

BLENDING COLLEGE PREPARATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR ADULT STUDENTS IN NEW ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

Transition to College and Careers was a two-year demonstration project that addressed both academic and non-academic barriers to college for adult learners. Of the 397 adult learners who enrolled in one of the six participating programs, 66% completed it, 69% attained college level reading skills, and the majority enrolled in college afterwards. Students who enrolled in TCC with poor math skills made the least amount of progress in math. One innovative program feature was an online 'Introduction to Health Science' course that students from all programs took as a cohort. The findings support a program design that emphasizes students' personal readiness, math, online learning, pro-active counseling and advising, and engagement with career centers and employers. Lack of reliable transportation and health issues were the main reasons for non-completion.

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

"I always wanted to go to college but I didn't know how. When I heard of this, I enrolled, and now I am doing well and getting ready to go to college. I didn't know where to start, and this program enlightened me with how it all works." ~Transition to College and Careers program student

Postsecondary education and training is an economic imperative, both for individuals and for the nation. Employers across the United States have difficulty filling openings for middle-skilled jobs, which make up the largest segment of the labor market. The jobs, requiring education beyond high school, but less than a four-year degree offer economic opportunity to

those with the training and credentials to meet the demand (National Skills Coalition, 2015).¹ However, approximately two-thirds of adults age 25 or older do not persist in postsecondary education long enough to earn any type of credential, and many others do not even enroll (Ryan and Siebens, 2012).²

A 2013 study of adults' skills in 24 industrialized countries found U.S. adults lagging well behind their counterparts in the other countries: 16th and 21st in literacy and numeracy, respectively.³ For adults with low literacy and numeracy skills and those learning English, the transition to and completion of postsecondary education and training can be especially challenging. As nontraditional students, they face a range of barriers, including inadequate academic preparation, lack of the information needed to navigate college admissions and financial aid systems, and family and work obligations.

Transition to College and Careers (TCC) was a two-year demonstration project aimed at addressing these barriers, designed and managed by the National College Transition Network (NCTN) at World Education. It built on the successes and lessons of the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project (2000–2007), adding an increased emphasis on career pathways.⁴ The goal was to help young and older adults with limited education enter and succeed in college-level programs of study that prepare them for high-growth occupations providing family-sustaining wages. Implemented in partnership with six adult education centers across New England and funded by Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the TCC project began in January 2009 and ended in December 2010.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

College and Career Readiness Framework

Although academic skills are critical to accessing college and career training opportunities, ample research shows that nontraditional learners and first-generation college students need more than academic skills to succeed in college.

The NCTN uses a framework of college and career readiness that identifies four areas of college and career readiness—personal, career, academic, and college knowledge—in which adult learners are typically underprepared and without which it is difficult to succeed in a

1 National Skills Coalition. (May 2015). *Analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics by State* and (2015). *American Community Survey* data.

2 C. Ryan and J. Siebens (2012). *Educational Attainment in the United States: 2009*. Washington, DC: US Census Bureau <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p20-566.pdf>.

3 <http://piaacgateway.com>

4 C. Zafft, S. Kallenbach, and J. Spohn (2006). *Transitioning Adults to College: Adult Basic Education Program Models*. Boston, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy <https://www.collegetransition.org/college-career-readiness/publications/transitioning-adults-college>

college environment. The TCC model was designed holistically to foster college and career readiness skills in all four areas:

1. *Personal readiness*: Noncognitive factors that underlie individuals' persistence and resilience, including the ability to anticipate challenges, access varying forms of supports, balance competing priorities and responsibilities, conduct a realistic self-appraisal of strengths and attributes, resolve conflicts, and advocate for oneself.
2. *Career readiness*: The ability to assess one's skills, interests, and values; to research labor market information, occupational profiles, and training opportunities; to set realistic goals and determine the steps needed to pursue the appropriate education and career pathway; and to develop effective interviewing and job search skills.
3. *Academic readiness*: Gaining the level of reading, writing, math, and algebra skills needed for placement into college-level classes; learning the necessary academic vocabulary; developing study and test-taking skills; and achieving computer and digital literacy.
4. *College readiness and knowledge*: The ability to navigate college admissions and financial aid processes, take advantage of the full array of campus resources, and communicate proactively and appropriately with faculty and staff.

Noncognitive Variables and Learner Persistence

Research on noncognitive variables that influence student success and deepen the focus on personal readiness informed the TCC program and evaluation tools. Sedlacek (2004) cites eight noncognitive variables that, in addition to test scores, predict success in postsecondary education programs.⁵ The TCC evaluation used four of these variables in analyzing learner persistence:

1. *Positive self-concept*: Demonstrates confidence, strength of character, determination, and independence
2. *Realistic self-appraisal*: Recognizes and accepts any strengths and deficiencies, especially academic, and works hard at self-development
3. *Availability of a strong support person*: Seeks and takes advantage of a support network or has someone to turn to for encouragement
4. *Preference for long-term goals*: Defers gratification, plans ahead, and sets goals

In addition, research on adult learner persistence identifies six affective needs of adult learners that drive persistence: a sense of belonging and community, clarity of purpose, competence, agency, relevance, and stability.⁶

5 Sedlacek, W. E. (2004). *Beyond the Big Test: Noncognitive Assessment in Higher Education*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

6 Kallenbach, S. and A. Nash. (2008). *Making It Worth the Stay*. Boston: NELRC/World Education.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected from all students when they entered the TCC program and during their time in the program. Students who completed the program filled out a survey that was a self-assessment of their personal characteristics, level of knowledge, and life circumstances upon enrollment and after completion of the program. The analysis focused on the degree to which these perceptions changed over the 14 weeks of their TCC program participation.

Academic skill gains were measured by college placement test scores at entry and upon completion of the program. Most community colleges in New England use the Accuplacer college placement test to assess whether a student has sufficient reading, writing, math, and English language skills to succeed in college-level courses. A cutoff score is used to determine whether students must take one or more developmental (also known as remedial) classes or may proceed to college credit-bearing courses.

These cutoff scores vary from state to state, and sometimes from college to college within a state. Therefore, NCTN used cutoff scores set by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education as a threshold for determining TCC students' academic readiness as a group.

Toward the end of the program, NCTN also collected focus group data from staff at the TCC program and partner organizations (e.g. community colleges, health care employers, workforce development agencies). The purpose was to learn about the strengths and challenges of the program design and partnership activities in meeting the needs of the targeted student population.

Academic and noncognitive outcomes of the students who completed TCC were analyzed for possible program effects. To this end, the evaluation looked at students' use of counseling services, dropouts' reasons for leaving, and focus group findings for students near program completion, among other information. The data from TCC completers and noncompleters were compared in an effort to understand why students completed or did not complete the program.

PROJECT FINDINGS

1) Demographics of the Transition to College and Careers Students

The majority of TCC students were female (79%), white (57%), and born in the United States (63%), with an average age of 37. They had graduated from high school (55%) or earned a GED[®] credential (31%), were employed (58%), and were parents (69%). Family income was \$25,000 or less for 54% of students. Students spoke over 20 different native languages, but the language most often spoken at home was English (68%), followed by both English and Spanish.

Students' most commonly cited reasons for enrolling in TCC were "to change jobs/careers" (30%), "to achieve a personal goal" (24%), and that they "always wanted to go to college" (24%). Of the majors identified by students upon enrollment, health care was cited the most frequently (33%).

2) Transition to College and Careers Enrollment and Completion

- The TCC programs enrolled 397 students over four semesters, which exceeded the enrollment target of 360 students by 19 students, or 5.3%.
- The project also exceeded its program completion target of 60%: of the 379 students who enrolled, 66% completed the program (n = 249).
- The enrollment of students in the online “Introduction to Health Science Course” far exceeded the target of 96 students, for a total of 307 students in this course; 54% of the students who enrolled completed the course.

Challenges to Persistence and Completion

“I am having a tough time with my time management, but I am working on it.” ~TCC student

A 66% program completion rate is commendable for a rigorous 14-week program, but one-third of the students did leave the program before completion. Their reasons for leaving were primarily challenges related to transportation, their own or their family’s health, or the overall program demands and the demands of college that the transition program foreshadowed.

In every focus group, students reported that when faced with the reality of program demands, they had to make changes in their lives. In spite of lessons and activities on time management, TCC students felt challenged by having to juggle school, work, and family responsibilities. The post-program assessment indicated that time management remained a challenge, even for TCC completers. This was reflected in the pre- and post-TCC self-assessment, in which students reported only a slight increase in their knowledge of time management skills (0.47 on a 4-point scale).

Following is a poignant example of how even some noncompleters served as inspiration for their peers:

“There was one young girl with three kids. She would come home from work, pick up the kids and take care of them so that she could get ready to come to school. She was incredible. She was my inspiration to continue when I was frustrated. She was one of the reasons that I did not quit right away. I saw her and said to myself, ‘If she can do all that, I can do it too.’ It finally just got to be too much for her, and she dropped out.” ~TCC student

3) Postsecondary Enrollments

The TCC program was designed to enable students who completed the program to transition successfully to college, with a target of 75% enrolling in college. Shortly after the fourth program cycle, 50% of the 249 students who had completed the program had transitioned to postsecondary education and 33% were at different points along a continuum of transitioning to college (i.e., applied or applied and accepted) at the conclusion of the evaluation.

4) Personal Readiness

As discussed above, personal readiness refers to noncognitive factors that underlie a person's resiliency and persistence with her studies. Personal readiness is fundamental to college readiness and success because it underlies adults' ability and motivation to attain academic and career readiness and college knowledge.

In addition to academic skills, career awareness, and college knowledge, the TCC program was designed to increase students' self-efficacy and confidence to pursue their goals. Specific strategies included cohort development and peer support, individual and group counseling, ongoing encouragement by teachers, and college success skills workshops. The personal readiness outcomes are discussed in relation to the noncognitive characteristics that research indicates underlie student persistence and success.

Self-Efficacy and Realistic Self-Appraisal

"Sometimes when you are given an assignment, it is hard to know how to even start it. And the fear takes over. Now, I don't have that and I am not as afraid." ~TCC student

Self-efficacy refers to a person's confidence and belief in their competence to perform specific task(s), whereas *self-concept* refers to a more general appraisal of self-worth.⁷ In all focus groups, students and program staff described positive changes that reflected an increase in students' college-related self-efficacy and more general self-concept during their participation in the program. The results of the pre- and post-TCC student surveys were consistent with students' focus group statements.

Regarding their sense of academic preparedness, students on average reported the highest ability in "I have a good understanding of my academic strengths and weaknesses" (4.09 out of 5). In the post-program survey, students were asked to rate their preparedness for college in various academic areas on a 4-point scale. Their self-rating of skills in reading (3.08) and math (2.45) echoed the results of college placement test scores, in which average reading scores exceeded the math scores. Similarly, the relative self-ratings of preparedness in writing and reading (2.82 versus 3.08) were consistent with students' statements in focus groups in which many students (especially English language learners) talked about their difficulty writing essays and research papers for the first time.

Specifically, students identified some or all of the following gains:

- Pride in their ability to overcome their fears of returning to school;
- Clear academic progress in all basic skill areas (math, reading, writing);
- Adaptations made in personal life arrangements and choices in order to succeed;
- Reduced personal and academic barriers, achieved with the help of staff and peer support;

7 Bandura, A. (1995). *Self-Efficacy in Changing Societies*. NY, NY. Cambridge University Press.

- Feeling better about themselves because of what they had accomplished; and
- A broader overall knowledge base of college and career options.

“I have seen my own growth in the way that I handle English assignments since when I started. Now I can correct my old assignments and I know what I did wrong. I have seen my growth in English and science, not quite as much in math.” ~TCC student

Strong self-efficacy predicts academic success if it is based on a realistic self-appraisal. In order to understand whether the ability to make a realistic self-appraisal played a role in student persistence, the evaluation compared how completing and noncompleting students assessed their anticipated barriers to completing the transition program at the time they entered, and then examined how completing students rated these challenges as they finished the program.

The nonacademic challenges fell into two broad categories: personal characteristics and what can be called logistical challenges, such as reliable transportation and work schedule. Transportation emerged as the greatest challenge to attending college between pre- and post-program surveys (from 6% to 15%). Questions related to personal characteristics asked about students’ perceptions of their academic skills; the clarity of their goals; and their abilities to manage time, keep up with homework, and deal with change and an unfamiliar environment. Upon entry to the program, completers on average rated each of these factors as greater potential challenges than noncompleters did.

Noncompleters entered the transition program with less concern about personal challenges than completers did. Completing students ultimately found these challenges to be even greater than they had anticipated. Nevertheless, this would seem to show that maintaining a realistic self-appraisal has a protective effect against dropping out of the program and hence supports persistence.

If this also held true for noncompleting students (which cannot be known because exit data were not collected consistently from noncompleting students), it is possible that they may have underestimated their personal challenges to a greater extent than completing students did. Unrealistic assessment of their skills and personal characteristics may have been a factor in their not being able to complete the program.

Sense of Belonging and Community

“I think we have managed to find a really good peer support system. On the first day, it was a small little room; we all did this silly exercise that we all laughed about and started building friendships right away. All of us have at least one of each other’s contact information and we talk to each other.” ~TCC student

A sense of belonging and community in the TCC program, and the peer support it engendered, played a large role in student persistence. In the post-TCC survey, 82% of the students who completed the program said that being part of a community of learners played

a “very important” or “important” role in staying in the program. This community of learners was also “very important” or “important” to learners: 80% said they felt connected and 84% said it helped them learn. The support from the community of learners played a role in strengthening students’ persistence.

Availability of a Strong Support Person

“When you feel like you just want to give up because it is too hard, the staff is right there saying ‘Look, you have come this far, you can’t quit now. You are so close to making it and you need to do this for yourself because you deserve it.’ They really build you up.” ~TCC student

“They all are always available . . . and I think it is important that the support is not just academic. It is in everything.” ~TCC student

Students themselves were a major source of support to each other. Students found their peers just as critical as staff members to their ability to feel that they could handle the challenge. In addition, students said the reason they persisted in the program was the supportive staff who continually reached out to them when they needed encouragement and support. Most students seemed to also have the support of friends and family.

In the survey questions about support, the largest increase from pre- to post-TCC survey on average was in response to the statement, “If I run into problems at school, I have someone who will listen to me or help me” (0.18). This statement also had the highest average rating regarding support in the pre-program survey (4.20), showing that the level of support they were receiving before entering the program was high, and that being in the program only increased it further.

TCC students began the program with a relatively high level of support from family and friends, with average ratings of 3.71 and 4.14, respectively, on a 5-point scale on the pre-program survey. There were small increases from the pre- to post-TCC survey in having support from children (0.02) and friends (0.05). The data suggest that challenges caused by unsupportive family and friends, other than those related to health, were a relatively small issue for TCC students. It may indicate that support from family and friends is a precondition for adults’ feeling confident enough even to apply to a transition program.

5) Academic Readiness

In addition to academic instruction in math, reading, writing, and computer skills that were aligned with developmental courses at partnering colleges, the TCC programs taught college success strategies and study skills. These included topics such as vocabulary encountered in college texts, awareness of learning styles, note-taking, and test-taking skills.

Academic Skill Gains

TCC students were asked to take the Accuplacer college placement test when they

entered the program. At baseline, the percentage of completing students whose pretest scores were at or above the Massachusetts cutoff score in elementary algebra was 2.74%; in reading comprehension it was 55.77%. These data indicate that most students did not know elementary algebra, but about one-half of them started the transition program with college-level reading comprehension skills. TCC students entered the program with poor math skills and made the least progress in math. Even those who entered the program with a traditional high school diploma did not have sufficient algebra skills to place into a college-level math course.

For the Accuplacer post-TCC test, the percentage of completing students who were at or above the cutoff score in elementary algebra was 20.55%; in reading comprehension it was 69.23%. This means that after completing the program, about one-fifth of TCC students were ready for college-level math courses and two-thirds were ready for college-level reading-based courses. For math in particular, this represents a significant skill gain and yet, the majority were still not ready for college-level math classes.

Online Health Science Course

"I am kind of old school in that when I was in school, we didn't use computers.

Coming back into this was difficult. Everyone has a computer and I have not had much experience on a computer." ~TCC student

The model of blending online and classroom instruction allowed TCC sites to supplement general academic instruction with contextualized academic instruction to learners who set the goal of entering health care programs. The rationale for providing an online course was to support smaller communities, where individual adult education centers were not likely to have a critical mass of learners for a specific career sector. Online and onsite instructors collaborated to ensure that students received enough access to technology and support on site to complete course assignments successfully.

While intended as an optional supplement, some programs required all students enrolled in TCC to take the online "Introduction to Health Science" course, regardless of their interest in health careers or assessment of technology skills. A total of 307 students enrolled in the course and 166 students completed it.

Of the completers, more than 100 responded to a post-course survey about the course. Almost all responders said that the research project that was required for completion of the health science course helped them learn research, writing, and note-taking skills they needed for college. They also felt that with some positive online learning experience behind them, they would consider taking another online course in the future.

The positive attitude toward the online course expressed in the surveys was mirrored in the focus groups, where many students cited it as a strength of the program, in part because the course gave them experience with online learning. At the same time, they found using the

computer, working independently, and handling the extra work challenging. Both students and staff indicated that many students did not have sufficient computer skills for the online course without more individual assistance than was available on site.

6) Career Readiness

“It [career planning] is the piece that we have not had the luxury of having in the past. Having a dedicated career counselor has really made a difference.” ~TCC staff

Gains in Career Knowledge

Virtually all participants in the staff focus groups cited the career education and planning component as a strength of the TCC program, including the requirement to develop a written Career and Education Plan. It was seen by some staff and students to have a positive effect on student focus and motivation. Most TCC programs started out with making individual career counseling optional but moved toward requiring that each student meet individually with the counselor at least three times—at the beginning, middle, and end of the program—so that all students received individual guidance. The TCC sites that integrated career planning content (e.g., online occupational research, analyzing labor market data) into the academic classes to supplement individual career counseling reported stronger student participation than those that held separate workshops.

According to student survey data, most students increased their knowledge of career pathways. Over one-half of students (53%) who completed the program had said at the beginning of the program that they “knew something” about their chosen career field. At the end of the program this response rate increased to two-thirds (66%). Students also indicated that learning resume writing, job search, and interviewing skills were very important to their growing career knowledge.

Students and staff alike considered having a staff member designated as a career counselor highly beneficial. When asked in the post-program survey to check “all of the things that helped you learn about chosen career path while you were in the TCC program,” 80% of students selected “TCC counselor and program materials.” Online career research was a close second, with 70% indicating it was also helpful. Fifty-seven percent of the students found guest speakers at the TCC program helpful.

Clarity of Purpose and Preference for Long-Term Goals

“I got laid off and I wasn’t sure what to do. This has given me direction and a focus on my future and getting ready to go to college.” ~TCC student

While all TCC students indicated a desire to prepare for college, not all had specific career goals or were used to setting and striving to meet specific goals. On average, from pre- to post-TCC survey, students showed an increase in goal-setting and goal-oriented behavior. “I make goals and work toward them” showed a change from an average pre-program rating of 4.17

(on 5-point scale) to an average post-program rating of 4.36 (a change of 0.19). Responses to the statement, “I have clear career goals,” changed from an average rating of 3.77 beforehand to an average rating of 4.28 (a change of 0.51) afterward.

7) College Knowledge

“We wouldn’t be able to succeed without it. I think that the College Skills course is the most important thing that they provide us.” ~TCC student

When asked about their knowledge of topics related to college knowledge before and after the program, completing students rated their knowledge and understanding higher on all seven topics that were assessed for college knowledge: college culture, study skills, time management, cost of college and financial assistance available, college admissions requirements and process, types of college degrees and certificates, and academic requirements for chosen career.

On a 4-point scale, the highest average change students reported was in their knowledge and understanding of “financial assistance and cost of college” (1.05). This was followed by “academic requirements for my chosen career or the careers I am considering” (0.92) and “college admissions requirements and process” (0.91).

Consistent with their learning gains in college knowledge, students’ responses showed *decreases* on average from pre- to post-TCC surveys in what they anticipated would be challenging in these areas: lack of financial aid, overall cost of college, and needing to work to pay for tuition. In other words, most TCC students became more adept at overcoming the barrier of financing college.

SUMMARY

Both students and staff reported that TCC program components had a tremendous impact on students’ ability and confidence (i.e., self-efficacy) to tackle more challenging academic work and navigate college culture and systems. Students who entered TCC with slightly higher academic skills in math and language arts completed their coursework at a higher rate on average. The findings also indicate that while students were attending the TCC program, they benefited from the sense of community and the readily available support from staff and peers that the TCC programs provided.

Still, some were challenged by unreliable transportation, juggling multiple responsibilities, and health problems.

Although the online introductory health science course challenged students’ technology and independent learning skills, the majority of course completers derived great benefit from the experience. Given the flexibility that online courses can provide and the trend toward increasing online and hybrid college course offerings, gaining competence and confidence in online learning is a significant benefit.

In addition to deepening their existing relationships with their college partners, most TCC sites were also successful in engaging career centers and health care employers to leverage their expertise to benefit students' career exploration activities.

During their time in the program, TCC students evidenced noncognitive gains, including positive self-concept and preference for long-term goals, which helped students to succeed in the program and transition to postsecondary education. Students indicated that the program helped clarify their goals, prepared them for college-level work, and motivated them to persist.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The TCC project is instructive in its implications for practitioners and researchers. While we believe that all the following components are essential for preparing adults to enter and succeed in college, we also recognize that reflective practice and research can enhance implementation of these components.

Design programs to foster personal readiness as well as academic readiness and college knowledge.

The TCC program experience and findings highlight the importance of a holistic college transition program design that balances emphasis on academic skills development with career planning, college knowledge, and personal readiness. The TCC findings indicate positive outcomes for program design intended to promote student persistence through a sense of community, peer support, and availability of consistent support from staff. They also point to the importance of supporting students in securing reliable transportation and addressing their own and their family's health issues.

Include career counseling and planning as an essential component.

Career counseling/advising is an essential function in a college transition program and one that requires investments in building staff's capacity to provide it. Both TCC students and staff identified the career planning component as a valuable tool for enhancing motivation and an opportunity to learn new research and planning skills.

In addition, occupation-specific preparatory courses, such as the "Introduction to Health Science" course, give students a head start along an educational and career pathway. They can also help students steer away from a career choice that is not a good match for their interests and aptitudes, without negative repercussions.

Program administrators would benefit from further training in how to lead the process for incorporating career exploration activities across the broader program curriculum design. Instructors and advisors would benefit from targeted professional development on how to incorporate career exploration and planning into their classroom instruction and advising activities.

Focus on math.

TCC students' math skills mirror the results of the international assessment of adult skills,

which showed that adults in the United States have numeracy skills well below the other industrialized nations, even worse than their literacy skills.⁸ TCC students benefited from attention to both academic and nonacademic skills, but the program model did not adequately address math skill development. It is not clear if this stemmed from lack of sufficient intensity and duration of math instruction or if instructors in the adult basic education setting were not equipped to teach precollege math. More research and development is needed to identify practices that accelerate adults' learning of math.

Develop postsecondary and employer partnerships.

College transition programs should not operate in isolation from the postsecondary institutions or the college-level programs to which they aim to transition their students. Partnerships between local adult education providers and community colleges can expose students to college life and give them personal contact with college personnel, which increase college knowledge and a sense of belonging on a college campus.

The TCC programs' experience confirms the truth about any partnerships: they require ongoing communication and relationship-building as well as concrete mechanisms for working together. Partnership development takes time and perseverance. It can be prompted by line or executive staff, but institutional leaders must come on board with their full support to ensure a lasting partnership.

In addition to deepening existing relationships with their college partners, most TCC sites increased their level of engagement with career centers and health care employers in order to leverage their expertise for the benefit of students' career exploration activities. Employers and career center staff are in the best position to help staff and students gain a firsthand understanding of the local labor market and in-demand jobs. Such partnerships should inform both the transition program design and students' career research.

Programs should pursue multiple avenues for partnering with the industry sector targeted by the program, including large and small employers, unions, and sector-specific networks and trade organizations. These entities can provide firsthand knowledge about the local labor market and in-demand jobs to inform the transition program design. They may be willing to host workplace site visits and provide guest speakers. They also help to recruit students who are already working in the health care industry and interested in advancing in their careers.

Provide supported opportunities for online learning.

Adults in the United States scored below the international average in the ability to solve problems in a technology-rich environment,⁸ which is cause for concern because use of information technology is a growing imperative in virtually all educational and employment settings. At the time of enrollment in TCC, only about one-half of the students had the computer skills they needed to succeed in online learning without more support than was

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. (2015, February). *Making Skills Everyone's Business: A Call to Transform Adult Learning in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Author. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/making-skills.pdf>

available at most sites. The TCC findings indicate that most students would be better served with programs that incorporate explicit digital literacy instruction, and that students benefit from online learning that supplements classroom instruction. Programs would do well to use a hands-on technology assessment at intake and to gear instruction and support at the level students need to succeed. The TCC experience demonstrates that with instruction, support, and opportunities for online learning, adult learners can make progress and gain confidence to succeed in online learning. ⌘

TRANSITION TO COLLEGE AND CAREERS PILOT SITES

- [Community Education Project](#), Holyoke, MA, in partnership with Holyoke Community College
- [Lewiston Adult Education](#), Lewiston, ME, in partnership with Central Maine Community College, Central Maine Medical Center College, and the University of Southern Maine
- [Marshwood Adult and Community Education](#), South Berwick, ME, in partnership with Great Bay (NH) Community College and York (ME) County Community College
- [North Shore Community Action Programs, Inc.](#), Peabody, MA, in partnership with North Shore Community College
- [The Tutorial Center, Inc.](#), Bennington, VT, in partnership with the Community College of Vermont and Vermont Adult Learning in Burlington
- [Vernon Regional Adult Basic Education](#), Vernon, CT, in partnership with Manchester Community College

TRANSITION TO COLLEGE AND CAREERS PROGRAM MODEL

Target Population
Adults with a GED or alternative or traditional high school diploma with a stated goal of enrolling in postsecondary education
Program Length
Minimum of 14 weeks of instruction and minimum 6 hours per week of direct academic instruction, including language arts, math, study skills, and basic computer and Internet skills at each site
Academic Instruction
Instruction in math, reading, writing, and computer skills aligned with developmental courses at partnering postsecondary institution(s)
College knowledge; for example, the vocabulary related to college processes and policies, information and assistance with admissions and financial aid, additional emphasis on navigating academic departments that prepare students for health care careers
College success and study skills; for example, awareness of learning styles and strategies, test-taking skills, and time management
Blended Instruction for Health Careers
Online "Introduction to Health Science" course for those interested in health careers, taught centrally by an NCTN instructor to supplement general academic instruction with contextualized instruction
Counseling and Advising
Proactive counseling and support in group and/or individual sessions to foster resiliency and persistence and to help participants solve problems and manage multiple commitments
Career counselor/advisor available on site to provide general counseling support and facilitate career awareness workshops and individual career planning sessions, which draw on local labor market information about high-growth occupations
A written Career and Education Plan required of students completing the TCC program
Partnerships
Partnerships and formal agreements between adult education programs and postsecondary institutions, including the academic departments that prepare students for health care careers
Dual enrollment or college credit earned for college transition completion offered by some partnerships
Partnerships with health care employers and workforce partners to build sites' capacity to provide effective career counseling, which incorporates the most up-to-date information on regional health care career opportunities; to recruit students already working in the health care industry and interested in advancing; to host workplace site visits; and to serve as guest speakers

TCC SUCCESS STORY

My name is Queen Ceasar. I came to the Transition to College and Careers (TCC) program at Holyoke Community College in Massachusetts after I lost my job at a warehouse. I was having difficulty finding employment. I had heard about transitions classes at Holyoke Community College, so I enrolled in the noncredit course. I'd always wanted to go to college but didn't think I was smart enough.



There were several phases of the TCC program that we students had to participate in for a completion. We did a lot of academic work to learn to do math, take quizzes, and write essays. I also completed the online "Intro to Health Sciences" class offered by World Education. As part of the transition program design, we also had to start planning for our career. I decided that I wanted to work in the human services field.

When I graduated from the transition program, I enrolled in credit classes at Holyoke Community College. The staff of the TCC program helped with the process. When I got into college classes, I could see the difference in my skills and confidence compared to those of other students. My first college writing assignment was a narrative essay, which I had practiced in the transition program.

Recently, I got a job working with the mentally ill. The TCC instructor also asked me to serve as the "Intro to Health Sciences" online course teaching assistant this semester. If it was not for the transition program, I don't think I would ever have had the courage to go to college or to work at a job I really enjoy.