

TOMPKINS CORTLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
2015-20 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES  
FOLLOWUP ACTION PLAN  
NOVEMBER 30, 2015

## INTRODUCTION

Our Strategic Priorities were shared with the College community in three parts beginning September 10. The complete packet of recent strategic planning/priority documents is available on the College Corner.

At our annual all college Fall Day retreat on October 13, we heard a presentation from Molly Jackson of SimpsonScarborough on the marketing research project they completed for TC3. We also heard from Dr. Melinda Karp, from the Community College Research Center at Columbia University Teacher's College, highlighting recent research on student success initiatives that informed the basis for their recent book "Redesigning America's Community Colleges".

Following these presentations, two of the concurrent sessions provided opportunity for reactions to the morning's presentations and feedback on one or more of the four proposed Strategic Priorities. Subsequent to the Fall Day discussions, additional feedback has come from individual staff and faculty and various groups including Leadership Council, the Deans' groups, department meetings, and Provost Council.

This update will begin by highlighting the common elements of the feedback received that has helped guide the development of the action plans that follow. While there was general consensus of support for the four proposed Strategic Priorities, it is evident that further clarification is warranted to address some of the concerns raised.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF FEEDBACK

Most of the feedback received, before Fall Day, during Fall Day, and subsequent to Fall Day has been positive. However, some areas of concern were raised:

- *Some skepticism was raised about the validity of the marketing research given that the results were overwhelmingly positive. Observations were also made between the apparent inconsistency between the key strengths of TC3 highlighted in the marketing research and the challenges we face regarding our student success metrics.* As Molly noted at Fall Day, the purpose of the research was to find the "sweet spot" at the intersection of
  - what motivates TC3's external stakeholders to want a relationship with the College,
  - what the TC3 community believes in and what it does very well, and
  - what competing schools are not doing/not emphasizing.

SimpsonScarborough assures us that they did not bury negative information, in fact the results from all research groups were very positive.

It is important to note that, for prospective and former students, TC3 was NOT identified as the sponsor of the survey until half way through the questions. For example (without TC3 yet being identified as the survey sponsor):

- TC3 had the highest frequency of selection when former students were asked to select up to five institutions with excellent academic programs from a list of 76 Upstate colleges and universities.
- TC3 had the third highest frequency of selection when prospective students were asked to select up to five institutions that they were considering attending from a list of 76 Upstate colleges and universities (only Syracuse and U Buffalo ranked higher).

The entire report is available on the College Corner.

In relation to the apparent inconsistency of the messages from the two speakers, Melinda Karp said it well in her presentation – many initiatives (at TC3 and other institutions) are working well for some groups of students, but, and it is a very large but, they are not impacting or working well with other groups of students. It is indeed a Tale of Two Cities and we must, in the words of Marcus Buckingham, be able to talk about our strengths without bragging and our weaknesses without whining. Both are true of us an institution, our challenge is to spread and scale best practices to impact, as appropriate, all of our students, thus supporting more students to achieve success.

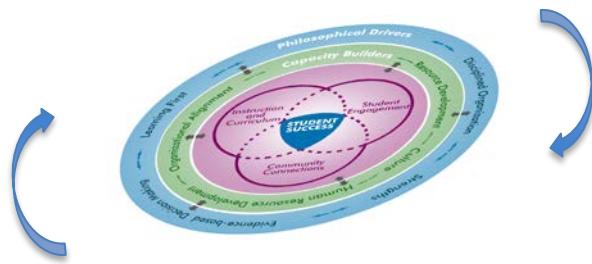
- *Concerns were raised that the role of faculty and instruction is not clearly evident in the Strategic Priorities.* The role of the faculty, instruction, and the classroom experience are key to attaining the goals we have set for ourselves. The critical questions identify our starting point for institutional focus. The first level (developmental and credit) basic skills courses were selected because they enroll such a large percentage of our first semester students (90% with an average of two courses per student), affording an opportunity to impact the experience of a large number of our students.

We encourage all faculty to examine the totality of the classroom experience they create, including pedagogy, curricular structures and choices, and assessment methodologies, and to understand how those choices impact their students' experiences, positively and negatively. These conversations are happening now in many areas of the college, formal and informal, e.g. CTC discussion groups, Write to Learn sessions, and English and Reading faculty conversations.

- *Similar concerns were raised regarding the inclusion of student life functions and their contribution to the vital role of student engagement in student success.* While the CCRC research did not specifically speak to many aspects of traditional student life services within their findings or proposals (with the exception of advising, tutoring, etc.), student life functions at TC3 are integral to our transition processes, first semester experiences, and on-going student engagement. We remain committed to learning outside the classroom as a key element in student success. Student Life staff will be specifically involved in our discussions related to transition, marketing, and connections with residence life students. As noted above in relation to faculty, we encourage all staff within the college to examine the totality of the student experience they create and to understand how policies, practices, and procedures impact students' experiences, positively and negatively. Each dean is charged to ensure that conversations happen in each of their areas of responsibility.
- *There was concern about how are we going to be able to address the additional work implicit in addressing the Critical Questions outlined for each Priority when we're already working at or beyond capacity.* Here's the good news! As you will see below, there are only six groups being

formed and charged with development of specific action steps related to the twelve critical questions included in the memo. Most of the groups will be made up of staff and faculty who already have functional responsibilities for the issues at hand. That said, we are cognizant of the workloads that staff and faculty are working under and are committed to providing a sharp focus and charge to each group.

- We need to clarify the link between our College wide goal of Student Success, our overall planning paradigm (the Fly Wheel), and the Strategic Priorities. We remain committed to our single, continuing goal of Student Success and the general strategic planning flywheel model illustrating the relationship between all elements of the college – Critical Elements of Student Success, Capacity Builders, and Philosophical Drivers. The identified Strategic Priorities can be thought of as internally-driven tailwinds that add energy to the flywheel. Energy that can help us build momentum to sustain increased student success in the face of brutal facts that can act as headwinds.



## OUR GOALS

During the listening tour in the Spring of 2015 there was a consensus on the need to quantify our College wide completion goals. Those goals as presented in the Strategic Priorities report and again on Fall Day are as follows:

Increase completion rates by 50% by 2025:

- Completion rates for first time full time students after 4 years (the national IPEDS measure). Our goal is to increase that rate from 25.5% to 38% by 2025.
- Completion rates for all students new to TC3 (full-time or part-time) after 6 years and who earned at least 12 credits. Our goal is to increase that rate from 41% to 60% by 2025.

Increase success rates for basic skills courses to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile in the National Community College Benchmarking Project:

	Fall 2014 Success Rate ( $\geq C$ )	Target Fall 2017 Target Success Rate
ENGL 99	61.7%	72%
ENGL 100	65.7%	77%
RDNG 99	58.1%	74%
RDNG 116	55.4%	74%
MATH 90	43.7%	65%
MATH 95	43.1%	65%
MATH 100	48.1%	72%

Increase, over the next three years, the Fall-to-Fall retention of FTFT students from our current 51% to 61%, the SUNY community college average.

Increase new student FTE enrollment by at least 1% every year.

- FALL 2015 – 399
- FALL 2016 – 403
- FALL 2017 – 407
- FALL 2018 – 412

#### NEXT STEPS

It is clear that our College community strongly embraces student success as our singular goal. During Fall Day and follow up meetings on campus, there is also a renewed understanding of the vital importance of our retention efforts on campus. These are important not only in supporting our students and their goals, but also for achieving externally imposed student completion benchmarks and providing a source of additional revenue for the College.

Support for both our students and the institution requires us to collectively focus on those challenges that must be addressed in the near term to move us forward - forward on a path of continuous improvement that will foster achievement of our short and long range goals.

As an institution, we must be laser-focused on a select few initiatives that the data indicates are clear and compelling challenges. As these challenges are addressed in the next semester or two, additional challenges will be identified and addressed. We have a daunting task before us and must pace ourselves to ensure availability of resources and respect for the other responsibilities of those engaged in the efforts.

My earlier memos noted that this process must remain organic in nature while becoming more focused than has been the case in the recent past. Four to six reports per fiscal year will be provided to the college community including updates on new or continuing retention and recruitment initiatives and information and data that will keep the College community informed on our collective efforts to achieve our goals.

Several have asked about the format of the Department Plans that are developed each year and how they should be modified in light of our reframed strategic priorities. Executive Council will be working on this change over the next few months to have ready for Departments to use in preparing plans for 2016-17. There is also the need to address our budget development process. In recent years, with severe resource limitations and resultant budget reductions, the opportunity to explore and discuss department needs has been very limited. While budget resources will continue to be a challenge in the foreseeable future, we nevertheless will engage in more cross-departmental, cross-functional dialogue as we build the 2016-17 budget to better utilize our limited resources. The first Strategic Priorities periodic report in early Spring 2016 will provide updates on revisions to both our budget process and the necessary link to our department planning process.

Our institutional next steps are outlined below, structured by the four Strategic Priorities and focused on the opportunities to build momentum, encompassing the Critical Questions identified in earlier memos.

#### STRATEGIC PRIORITY: THE FIRST SEMESTER MATTERS

This has been the theme of many recent college-wide discussions, all of which, coupled with extensive research, have pointed to the need for increased understanding of the barriers our students face. Framing the conversation as “students should . . .” is not sufficient. How can we redesign the transition and first semester experience to increase the success of more of our students?

#### OPPORTUNITY: TRANSITION/ENTRY LEVEL PROCESSES

- *How can we best design our entry-level processes (from recruitment to first semester enrollment) to provide guidance through the many necessary complex processes, leading students onto a path most likely to lead to success and completion, while not restricting choice?*

Led by Blixy Taetzsch and Khaki Wunderlich.

This group will include a wide range of perspectives, including students, to evaluate and redesign the transition process, including placement assessment and advisement processes, from the student perspective. Initial redesign will be completed by February 2016 for inclusion in the Fall 2016 new student process.

#### OPPORTUNITY: BASIC SKILLS COURSES

- *What processes will most efficiently and effectively identify our students’ basic academic skills and need for pre-college intervention?*
- *What curricular models can best meet the needs of our current students and increase success rates in basic skills first semester courses, while decreasing the time spent in non-program applicable courses?*
- *How can we leverage the high enrollment basic skills first semester courses to ensure student access to our best, most effective practices, methodologies, and interventions? How can we leverage content courses to build basic skills, and vice versa?*

Led by John Conners and Carl Penziul.

Comprised primarily of faculty from the basic skills disciplines, this group will focus on the full range of issues related to first semester placement and success. As noted above, 90% of our first semester students are enrolled in an average of two of these courses; impacting the success in these courses will significantly impact student success.

#### OPPORTUNITY: LARGE RESIDENTIAL POPULATION

- *How can we better leverage the opportunity for support provided by students living on campus?*

Led by Amy Trueman.

This group will include leaders throughout the student life group to evaluate recent efforts to engage students in residence life and to better develop a plan to increase the level of engagement of residential students in all aspects of college life. As we seek to better meet our students “where they are,” can we leverage the fact that these students are present on campus 24/7 to lower barriers to success? The group will develop and prioritize strategies for improving residential student engagement and success.

#### STRATEGIC PRIORITY: ON-GOING SUPPORT FOR HIGH-RISK GROUPS OF STUDENTS

While support for the transition to successful student and academic citizen during the first semester is important, the research is also clear that the need for support and guidance does not end there. How

will we design and integrate policies, programs, and practices that provide on-going support and development to our students, particularly those who bring or find significant barriers to success?

Support while valuing and respecting the life experience and diversity, indeed the rich cultural capital that “high risk” students bring to us that many of these students bring that enrich our community and can improve our learning

#### OPPORTUNITY: DEVELOPING INCREASED INFORMATION TO BETTER SERVE STUDENTS

- *What, in fact, are the needs and gaps experienced by our students and what should be the indicators and short term goals to assess the success and equitable access for identified “high risk” groups?*  
Led by team of Kris Altucher, Tim Densmore, Blixy Taetzsch, and Khaki Wunderlich.

Building from the questions raised by a group addressing the Institutional Effectiveness Council’s recommendations in 2013, this group will complete an initial analysis, by February 1, of available data and information and identify next steps and goals related to closing identified outcome gaps for URM, low income, first generation and students with disabilities.

#### CHARGE TO ALL OPPORTUNITY GROUPS

- *What structural barriers are created by our practices, procedures, and policies that all students must interact with throughout their experience with TC3?*  
Led by John Connors.

Creating a single group to address this critical question would trivialize the work that needs to be done to transform the TC3 student experience. This question must be addressed within the context of all of the opportunity groups, in fact, in the work in which each of us is engaged. Each of the opportunity groups identified herein are charged to specifically address this question in their findings and recommendations.

#### STRATEGIC PRIORITY: MARKETING

We need to approach the concept of marketing holistically, understanding that it is inclusive of our curriculum, academic rigor, support services, campus life, and outcomes. It is not just advertising. What are the key strategies that will strengthen the TC3 experience in ways that will resonate with current and prospective students?

#### OPPORTUNITY: BUILDING FROM THE MARKETING RESEARCH RESULTS

- *How do we build on the key strengths identified in the SimpsonScarborough study, particularly around our academic strength and community of support?*
- *What is the comprehensive visual brand that expresses our authentic core strengths?*
- *What recruitment and communications strategies will best build enrollment?*  
Led by Bruce Ryan and Blixy Taetzsch

A core strategic marketing team, including key staff from admissions, financial aid, and marketing communications, will lay the foundation for a new recruitment and communications plan to build enrollment. The team's immediate projects, informed both by the SimpsonScarborough study and the college's own data, will include developing a new visual brand, creating a conceptual framework and message map to shape our brand position, and identifying data-driven target markets.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY: ENHANCED EVIDENCED-INFORMED DECISION MAKING

We create a lot of data and information but it is not always readily available and known to all who could use it. How can we strengthen our creation, sharing, and use of meaningful information to provide guidance to our decisions related to planning and resource allocation?

### CHARGE TO ALL OPPORTUNITY GROUPS

- *What is the meaningful evidence of success that will tell us that what we are doing is working, at the initiative, program, and institutional level?*

Led by John Conners.

Again, this question is not served by charging a single group, but is embedded in the work of all the identified opportunity groups, and, again, in the work in which we are each engaged. Each of the six opportunity groups identified herein will specifically address this question in their findings and recommendations.

### OPPORTUNITY: MAKING INFORMATION MORE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

- *How can we make information more accessible to the college community?*

Led by Kris Altucher, Khaki Wunderlich, Tim Densmore.

This group is charged to develop, by early Spring, a web-based dashboard/repository, including links to critical data sources to be easily accessible by the college community and routinely updated.

## CONCLUSION

All of these priorities are the product of our collective discussion, born of last Spring's Listening Tour, and refined by internal and external conversations and research and recent publications including the Community College Research Council's *Redesigning America's Community Colleges*.

We have shown enormous capacity for change and evolution in the past. The Brutal Facts outlined in the earlier memos are our reality and we must change to meet the challenges they present. These strategic priorities represent our collective commitment to be the agent of our own change.