From Pockets of Excellence to Engaged Innovation at Scale

Guided Pathways Reforms at Cuyahoga Community College

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In fall 2018, CCRC researchers conducted site visits at eight community colleges implementing guided pathways to learn how they are managing the whole-college change process involved. These colleges are among the 30 nationally that were in the first cohort of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Pathways Project, a national demonstration initiative that was launched in late 2015 to show how community colleges could create clearer pathways to program completion, employment, and further education for all students.

Our full report on this study, *Redesigning Your College Through Guided Pathways: Lessons From Community Colleges in the AACC Pathways Project*, synthesizes lessons from all eight colleges we visited and shares new findings on how long it takes to implement guided pathways at scale. Here, we provide a case study of Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) in Ohio. During a two-day site visit to the college, CCRC researchers conducted one-hour interviews with 33 faculty members, administrators, counselors, and other staff. Researchers also held hour-long focus groups with 12 additional faculty members, counselors, and students at the college. Based on the data we collected, in this report we describe the organizational change work that has enabled Tri-C's exceptional progress in redesigning academic programs, student services, and related support systems using the guided pathways model.

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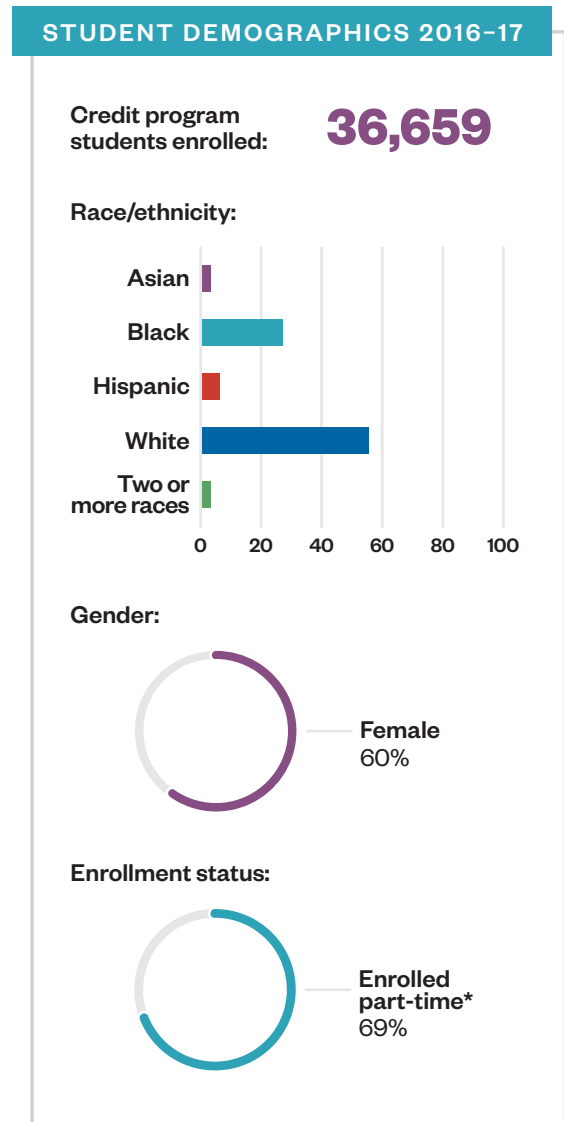
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About Tri-C

Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) has aimed to provide high-quality, affordable, and accessible higher education to the greater Cleveland community since 1963, when it became Ohio's first community college. Tri-C has four campuses in the Cleveland area and several satellite locations throughout Cuyahoga County. Tri-C, which boasts the lowest tuition in Ohio, serves over 23,500 credit students annually in more than 150 fields. Tri-C has more than tripled its IPEDS three-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time students in recent years, from 5 percent for the 2010 cohort to 19 percent for the 2015 cohort. The college ranks first in Ohio and 25th in the nation in the number of associate degrees conferred in all disciplines.

Overview

In the past, Tri-C's efforts to improve student success typically benefitted relatively small numbers of students. Over the past six years, however, under the leadership of President Alex Johnson, the college has built a culture of shared responsibility for student success by engaging faculty and staff college-wide in examining the student experience, identifying barriers to student success created by the college, and working together to remove those barriers.

Changes to Tri-C's organizational structure have expanded college community members' involvement in decision-making related to student success. Cross-functional teams have played a central role in designing and implementing reforms geared toward improving programs and student supports—and the engagement of so many stakeholders in the process has facilitated the adoption of these reforms at scale. Rather than portray guided pathways as a wholly new initiative, Tri-C introduced it as a framework for focusing the college's reforms to programs, practices, and systems on helping students explore, choose, plan, and complete programs in a field of interest. Through this collaborative approach, which Tri-C's leaders call "engaged innovation," the college has established guided pathways practices at scale that few colleges nationally have succeeded in implementing. These practices, described below, are changing the experience of the college for students, and Tri-C has seen substantial increases in degree completion rates.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS 2016–17

Credit program students enrolled: **36,659**

Race/ethnicity:

Gender:
Female 60%

Enrollment status:
Enrolled part-time* 69%

*Fall 2017 only

Guided Pathways Practices Tri-C Has Implemented at Scale

Meta-majors and Program Maps

College faculty and counselors have mapped programs in nine meta-majors, which they refer to as "pathways," creating better connections between career-technical and academic programs and improving the alignment between programs and the requirements of employers and transfer institutions. Each map designates an appropriate math course or courses for program students. The mapping process is now an integral part of ongoing program review and new program development.

A Course Catalog That Helps Students Identify the Courses They Need to Progress

Tri-C replaced its static pdf course catalog with a dynamic online catalog that presents credit and noncredit programs within their respective meta-majors. Based on the college's program maps, the catalog shows recommended course sequences, course descriptions, and employment and transfer outcomes. Faculty review the catalog annually and make recommendations for changes through an online curriculum management system that updates the catalog once changes are approved.

A First-Year Experience That Supports Educational Planning for All Students

All incoming students learn about Tri-C's meta-majors during a first-year experience consisting of a new student orientation, a new student convocation, and a first-year success seminar—all of which are required. During orientation, students meet with a counselor to develop a one- or two-semester plan in their initial field of interest as indicated on their college application. At convocation, they meet faculty and current students in their field of interest. In the first-year success seminar, they begin to develop a customized educational plan. In fall 2017, the college began offering a course called Second Semester Pathway to help students refine their interests, update their plans, and connect more deeply with faculty mentors in their meta-major. Students' plans are stored in DegreeWorks, and they and staff use them to monitor progress toward their goals.

A Yearlong Class Schedule Built Around the Courses Students Need to Advance

Tri-C is capitalizing on its efforts to clarify program sequences in its course catalog and help every student create a full-program plan by creating a yearlong class schedule that offers the courses students need to advance in their programs when they need them. Students registering for the fall semester can easily see the spring and summer schedules and plan ahead. The college guarantees it will always offer critical program courses so that students' progress will not be delayed by class cancellations.

Consistent Documentation of Student Support

Counselors and others developed the OneRecord information system used by all student services staff and faculty to document their interactions with each student. This ensures that students do not have to explain their needs and circumstances to every new staff member they encounter, and that staff can see what guidance and supports a student has already received.

A Dashboard for Tracking Program Performance

The college's Office of Evidence and Inquiry created a dashboard that tracks students' progress from the time they enter a program until they complete a credential. The dashboard provides graduation and persistence rates for each program, along with course completion and stop-out rates. Data on transfer outcomes are also available by program, including how many students transfer, where they transfer to, and whether they earn a bachelor's degree. The dashboard enables faculty and staff to benchmark the performance of any program against that of other programs within a given meta-major.

Laying the Groundwork for Whole-College Redesign

The Limits of Small-Scale Interventions

According to college leaders, Tri-C began to lay the groundwork for systemic change to support student success when it joined Achieving the Dream (ATD) in 2005 and further advanced these goals when it became involved in ATD's Developmental Education Initiative in 2009. ATD encouraged college leaders to hold college-wide discussions about data on student progress and outcomes, which in Tri-C's case showed poor performance overall as well as gaps by race/ethnicity and income.

These discussions led members of the college to experiment with interventions to improve student outcomes. For example, data showing that students were languishing in developmental education encouraged faculty and staff to try different ways of accelerating their progress into college-level English, such as lowering cut scores on the college's placement test and providing test prep through instructional software and summer bridge programs. These reforms did lead to more students taking and passing college-level English, but because reforms in developmental math proceeded more slowly, most students were still not able to progress beyond developmental education.

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Tri-C implemented numerous interventions as part of ATD, but most of them benefitted small numbers of students—and because different campuses often tried different approaches, their impact was not always felt college-wide. Moreover, most

of the interventions were focused on developmental education and new student onboarding, so their potential to benefit students throughout their time in college was limited. The strong emphasis on developmental education also meant that faculty outside of math and English were generally not involved in the reforms.

Creating a College Culture That Embraces Change

When Dr. Johnson became president of Tri-C in 2013, he acknowledged that the college had many pockets of innovation but lacked a wholesale focus on improving all students' experiences and outcomes. Dr. Johnson believed that to change college practice at scale, it was necessary to change organizational culture. Soon after he arrived, he hired a consultant to administer a survey to all college employees on college climate and culture. The results showed room for improvement in employee involvement, accountability, adaptability, and communications. Working groups composed of faculty and staff from across the college examined the survey results, and Dr. Johnson asked the college-wide cabinet—a deliberative body that makes recommendations to the president's council and facilitates college-wide communication—to develop strategies for addressing the survey results.

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An Inclusive Leadership Structure

Dr. Johnson also believed that to foster a culture of involvement and adaptability, decision-making should not be top-down but "from the middle." To shift the locus of leadership, he increased his number of direct reports from three to 12 and expanded the president's council to include faculty union and senate leaders and chief administrative officers. He also expanded the college-wide cabinet to include more deans, department chairs, and program directors.

Campus-Based Student Success Teams

Tri-C employs 4,000 employees across four main campuses spread out across Cuyahoga County, so each campus needed some flexibility to adapt college-wide reform ideas to its particular situation. Consequently, each campus formed a student success team led by the campus president with representation from all constituent groups, including faculty, counselors and other student services staff, academic administrators, and students. Because each campus president reports directly to Dr. Johnson, the teams acted as another mechanism to keep him connected to improvement efforts across the college.

A Commitment to Collaborative Decision-Making

Earlier student success reforms at Tri-C were often developed by small groups of faculty and staff, making broad-based implementation difficult because most faculty and staff were not involved in the design process. When Dr. Johnson arrived at the college, he observed that faculty in particular showed symptoms of "initiative fatigue."

The expansion of the president's council and college-wide cabinet and the development of student success teams signaled that moving forward, everyone would have an opportunity to participate in developing strategies for improving student success. The involvement of faculty leaders in strategic improvement efforts also sent a clear message to faculty that they were valued members of the college and that the college's leadership team was committed to transparency and inclusion. As one college leader observed, the relationship between faculty and administrators was not always cooperative, so Dr. Johnson made early efforts to build a strong partnership with Tri-C's faculty. Several of our interviewees noted that Dr. Johnson's actions showed that he valued the college's collaborative decision-making model.

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Before Dr. Johnson initiated a process of defining strategic priorities for the college, he met regularly with the college-wide cabinet, student success teams, and other groups across the college to discuss the state of the college and its future directions. Having these conversations before setting institutional goals helped build a collaborative rapport that was critical to the transformational changes the college was about to begin implementing.

A Clear Call to Action

To create a sense of urgency for institutional reform, Dr. Johnson and other college leaders began speaking across campus about national, state, community, and internal developments that posed challenges for the college and its students. They cited President Obama's call to increase by 50 percent the number of Americans with a postsecondary credential by 2020 (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2009) and pointed out that among the 50 states, Ohio placed 39th in college degree attainment. They presented data showing that the local outlook for individuals without a postsecondary credential was poor and that Cleveland-area employers had a hard time finding workers to fill high-wage, high-demand jobs.

They also made clear that the college's low graduation rates were not only unacceptable outcomes for students but also threatened the financial health of the college. In 2013, the same year that Dr. Johnson became Tri-C's president, Ohio adopted a performance funding policy for community colleges that would result in 100 percent of their state operating support being based on performance rather than enrollment.

Engaging the Whole College in a "Big Idea" for Improving Student Success

To engage the college community in thinking strategically about how to improve student outcomes, college leaders launched an initiative in 2014 called *One Door— Many Options for Success*. In the past, the quality of information, guidance, and supports students received depended on which "door" they entered. Some students entered the college via TRIO Programs or other special programs that provided strong support, but most were left to navigate the college on their own. Dr. Johnson and other college leaders argued that all students, not just those served by special programs, should have a consistently high-quality educational experience. The college

held a series of summits that gave faculty, staff, administrators, and students a shared space to discuss how to realize this "big idea" for improving the student experience. Participants were asked both to take stock of the college's strengths and to identify ways that practices could be improved in all areas affecting students, including academics, advising, and financial aid.

The inclusive deliberations that took place at the summits were intended in part to cultivate the idea that all college personnel, regardless of their formal roles, are responsible for student success. According to a student services dean, when the college launched its One Door initiative and staff were invited to participate in the summits, most were uncertain about what to expect. Their participation helped establish a common understanding that the college needed to make major changes to improve student outcomes and to protect its financial health under the state's new performance funding policy. Most staff had not been asked to contribute ideas for improving college practice prior to the summits, and once engaged, they were energized by the experience. Following the summits, college leaders issued another broad invitation to participate in project forums focused on designing specific strategies for realizing the recommendations that emerged from the summits.

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Cross-Functional Teams Charged With Redesigning Practices and Systems at Scale

The One Door summits and project forums spawned cross-functional efforts to redesign practices and systems at scale. These efforts set a strong precedent for collaborative and engaged innovation, an approach the college would continue to use as it redesigned practices and systems under the guided pathways model.

A Consistent and Supportive First-Year Experience

One of the first redesign efforts at Tri-C was the creation of a mandatory and consistent first-year experience for students. Initially, this project was led by a small group of faculty and administrators. Because college leaders ordered that a full-scale first-year experience be implemented right away, however, the group decided after a few months that the planning process should be more inclusive of faculty and staff. As a result, college leaders convened a college-wide, cross-functional planning team co-led by a faculty member and a campus president.

According to counselors who participated on the team, this was the first time a large group of counselors, disciplinary faculty, and other staff came together to plan and implement a comprehensive intervention. The team designed a common experience for all new students consisting of orientation, convocation, and a first-year success seminar. The team vetted the design with academic and student affairs staff on each campus and produced an instructor handbook for the seminar. Once staff and instructors were trained, the college launched the full-scale first-year experience in fall 2013.

A Shared System for Documenting Interactions With Students

The One Door initiative also led the college to implement OneRecord, a homegrown system that centralizes student information and staff notes about interactions with students. The system was designed to facilitate information continuity for student points of contact, eliminating the need for students to repeatedly tell their story and thereby freeing up time for faculty and staff to offer in-depth, personalized advice.

College leaders created a cross-functional team to design and implement OneRecord. According to the chief information officer, the system was developed and rolled out in only nine months—a very short timeline for change at an institution as large and complex as Tri-C—so soliciting input from across the college community was crucial:

> *[When designing a system like OneRecord], it is very important to get lots of input from potential users. … If you roll out a major system or process change and people don't understand what it is intended to do or where it came from, it won't be successful. … When everyone is at the table and everyone has a voice in [the design], then everyone wants it to succeed.*

As a result of the broad engagement in the design of the system and support for implementation, according to a counselor, "OneRecord is how everyone at the college communicates about students."

A Revamped Educational Planning System, Online Catalog, and Class Schedule

To better enable students and counselors to develop educational plans, register for courses, and monitor progress, the college switched to DegreeWorks, replaced its static pdf catalog with a dynamic online catalog, and developed a yearlong class schedule. Again, Tri-C relied on cross-functional teams to oversee the customization, implementation, and ongoing improvement of all three systems.

A More Strategic Role for Institutional Research

Tri-C had already built a strong institutional research (IR) capacity, but under Dr. Johnson's leadership, data on student success began to be shared more broadly. The Office of Evidence and Inquiry also became more integrally involved with decision-making at the college. For example, the office's director participates in meetings related to recruitment, enrollment, programming, completion efforts, and faculty affairs to aid decision-making in these areas.

Introducing Guided Pathways to the College Community

When the opportunity to join the AACC Pathways Project arose, Dr. Johnson wanted to ensure that faculty leaders supported Tri-C's participation. To dispel any notions that guided pathways was just the next "flavor of the month," Dr. Johnson, the president's council, and the college-wide cabinet conveyed a consistent message across Tri-C's

campuses: Guided pathways was a framework that could help advance Tri-C's goal to increase student success and completion. Rather than portray guided pathways as a new strategic initiative on the level of One Door, college leaders talked about it more as a framework for enhancing and connecting ongoing reforms at the college.

Even so, upon officially joining the AACC Pathways Project, college leaders organized numerous forums to acquaint members of the college with guided pathways. For example, after attending the AACC Pathways Institute on program mapping in spring 2016, the college's faculty union president and other colleagues organized a colloquium on guided pathways and made presentations at department meetings and at the college's convocation. At these and other convenings, presenters shared data to illustrate how pathways reforms could benefit students. For example, degree audits showed that some students had earned over 100 credits at Tri-C without earning a degree, and additional analyses demonstrated that graduation rates were higher for students who chose a program of study early on in their college careers. With its focus on helping students explore and enter programs of study early on, guided pathways could help Tri-C graduate more students with fewer excess credits. Meanwhile, Ohio legislation passed in spring 2016 to make the college transfer process more efficient through guaranteed transfer pathways underscored the need to clarify pathways to transfer at Tri-C and connect its programs to further education at four-year institutions.
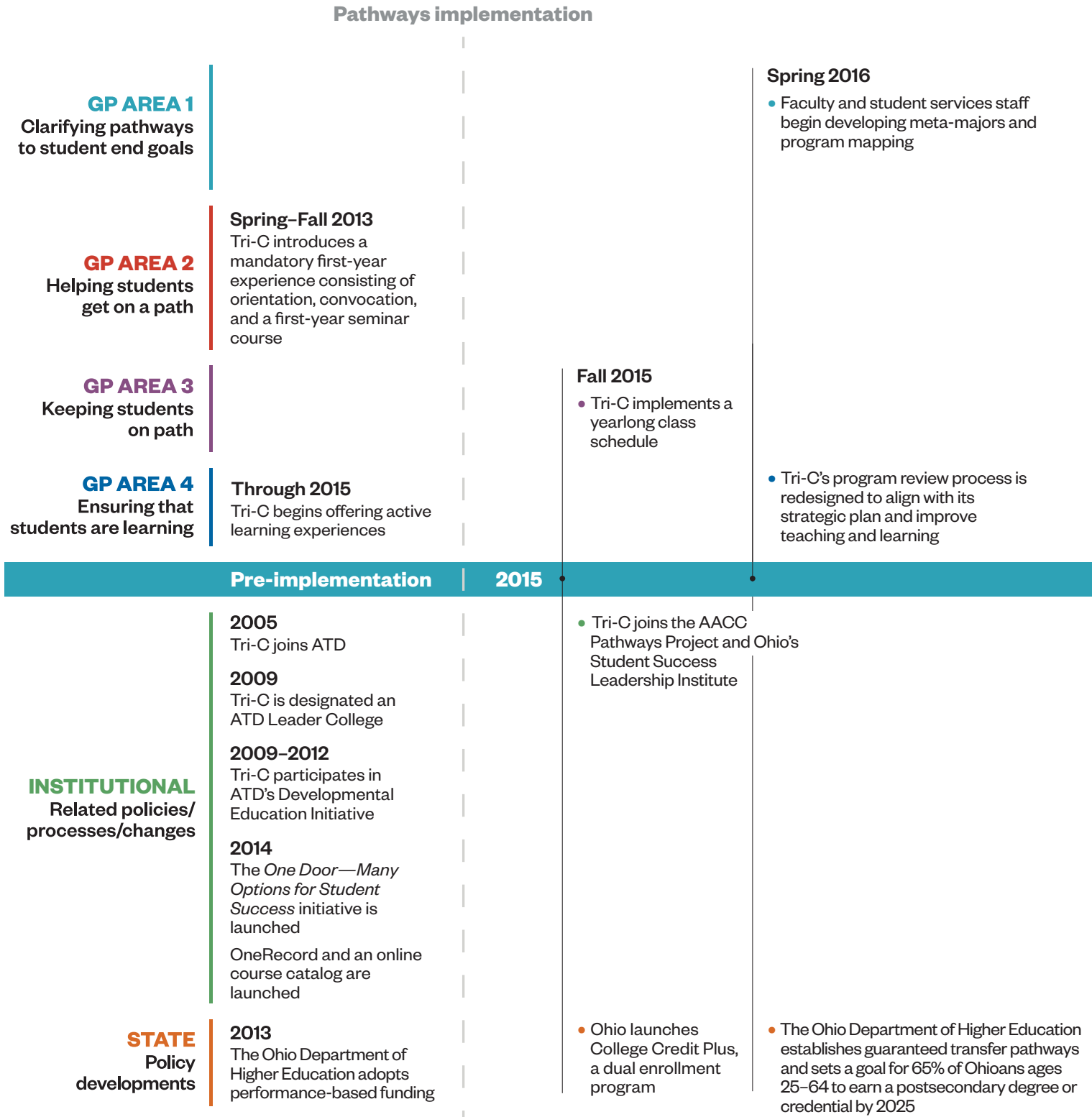
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According to those we interviewed, the following features of the guided pathways model resonated with stakeholders across the college:

- Mapping paths to program completion, employment, and further education would help students make sense of the many programs offered by the college.

- Encouraging students to start educational and career planning from the beginning of their time in college would motivate students by building their academic and preprofessional identities, and testing these identities early would help them avoid costly changes later.

- Providing more guidance on which courses best support academic and career goals would help students make more informed choices and mitigate excess credits earned due to uncertainty about which courses to take.

- Having an educational plan that students and college personnel can monitor would offer students a clear path to completion and better support at each step.

While faculty were generally supportive of these ideas, some expressed concerns about which courses would be on program maps—and which would be left off. According to faculty leaders, these concerns were mostly allayed by the emphasis college leaders placed on clear plans to completion for students and their affirmation that it was faculty members' responsibility to create program maps alongside student services staff.

Timeline of Guided Pathways Implementation

Pathways implementation

GP AREA 1
Clarifying pathways
to student end goals

Spring 2016
- Faculty and student services staff begin developing meta-majors and program mapping

GP AREA 2
Helping students
get on a path

Spring–Fall 2013
Tri-C introduces a mandatory first-year experience consisting of orientation, convocation, and a first-year seminar course

GP AREA 3
Keeping students
on path

Fall 2015
- Tri-C implements a yearlong class schedule

GP AREA 4
Ensuring that
students are learning

Through 2015
Tri-C begins offering active learning experiences

- Tri-C's program review process is redesigned to align with its strategic plan and improve teaching and learning

Pre-implementation | **2015**

2005
Tri-C joins ATD

- Tri-C joins the AACC Pathways Project and Ohio's Student Success Leadership Institute

2009
Tri-C is designated an ATD Leader College

2009–2012
Tri-C participates in ATD's Developmental Education Initiative

INSTITUTIONAL
Related policies/
processes/changes

2014
The *One Door—Many Options for Student Success* initiative is launched

OneRecord and an online course catalog are launched

STATE
Policy
developments

2013
The Ohio Department of Higher Education adopts performance-based funding

- Ohio launches College Credit Plus, a dual enrollment program

- The Ohio Department of Higher Education establishes guaranteed transfer pathways and sets a goal for 65% of Ohioans ages 25–64 to earn a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025

Fall 2016

- Tri-C introduces meta-majors and begins identifying employment and transfer opportunities for all programs

Fall 2017

- Program maps are completed and added to Tri-C's catalog

- Tri-C introduces the second semester pathway course

Summer 2017

- Tri-C implements a student progress monitoring system

Spring 2018

- DegreeWorks is implemented to facilitate educational planning

2020

- Tri-C's Office of Evidence and Inquiry creates program dashboards

- Tri-C launches a strategic initiative to address nonacademic barriers to student success

- The Ohio Department of Higher Education receives a three-year Strong Start to Finish grant

Supporting Collaborative Planning and Implementation

Cross-Functional Teams to Design and Implement Guided Pathways Reforms

College leaders continued to rely on cross-functional teams to design and coordinate innovations in practice and systems following the guided pathways model. As Dr. Johnson explained, the president's council and the college-wide cabinet provided guidance and support, allocating resources needed by the cross-functional teams, ensuring that the reform efforts were coordinated and on track, and communicating progress to the college community.

College leaders appointed a faculty member, a student services administrator, and a campus president to co-lead Tri-C's overarching guided pathways efforts. The following are examples of key changes in practice implemented through this collaborative approach.

Meta-majors and Program Mapping

After the second AACC Pathways Institute on program mapping, members of the college began to group programs into meta-majors, which they refer to as "pathways," and to map program paths to student end goals. A team composed of faculty and student services staff organized the college's programs into nine meta-majors:

- business;
- creative arts;
- nursing and healthcare;
- hospitality;
- humanities, liberal arts, and social and behavioral sciences;
- industrial manufacturing and construction;
- information technology;
- public safety; and
- science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

At the same time, faculty and counselors began mapping programs to clarify paths to jobs and further education. Maps were to specify the math courses appropriate for each field of study and other critical program courses.

Career-technical faculty worked with advisory groups to help ensure their programs' maps were aligned with industry and employment needs in the college's region. Mapping teams also drew on ongoing efforts by staff to develop and maintain transfer agreements in popular majors with Tri-C's main transfer partners. For the first time, credit and noncredit programs were integrated within the course catalog under the same meta-majors.

Faculty and counselors we interviewed generally agreed that the maps helped students make sense of program options, understand their paths to career and transfer goals, and generate educational plans that would lead to degree completion. According to academic deans, developing and implementing program maps also helped move faculty away from a paradigm of teaching within a disciplinary department to one of teaching across a meta-major. Others who participated in the mapping process indicated that they now have a clearer idea of their role in the process of helping students succeed in their journey into and through a program.

Developing and implementing program maps also helped move faculty away from a paradigm of teaching within a disciplinary department to one of teaching across a meta-major.

A Course Catalog That Helps Students Identify the Courses They Need to Progress

Once program maps were developed, Tri-C's online course catalog was reorganized by meta-major to help students visualize possible courses of study and their connection to jobs and further education. For every program, the catalog shows a recommended course sequence, course descriptions, and learning outcomes defined by faculty and counselors.

Students can search the catalog in many ways, including by length of program, career interest, or transfer connection. A relatively new feature provides a timeline showing how quickly a student can complete a given program. The catalog also shows how certificates can be stacked to help students advance to better jobs while pursuing a degree that will produce a higher long-term return. A career-technical education faculty member told us: "In the past, we talked about stackable credentials, but it wasn't necessarily clear to students. … These maps clearly show program on-ramps and off-ramps." All of these catalog features are also accessible on mobile devices.

A First-Year Experience That Supports Educational Planning for All Students

Using meta-majors and program maps as a framework, Tri-C sought to enhance the practices and systems it had developed under its One Door initiative to strengthen career and college exploration and educational planning for all students. The cross-functional team that created the college's first-year experience through One Door revised it to focus more on career exploration and transfer and formalize the educational planning process. Students are now asked to choose a meta-major on their college application, and at orientation they meet with a counselor to develop a one- or two-semester plan in their field of interest. At new student convocation, students meet with faculty and staff in their meta-major, and as part of the required first-year success seminar, they explore their career interests and options in depth and further develop their educational plans.

Recognizing that many students do not completely make up their mind about a program of study in their first term, the first-year experience team proposed an eight-week course called Second Semester Pathway, which the college launched in fall 2017. This course, taught by a faculty member in students' field of interest, helps students confirm their major and career objectives or choose a program if they are still undecided. The course guide outlines a wide range of activities faculty can use to help

students explore fields, including research on careers, informational interviews, and interactions with guest speakers. Faculty also help students with contacts, job searches, and transfer applications.

A System for Monitoring Students' Progress on Their Educational Plans

The team from the registrar's office overseeing the DegreeWorks planning system added new features to enhance the capacity to help students develop an educational plan they and their counselors can use to guide their progress through their program. Recently, a feature was added to allow students to see their full educational plan when they register for courses. The system also shows time to completion at different credit loads, highlighting for students the time and cost implications of attending full-time as opposed to part-time.

With every student's plan in DegreeWorks, both students and counselors can monitor their degree progress. Students can use the system to conduct "what-if" audits to examine how many of their credits would apply to other programs, should they decide to switch; however, they must see a counselor if they want to do so. In conjunction with the OneRecord system for documenting staff members' interactions with students, DegreeWorks is enabling counselors to move toward a case management approach to guiding students from program entry through completion.

A Data-Driven Approach to Supporting Program Improvements by Pathway

In response to a growing college-wide appetite for data on program performance and outcomes, Tri-C's Office of Evidence and Inquiry developed a dashboard that shows students' progress from the time they enter a program until they complete a credential. It displays graduation and persistence rates for each program, along with course completion and stop-out rates, and enables faculty and staff to benchmark the performance of a given program against that of all other programs in the same meta-major. The system also allows them to examine course-taking patterns within their meta-major. The director of IR said that access to data by meta-major helps to build a sense of responsibility among faculty and staff for students in their programs and has become a useful program recruitment tool, as it enables deans and department chairs to see which students are enrolling in program courses. In fact, he reported that the most frequently requested data points from faculty are program rosters. The dashboard also displays transfer rates, destination institutions, and success after transfer—information that faculty and staff use to assess and improve transfer programs.

Structures for Ongoing Communication and Engagement

Pathways leaders at Tri-C indicated that with all these changes, continual and focused communication is critical to keeping engagement high and preventing misinformation from derailing productive work. They found face-to-face communication to be particularly vital; one pathways leader told us, "Much of what needs to be communicated can't be done through email." Consequently, college leaders have continued efforts to keep communication channels open and frequently meet in person. In addition to using newsletters and social media, pathways leaders have orchestrated communication about guided pathways reforms through an array of in-person forums, including the annual faculty and staff convocation, campus days, town hall meetings, college-wide council and department meetings, and a daylong retreat for faculty.

Sustaining and Institutionalizing Student Success Reforms

Changes in the Student Experience—and in Conversations About Student Success

By using guided pathways as a framework for enhancing programs, student supports, information systems, and business processes established through previous strategic initiatives, Tri-C has changed the student experience. According to the college's provost, "From the moment a student walks in, the college gets them focused on conversations about their pathway. Pathways is the umbrella under which everything else flows. It is how we talk about the student journey." Counselors indicated that in the past, entering students were not asked about their career goals, which particularly risked marginalizing first-generation students, who often lack outside networks to help them explore career options. Now, according to one counselor, "Students are coming to us much more focused on career. … They are approaching academic planning with more career-mindedness." Department chairs also indicated that conversations between faculty members have changed. One chair said, "Now conversations are around pathways, focusing on students' end goals, and what will enable students to reach their goals."

> " Pathways is the umbrella under which everything else flows. It is how we talk about the student journey. "

Commitment to College-Wide Engagement in Reform

There was a clear consensus among those we interviewed that a key reason the college has been able to make such large-scale changes in a short amount of time is the commitment of its leaders to engaging faculty and staff broadly in a collaborative design and implementation process. Faculty leaders said they have a great rapport with top administrators and that their ideas and concerns are valued. According to faculty leaders, "With every new initiative, faculty have been at the table co-leading everything." They praised the leadership team for being proactive in engaging faculty and said that when college leaders think about a new initiative or practice, they "invite us in and ask us, 'What do you think about this?'" One faculty leader elaborated:

> *Dr. Johnson came in at a challenging time with the advent of performance funding [in Ohio] and has provided transformational leadership. … He has done a great job because people are bought in, and faculty are willing to come along with him. … Dr. Johnson never loses sight of the greater good, the fact that our students are going to be crucial to the vitality of our community.*

Faculty counselors and other student services staff we interviewed said they too were invited from the start to design and implement new initiatives and that they felt valued by senior administrators and faculty. While academic and student affairs departments had previously operated in silos, our interviewees spoke of a new

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spirit of collaboration and partnership as a result of Tri-C's "engaged" approach to implementing improvements in practice.

The college has conducted regular surveys of college climate and culture since 2013, the results of which have shown improvements over time. One of the most notable changes is in the widespread recognition of the importance of collective action for student success. According to Dr. Johnson, "Before, we had a culture of individuals with pockets of excellence; now we have engaged innovation [across the institution]." He also said that he no longer hears about initiative fatigue because pathways reforms are now systemic and feel like part of the college culture. Another senior administrator said: "We feel a lot more focused. Before, there was a lot going on, and we didn't know what was working." A staff member said, "People are not okay with being stagnant anymore. People are enthusiastic about what the college is doing to help students."

Staying Focused on Improving Student Success

The president is proud of what the college has accomplished in the past five years but emphasized the importance of avoiding complacency, saying, "We can't rest [on] our laurels." To that end, Tri-C has continued to embrace new tactics for improving student outcomes. For example, two years ago, Dr. Johnson launched another strategic initiative focused on removing nonacademic barriers to student success—such as poverty; food and housing insecurity; and lack of secure, stable employment—and identifying subgroups of students who may need extra supports. As has been a key practice at Tri-C, this initiative was launched through a series of college-wide summits. The initiative has informed increased efforts to minimize stop-out and student debt, since nonacademic barriers often elongate a student's path to a credential, causing them to incur additional costs and challenges.

This past year, Dr. Johnson also initiated a new strategic planning process that engaged over 1,800 individuals from inside and outside the college in another series of summits. A key focus of this process was identifying strategies for better serving community members whom the college had not served well in the past, such as GED completers, formerly incarcerated individuals, and veterans who lack good jobs. Nine hundred students completed a survey and participated in focus groups to inform the planning. Drafts of the strategic plan were vetted through meetings at each campus that brought together over 500 people in total. Cross-functional teams were convened to design and coordinate the implementation of strategies for achieving the goals set forth in the plan. One upshot of this process is that Tri-C is planning to establish a new department focused on increasing access to the college by underserved populations.

Beginning to Move the Needle on Graduation Rates

Because Tri-C has succeeded in changing policies, systems, and practices at scale, it has begun to improve its student success metrics. The college's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) three-year graduation rate increased from around 4 percent in the years prior to Dr. Johnson's arrival in 2013 to 19 percent in 2018. College leaders expect that with sustained efforts, they will continue to see improvements in student outcomes. Equity remains a critical concern, as graduation rates for Black students have increased but are still less than half of those for White students.

Plans for Building on Improvements to Date

Tri-C continues to build on its guided pathways reforms and has prioritized the following next steps.

Strengthening Transfer Relationships and Information

The college's transfer staff have spent the past three years reviewing and updating transfer agreements with over 30 institutions. In the past, Tri-C had often developed separate agreements with each department or school of a partner university. Starting with Cleveland State University, the college is developing transfer agreements that have more flexibility to change as program requirements change. In early 2019, Tri-C added more information about both transfer and employment to program pages on its website, including lower and upper division requirements by major at partner universities.

Connecting Students' Financial Plans With Their Educational Plans

In the past three years, Tri-C has improved its strategies and tools to help students make more informed financial plans. According to the director of financial aid, the fact that entering students are now helped to develop educational plans will make the full cost of programs far more transparent to them, and new software integration has made financial aid information—including which courses financial aid will and will not pay for—far more personalized and accessible. The college continues to explore ways to help students deal with financial challenges, including reducing textbook costs, negotiating student bus pass rates, and identifying affordable childcare options.

> **The fact that entering students are now helped to develop educational plans will make the full cost of programs far more transparent to them.**

Improving Student Progress Monitoring and Support to Completion

The technology infrastructure needed to implement better progress monitoring is currently in place, and the DegreeWorks team is working with Tri-C's information technology (IT) staff to create off-plan alerts so that students and their counselors are notified when students register for courses that are not on their plans. The college is also working with its scheduling software vendor to transfer data from DegreeWorks so that class schedules can be based directly on the courses students need to advance on their plans. The next challenge Tri-C faces in better supporting students' progress is a lack of staff to advise students along their pathways. The faculty mentors who work with students after they have taken the Second Semester Pathways course are one resource for students, but counselors and others we interviewed indicated that ensuring strong advising throughout students' pathways is still a work in progress.

Using Data to Further Strengthen Programs

The college's IR staff used data analytics software to identify courses that strongly predict degree completion in particular meta-majors, and faculty are now working in teams to enhance teaching in those courses. The college is also continuing to develop new programs to prepare students to meet labor market demands. According to deans in the IT programs, labor market data on IT jobs in the region revealed that most require at least a bachelor's degree. This finding spurred the development of a new curricular bridge from Tri-C's IT programs to Cleveland State's bachelor's degree programs in IT.

Promoting Equity and Upward Mobility

Dr. Johnson has said that his message to the college community is that improving overall student success rates is not enough; Tri-C also needs to close equity gaps. One current focus is on gaps in access and outcomes for programs that lead to higher paying career opportunities. The college has begun providing training on culturally responsive teaching and has become more inclusive in faculty hiring. The college is now working to close gaps in program completion by race/ethnicity. Faculty and staff in the public safety pathway are also working to address equity gaps in the region's police, fire, and emergency medical technician workforces as reflected in enrollment and have begun offering summer camps to expose local youth to public safety careers.

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