

From College Council.....

The Community College Completion Challenge

A Call to Action!

It's a lofty goal: To increase student completion rates in community colleges by 50 percent over the next decade.

Yet, helping an additional 5 million community college students attain a credential by 2020 is the foundation of [President Obama's plan](#) to once again make the United States the top producer of higher education graduates.

Background:

In September 2010, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) sent [a letter](#) to community college presidents and Board chairpersons asking them to join in a Call to Action to advance the **“completion agenda” – increasing the number of students who complete degrees, certificates, or other credentials with value in the workplace.** Since then, in an unprecedented and unified action, four other national organizations representing our nation's 1200 community colleges have joined AACC and ACCT in a formal pledge dubbed [Democracy's Colleges Call to Action](#) to increase student completion rates. In addition, the Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation have embraced the goal of dramatically improving U.S. graduation rates and are providing grant funding for community colleges and universities. K-12 and four-year institutions are involved in the discussions about increasing completion and should be critical partners along with employers and lawmakers. And, most importantly, students are necessary partners. For example, Phi Theta Kappa is heading the [Community College Completion Corps](#) – a student led initiative to raise awareness about college completion.

The resounding message is:

- **A success and completion agenda is the future of community colleges.**
- **College completion matters. And every student counts.**
- **It is within a student's potential and responsibility to succeed – and that an engaged and challenged student is more likely to persist in college.**

Many community colleges have accepted the College Completion Challenge and formally signed statements of commitment. Accepting the challenge means that presidents, boards,

faculty, staff and students will contemplate, discuss, and initiate changes to their institutional culture that will

- emphasize not only access, but student success and degree attainment;
- address attainment gaps that separate students based on race, ethnicity, and income;
- better define completion;
- refine strategies to reach goals of success and completion; and
- convey the completion agenda to all campus stakeholders as well as lawmakers, businesses, and local communities.

How Does BCC Fare?

As Dr. Drumm has conveyed in his communications, BCC is a high performing organization on many levels. College Council would also like to affirm and underscore that:

- BCC understands and embraces its core mission pertaining to open access and the need to support student success.
- The quality and relevance of our academic programs are a testament to our faculty and their clear understanding of the College's instructional mission.
- Our student services focus has strengthened over the years. Support services are valued by students and rated highly in our measures of student engagement and alumni surveys.
- The customer service and student-centered philosophies of our staff, across all units of the campus, is an important and integral aspect of our success infrastructure.
- Our leadership is committed to student success as an institutional priority.

Yet, we do have data that suggests we have room for improvement in areas related to student success and completion. Consider BCC statistics based on the *National Community College Benchmark Project (NCCBP) 2010 Aggregate Report which includes data from 2006-2009*:

1. Completion Rate

- Proportion of full-time, first time degree/certificate seeking students who actually complete a certificate or degree program in 3 years: 27.39%
- Compared to other community colleges, BCC is above the median of 18.24% and is at the 79th percentile.
- **To meet the Completion Challenge, the proportion of BCC students who complete a degree/certificate is expected to be raised to 41%. A tall order! How do we get there from here?**

2. Developmental Course Retention and Success Rate

- Math Retention Rate: 87.23% (60th percentile)
- Math Enrollee Success Rate: 57.70% (58th percentile)
- Math Completer Success Rate: 66.15% (43rd percentile)
- BCC is above the median for retention (85.38%) and success (56.18%), but slightly below the median for completion (68.06%).

More significantly, the proportion of students who complete their first college-level math course after successfully completing a developmental course is 70.67% which is only at the 24th percentile. An area where we can improve?

- Writing Retention Rate: 95.77% (95th percentile)
- Writing Enrollee Success Rate: 68.31% (67th percentile)
- Writing Completer Success Rate: 71.32% (36th percentile)
- BCC is above the median for retention (88.6%) and success (64.59%), but slightly below the median for completion (74.76%).

The proportion of students who successfully complete a college-level writing course is 83.33% which is at the 63rd percentile. We're heading in the right direction!

- Reading Retention Rate: 96.77% (95th percentile)
- Reading Enrollee Success Rate: 80% (92nd percentile)
- Reading Completer Success Rate: 82.67% (74% percentile)
- BCC is above the median for retention (89.56%), success (67.18%) and completion (76.08%).

Our reading courses have performance and outcome metrics that are **all** better than benchmarks. Kudos! How can we continue and replicate what appear to be effective strategies here?

- Meeting the Completion Challenge necessitates that we recognize that the most serious impediment to increasing the number of students who complete a degree, certificate, or some other credential is that community college enrollees are often underprepared to do college level work. Therefore, the performance and outcome measures of our developmental program deserve monitoring and attention because they will continue to be widely accepted as indicators of our institutional effectiveness relative to meeting our mission pertaining to access and preparing underprepared students.
- In addition to maintaining and, where applicable, increasing the success and completion rates of students enrolled in our developmental courses, a further goal is to demonstrate that developmental course success/completion is correlated with success and completion in first college-level courses.

3. Transfer Rate

- Proportion of full-time, first time students who transferred in 3 years: 17.59%
- Compared to other community colleges, BCC is below the median of 18.43% and is at the 45th percentile.
- **Transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions can be improved within the SUNY system and nationally. In addition to maintaining the academic rigor of courses to ensure their transferability, BCC can continue to work with SUNY and other institutions where our students transfer, to improve articulations, align course equivalencies, pursue joint degree programs, etc. We might also consider strategies to, where possible, increase the number of students who graduate in normal time (2 years) versus extended time (3 or more years) so that transfer and continuance is expedited.**

4. Gaps in Success Rates for Target Groups

- BCC can improve data collecting mechanisms for various student subgroups: minority, part-time, adult learners, low-income, etc.
- **The Completion Challenge is aimed at closing attainments gaps for these (and other) target groups. BCC will need to disaggregate our data so that we can reliably identify, track, and report on certain populations of students. In addition, the data can be used to inform strategies to support success in these populations.**

Next Steps:

The data highlighted above are just a sample of the key measures that BCC and other community colleges should track in order to compare performance against national completion goals. Metrics that are recommended for tracking by benchmarking organizations appear below.

Outcome metrics:

- **Completion rates:** annual number and percentage of certificates and associate degrees awarded;
- **Graduation rates:** number and percentage of certificate-or degree-seeking students who graduate in 2 years (normal program time) or 3 years (extended time);
- **Transfer rates:** annual number and percentage of students who transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution;
- **Time and credits to degree:** average length of time in years and average number of credits that graduating students took to earn a certificate or associate degree.

Progress metrics:

- **Enrollment in Remedial Education** : number and percentage of entering first-time students who place into and enroll in remedial Math, English, or both;
- **Success Beyond Remedial Education:** number and percentage of first time students who complete a remedial education course in Math, English or both and complete a college-level course in the same subject;
- **Success in First-Year College Courses:** annual number and percentage of entering first-time students who complete entry-level Math and English courses within the first two consecutive academic years;
- **Retention Rates:** number and percentage of entering students who enroll consecutively from fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall at an institution;
- **Course Completion:** percentage of credit hours completed out of those attempted during an academic year.

As a result of our recent Middle States visit, BCC has begun the process of identifying metrics in these and other areas of importance to our institution as a necessary first step as we seek to become better at assessing our productivity and institutional effectiveness. The data will not only allow us to compare ourselves to comparable institutions, but it will also be essential in informing decision-making about our success and completion strategies. *(Our dashboard of metrics can be found in the Institutional Assessment area of My College.)*

For BCC, pursuing aspects of the completion agenda would translate to:

- developing a set of comparable metrics and establishing reliable data collection and reporting mechanisms;
- using the data to gauge whether our policies, strategies, and programs have an impact on increasing success and completion rates;
- using this information to improve efficiency and results and connect data to decision-making;
- institutionalizing and supporting related success and completion strategies which are working;
- identifying, developing, and launching strategies that are considered best practices for success and completion and that are consistent with our Core Values, Mission, Vision, and Strategic Directions;
- thinking in new and innovative ways to get more students to complete their degrees;
- creating “positive tension” around the gaps between where we are and where we need to go in order to increase our success and completion rates; and, most importantly
- coming together as a student-centered community around this shared goal and doing the necessary work to achieve it.

So.....

CALL TO ACTION! CALL TO ACTION! CALL TO ACTION! CALL TO ACTION!

College Council invites the entire campus community to:

1. participate in renewed conversation about our Core Values, Mission, Vision, and Strategic Directions;
2. contribute to setting our success and completion goals and developing related activities to achieve them;
3. support the Council recommendation that Broome Community College join the growing number of community colleges accepting the Completion Challenge;
4. encourage our President, Dr. Kevin Drumm, and Board of Trustees Chairman, Dr. Angelo Mastroangelo, to sign the [Statement of Commitment](#) offered by the American Association of Community Colleges and the Association of Community College Trustees.

Increasing our graduation rate to 41% can be viewed as a mammoth undertaking, but it can also be viewed as manageable if we think of it as one to two-percent increases over the next ten years. Importantly, **student success and completion is more a product of an overarching shared culture than it is the result of a more narrowly-conceived deliberate “graduation” or “completion” effort.**

By collectively agreeing and understanding where we want to go as an institution, and acting upon this vision in accountable ways using data driven approaches, there is no doubt that we can be successful in making strides toward meeting the call to increase completion rates. Accepting the challenge will necessitate that we move forward together with a strategic focus and intentionality that will not compromise our standards in order to meet completion goals. We must commit to making decisions that will maintain our strong tradition of academic excellence as well as serve and retain students in the manner that is our hallmark. With this attitude, much is possible!

Recommended Resources:

1. **Policy brief - *Rebalancing the Mission: The Community College Completion Challenge* - from the American Association of Community Colleges**
www.aacc.nche.edu/Publications/Briefs/Pages/rb06152010.aspx
2. ***Establishing a Culture of Completion: Commentary***
Rod Risley - Executive Director of Phi Theta Kappa
www.communitycollegetimes.com/Pages/Opinions/Establishing-a-culture-of-completion.aspx

3. Creating a Retention Culture

www.semworks.net/papers/Creating_a_Retention_Culture.pdf