## Using Research to Design Integrated Education and Training Programs

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With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, Northampton Community College began the creation of Integrated Education and Training (IE&T) programs in October 2015. These programs came to fruition through the collaboration between the College's Center for Adult Literacy and Workforce Development, credit and non-credit departments, workforce development boards, and employers. After a needs assessment was conducted with the partners, programs were created to address the needs in the hospitality and healthcare sectors. The College took into account the Evolution and Potential of Career Pathways report as one of the building blocks for IE&T program creation.

The Evolution and Potential of Career Pathways report (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) provided a comparison of six key elements of career pathways with the Vice President's Job-Driven Checklist and provided the foundation to build IE&T programs. The College embedded four of the six career pathway elements within its programs:1) build cross-system partnerships, 2) engage employers/identifying key industry, 3) design education and training programs that meet the needs of participants, and 4) identify funding for sustainability and scale. The other two elements of aligning policies and programs and aligning cross-system data and performance measurement are being discussed with the two workforce development boards within the service area.

As for the job-driven checklist (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), the College has implemented six of seven items listed: 1) establish regional partnerships, 2) engage employers, 3) break down barriers and provide job supports and guidance, 4) incorporate work-based learning, 5) create a seamless progression from one educational functioning level to the next, and 6) analyze data in a better way to drive accountability and inform program and pathways. The College continues to collaborate with workforce development boards and employers to attain the seventh item on the checklist—measure and evaluate employment and earning outcomes.

### Creation of IE&T Programs

When creating these programs, the College used WIOA's definition of integrated education and training as "a service approach that provides adult

education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement" (WIOA, 2014, p. 187). In order to provide a seamless, comprehensive approach when integrating instruction, the College built upon its existing College and Career Readiness (CCR)-aligned curriculum framework to incorporate more contextualized instruction focusing on hospitality, healthcare, and manufacturing career pathways.

The U.S. Department of Education (2015) states that:

> Career Pathways systems involve employers and other stakeholders in: identifying the skills that are needed by high-demand employers; determining how students are deemed proficient in these skills; identifying the credentials that employers value in making labor market decisions; providing work-based learning opportunities for students; and identifying how to validate curricula and credentials. (p. 15)

McCarthy's (2014) research shows, "that from the standpoint of the career education student, employer perceptions of program graduates are crucial in determining the value of a program" (p. 16). "Enabling students to accelerate their time to completion by allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities makes sense for both the students and taxpayers. Making learning outcomes more transparent through the use of rigorous assessments builds the confidence of employers who know what they are getting when they hire a graduate" (McCarthy, 2014, p.17). In each of the two programs below, the College has worked closely with employers and other community-based programs

to gather workforce data, create assessment tools to determine student competency, and ensure that program curricula and student skills attainment meet and exceed employer expectations as well as being transparent in the collecting and reporting of program outcomes.

The policy climate is grounded in research that shows a strategic approach is needed to close the skills gap that exists (Tyzko, Sheets, & Fuller, 2014). This involves upgrading the skills of incumbent workers, leveraging professional networks to recruit and employ experienced workers, or building partnerships for newly trained workers from education and workforce providers.

Carnevale, Rose, and Hanson (2012) conclude that community college open enrollment policies and flexible course schedules have resulted in certificate programs being one of the main conduits for adult learners to access postsecondary education, increase job marketability, and upgrade existing skills to become competitive in the labor market. The Lumina Foundation (2013) compliments the findings of Carvenale et al.'s research when stating certificates have the potential to provide low-performing, low-income adults with a pathway to better economic future. Certificate programs provide these opportunities to populations that have been underrepresented in higher education and who will most likely be unprepared for the continual changes in the labor market (Lumina, 2013).

Xu and Trimble (2014) state "certificates have assumed an increasingly important role in the postsecondary landscape" (p. 1). This increase is due to the focus being placed on vocational education and higher completion rates of associate degree programs (Bailey & Belfield, 2013). Within each of the program described below, Northampton Community College has built a bridge connecting the underemployed,

dislocated workers, and incumbent workers with postsecondary opportunities and employers using the aforementioned research.

## START Hospitality Program

Based on this research and long-standing relationships with workforce development boards, employers, and community-based organizations within the service area, the College applied for funding through the Department of Labor and Industry to fund 120 training slots for the Skills, Tasks, and Results Training (START) Hospitality Program for residents located in six northeastern Pennsylvania counties. The proposal was a joint collaboration between two workforce development boards, two community colleges, and nine hotels and resorts to create a 300-hour program that delivers 200 hours of hospitality instruction, 45 hours of academic support and 55 hours of fieldwork experience. The program utilizes the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute's START curriculum and adds Guest Service Gold® (customer service training), ServSafe® (food handling), and Responsible Alcohol Management Program (RAMP). Students who successfully complete receive a College certificate, START certificate, and portable certifications in Certified Guest Service Professional®, SafeServ®, and RAMP. For those transitioning to the College's hospitality management associate degree programs, the three-credit Hospitality 101 course will be waived.

## Community Health Worker Program

The College also collaborated with the Area Health Education Center and workforce development boards to seek approval of a 100-hour Community Health Worker (CHW) certificate program to be added to the local approved training providers list. This request was in response to local healthcare providers and

hospitals that sought to access this training due to the need for community health workers as outlined in the Affordable Care Act. Community health workers are individuals who contribute to improved health outcomes in the community where they reside and/or share ethnicity, language and life experiences. They serve as a liaison between communities and healthcare agencies, provide guidance and social assistance to community residents, advocate for individuals and community health, and provide referrals and follow-up services for care.

Students will receive 100 hours of instruction in motivational interviewing, communication, care coordination, ethics, preventative care, and chronic diseases. Contextualized academic support is available for an additional 45 hours and is scheduled currently with the CHW training. Students will also benefit from local guest speakers from a variety of health-related organization to speak about their services. Graduates of the CHW certificate program will receive an NCC certificate and certifications in: Youth Mental Health First Aid, CPR/First Aid and AED, and Tobacco Dependence Treatment.

## Academic Support

The academic support component of the both START and Community Health Worker programs used the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education document (Pimentel, 2013) to align adult literacy instruction with the CCR standards and develop a curriculum framework. Once the curriculum framework was established, the College utilized the lesson study and student work protocols from the Standards-in-Action: Innovations for Standards-Based Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) to engage instructors in professional development focused on improving student outcomes through lesson re-design and analyzing student work.

Lessons were vetted through these protocols and incorporated into the contextualized instructional set. Students enrolled in the academic support component are provided with contextualized instruction in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, soft skills, workplace activities, interviewing skills, and modeling appropriate workplace behaviors. This component is designed to serve students placing in the high intermediate educational functioning level in either adult basic education or English as a Second Language cohorts.

## Economic Benefits of Certificate Programs

The research of Jespen, Troske, and Coomes (2014) provided the first detailed empirical evidence of the labor-market returns to community college diplomas and certificates. Their research found that associate's degrees and diplomas have quarterly returns of nearly $1,500 for men and around $2,000 for women while certificates have small positive returns of around $300 per quarter for men and women. Jespen et al. (2014) found that the highest returns for associate's degrees and diplomas are for health-related awards, and the highest returns for certificates are in vocational fields for men and health fields for women. All three credentials were associated with higher likelihoods of employment, although—like earnings—the largest increases are for degrees and diplomas (Jespen et al., 2014).

Bailey and Belfield's (2014) research states that higher wages for certificate recipients result when the credential is stackable on a lower credential, such as a high school diploma or its equivalent. Furthermore, the research also indicates that the timing of a certificate's attainment is important in maximizing wages only when as long as the certificate is received prior to obtaining an associate or bachelor's degree

(Karp, 2015). Karp's analysis of the National Center for Education Statistics Beginning Postsecondary dataset yielded that "only 7 percent of first-time students who earned a certificate went on to an associate's degree" (p. 12).

For these reasons, it is imperative that certificate program build seamless connections to associate and baccalaureate degree programs in order to set students on a trajectory for careers that pay self-sustaining wages and provide an opportunity for upward mobility.

As we continue to practice continued program improvement and professional development, we must enhance our connectivity to engage workforce development boards, employers, and community-based organizations in the development of stackable credentials that testify to people's skills, knowledge and abilities in order for our diverse population to "secure a foothold in the labor market, keep their existing jobs, and advance to better jobs in the continually changing economy" (Ganzglass, 2014, p. 1). ❖

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