followed soon after Foundations of Excellence—namely, Achieving the Dream, Career Pathways, and Center for Working Families. Among these senior leaders, the commitment and determination to make a difference on behalf of student outcomes could be palpably felt in every interview conducted for this study.

Since those early discussions and the accomplishments that have followed, PCCUA has staked the full range of its expertise and resources upon becoming an innovative academic culture that is willing to do whatever it takes to improve students’ prospects for completing their educational goals and finding a career pathway out of poverty.

For example, PCCUA, using Career Pathways funds and other resources, has staged mandatory “poverty simulation” exercises with all faculty and staff to help them more fully realize the limitations that

students can experience when coming from a poverty background. “One of the most important things for us is that most of the educators have a middle-class background,” said Dr. Deborah King. “We may forget how difficult it is for our students to succeed.”

Last year, using Achieving the Dream and Carl Perkins funds, PCCUA trained one-third of the faculty through a cooperative learning workshop. Another third of the faculty took the workshop in 2011. The focus is upon how faculty can encourage students to work together and learn more effectively.

What has emerged from these and other learning experiments has been a paradigm shift. “Some instructors didn’t much like it and resisted the CWF approach at first,” said one student success coach. “But when they see that students who formerly were performing poorly in their classes are now doing well, getting their assignments turned in on time, they change their minds.”

Outcomes

Succeeding in a small, economically distressed rural town such as Helena-West Helena definitely has its challenges.

For many students, finding a good job or establishing a career in their chosen field can require relocating to a bigger city, such as Little Rock or Memphis, each a considerable distance away from Helena. And yet, Helena is where these students have access to family and friends who have been their support systems while they pursue their degree, often providing child care and sharing their living quarters. It’s not an easy decision to move on, even when local economic opportunities are limited.

Ultimately, though, college administrators and students alike are confident that the CWF approach is making a difference in the lives of students and the community. “If you are interested in doing good, Helena is small enough so that you can have a visible impact” said Dr. Steven Murray, PCCUA’s chancellor. “We’re creating a critical mass of young people who come here and want to make a difference.”

Moving forward

The need to improve outcomes among African-American male students is perhaps the single greatest challenge on the minds of many PCCUA administrators and faculty members.

Career Pathways chiefly serves female students, as its eligibility requirements leave out most males. Looking at the bigger picture, there exists a similar pattern: Female students generate 70 to 75 percent of all semester credit hours.

What exactly to do to address the problem is a matter of deep discussion at the college. Some faculty and staff assert that the college needs to hire more young African-American staff. Others recommended the creation of an African-American male mentorship program.

It is encouraging, however, that a majority of the participants in the college’s book club are black males, a college official observed. Book club discussions previously have served as a catalyst for significant improvements on campus, especially addressing matters related to race. Given the remarkable resourcefulness and cohesiveness that is apparent among present-day administrators, faculty, staff, and students, it appears likely that they will continue to do so.

yeAr begAn	cwF students served (2010)	tArget populAtion	key Focus
2010	1,250	San Mateo County residents who fall below the Self-Sufficiency Standard	Helping individuals mobilize and manage their life resources.

introduction and background

SparkPoint at Skyline College in San Mateo County, California, serves as a one-stop center that students and the local community can access to achieve financial self-sufficiency. The college developed the Center, which opened its doors in early 2010, with inspiration and support from both the United Way’s dynamic initiative to reduce poverty in the San Francisco Bay area and the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s national leadership with the Center for Working Families (CWF) approach.

Skyline College is the most demographically diverse postsecondary institution in California. San Mateo County, where the college is located, is one of the wealthiest counties in the state. In fact, it often is considered part of Silicon Valley. San Francisco International Airport is located at the county’s northern end.

Skyline College officials point out, however, that income is unevenly distributed in San Mateo County, with 10 percent of the population—and more than 6 percent of families—living below the poverty line. **The college also uses a Self-Sufficiency Standard to measure the actual cost of living. By that measure, about 22 percent of the county’s population struggles every day to meet their basic needs.** African-Americans and Latinos have a disproportionate number of households with incomes below this Standard.

Even some college achievement enables San Mateo residents to fare better those with only a high school degree. About 25 percent of those with at least some college experience fall below the Self-Sufficiency Standard, compared to 46.5 percent of those with only a high school degree. For those residents who have *graduated* from college, however, only 9.9 percent fall beneath the Self-Sufficiency Standard.

Accordingly, SparkPoint at Skyline College seeks to help low-income families move from poverty to self-sufficiency. Its services focus on three key areas: Improving credit, increasing income, and building assets. In fact, SparkPoint at Skyline College is one of nine such Centers established throughout the Bay Area by the United Way (UWBA). Through these facilities, UWBA expects to serve at least 12,500 families over the next five years.

In fact, SparkPoint at Skyline College was the first one to be located on the campus of a California community college and to integrate its services into the college’s existing framework of student support services. **“The CWF approach [at Skyline College] is both a physical center and a retention strategy,”** said Skyline’s president, Dr. Regina Stanback Stroud. **“Retention and persistence are key factors in student success.”** She also asserts that CWF is an effort to **“reconceptualize what it means to educate a person.”**

Target population

SparkPoint at Skyline College serves its most at-risk students and their families as well as San Mateo residents in need.

Because its CWF approach integrates a number of complementary support service programs, the specific eligibility requirements for each one vary. Overall, however, the Center's goal is to help low-income families. It defines "low-income" according to the Bay Area's Self-Sufficiency Standard, which, when averaged for the region as a whole, is an annual income of \$65,000 for a family of four.

The SparkPoint Center also strives to ensure that its services are fully accessible to non-English speaking populations, to persons with disabilities, and to communities which may not have had positive experiences with educational and governmental institutions in the past. Building trust with Latino residents, college personnel said, has required a persistent, long-term approach.

"I've met a lot of students here [at the SparkPoint Center]," said one student, who, although legally blind, is successfully pursuing an associate's degree in computer information systems. "They are all very helpful. If they don't already know the answer, they will help you look for it. Or direct me to other places."

how the CWF approach is implemented at Skyline College

Operating out of a suite of offices on the second floor of Building 1 on the Skyline College campus, the SparkPoint Center provides bundled services to support students at the college and to serve low-income residents throughout its San Mateo County service area.

The SparkPoint Center structures services and resources that students and community residents utilize to improve their educational outcomes, secure better-paying employment, and promote long-term individual and family financial stability. It pursues these three goals through the following bundled programs and activities:

- **Financial education services** provide individuals and families with effective tools to manage household budgets, repair credit, modify mortgages, enroll in IDA-matched savings programs, and build the assets that can assure long-term financial stability.
- **the career and employment services center** offers a full range of services and activities that include strategies to perform well during job interviews, improve resumes, explore career options, and train for high-demand professions.
- **the english language Institute** provides personalized guidance to second-language speakers seeking education, careers, and financial stability;
- **the grove scholars program** offers need-based student scholarships—as much as \$2,500 a semester for a maximum of two semesters—that enable persons from diverse backgrounds and stages of life to pursue Career and Technical Education programs.
- **the volunteer Income tax Assistance (vItA) program** offers free tax help for local residents who annually earn \$30,000 or less. Students from Skyline's accounting program provide these services.

Other SparkPoint services include opportunities to enroll in public benefits programs, gain access to free and low-cost banking services, learn how to purchase a first home, and qualify for discounted utilities, discounted transit fares, low-cost automobile insurance, and a free food pantry. For the students,

access to the food pantry for emergency food shortages frees up money for college tuition, fees, and books. For low-income community residents, the food pantry may be the magnet that draws them to the Skyline campus for the first time.

Whenever feasible, the Center offers one-to-one coaching to help students and community residents make the best use of their access to these resources. For example, SparkPoint coaches meet regularly with all of Grove Scholars to help them learn how best to manage their scholarship awards and other household finances. The coaches also monitor student progress toward accomplishing their self-declared educational goals, as well as helping them improve their job-search skills.

Word-of-mouth is likely the SparkPoint Center's most effective marketing. The Center also promotes its programs, events, and services through a mix of well-designed flyers, a newsletter, press releases, and web presence, www.skylinecollege.edu/sparkpoint. "We're specifically trying to develop a SparkPoint Center brand," said the Center's director. "Financial coaching is the glue service. SparkPoint Centers are branded and designed to be welcoming, with a professional presentation in order to help overcome a perceived stigma that has been associated with 'social services.'"

Financial aid/asset building

As noted earlier, a fundamental emphasis upon financial education is at the core of the CWF approach embraced by SparkPoint at Skyline College.

Seven Skyline employees as well as program partners provide financial education and coaching services. SparkPoint leverages strategic partnerships in the wider community, especially to facilitate workshops and other services that support asset building. Several key community partners include:

- **san mateo credit union**, which offers second chance checking accounts, debt counseling services, credit repair, and low-cost banking services;
- **opportunity Fund**, which provides matched-savings plans (IDAs) to help students and community members build savings to invest in education or business;
- **eArn wealthcare**, which offers financial coaching; and
- **community Financial resources**, which provides financial education and coaching, low-cost banking and payment tools, including a prepaid debit card, and asset-building skills training. Community Financial Resources also provides information about the larger policy context—locally, regionally, and nationally—in which individual and family economic decision-making takes place. It helps participants understand "local living economies," "move your money" campaigns, and "voting with your dollar."

Data and outcome tracking

Skyline College has developed, implemented, and continually refines a comprehensive, carefully defined data gathering and management process to track students who interact with its SparkPoint Center. This protocol begins during the intake process with a welcome form that captures the basic information needed to continue the relationship.

Once students decide to seek one-on-one coaching services and to work toward specific SparkPoint goals, they also fill out a Baseline Assessment that captures information about the individual's income,

asset, debt, and credit scores. There also is a budget sheet that breaks out the individual's expenses. Many coaches fill out the form with the student during the initial coaching session.

Taken together, these two components comprise the SparkPoint Center's minimum data requirements. The college seeks to keep the process as flexible as possible to respect the customer relationship and not create a bureaucratic or impersonal "social services" feel to the process. The college emphasizes, however, that it is critical to capture complete and accurate data in order to effectively assess whether the SparkPoint Center's CWF approach is, in fact, moving individuals away from poverty and toward financial stability.

The SparkPoint Center uses Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) software to track and manage this data. It has built out and streamlined the system, the Center's director said, and now "we are working to turn a logic model into a dashboard." In fact, ETO is connected to the college's information system (Banner) but along with such integration also come challenges.

For example, SparkPoint at Skyline College recently enlisted four new community service providers with formal memoranda of understanding. The ETO software, however, is written in a way that granting these partners any access at all to student data would allow them to access the *entire* database, including those students who have not yet granted formal permission for these new partners to view their data.

Such unrestricted access presents a formidable obstacle to sharing data. The federal government has set stringent guidelines, called the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), to protect the privacy of educational data. Accordingly, Skyline College made a decision to capture the partner's client data and have Skyline College input that data directly into ETO, as permitted under FERPA.

The college also collects Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program "Completers and Leavers" information through a survey that also gauges student satisfaction, time to employment, and wages before and after their CTE program experience. A recent survey, disseminated through email, phone, and traditional mail, had a 29 percent response rate. The college also gathers employment data, through formal contacts with employers in a cooperative learning program and through informal conversations.

Funding

Funding for the SparkPoint at Skyline College comes from diverse sources, including both public and private dollars. The Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative made a sizable investment of \$600,000 for 2009-2012. Additional funding managed by the SparkPoint Center facilitates improved CTE Pathways and college going rates among San Mateo County high school aged youth and connects those youth to career pathways linked to SparkPoint resources and services.

College personnel estimate that about 10 percent of the cost of operating the Center has come from the United Way of the Bay area. Other funders include: the Grove Foundation, the San Mateo County Human Services Agency, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation (which provided a small initial planning grant).

Regarding long-term sustainability, the college recognizes that it needs to document solid data about student outcomes, especially for its innovative SparkPoint Center programs. Administrators and program leaders assert that investors need to know whether these initiatives are working, as does the college itself. One staff person commented that it would be very helpful to have such data by the end of 2011.

Partnerships

Within the college, SparkPoint provides tours of the facility for faculty and staff, who often bring with them learning communities of students. These learning communities are cohorts of students who share courses in common. Faculty members develop linked instruction and provide contextualized learning for these groups. Financial coaching and workshops, too, are linked to specific learning communities, such as those that bring together individual cohorts of Latino, African-American, and Filipino students.

Beyond the campus, SparkPoint at Skyline College has five external partners defined either by Memorandum of Understanding or contract. Extensive referral relationships enhance the SparkPoint network of services and resources. The Bay Area has a rich nonprofit culture, and there appears to be a considerable degree of synergy in that many community partners are interested in “measuring the same things” as the Center.

SparkPoint at Skyline College is an integral part an emerging regional network of community-based SparkPoint Centers that are supported by the United Way of the Bay Area (UWBA). That network lately has expanded, and several of the newer SparkPoint Centers have visited or consulted with Skyline College as they prepared for launch. All of these SparkPoint Centers are collaborating in the UWBA initiative to cut poverty in the Bay Area by 50 percent by the year 2020.

Jewish Vocational Service currently has been underwriting a part-time staff position at the SparkPoint Center to build capacity with employment services. The pilot model has focused upon green and sustainable jobs, with the goal of helping students gain skills and become ready to go back into the workforce. Other recent peer-to-peer learning partnerships with local community organizations have included the Pacifica Resource Center, which also supports low-income families in San Mateo County, and 211 Bay Area, a toll-free number in the Bay Area that connects residents with community services.

Across all of these networks, Skyline College has sought to facilitate learning about the power of social networks. Staff cited AECF research asserting that positive social networks—meaningful connections between people and between people and institutions—help families gain access to valuable resources. One United Way of the Bay Area employee, in particular, wondered how one might strengthen the ability of any particular node in the United Way network of regional SparkPoint Centers to more effectively serve as a portal to resources located at any other node. “We need to identify the nodes that are working and study them,” she said.

Outcomes

Like the other SparkPoint Centers clustered in the Bay Area, the **Skyline College SparkPoint Center seeks to help low-income families move from poverty to financial stability, as measured by their attaining the following four outcomes:**

Livable income that reaches the Self-Sufficiency Standard (i.e., \$65,000 for a family of four in San Francisco)

Good credit score of 650 or above

Savings equal to three months of living expenses

Debt less than 40 percent of monthly income

“We want to see mobility toward those goals within two to three years,” declared one senior administrator.

Meanwhile, as the college gathers and analyzes outcome data, the Skyline Center can look for encouragement to recent program output data (2010) reflecting annual participation in some of its core programs: 2,088 served overall. 770 served by the food bank. 450 served by the campus office California Employment Development Department. 100 people had their taxes done, mostly community clients, through VITA, and 350 people participated in financial education and coaching.

Moving forward

As Skyline College moves forward with its CWF-inspired SparkPoint Center, several key insights can indicate its progress.

First of all, the college and its partners keep in mind that the larger community-based outcomes it seeks are not likely to happen overnight. The United Way would like to use ETO outcome data to influence policy and effect systems change at the national level, but this, too, will take time. The United Way is evolving toward more collective impact, one staff member informed us. Even so, it needs a stronger network, with more interaction among the agencies.

SparkPoint has garnered significant support and good will from the campus and community. However, SparkPoint criticism questions whether or not SparkPoint’s focus takes the college off mission. “We have a very delineated line to walk about our mission,” Dr. Stroud, the college president, said. “We are not a social services agency.”

In any event, college personnel said the institution must find ways to “tell the story better.” Doing so will require compelling outcome data, testimonials from students and their families, and a continuing wave of successful academic innovations, such as stackable certificates in programs like automotive, early childhood education, and allied health.

Overall, Skyline must concern itself with the overall integrity of community economic sustainability, the college president said. “It must promote self-agency on the part of community residents. After all, this community really does come to the college, and community residents view Skyline as their cultural capital.”

brief descriptions of remaining cwFs

gAtewAycommunitycollege

background: Gateway Community College is located in New Haven, Connecticut, a city notable for its dichotomy between areas of wealth and poverty. In 2009 the college used support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to start its CWF approach in the context of two learning communities of students (Learning communities are linked, cohort-based courses that provide more engagement and support for at-risk students because they have more consistent contact with faculty and students.). Students enrolled in these learning communities are typically working, first-generation college students with very little knowledge about how to navigate through higher education.

key activities and approach: The college developed an assessment for students in the learning communities to find out what their non-academic needs are and developed partnerships with community agencies to meet those needs, such as transportation and food assistance. A credit union employee teaches a seven-hour financial education unit in one of the learning community courses. It covers financial products, credit histories, budgeting, and asset building.

particular focus/unique aspects: CWF leaders have worked with the college's foundation to obtain emergency financial support for students in need, particularly for child care, rent and books.

plans for moving forward: Gateway has recently expanded its outreach beyond the learning communities so that more than 300 have received some type of CWF service. Despite having relatively little external funding for this effort, the program leaders have been able to match students' needs with resources on and off campus. They envision long-term sustainability for the CWF approach through the integration of the CWF services into traditional student service functions on campus.

norwAlkcommunitycollege

background: The CWF approach at Norwalk was developed in 2009 in concert with a local community foundation—Fairfield County Community Foundation's Fund for Women and Girls—and the Norwalk Community College Foundation. Branded the Family Economic Security Program, its purpose is to more successfully support student parents, placing them on a path toward better jobs and self-sufficiency.

Norwalk is located in an affluent county in Connecticut and it is difficult to find a family-sustaining job without a four-year degree, according to a labor market study conducted by the community foundation. As a result, the college's CWF emphasizes transfer to a four-year college over immediate employment. CWF leaders call this the "fourth" pillar of their particular CWF approach.

key activities and approach: Norwalk's CWF is a cohort-based, highly structured, five-year effort. Students apply for scholarship support and each year 20 are selected to receive financial support in conjunction with prescribed numbers of achievement and financial coaching sessions. The purpose is to help these student parents meet their educational and financial goals.

particular focus/unique aspects: One-day retreats with students and coaches and a networking event with potential employers are community and skill building components in the college's CWF approach.

In addition to the students enrolled in this “full treatment” of scholarship plus coaching, the CWF director identifies other student parents on campus and reaches out to them to participate in some CWF services too, e.g., assistance in applying for financial aid and other financial education services.

plans for moving forward: Norwalk is treating this five-year scholarship/coaching effort as a research platform, building in substantial quantitative and qualitative assessments. The purpose is to evaluate the CWF services and outcomes, identifying the most effective policies and strategies they may be institutionalized college wide after the five years.

collegeoftheouachitas

background: The College of the Ouachitas (COA) in Malvern, Arkansas is a small, single-campus institution that serves a five-county area in the state’s mostly rural south-central region. The approximate median yearly income in the five-county region is \$33,400.

key activities and approach: Like other CWF colleges in Arkansas, the CWF program at COA is aligned with other complementary student success initiatives—principally, Career Pathways, TRIO, and Achieving the Dream. CWF services share offices with Career Pathways (as well as having a physical presence at the off-campus workforce center). Achieving the Dream helped the college learn how to be a data-driven organization, throwing a spotlight on the college’s underlying shortcomings and highlighting its successes. Support for most CWF activities at COA come from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

According to one college administrator, CWF essentially represents an “intensive care” or “emergency room” approach for helping at-risk students accomplish their educational goals. “We find that our students come to college with a lot of baggage,” the administrator said. “They’re looking for the first speed bump that will knock them out of school.” CWF is there to help make sure that does not happen, he asserted.

In this context, CWF is especially valuable, because it allows COA to reach a lot of students who do not qualify for Career Pathways. Plus, the flexibility of the CWF grant permits COA to extend its reach into the community and serve young people at Boys and Girls clubs and even people at Walmart. “We use it to get past a lot of the barriers that other programs have,” said the CWF program leader.

particular focus/unique aspects: The CWF program at COA is a relatively young program that is just now taking flight after a year-long planning period. The college’s CWF director said they are patterning their program after Phillips Community College, especially in the area of financial education. COA is developing a financial education curriculum that will be fully integrated into coursework required for all incoming freshmen, plus the CWF program seeks to have all Career Pathways and TRIO staff trained as financial coaches. The college asks all CWF participants to participate in community-service activities.

plans for moving forward: Mentoring African-American young men is a high-priority for COA, including reaching out to middle-school students in the local area.

pulaski technical college

background: Pulaski Technical College is the largest two-year college in Arkansas. Its three main campuses are clustered in and around Little Rock, the state capital, located in the central part of the state. Its 11,500-student enrollment is about equally divided between full-time and part-time students. Eighty-five percent are first-generation college students.

key activities and approach: CWF began within Career Pathways but now is located within Student Life and Leadership. The college's one full-time CWF staff person travels among the college's three campuses to help implement the financial education program. Primary support for most CWF activities at Pulaski Tech comes from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

particular focus/unique aspects: Pulaski Tech is seeking to widen the availability of its financial education opportunities to include all students on the three main campuses. It has integrated financial education into the College Seminar that is a required course for all first-year, full-time students. The class covers household budgeting, credit score counseling, how to access and manage financial aid, and other topics.

The college provides more intensive financial coaching through other student support programs, including its Network for Student Success, Career Pathways, TRIO, and an initiative that seeks to encourage and support African-American males to stay enrolled in school and accomplish their educational goals.

plans for moving forward: Last spring, Pulaski Tech realized that not many students had been taking advantage of financial education workshops until late in the semester, and then only because doing so was mandatory to meet the requirements of their scholarship money. As a result, the college took responsibility for financial education out of Career Pathways, placed it with CWF, and completely rewrote the 18-module plan for presenting financial education information.

Now the college seeks data to assess the outcome of these changes, although it acknowledges that asking the coaches, whose full-time faculty teaching duties are their primary responsibility, to gather such information can be a challenge.

southeast Arkansas college

background: Southeast Arkansas College (SEARK) is located on a 42-acre campus in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Pine Bluff is also home to the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. SEARK serves the citizens of six counties in southeast Arkansas that have a combined population of approximately 158,000. Like the rest of the Mississippi Delta region, these six counties overall in 2009 experienced relatively high percentages of persons living beneath the poverty line.

key activities and approach: With primary support from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, the primary goal of the CWF program at SEARK is to implement the CWF financial education and support model for low-income students and their families. As with the other Arkansas colleges in our study, the CWF program works hand-in-hand with other complementary programs, such as the Career Pathways Initiative.

SEARK seeks to improve retention and graduation rates through providing a multifaceted package of voluntary CWF workshops and a lecture series that address a range of skills including writing a resume, interviewing for a job, improved nutrition and health, managing personal credit scores, and overall financial education. The college also integrates modules about these skill sets into its first-year experience course that is required for all new entering students.

The CWF also provides one-on-one coaching for students who drop by the CWF offices to seek advice about topics ranging from legal questions, housing, and personal debt. The college seeks to meet individually with Career Pathways students, in particular, on a regular basis.

particular focus/unique aspects: SEARK was the initial pilot site for developing the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative, which since has expanded to all 22 of the state's two-year institutions. The college realized, however, that Career Pathways does not meet the needs of all students. With CWF, SEARK has sought to connect students with a broad range of community-based programs that offer strategic resources that can assist students. CWF recently hosted a community resource fair in which 225 students turned out to meet with 34 community agencies.

plans for moving forward: The college's new president said that CWF is definitely the "right thing to do," in terms of serving both students and the workforce development needs of local employers. He also said that tracking improved CWF outcomes would help "justify our existence," especially in anticipation of performance-based budgeting legislation approved earlier this year in Little Rock. Looking forward, he also said the college needs to work closely with the Pine Bluff Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Alliance of Jefferson County to help develop and expand the local economy so SEARK graduates can find good jobs.



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