

DANVILLE AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGE - UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS REPORT 2021

INCREASING GRADUATION RATES & CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Institutional Practice/Topic #1: Toolbox – Building Bridges to Success

Part A - Purpose, Goal, or Objective

After following the enrollment patterns of first-time, full-time students at DACC, the College noted large success rate gaps between white students and African American students, especially with the male gender. The College investigated best practices across the nation and decided on a few strategies to put in place. Initially, the program was titled AMALE (African American Males Addressing Life Effectively). After working with the AMALE group for a year, the College assessed the program's success. A few changes were made and Toolbox was born.

The main goal of the Toolbox initiative is to improve the success rate of first-time African American male students who attend DACC. The graduation rate, after 3 years (150% time) of first-time male students who started full-time in 2016 was 42% for white males and only 23% for African American males. In addition to graduation rates, Fall to Spring retention and the percentage of full-time students earning 24 credits in their first year showed great disparities in the performance gaps between white males and African American males.

In order to reduce these performance gaps, the Toolbox program developed the following objectives:

- DACC faculty, staff and administration build relationships with each Toolbox participant. By getting “proximate” with the students, going to their homes before the semester started, Toolbox mentors would begin building relationships and a network of resources with potential participants, meeting them in their environment.
- Gain a better understanding of educational barriers on and off campus. Determine best ways to communicate, assist, and motivate our African-American male population. Use information to develop both academic and social support activities to build engagement and inclusivity.
- Share data and lessons learned with DACC faculty, staff, and administration to build equity in policies, procedures, services, and instruction.

Part B - Date of Implementation: July/August 2019

Part C - Description of Program Elements or Strategies that Make the Program Successful

By getting proximate with first-time, full-time African American male students, the College prepared the students for academic success by gaining a better understanding of their personal and educational journeys, including the barriers to engagement, persistence, and graduation as well as identifying the strategies that increase success.

The participants were inducted into the program as Toolbox mentors visited the homes of each student before the Fall term started and welcomed them to the College, giving them a “Welcome to DACC” backpack with information on services and resources as well as a few DACC trinkets.

Strategies of the revised initiative include the following:

- Participants were invited to meet with Toolbox organizers and guests once a week. Participants were given two day/time options to work with around their class and work schedules.
- To mimic a steady job, participants were given a \$25 VISA gift card for attending and participating each week.
- To build relationships and success habits, both academic and social activities were planned throughout the semester, including training on personal finances, financial aid, technology/LMS assistance; guest speakers/listeners; appearing on the local radio show; movie night; DACC basketball games; and faculty meetings.

Part D - Evidence of Success

After implementing the changes, the College saw positive changes in the engagement, communication, persistence, and success rates of the Toolbox participants.

- In Fall 2019, 21 students were identified as potential Toolbox participants: 18 participated (86%) with 15 regular attendees. Twelve (67%) were still enrolled at the end of the term and engaged with the Toolbox group.
- In Spring 2020, 13 students were part of the cohort (12 from Fall and 1 new student). Despite COVID and various economic/family oriented decisions to stop out, 11 participants persisted.
- The average grade point average at the end of Fall 2019 term for Toolbox participants was 2.60 compared to 2.32 for all identified as first-time, full-time African American males.
- Participants took leadership roles in the Toolbox meetings and in other extra-curricular activities.
- Toolbox participants mentored each other and became supportive friends outside of the College.
- Students made real connections to various resources on campus including faculty, Administrators, and Toolbox mentors. They reached out to these contacts for help throughout the year and even when on break.
- With the evidence of personal growth, persistence, and academic success, the College agreed to fund a ½ time Toolbox Coordinator who is tied to the local middle schools and high schools to help scale-up the program.

Institutional Practice/Topic #2: Innovative Bridge & Transition Programs

Part A - Purpose, Goal, or Objective

In an effort to meet the needs of community college district employers, the College focused on increasing the number of eligible, job-ready workforce members through acquiring credentials, intrusive retention strategies, and essential job skills training and resources. With the ICCB Innovative Bridge & Transition grant, DACC implemented two programs. The first, CNA I-Path, focused on incoming students and the second, focused on career students who were close to completion, but lacked the needed resources and support to complete their certificate or degree. These initiatives focused on first-generation college students and served other underrepresented groups as well.

The goal of both programs was to develop undereducated, unemployed, and underemployed adults. To reach this goal DACC set out to implement the following objectives:

- Provide access to higher education credentials to adult community members who have not earned their high school diploma.
- Develop a fast-track cohort program for the adults to complete both their high school equivalency and a Certified Nurse Assistant certification.
- Provide essential soft skills training to participants.
- Assist students enrolled in essential worker career programs in completing their credential and in their transition from education to the workforce with the resources needed to increase completion and success rates.

Part B - Date of Implementation: CNA I-Path started in Fall 2019. The Bridge to Careers services started in Spring 2020.

Part C - Description of Program Elements or Strategies that Make the Program Successful

Both programs were successful due to common elements threaded throughout from start to finish:

- Collaboration between Adult Education, DACC Faculty, Vermilion County Works/American Job center, and local employers.
- The essential soft-skills training provided to participants filled a critical need/gap identified by the employers in the college district. They noted that a lack of practical understanding of how to be successful as employees and to advance in a job to supervisory level was severely lacking in the available workforce pool.
- Students were invited to participate in Vermilion County Works program for additional support and resources.
- Students benefited greatly from a network of resources and support in both programs. Connecting both programs to employment outcomes was very motivating.

Part D - Evidence of Success

The evidence of success was multifaceted with the Bridge & Transition programs:

- A two hour, “Power Up! Essential Skills Coaching” program was developed by Corporate Education in collaboration with local business leaders. Taught by two Essential Skills Coaches, participants learn how to succeed in a job, in a career, and in life. Topics such as communication, conflict resolution, problem-solving, initiative, accountability, adaptability, teamwork and lifelong learning are covered.
- The CNA I-Path program served 8 students in the Fall and 8 students in the Spring.
 - 80% were African American
- The School to Work Bridge program to help current students to the finish line (certificate/degree completion) served 27 students total: 17 (=63%) graduated and 16 (=94%) of the graduates found employment.
 - 14 of the 17 (82%) were first-generation and/or minorities.
- The College gained insightful knowledge with the two programs and Power Up Essential Skills class. The College plans to duplicate and scale up both initiatives.