

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2015-2020

### Part II

This portion of the Strategic Planning memo focuses on two of the identified priorities - The First Semester Matters and On-going Support for All Students. While Marketing and Enhanced Evidence-based Decision Making will be the focus of Part III, it is important to remember that all of these priorities are inter-related and many of our desired outcomes are dependent on progress in more than one of the priorities.

#### THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Last year I challenged the college community to increase his or her understanding of how race and class affect learning and teaching and to use that knowledge to better perform their work to help our students achieve success. This need to better understand the barriers all of our students bring or find at the college remains a key element of the work we must do in the near and long term to transform the student experience and our outcomes.

Meeting student needs and providing the appropriate support for each student's development requires a collective effort and assistance with a widely varied group of potential issues. There is no magic bullet or wand. We must look at all of our work and all of our students' experiences - inside and outside the classroom, from recruitment to graduation - and the impact our practices, policies, and procedures have on those experiences.

#### BRUTAL FACTS

In Part I, I outlined a number of brutal facts related to the institution as a whole. The truths below are directly related to our first two strategic priorities and help identify areas for our immediate focus.

- Students who succeed academically in their first semester are significantly more likely to persist, to succeed in future semesters, and to complete a degree. 70% of last Fall's FTFT students who were in good standing at the end of their first semester returned this semester; only 16% of those who were on probation returned.
- Focusing intervention on students who have already fallen below academic standards has shown little to no success. In recent years, 70% or more of probationary students are suspended their next semester.
- The academic success of our first semester FTFT students decreased precipitously last Fall (from 72% to 65%) and we have seen the impact of that in subsequent success and retention rates, impacting both the students' potential futures and the college's budget.
- Our most recent Fall to Fall retention rate (Fall 2014 FTFT students) fell to 51.4% from 52.5%. These rates are 10 percentage points behind the SUNY Community College average.

- Our underrepresented minority (URM) and low income students have grown in numbers in our population but show persistent success gaps in first semester success, Fall to Fall retention, and completion rates. Recent completion rates show more than a 10% gap from rates for other students. Comparison academic success and retention rates are shown below:

FTFT Fall 2014	All FTFT	Race/Ethnicity		Family Income	
		URM	Other	< \$24,000	\$24,000+
First semester academic success	64.9%	57.5%	68.8%	52.2%	72.7%
Fall to Fall retention rate	51.4%	43.3%	55.7%	40.5%	58.1%

- 90% of our new students are enrolled during their first semester in ENGL 99, ENGL 100, RDNG 99, RDNG 116, MATH 90, MATH 95, and/or MATH 100, taking an average of two classes per student. These courses provide an opportunity to impact the first semester experience and subsequent success of our new students.
- In 2007, during our Foundations of Excellence Self Study, we recognized that success in the above courses is essential for student success while also recognizing that success rates in the courses were below desired levels. Attempts to increase success in these courses have had little, if any, effect. The success rates in these courses fall below most of our colleague institutions. Only English 99 and 100 have shown a positive success trend since that time, likely attributable to the curricular restructuring completed in 2008.

The chart below identifies the Fall 2013 and Fall 2014 success rates (C or better grade) and the percentage of this semester’s new students taking each class. Also included is the percentile rank for the 2013 rates compared to over 200 other community colleges who also participate in the National Community College Benchmarking Project.

	Fall 13	NCCBP National sample (200+ comm colleges)			Fall 14	Fall 15
	≥ C	TC3 % Rank	50th %tile	75th %tile	≥ C	% NEW students
<b>ENGL 99</b>	69.5%	66th%	67%	72%	61.7%	31%
<b>ENGL 100</b>	64.9%	30th%	72%	77%	65.7%	52%
<b>RDNG 99</b>	61.1%	25th%	68%	74%	58.1%	14%
<b>RDNG 116</b>	59.6%				55.4%	36%
<b>MATH 90</b>	59.6%	25th%	59%	65%	43.7%	14%
<b>MATH 95</b>	44.4%				43.1%	19%
<b>MATH 100</b>	56.9%	42nd%	63%	72%	48.1%	28%

- Half of our first semester students live in our housing, a ready opportunity to provide support. In the last two years, we’ve seen a decrease in the first semester success indicator for our FTFT residential students while those for commuter students have improved.

	Fall 2011		Fall 2012		Fall 2013		Fall 2014	
	Res	Comm	Res	Comm	Res	Comm	Res	Comm
First semester academic success	69.2%	65.6%	70.8%	68.5%	67.8%	75.6%	59.1%	70.0%

## THE FIRST SEMESTER MATTERS: ENHANCED TRANSITION AND FIRST SEMESTER SUCCESS

What do we know about what appears to be working at other institutions? The national research related to community college success has converged on the need for intentional, clear guidance and assistance that will directly help students make the choices most likely to lead to success and completion. Too often the complexity of processes (at least in the student’s mind), e.g. those related to admission, financial aid, program and/or course selection, transfer, and accessing advisement and support services, leads to confusion and poor choices. Or, as we too often see, students taking a very passive role and deferring or making no choices.

The challenge becomes creating “maps” that can guide students through complex processes without unduly restricting options. The most promising new practices that appear to be significantly impacting student completion rates have done just that, each within the needs and cultures of their individual institutions.

While program and service design vary among campuses, all share certain elements:

- Active choice, requiring students to choose among a relatively small group of clearly defined options, while also providing the opportunity to opt out and customize to meet a particular student’s needs
- Built in learning “sign posts” along the path
- Integrated advisement and other support services, including developmental coursework and early alerts when a student is falling off a path
- Involvement with the student from an early point in the transition to college and continuing throughout the student’s program

Many of our current success initiatives include frequently discussed “high impact practices”, e.g. accelerated developmental English programming, VOICES and PEERS, Write to Learn, Network Mentoring program, PACE, Pathways, Vector Scholars, and our many orientation activities. But none of these are structured to provide a framework for the totality of the student’s experience.

**While we may see some of the above elements in some of our initiatives, we do not have any initiatives that incorporate most of the elements in a comprehensive format. The transformational change we are seeking requires that we challenge our current models for the student experience and address that experience comprehensively, not just by tweaking aspects of it.**

We must look holistically at the experience of the new student and develop integrated supports to help students develop the skills, habits, beliefs, and relationships essential to their success at TC3. We need

to integrate the elements identified above with other known high impact practices and increase their presence in the experience of our students.

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The questions identified below are intended to frame an initial focus for our work and impact the experience of a large number of students. However, this is only the beginning. Every person, department, and function in the college must assess their work and the experiences they create to better provide equitable opportunities and supports for all of our students.

*How can we best design our entry-level processes (from recruitment to first semester enrollment) to provide guidance thorough the many necessary complex processes, leading students onto a path most likely to lead to success and completion, while not restricting choice? Students often engage with the various processes – admissions, financial aid, START, advisement, orientation – as a single entity, not recognizing that each has requirements and separate processes. How can we make our processes more seamless for students?*

*What processes will most efficiently and effectively identify our students’ basic academic skills and need for pre-college intervention? What impact does our placement processes have on student success? We have relied heavily on placement test scores in recent years while a growing body of research supports the unreliability of such scores to identify appropriate basic skills course placement. In fact, one of the major postsecondary placement test publishers, ACT, has stopped publishing theirs. In our most recent CCSSE administration, 27% of English developmental students and 31% of math developmental students indicated that they felt that the class they were placed in was above or below their academic skill level.*

*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? A growing body of research identifies integrated academic support as most effective and efficient in assisting students to achieve the necessary competencies (e.g. our ENGL 98/100 model). While many of our faculty are currently exploring new curricular models, we must do so in all basic skill areas.*

I challenge us to increase the success rates in these courses, over the next three years, to the rates identified as the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile in the National Community College Benchmarking Project. We are not the “average” community college and our aspirations cannot settle for being so.

	<b>Target Fall 2017 Target Success Rate</b>
<b>ENGL 99</b>	72%
<b>ENGL 100</b>	77%
<b>RDNG 99</b>	74%
<b>RDNG 116</b>	74%
<b>MATH 90</b>	65%
<b>MATH 95</b>	65%
<b>MATH 100</b>	72%

*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?* We must seize the opportunity these courses present for access to our students and intentionally design and integrate those experiences that will best engage our current students?

*How can we better leverage the opportunity for support provided by students living on campus?* These students (remember, 50% of our new students) are on campus 24/7. Our promotion for housing speaks of being part of a “living and learning community.” What can we do to better integrate services and academic supports into the living environment? How do we better walk our talk?

## **ON-GOING SUPPORT FOR HIGH-RISK GROUPS OF STUDENTS**

We must intentionally focus on the transition into college and the first semester, but also recognize that many students are still in various developmental stages toward becoming independent, responsible learners in their second semester and beyond. Assistance is still needed to guide many along the path to success. Barriers (personal, social, and structural) have not magically disappeared because of a successful first semester. “[T]o substantially improve rates of student progression and completion requires changes in practice throughout the student’s experience with the college, and not just at the front end.” *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges*. We must continue to examine our work and design it with a lens of structural equity. We must develop specific supports and structures that will continue to provide necessary support while leveling the playing field for all of our students.

## **CRITICAL QUESTIONS**

*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?* In 2013, our Institutional Effectiveness Council recommended that we “develop and disseminate data related to historically under-represented student groups including recruitment, retention, academic success, judicial, and financial aid status.” This analysis must be completed to provide a more comprehensive picture of the barriers experienced by our students, including:

- Under Represented Minorities
- Students with disabilities
- First generation students
- Low income students

Analysis should be completed by February 1, 2016 and include identification of specific indicator targets for each group. We must also develop a system to identify first generation students.

*What structural barriers are created by our practices, procedures, and policies that all students must interact with throughout their experience with TC3?* Structural barriers are unintentionally created for all students, not just those who can be identified in a particular “high risk” group. Again, every person, department, and function in the college must continually assess their work and the experiences they create to better provide equitable opportunities and supports for all of our students.

Access for all requires lowering barriers for all. We are committed to high standards for all and access for all. There is no other acceptable path.