

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Northeast Iowa Community College

Project Details			
Title	Evaluating Student Onboarding and Placement	Status	COMPLETED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated	09-15-2015
Timeline		Reviewed	10-12-2015
	Planned Project Kickoff 01-01-2014	Created	11-24-2013
	Actual Completion 09-15-2015	Version	2

1: PROJECT SUMMARY

A: The purpose of this action project is to evaluate Northeast Iowa Community College's (NICC) current onboarding and placement processes for credit students, non-credit students, and transfer students in the context of best practices, data related to pilot projects, and current student outcomes both positive and needing improvement.

2: PROJECT RATIONALE

A: In fall 2013, several members of the NICC leadership cabinet attended a state-wide summit on best practices and state-specific outcomes related to placement testing, career advising, and the onboarding of students into College programs and services. As part of this summit, NICC submitted a high-level overview of current onboarding processes, revealing both positive processes that work effectively as well as processes with which NICC is dissatisfied. At the same time, academic programs are analyzing enrollment and retention data and considering program entrance requirements. To add another layer, NICC has piloted national best practices related to placement and remedial education (i.e. IBEST and credit for prior learning assessments) and is increasing its transition of students into credit programs from both industry and non-credit programming where they may have taken other assessments. In short, NICC finds itself at a critical crossroads where it is difficult to move forward on decisions regarding program entrance requirements, credit for prior learning, placement waivers, accepting other placement tests, and how to utilize multiple assessments for placement, without a thorough evaluation of how current onboarding practices are serving students and programs. With our first year completed, we still anticipate a target completion of August 2015, however, we have decided to separate the placement testing and processes into a separate action project. It has become apparent with the transition to a new placement system and state-wide participation in credit for prior learning efforts, that this portion of the onboarding process will continue to evolve and require sustained attention. Therefore, that Action Project will now be detailed separately, while this Onboarding Action Project will focus on processes of outreach and recruitment through admission to the College for particular sub-groups of students.

3: PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

A: Goal 1: Increase yield of high school students in the district who enroll at NICC
*Milestone: Increase from 16% in fall 2014 to 18% in fall 2015.
*Actions (2014-2015 academic year): Increased high school students participating in career facilitation, work-based learning experiences, and taking classes on a career pathway; focused recruitment at high schools of highest opportunity; increased recruitment by center directors and high school partnership staff in addition to admissions staff.

Goal 2: Increase or maintain enrollment of students within two years of students completing high school equivalency diploma or non-credit certificate into diploma or degree program
*Milestone: Baseline #s vary. Goal is for 30% to continue within 2 years.
*Actions: Intentional coaching and transitioning before students graduate from certificate program or high school equivalency diploma; development of educational plans for students before completing; warm hand-off/transition process for students moving into a credit program

Goal 3: Decrease the number of students who are "undecided" in their program.
*Milestone: difficult to pinpoint a true undecided cohort as students typically choose AA program if unsure
Actions: Look at system ability to track "undecided" students; increase number of students who receive career counseling as part of onboarding to College through updated processes in Career Services and through career coaching if active in other non-credit program at the college.

4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

A: The project will be led by the Vice President of Student Services (oversees advising, admissions, career services) and the Vice President of Business and Community Solutions (oversees center locations, Adult Education and Literacy programs, and non-credit certificate programming) with broad representation by student services staff, academic staff, and non-credit staff who work with recruiting, onboarding, and transitioning of students.

5: PROJECT CONTROL

A: Action Project timelines are overseen by the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness, the College's AQIP liaison. The outcomes of Goal 1 and Goal 2 will be measured by annual reports on high school yield and conversion of non-credit completers and high school equivalency completers to credit programs. These reports will be brought to the team responsible for this project by the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness. Goal 3 will be evaluated by a separate committee looking at how to identify undecided students earlier and provide additional required career counseling activities. Measures will be evaluated annually, but progress updates on actions will be provided quarterly or more frequently during strategic enrollment management meetings.

6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

A: The challenge in onboarding will be to move students through a highly distributed and multi-step application, orientation, and enrollment process, while making it feel personalized and supportive for their individual needs, level of readiness, and expectations. A further challenge in the initial recruitment will be leveraging our varied resources as effectively as possible to avoid duplication and maintain a consistent message in outreach to students.

7: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A: This is year two of an action project designed to streamline onboarding processes for students from recruitment to enrollment in courses to increase enrollment and increase first-term success of students, to ultimately affect the front-door experience which we know has long-term effects on success.

Project Update

1: CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

A: General Project Status: Completed In-progress Suspended Reopened

Original Project Start Date: 11 / 24 / 2013

Originally Projected End Date: 8 / 24 / 15

Anticipated Completion Date If Not Completed: / /

The Onboarding team reviewed all of the College populations being onboarded from credit and non-credit side of the College. We reviewed the processes currently in place for onboarding and identified gaps in outreach and support. Key process reviewed included: outreach, intake, career pathways advising, assessment, course placement, program placement, advising and support, orientations, college experience course, Developmental Education courses and supports. Identified and addressed onboarding areas to be strengthened included:

- Communication and understanding of processes between credit and non-credit sides of the College
- Need for expanding and deepening career development practices from a broader group of onboarding staff (career coaches, academic advisors, admissions representatives)
- Earlier identification and intervention with undecided students
- Expanded methods of student assessment for placement-move from ACCUPLACER to COMPASS and add non-cognitive methods of assessment of motivation, self-efficacy, etc.

In its 2015 portfolio, the College identified a need to "address the diverse needs of certain sub-groups from the recruitment through program and course placement onboarding process" and to increase students' engagement with career counseling and job placement services. The goal is that over the long term, such process improvements will lead to improved student persistence and completion.

2: ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

A: The following goals and metrics were determined for V.2 of this project.

Goal 1: Increase yield of high school students in the district who enroll at NICC

*Milestone: Increase from 16% in fall 2014 to 18% in fall 2015.

*Actions (2014-2015 academic year): Increased high school students participating in career facilitation, work-based learning experiences, and taking classes on a career pathway; focused recruitment at high schools of highest opportunity; increased recruitment by center directors and high school partnership staff in addition to admissions staff.

Goal 2: Increase or maintain enrollment of students within two years of students completing high school equivalency diploma or noncredit certificate into diploma or degree program

*Milestone: Baseline #s vary. Goal is for 30% to continue within 2 years.

*Actions: Intentional coaching and transitioning before students graduate from certificate program or high school equivalency diploma; development of educational plans for students before completing; warm hand-off/transition process for students moving into a credit program

Goal 3: Decrease the number of students who are "undecided" in their program.

*Milestone: difficult to pinpoint a true undecided cohort as students typically choose AA program if unsure

Actions: Look at system ability to track "undecided" students; increase number of students who receive career counseling as part of onboarding to College through updated processes in Career Services and through career coaching if active in other non-credit program at the college

3: ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

A: The following has been accomplished specifically in relation to goals described in #2:

Goal 1. Increase district high school yield

Metric: Increase from 16% in fall 2014 to 18% in fall 2015

Accomplishments: While, the official high school yield rate is not yet available, the number of high school applications (741) in 2015 exceeded 2014 high school applications by 10%. High school yield rate will follow but this is a positive development. We attribute these accomplishments to the following project actions:

- The Admissions high school recruiting model was reviewed and revised to a tiered model to maximize return on investment. The number of regional high schools visited decreased from 129 to 77 schools to increase interactions with the most strategic feeder schools (level A) High schools that are no longer routinely visited (level B) were placed on a year-long communication plan that will keep those school apprised of what is happening at NICC. Visits to those schools will be made upon request from the counselor.
- At our 7 center locations we have also added additional high school recruitment duties to feeder high schools by providing operations support to center directors to free up more time to work with students. In fact, one such center director works directly in the local high school.
- Last year, the College also began implementation of a Department of Labor Youth CareerConnect grant. This \$2.7m. grant has increased career pathway opportunities for high school students to complete substantial work towards a College program before high school graduation and pairs them with a success coaches to assist in career facilitation and transfer to college after high school.

Goal 2: Increase or maintain enrollment of students within two years completing high school equivalency diploma or non-credit certificate who enroll into diploma or degree program.

Metric: Goal is for 30% to continue within 2 years.

Accomplishments: This report runs in November of each year. For FY 13 career pathway certificate graduates (those completing in Certified Nurse Aide, Welding, EMT, CDL, Certified Production Technician, and Computer Numerical Control), 43% of them enrolled in a subsequent program either the same or following year. For students completing a High School Equivalency Diploma in FY 13, 35% enrolled in a subsequent program either the same or following year. Each cohort will continue to be tracked for 4 years to monitor onboarding time.

We attribute this accomplishment to the following project actions:

- All High School Equivalency Diploma students are assigned to meet with a success coach prior to completing their exam. This provides an opportunity to look at career opportunities and next steps at the College.
- All High School Equivalency Diploma students may secure 3 free credits towards their first class at NICC, if they have

completed an education plan with a success coach

- All career pathway certificate completers receive information at graduation about transferring their credits to a degree or diploma program
- Admissions receives a list of all career pathway certificate completers after completion to include them in the recruitment funnel.

Goal 3. Decrease the number of students who are “undecided” in their choice of program.

Metric: We have been unable to determine this accurately because students are not allowed to use “undecided” as an option if they want to access federal financial aid. Many undecided students identify Art and Science as a major, which is also a population demonstrating high attrition rates.

Accomplishments: The enrollment directors team at NICC identified two ways to possibly identify undecided students earlier in the onboarding process.

1. We agreed to add the question on the application for admission to NICC, "How certain are you of your program choice at NICC? 1) Certain 2) Somewhat certain 3) Uncertain." Those students answering “uncertain” would have a career counselor assigned as their intake advisor to assist the student in self-assessment and program selection. Once a program is selected, the student would be moved to an academic advisor. Those students answering “somewhat certain” would be identified by their intake advisor and more focused career counseling would take place. Intake advisors received additional training on specific tools and techniques for career advising. (NOTE: This initiative is on hold due to restrictions from our programming staff related to updating our student information system to accommodate this question).
2. The NICC intake advisors began using an internal tool called Goals for Personal Success (GPS) in spring 2015. All new students fill out the questionnaire prior to their advising appointment, and their advisor uses the tool to assess goals, motivation, self-efficacy, supports in place and personal concerns about starting college. 443 students have completed the document to date. Advisors report that this holistic view of a new student has helped to engage in deeper discussions and to identify students who are truly undecided about their academic goals and program choice.

Through a TAACCCT grant in the state, the College also subscribed to EMSI Analyst and is in the implementation phase for EMSI Career Coach. Both these tools have allowed the College to increase its career information that consumers and students have access to. Success coaches, advisors and others who work directly with students have all been offered free training on the Career Coach tool, set to launch in October 2015.

The original goals of this project did expand to a focus on consistent messaging and support services for students engaged in the onboarding process. That process was consistently regarded as “from outreach/inquiry to successful completion of the first semester.” Some positive developments have emerged since this project was first conceived:

- 2014 SENSE Results: The Survey of Entering Student Engagement ascertains the perceptions of new students in their first five weeks at the College and closely aligns with the College’s onboarding processes. The 2014 results showed that NICC surpassed the nation’s high performing colleges in the categories of Clear Academic Plan and Pathway and Academic and Social Support Network. The College approached the high performing level for Early Connections as well.
- 2015 CCSSE results: The highest benchmark score from the survey was in Support for Learners at 54.5%, surpassing the medium college, national and state cohorts.
- In questions related to an internal Student Satisfaction Survey (841 Student Surveyed in FY2015), the College achieved the following results:

Selected On boarding Questions	Avg. rating on 1-4 scale
NICC makes me feel welcome and important as a student	3.76
New student orientation helped me adjust to college	3.48
My academic advisor helps me set goals and encourages me to take the necessary steps to meet them	3.54
Enrollment staff adequately helped me select a program of study	3.53
Easy to find and use info on the College portal, Xpress	3.51
Information provided by the Financial Aid office is clear and easy to understand	3.53

- The College has greatly increased the number of staff cross-trained in onboarding process and career development facilitation as part of this project: Approximately 100 staff from Student Services, Business and Community Solutions (division for career pathway certificates, professional development, continuing education, and adult education and literacy), and Academic Affairs have been trained through a series of 4 trainings during the last year.
- An NICC team, including the College President, attended the High Impact Practices Institute spring 2015. The Institute focuses

on data analysis and strategy development based on fall 2014 SENSE results. Five new initiatives were identified and are in initial stages of development. See Next Steps section.

- NICC generally has around 1,000 students in the enrollment process at varying stages of completion. Enrollment staff work to make personal contact with these students to encourage movement from applied to accepted to enrolled status in a timely manner. With a lean enrollment staff, making personal contact with this large population was not feasible. Therefore, the student services division purchased and developed protocol for automated calling to the large number of students with a strong call to action. This effort was successful and lowered the number of personal calls needed to encourage movement toward matriculation.
- The student services division also began a communication audit of all onboarding correspondence with students in an effort to consolidate mailings, streamline the communication flow and simplify the messages for improved student understanding. Business services and high school partnership communications will be added as the process continues this year.
- The College Experience Course expanded from a pilot project in FY 2015 to a required course for all students beginning fall 2015. Twenty-eight faculty were hired and required to attend an all-day training. The number of course sections offered increased from eight (spring '15) to 20 (fall '17). A common curriculum and textbook, *Thriving in the Community College and Beyond*, is used and was modified for NICC and co-authored by NICC staff.

4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

A: This action project included strong participation from students services, Business and Community Solutions, and academic affairs staff who participated in a series of onboarding cross-trainings in FY 2015 in July '14, October, March and July '15. Over 100 staff have been in attendance and the training materials and topics were a collaboration between the divisions to increase consistency and improve seamless movement of students between divisions.

Through the launch of the College Experience course, faculty and staff were brought in to the project along with new adjunct faculty. Admissions staff, financial aid staff and advising staff joined in the first communication audit, with business services and high school partnerships staff joining in the coming year.

5: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

A: The cross-trainings have been a broadly valued experience for participating staff to truly step into the shoes of their colleagues and understand what onboarding looks like as students move through the system. We believe this is a best practice that other Colleges could replicate. In addition, the College has learned to identify federal and state barriers (funding restrictions, financial aid, etc.) vs. institutional policies that create roadblocks (student information system) for onboarding students. The College has prioritized revision of institutional practices that it has control to change.

Overall, the project has reinforced the ongoing importance of breaking down silos and working collaboratively across divisions, like our students must do to onboard into our institution.

6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

A: It is unfortunate that the College has struggled to identify undecided students in any comprehensive manner because of financial aid and student information system limitations. The College is persevering with this challenge through its state programmers.

7: PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIMELINE

A: Upon this review, the College plans to request the closure of this action project as we have reviewed the process, identified gaps and initiated new strategies for quality improvement. Several of the teams and initiatives will continue as we fine tune the recruiting actions, regions, and student populations touched by credit and non-credit staff working in district high schools, implement the High Impact Practices Institute strategies, develop the new guided placement process and others listed below that have been started this year.

- New communication track being developed to increase HS concurrent student yield to credit programming.
- Improved early alert system and policy being developed for ease of use and earlier notification.

- Revising credit program academic plans for clarity and visual appeal.
- Partnership with BCS and Admissions staff to develop an adult recruiting plan
- Comprehensive recruiting plan being developed
- Website review for clarity from the student perspective

Strategies from the High Impact Practices Institute (timeline fall 2015-fall 2017)

- 1a. Review and revise the policies and procedures for Placement testing.
- 1b. Develop the policies and processes for implementing a guided placement model using multiple methods of assessment.
2. Develop policies and processes to imbed developmental education into first semester of program path as a co-requisite course (3+).
3. Review of current advising model for effectiveness.
4. Develop a faculty to faculty mentoring program to share and implement high impact practices on engaged learning, particularly in the first four weeks of the semester

8: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS

A: This project will be sustained through the implementation of the HIPI Action Plan.

Update Review

1: CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

A: NICC reports this projects as complete and provides a clear and comprehensive explanation for their conclusion. NICC should be commended for thoroughly documenting the completion of this project on time.

2: ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

A: NICC provided specific targets for two of its specified goals but, due to difficulty separating the data, was not able to be as specific on the third. It is very refreshing to see an Action Project provide specific measurable goals and report on them. Giving a goal of 18%, instead of "improve" makes a review more useful to the institution because the reviewer can clearly and definitively determine success.

3: ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

A: Again NICC reports impressive results and seems to be on track to achieve all its goals. One note of caution is suggested. A change from 16% to 18% is a 12.5 % increase. It remains to be seen if a 10% increase in applications will translate into the 12.5% increase in enrollment; but, the increase in applications should still yield a notable increase in enrollment.

4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

A: NICC has involved a broad contingent of appropriate stakeholders in this project and has done so at the most important points for their involvement in the process.

5: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

A: The CQI concept is based on an organization's ability to not only improve, but sustain the improvement. One critical element to that concept is also recognizing what the organization can control. Clearly no college can control Federal and State regulations, which NICC acknowledges, but colleges can do what NICC has done. They can identify what is possible to change and work to continuously improve their abilities to work within the constraints imposed from outside.

6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

A: NICC may try to ascertain, or at least estimate, the number of undecided students by asking for their intended major on the application for admissions. This will allow students to identify to the college that they really are undecided.

7: PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIME LINE

A: NICC has presented a list of next steps to be implemented. That list is comprehensive and consistent with the goals of this Action Project. It is worth noting that NICC has clearly given much thought to how this project has informed its decisions for further improvement in the area of student onboarding success. NICC notes plans to close the current project. That is an appropriate decision in this reviewer's view.

8: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS

A: It is noteworthy that NICC has determined the importance of sustaining an effective new approach.

Project Outcome

1: REASON FOR COMPLETION

A: This action project was intended to review the onboarding processes for our credit and non-credit students. A committee reviewed the processes and identified process or service gaps, overlaps and/or inconsistencies. Many of those issues were resolved immediately and others became short- or long-term goals for specific departments. Cross-training of credit and non-credit front line staff was held over the past year with onboarding manuals provided for all participants. We believe we have met the goals of this action project and are ready to dissect several of the more complex onboarding areas such as course placement tools and processes and accelerated developmental education. A group also attended the High Impact Practices Institute and several goals were addressed at that conference and are sustained through the College's implementation plan from the conference. The recent review also validates this rationale for closing the project.

2: SUCCESS FACTORS

- A:
- We were able to identify many processes that could be revised quickly to improve clarity and efficiency for our students.
 - This project brought front-line staff from credit and non-credit programs together for training and dialog about work processes. This has led to a better understanding and appreciation for the roles and challenges of the two sides of the College.
 - Our Survey of Entering Student Satisfaction (SENSE) results demonstrate strong student satisfaction with the support and onboarding processes as compared with the state and national averages.
 - We were able to apply quantitative data to several areas for ongoing tracking

3: UNSUCCESSFUL FACTORS

A: It remains difficult to fully align the onboarding processes of all students due to the differing nature (rules, policies, regulations) and flexibility of the credit and non-credit programming.