

MOHAWK VALLEY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
TITLE III EVALUATION

*Year One
Annual
Evaluation
Report
Fall 2016*

Mohawk Valley Community College
Title III Project – *Pathways to Graduation*
Year One Annual Evaluation Report

Mohawk Valley Community College (MVCC) began its current Title III Project –*Pathways to Graduation* – in the fall of 2015. The overall purpose of the project is to improve the quality and effectiveness of the educational experience thus enhancing student success. With a comprehensive approach, the project strengthens two programmatic components: 1) the Student Success Portal, which enables dedicated college professionals to identify at-risk students and support them with individualized guidance, mentorship and assistance from their first entry into the college onward through timely interventions during their academic journey; and 2) Gateway Course Customization, which re-energizes the learning experiences through course enhancements that address learner-needs in multiple, engaging, effective ways. Concluding in the fall of 2020, *Pathways to Graduation* will increase successful Gateway Course completion rates by 10%, persistence by 5%, and retention by 10%--with a final outcome of a 5% increase in graduation rates

During the inaugural year of the Title III project, the College contracted with Development Institute, a Boston consulting firm, to conduct the external evaluation with Dr. Katherine German, Vice President, and Dr. Philip Sbaratta, Senior Associate comprising the evaluation team. Drs. German and Sbaratta have been involved with the design, implementation and evaluation of similar programs since 1980 and have held a variety of leadership roles within higher education over the past forty years. They are currently working

with numerous institutions on the development and evaluation of Title III and Title V projects as well as other strategic change efforts within higher education.

On May 29, 2016 and October 27-28, 2016, Drs. German and Sbaratta visited the campus to conduct the first-year interim and annual assessments. Prior to the campus visits, they reviewed the College’s overall five-year implementation plan as well as other related documents, outlining the evaluation criteria specified in the project for the inaugural year as indicated through project objectives, implementation strategies and anticipated results. These criteria have been incorporated into the evaluation report, which follows, for use as benchmarks against which to measure the progress of the project to date.

While on campus for the assessments, the evaluators conducted a series of discussions focusing on the overall goals of the project, its organization and management, as well as progress to date. During these discussions, they met with the Title III Project Director, Maryrose Eannace; Activity Director, Ibrahim Rosic; and President Randall VanWagoner. Additionally, the evaluators met with the following individuals:

Jim Lynch*	Starfish Team
Mike Faitell, Jim Roberts*	EN101 Toolkit Team
Gary Kulis, John Swistak, Anna Radlowski*	MA110 Toolkit Team
Maria Ramos, Nivia Cavic,* Hilmar VonStrunck	PY101 Toolkit Team
Rachel Golden,* Maimun Khan, Salina Billins	Completion Coach
Erin Severs, David Nackley, Kristin Raab*	EN099 Toolkit Team
Gina St.Croix, Brandon Shaw,* Norma Chrisman	DS090 Toolkit Team
Breanne Rathbun,* Russ Penner, Gabe Melendez	MA091 Toolkit Team.
Stacey McCall, Bill Zogby, Roman Santos	HI101 Toolkit Team
Erica Brindisi, Melissa Barlett, Dick Thomas	BI141 Toolkit Team
Jocelyn Ireland*	Instructional Designer
Jennifer DeWeeth, Stephanie Reynolds, Julie Dewan, Dawson McDermott, Rosemary Mink, Franca Armstrong, James Myers, Jennifer Fanelli, Steffani DiPierro	PGP Project Team

** Additional Members of PGP Project Team*

Throughout the evaluation process, participants described their involvement and accomplishments, sharing their commitment to and enthusiasm for the project. These discussions ultimately lead to a series of recommendations for consideration as the project continues into the next year.

Needs Assessment

The College completed a thorough analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, and major problems inhibiting self-sufficiency in concert with the design of its Comprehensive Development Plan. The analysis drew from multiple sources, including the Strategic Plan, CCSSE results, Middle States accreditation report, NCCBP, and other seminal documents, underscoring a single critical problem:

Five out of every ten students drop out within a year;
of those remaining, only two will graduate within three years.

This problem and its underlying weaknesses provide compelling evidence for the need to implement significant improvements in academics, student services, and technological support systems – all aiming to increase student engagement and achievement to graduation. As a result, the overall vitality and self-sufficiency of the institution will be significantly strengthened.

Scope of the Project

A single activity is designed to deliver dramatic improvements in success and achievement as students transition into and through the institution. *Pathways to Graduation* consists of two interrelated components supported by sophisticated technology:

Student Success Portal: A physical and virtual haven for active support of learning and navigating college, the Portal includes predictive analytics, early-alert tracking, Completion Coaching with individualized prescription pathways, a vibrant, resource-rich

Learning Commons to co-locate wrap-around instructional and life-challenges supports, and an iTeach Learning Lab for faculty to develop and enhance courses as they model learning for the students.

Gateway Course Customization: Digital course toolkits, lodged in Blackboard, enliven learning engagement in 18 Gateway Courses that are highly enrolled and which currently exhibit large gaps in successful completion. Faculty teams and an Instructional Design Consultant will develop, pilot, implement and provide training to all full- and part-time faculty teaching these courses so that all students benefit from deeper, livelier learning experiences.

The Activity addresses MVCC's key problem and the attendant weaknesses in a synergistic, strategic manner, promoting student success through improved retention, persistence, and graduation rates. In so doing, *Pathways to Graduation* is intended to strengthen both the student experience and the overall vitality of the institution.

Year One Interim Assessment

Guided by an annual implementation plan, the Project's objectives identify the expected gains in student success, achievement, and engagement during the grant period. The Year One objectives focus on the start-up elements of the *Pathways to Graduation*:

1.1 To increase from 0 to 100% student participation in the student success portal enhanced analytics.

1.2 To increase student satisfaction from 4.02 to 4.25 on a 5-point scale on the Student Opinion Survey (SOS).

As a result, it is anticipated that all first-time, full-time matriculated students will participate in enhanced assessment/analytics with 640 student participating in the Learning Commons, 600 of whom will complete the SOS and indicate a 6 percent increase in satisfaction.

At the outset, a significant effort has involved the recruitment and hiring of completion coaches. As of the spring, three highly qualified coaches have been hired with an expected start date later in the summer. Similarly, a talented candidate has been named to fill the

instructional designer/librarian position. Thus the team is being assembled that will carry forward the objectives of the Activity.

Component 1 – Student Success Portal

Importantly several foundational initiatives have been taken. First and foremost, an impressive space for the Learning Commons has been identified and an architect selected. Architectural renderings of the space have been approved with an expectation that renovations will be initiated immediately with construction and the installation of workstations and technological tools completed and ready for the Fall 2016 semester. The Learning Commons will serve as a multipurpose space to support tutoring, project-based learning, and coaching, as well as space dedicated to faculty for innovation and professional development – a significant addition to the learning environment. With a coffee bar just outside the door, students and faculty will surely be flocking to the Commons. At the same time, the installation of technological support through Starfish is underway including the Connect and Early Alert modules. An implementation committee is overseeing the integration of Starfish within the components of the College and developing training protocols and schedules, anticipating that the full suite will be up and running in August for use in the Fall of 2016.

Component 2 – Gateway Course Customization

The major academic initiative is to develop electronic toolkits within Blackboard for gateway courses with teams of faculty spending one semester developing the toolkit, a second semester piloting, and a third semester training colleagues. To launch the effort, Dr. Alice Voorhees-Bedard, a consultant in teaching practice and distance learning, provided training to the first cohort of faculty design teams representing English, Mathematics, and Psychology. A

two and one-half day training focused on the examination of points during the semester where students run into trouble within the courses identified followed with the development of appropriate interventions underscored by the principles of universal design. This initial training was followed by phone conferences and the development of Blackboard materials using the Creative Commons to vet materials while generating considerable synergy among the faculty engaged in the process. Some of the initial work on toolkits includes:

- Psychology—selection of articles and YouTube videos related to textbook chapters for PY101 by Nivia Cavic, Hilmar VonStrunck, and Maria Ramos, Chair;
- English—creation of supplemental resources for students enrolled in EN101 by Sarah Beck, Mike Faitell, and Jim Roberts, Chair; and
- Mathematics—selection of open source materials augmented with guided notes, vocabulary and supplementary instruction by Gary Kulis, John Swistak, and Anna Radlowski, Chair.

With initial work completed, the expectation is that faculty will pilot the toolkits during Fall of 2016, make necessary adjustments and expand their use with their colleagues thereafter.

Clearly the work of the first semester has generated excitement with participants suggesting that their efforts ‘turned out better than expected’!

At the midpoint of the inaugural year of the project a significant amount of progress has been made in getting both major components of the Activity off the ground. As a result, the first year should conclude with the College well positioned to meet and exceed its objectives.

Year One Annual Assessment

For a successful launch of a Title III project, thoughtful and detailed organization is required. MVCC has done an outstanding job, fulfilling the first year objectives of the *Pathways to Graduation*:

- 1.1 To increase from 0 to 100% student participation in the student success portal enhanced analytics.

1.2 To increase student satisfaction from 4.02 to 4.25 on a 5-point scale on the Student Opinion Survey (SOS).

Importantly, key personnel were hired to advance the project: Salina Billins, Rachel Golden, and Maimun Khan were hired as Completion Coaches, and Jocelyn Ireland was hired as Instructional Designer. With these individuals aboard, the Activity has a full complement of staff.

Component 1—Student Success Portal

The Learning Commons, a major initiative in Year 1, is up and running. In a short span of time, the a centrally located 8,714 square foot space was redesigned and renovated so that the Learning Commons now provides a welcoming, open, and fully-outfitted space for multiple types of learning and support, including an iTeach Lab for enhanced faculty professional development. Early indications suggest a healthy use of the space as students work independently, in groups, and online. With just a few more details to be completed, a ribbon-cutting ceremony will officially mark this new resource for students and faculty.

Housed within the Learning Commons are the Completion Coaches who are the main go-to persons for students. A primary focus for the Coaches is high-risk students enrolled in gateway courses. Initially, students were assigned to Coaches alphabetically, which proved to be inefficient, requiring the invention of a new assignment system. Nevertheless, Coaches emailed and phoned students, making contact and establishing rapport. To further introduce the coaching process, Coaches visited multiple courses, introduced themselves, and handed out business cards, stating “I am your coach--come see me.” Initial coaching sessions lead to a success plan and introduce students to multiple campus resources.

A significant part of the support structure for students is the addition of Starfish, a retention software system. Students, Completion Coaches, and eight faculty members started using Starfish to monitor academic progress of students enrolled in the seventeen sections of the first three Gateway courses. During the launch, Educational Technology and the IT department worked collaboratively, resolving glitches as they were identified. The Starfish protocol is initiated through surveys at specific intervals wherein faculty raise flags as well as kudos. During the Fall semester, nine faculty members teaching gateway courses completed two surveys regarding student progress. As a result, 450 students were flagged with Coaches responding. Additionally, over 100 students used Starfish to schedule appointments with tutors and coaches.

In an effort to better assist students in need, Completion Coaches participated in professional development. The three Coaches completed a series of workshops including: *Heroin: The Addicted Person, Family, and Community Concerns, Available Treatment; University Partners and Transfer Center Workshop - How to Search for a College or University that Fits You;* and *Center for Family Life and Recovery Presentation*. In addition, Coaches met with the Office of Accessibility Resources and Adult Learner Services to collaboratively support students. Moreover, the Coaches have read *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success* in preparation for a general discussion about their work and experiences.

Component 2 – Gateway Course Customization

The hiring of Jocelyn Ireland as the instructional design consultant is an important step in stabilizing the course redesign process and providing the necessary guidance to faculty design teams. Among her initial tasks was developing a template for the toolkits which has

standardized the look and feel of the toolkits across courses. During Year 1, two sets of toolkit design teams worked on creating toolkits of promising best practices:

Toolkit Design Teams	
Spring 2016 (Pilot Phase)	
EN101	Jim Roberts, Mike Faitell
MA110	Anna Radlowski, Gary Kulis, John Swistak
PY101	Maria Ramos, Nivia Cavic, Hilmar VonStrunck
Fall 2016 (Design Phase)	
EN099	Erin Severs, David Nackley, Kristin Raab
DS090	Gina St. Croix, Brandon Shaw, Norma Chrisman
MA091	Breanne Rathbun, Russ Penner, Gabe Melendez
HI101	Stacey McCall, Bill Zogby, Roman Santos
BI141	Erica Brindisi, Melissa Barlett, Dick Thomas

The first group, Spring 2016, is in a pilot phase. Faculty are experimenting with materials from the Creative Commons, select publishers, the Khan Academy, and other open educational resources. One math faculty member is in the process of developing a series of YouTube videos as supplemental material for MA110. As the Toolkit Teams continue to refine their materials during the pilot phase, they are meeting with the instructional designer every other month. During this period, the eight faculty members will collect data to compare successful course completion in sections using toolkits versus sections without toolkits.

In the overall, the MVCC team has created a strong foundation for success in this first critical year. With personnel hired, renovations near completion, technology installed, teaching practice enhanced, and student support expanded, MVCC is certainly on the path to institutional transformation.

Project Management

Mohawk Valley Community College’s Title III project is strategically managed and fully integrated into the institutional structure with the President of the College, Randall Van

Wagoner, assuming overall leadership responsibility. The Title III Project Director, Maryrose Eannace, Vice President for learning and Academic Affairs, reports directly to the President and supervises the Activity Director, Ibrahim Rosic, forming a talented and dedicated leadership team. The Project Director's responsibilities include overall project oversight to ensure the achievement of project objectives and intended impact. In this capacity Vice President Eannace promulgates Title III policies and procedures and, along with the Activity Director, supervises the Title III staff; establishes and supervises data collection and reports systems; approves all grant expenditures; oversees the evaluation process; and engages the College community's support for the project. Additionally, the Title III Project Director serves as the liaison with the Program Officer, Pearson Owens, providing regular performance reports and organizational updates along with budget amendments developed as necessary.

A Pathways to Graduation manual addressing the administration and evaluation of the project has been developed to serve as a guide to ensure effective management. All staff hired for Title III positions are selected and supervised in accordance with established hiring procedures at the college, and position descriptions are on file for all program personnel. Those paid directly by the project or contributing their time as outlined in the application maintain regular time-and-effort tallies to document their efforts in accordance with federal requirements, and all project records are maintained on file by the project leadership.

A Project Team involving all key stakeholders is chaired by the Project Director and meets monthly to ensure the smooth implementation of the project and the achievement of all project objectives. In this capacity, the Team oversees the direction of the Activity, assists with implementation, provides support, makes recommendations, and disseminates information

about the project to all constituencies across the institution. A standardized monthly report documents achievement, while a project web page ensures transparency and open communication regarding project implementation. A data warehouse captures baseline measures, monthly reports, activity logs and professional development rosters, as well as quantitative and qualitative information from coaches and support systems to monitor and assess achievement, persistence, and retention to graduation.

All project expenditures are initiated by the appropriate individuals to be processed through the Activity Director, approved by the appropriate College officers, and reviewed by the Project Director prior to submission to the Business office for processing to ensure compliance with the approved budget as well all federal and state regulations. Program records are maintained in the business office under the proper standards of accounting, and the Title III Project Director has direct electronic access to current statements at any time. At the end of the first year, \$415,201 of the \$440,546 available for the first year of the project implementation was spent, leaving a balance of \$25,345 to be carried over into the next year. With a year two budget of \$448,053, ample funding is available to sustain the continued development of the project.

The Mohawk Valley Community College management plan reflects the College's intense investment in the success of the project, with everyone, from the President and the Vice President to the members of the Title III team, the faculty and staff dedicated to the effort.

Conclusions, Commendations, and Recommendations

The first year of any Title III project sets the agenda for the duration of the effort; it establishes the infrastructure to strengthen the institution and creates a framework for

sustained progress. MVCC has seized the opportunity with much accomplished to support the development of the Student Success Portal and the implementation of the Learning Commons along with the development of Gateway Course Customization and the implementation of course enhancements that re-energize learning experiences from the start for all students. However, as with any massive new project, getting started presents challenges as unanticipated issues arise which require attention moving forward. Therefore, at the midpoint of the first year the leadership was encouraged to consider the importance of technological improvements such as a single sign-on as well as the selection of a talented instructional designer/librarian to fuel the development and use of course toolkits.

During the balance of the year as work continued on the two components and the remaining staff came aboard, the Title III Leadership, with the members of the design team and the members of the implementation team, explored the vision and identified the elements that linked the two components of the Activity to create the anticipated synergy and ensure improvements in student achievement, persistence and satisfaction. As a result, the full complement of resources available were interwoven, and, by the fall semester students were flocking to the Commons to engage with tutors ready to assist with Gateway course assignments, with faculty invested in their success, and with coaches encouraging them to excel, setting the stage for the second year of implementation. To fuel this effort, four additional recommendations might be considered by the project leadership:

- The Completion Coaches are a dedicated and energetic crew and provide an important support structure for students. Since this is a new initiative, the Title III team needs to assess the best ways in which the Coaches can have the greatest impact. Some areas include determining a manageable case-loading or cohorting system, clarifying the relationship between coaching and advising, and forecasting the impact of Starfish once

it is used collegewide. It may be useful to research institutions using coaching and Starfish to learn about best practices.

- Complementing the coaching initiative, the instructional toolkits have potential in providing vetted resources for full-time and part-time faculty. As the process matures, faculty could benefit from a range of professional development opportunities centered on their work. Some suggestions include creating communities of practice, enhancing toolkits with high impact practices (AAC&U), establishing clear expectations and deliverables, and scheduling opportunities for faculty participants to share ideas and meet across disciplines. Finally, there may need for clarification of the audience for the toolkits—faculty (descriptions of classroom practice and activities) or students (resources and supplemental information)—or some combination leading to a toolkit structure that will serve both potential audiences.
- With many moving parts, the Title III team needs to consider mechanisms to assess what’s working and contributing to improved student outcomes. Looking at impact in terms of instructional practice, Starfish protocols, the services of the Learning Commons, and coaching should be considered as each of these initiatives becomes fully operational. The “who, what, where, when, and how” are central to determining the efficacy of components of the Activity.
- And finally, moving forward some lingering technology issues can hopefully be resolved: developing a single sign-on, creating a masterplan for Starfish rollout and training, simplifying attendance reporting, and using “sign-in” technology to track student usage of the Learning Commons.

Kudos to the Title III Team! *Pathways to Graduation* is off and running with a strong leadership, tremendous energy, and significant accomplishments! Students are, in fact, using – and thriving – in the Learning Commons even as faculty pilot their initial toolkits and begin to expand their development with plans to measure the impact using the SUNY Student Opinion Survey as it is administered in the months to come. Over the course of the next year both components of the project will continue to intensify with the intention of increasing student satisfaction, persistence and achievement. Given the talents of the *Pathways* team and the work of the first year, the impact of the second year should meet - or exceed – expectations!