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The aim of NCCCJT is to provide all North Carolina Community College System faculty and staff with an outlet for publishing manuscripts of research and practice, as well as to provide open access to readers or scholars interested in higher education topics surrounding North Carolina community colleges.



NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE JOURNAL OF TEACHING INNOVATION

The Journal of North Carolina Community Colleges

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Editor's Note

As we present to you the latest issue of our journal, I am filled with a profound sense of gratitude and anticipation. Our journey to this point has been marked by challenges and triumphs, but through it all, our commitment to delivering insightful scholarship remains unwavering.

The past year has brought about significant changes within our editorial team, leading to delays and uncertainty. However, our resolve to uphold the standards of excellence that define our publication has never faltered. Despite the hurdles we faced, our dedicated team of editors worked tirelessly to ensure that this issue would meet the high expectations of our readers.

As we look ahead, we are excited to announce our plans to connect with our readers at the upcoming state conference in the fall. This gathering presents a unique opportunity for us to engage with educators, researchers, and stakeholders from across North Carolina and beyond. We eagerly anticipate the chance to share our vision for the journal and to recruit new editors from colleges and institutions that have yet to be represented on our editorial team.

The state conference serves as a nexus for intellectual exchange and collaboration, providing a platform for scholars to showcase their work and discuss emerging trends and challenges in higher education. We are thrilled to be a part of this vibrant community of scholars and practitioners and look forward to forging new connections and partnerships that will enrich our journal and advance the field of community college education.

In addition to our presence at the state conference, we are actively reaching out to colleges and institutions across the state to recruit editors who can bring diverse perspectives and expertise to our editorial team. We believe that by expanding our team, we can better serve the needs of our readers and ensure that our journal remains at the forefront of scholarly discourse in the field of community college education.

At the heart of our journal are the authors whose groundbreaking research and innovative ideas drive the conversation forward. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to each author who contributed to this issue, enriching our publication with their insights and expertise. Your dedication to advancing the field of community college education is truly inspiring, and we are honored to feature your work in our journal.

Finally, I want to express my sincere appreciation to our readers for their continued support and engagement. Your feedback and encouragement motivate us to strive for excellence in everything we do, and we are grateful for the opportunity to serve you. As we embark on this new chapter, we are excited to continue our journey together and to explore new possibilities for collaboration and growth.

Thank you for your ongoing support, and we look forward to connecting with you at the state conference this fall.

Happy Reading!

Dr. Josh Howell—Editor-in-Chief



From Hybrid to Online Courses: Navigating Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dr. Liane She and Dr. Kimberly Miller



Abstract

The unprecedented Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) created many unforeseen challenges in education. In order to continue students' education, North Carolina's higher education institutions, as well as primary and secondary schools in the United States, shifted to a completely online environment. This shift from traditional teaching to remote learning was done so rapidly that challenges may have been encountered for both faculty and students. Faculty were required to pay special attention to students in order for them to be as ready as possible and fully equipped to switch to an online setting. Focusing in particular on community colleges, hybrid instructors may have focused on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) when considering curriculum, but what does this practice look like in the transition to a fully online course? Therefore, it is paramount for faculty to ensure that all students from different backgrounds receive clear instructions and directions, in order to avoid frustration and inconsistency. Faculty learning to navigate this transition can present challenges while ensuring cultural responsiveness and keeping students motivated and reassured in their learning journey.

Keywords: Culturally responsive teaching, online teaching and learning, community colleges, diversity, COVID-19

From Hybrid to Online Courses: Navigating Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Community colleges enhance education and stay

current with the shifts of society. For many community colleges, a portion of their mission is to create a strong sense of community and cultural development. As society continues to be fluid and more diverse, a need is created to attract and retain students with diverse backgrounds on higher education campuses; in order to survive, higher education institutions must put diversity conversations at the forefront (Smith, 2009). As stated in Smith (2009), "Culture takes longer to change than climate, and it must be framed so that diversity can be facilitated rather than obstructed" (p. 67). Particularly in community colleges, there is an attempt to implement equity and diversity through a variety of programs, in order to prepare students to transition to either a real-life work setting or to a four-year higher education institution.

Literature Review

According to Gómez-Rey et al. (2018), it is important to prepare instructors with what it means to teach and learn in technology-rich environments. As educators prepare to instruct their students, there needs to be an increased intention behind the instruction (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). These conversations regarding diversity and equity instruction have prompted CRT. Zorba (2020) stated, "CRT is considered the extension of multicultural education in the classroom as multicultural education is mostly related to plans, ideas, and organizations on paper" (p. 42). The main goal of CRT is to recognize that though students may be in the same classroom at the same time, all students bring different perspectives into the classroom. Socioeconomic

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status, environment growing up, racial/ethnic status, and gender may impact a student's learning experience. In an effort to provide a successful experience for their students, instructors may provide examples that extend to as many students as possible, as well as provide room for narratives to be heard.

Many higher education educators hold the view that their vocation is providing students transformative experiences within an equal and equitable learning environment. As with students, instructors also have different social, ethical, cultural, and geographical backgrounds, which can make teaching and learning experiences challenging (Heitner & Jennings, 2016). For instructors, clearly stating culturally responsive issues and practices (Heitner & Jennings, 2016), being intentional about learning (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009), and continuing to foster diversity in higher education (Smith, 2009) will continue to enhance instruction and challenge the status quo. In Garrett et al. (2021), the study reveals that faculty working in community colleges in North Carolina have yet to receive the opportunity to thoroughly implement CRT in their pedagogical practices and ensure that all students are treated equally. A way to ensure faculty receive current information regarding practices and policies is to offer development. These trainings can support instructors in their effort to establish a connection with students and to enhance learning that recognizes diversity and, at the same time, challenges inequity in regard to race, culture, and stereotypes. Updating training for CRT will allow for new, intentional practices that will benefit students. For example, it may be common for instructors to begin their courses by asking students their preferred pronouns. Being aware of current needs from the pandemic in an online environment can only increase the feel of a community for students.

In traditional or hybrid course environments, it may be easier to learn how a student identifies because students may feel more comfortable sharing identities with their peers. In an online environment, students may not feel as comfortable with publicly identifying their identities due to the barrier between their computer and their peers. If a marginalized student already feels isolated online, their concerns may increase due to cyberbullying (Kanbul & Ozansoy, 2019). In an online setting, engagement is particularly important as students have less opportunities to interact with other students and their institutions (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Though it may be chal-

lenging, building a sense of community can be done online through a variety of synchronous and asynchronous activities. As in seated or hybrid courses, instructors need to be clear about their policies, intentional about their instruction, and facilitate fruitful conversations.

In classes with marginalized students, there should be representation and narratives for their voices. If educators provided a comprehensive education that included narratives from all possible representation of a myriad of groups, what would that mean for the status quo? Would funding for education be available? Would there be support for this kind of curriculum? With the emphasis on CRT, there seems to be some evidence to support this educational goal. CRT is especially important during the pandemic as this unprecedented time has caused many higher education institutions to be fully online. As instructors navigate their courses from a hybrid to a fully online environment, communication and instructions for assignments need to be clear for all students. For instance, assignments with a variety of examples can reach students where they are.

It needs to be questioned if higher education campuses are ready for abrupt changes in their educational norm and what support is there for faculty and students during an unforeseen transition. In this study, the authors researched the following questions:

1. How did faculty and students define CRT before, during, and after COVID-19?
2. What did COVID-19 teach us about implementing CRT in current and future online learning?
3. What are the ramifications of COVID-19 in community colleges in relation to support of CRT?

Research Design

The research design consisted of a mixed methods approach as there was quantitative and qualitative data collection. A total of eight faculty and thirty-one students from the same community college participated in this study. This community college was chosen because in 2019, it was ranked the eleventh best online community college in the nation (SR Education Group, 2019). Additionally, this Southern community college was ranked the 2020 second-best community college in North Carolina (Niche, 2020). After obtaining IRB approval, the surveys that

were conducted were semi-structured (see Appendices 1 and 2). A semi-structured survey consists of both closed-ended such as multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions, where participants could elaborate further on some of the topics.

For the open-ended questions, a constant comparison method was then used so the open-ended responses can be compared and analyzed accordingly. As such, open-ended responses were categorized under themes and subthemes, which allowed the researchers to examine and interpret the responses to address each open-ended question.

Faculty Demographics

A survey was sent out to all faculty members at a southern community college in North Carolina. Anonymity to all participants ensured. A total of eight

faculty members responded. For years of teaching experience, 25% had been at southern community college for five years or less; 12.5% had been at the college between six to 10 years; 37.5% had been at the college for 11 to 15 years; and 25% had been at the college for 16 years or more. 87.5% were full-time faculty and/or department heads, with the remaining 12.5% as adjuncts.

Faculty Findings

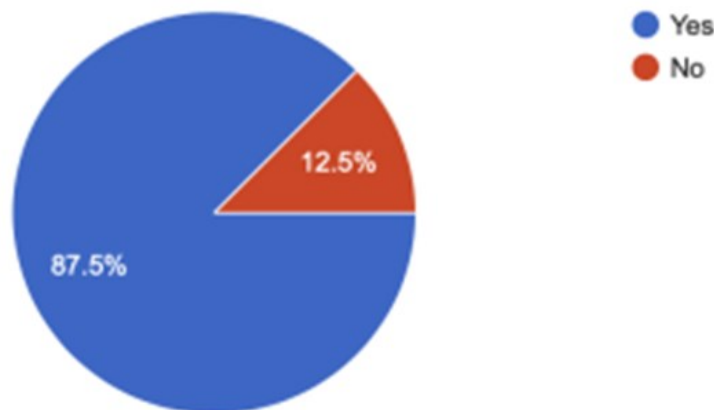
On the next question, faculty were asked if they had ever taught a fully online class prior to the spring 2020 semester, or before the rapid course format change due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 87.5% had taught full online classes before and 12.5% had not, as can be seen in Graph 1.

Graph 1

Responses to question 3 of the faculty survey

Prior to the Spring 2020 semester, have you ever taught any fully online classes?

8 responses



In the survey, it was noted that the majority of the participants had experiences teaching an online course prior to the Spring semester. This is confirmed as this particular community college offers many courses in both hybrid and online formats; humanities, communication and social sciences faculty all have the opportunity to teach online courses and receive training on online teaching (Anonymous, 2020).

If participants answered yes to teaching fully online courses before, they were asked to complete

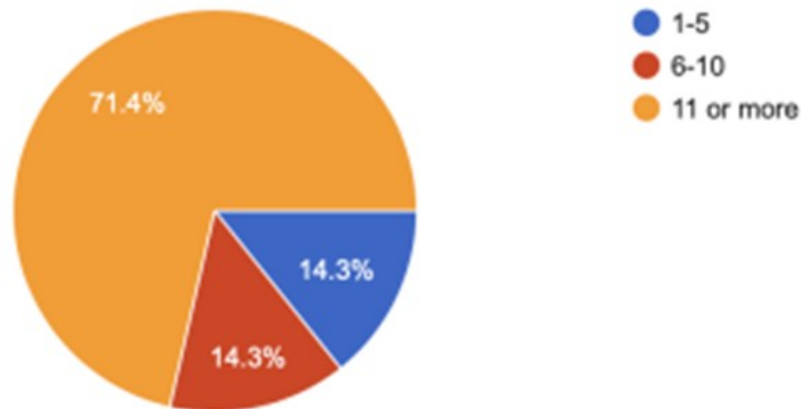
an additional question of how many fully online courses they had taught. 14.3% had taught one to five courses; 14.3% had taught six to 10 courses; while 71.4% had taught 11 or more, as Graph 2 shows. Graph 2 responses confirmed that the majority of faculty had taught over 11 or more online courses. As such, it should be noted that the participants had the opportunity to increase and improve their online teaching experiences prior to the start of the pandemic.

Graph 2

Responses to question 3a of the faculty survey

If you answered yes to the above question, how many fully online courses have you taught?

7 responses



Faculty were asked if they had completed training or professional development on CRT and the response rate was 100%. Since the participants answered yes to this question, a follow up question on what they learned was asked. Common themes were use of pronouns in class, being ADA compliant, specific training placed in classes, and being intentional about online students' and their needs. Some of their needs included ethical considerations, anonymity for students to be brave, and placing an emphasis on cultures and recognizing that not everyone is from the same culture.

Participants were then asked to define CRT before COVID-19. One participant responded the same as how they learned what CRT is. Again, themes of recognizing all students' cultures and perspectives were apparent. Another participant suggested providing representative examples for all groups in the classes would be beneficial. A participant also suggested that CRT should be embedded in all classes. Lastly, one participant stated that, "In a seated class you could talk to students to see how their culture differs and how to change the way you taught a subject to them."

On the next question, faculty were asked to define CRT during COVID-19. Again, themes of being proactive to meet students where they are was present during the findings. Responses of COVID-19

specific related answers were also given. This response from one of the participants highlights the other participants' responses, "In an online class you do not have that one-on-one contact to determine if you need to change the way you teach a subject. Unless a student tells you that they do not understand because of the way they think or because of their cultural learning ways, it is much harder to do."

Then, faculty were asked to define CRT after COVID-19. Similar responses were given from defining CRT before and during COVID-19. However, two comments illuminate the responses for this section. One participant stated, "I do not know yet. I'm not certain we'll ever enter a true 'post COVID-19' era. At our institution, I believe that we will continue with our philosophy to meet students where they are and bring them into fruition of their aspirations and dreams. We have always focused on meeting the specific needs of each individual and removing barriers that impair their quest for success." Another participant took this conversation further by expanding upon using what we have learned about CRT during COVID-19 to an after COVID 19 environment. "Educators and institutions need to use these moments for leveraging resources in a post COVID-19 time; if we could secure access, devices, and the 'tools' needed for all (to be checked out, provided, stipends for technology, etc.), then that

would help tremendously moving forward. I think the online format (for some) has also made the prediction of face to face involvement after COVID-19 unpredictable as in some situations, it is more convenient although not quite as humanizing. It will be critical for educators to think about how to continue creating online spaces that still ‘feel’ closer to the real thing (experiential activities, etc.).”

Upon answering how prepared the participants felt to switch completely online, most felt that the transition was rather easy. One faculty member commented that their hybrid course was already set up to be fully online, whereas another faculty member taught completely online.

Students Demographics

A survey was sent out to all students at a Southern community college. As the informed consent ensured anonymity to all participants, students who identified themselves as non-native English speakers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer questioning and other identities (LGBTQ+) were invited to participate. Out of thirty-one students who responded, twenty-five participants responded with trustworthy and credible responses. In the open-ended questions, responses such as “N/A” or blank ones were not considered as trustworthy or credible for the results analysis. As such, 67.7% of the participants were between the ages of 15 and 25, followed by 19.4% who were 36 or older; 9.7% were between 26 and 30 years old and the rest, between 31 and 35 years old. Additionally, 77.4% of the participants identified themselves as female and 22.6% as male.

Seven of the participants considered themselves to be heterosexual, four as lesbian or queer, one did not wish to answer, and one was pansexual. Four responses such as “normal”, “married”, “N/A”, and “I am a minor” seemed ambiguous; therefore, they were not taken into consideration for the further result analysis. As far as the first language spoken at home was concerned, 12.9% of the respondents spoke Spanish, 3.2% Hmong, and the rest of the participants were English speakers.

Students Findings

The first open question asked to the participants: How would you define CRT? First of all, there was a strong focus on teaching methods, such as: “It is a kind of teaching that makes connections between education information and students daily lives/culture”, and “how teachers teach based on the cultures around them”. Students state that teaching must be done with a focus on recognizing and cele-

brating each student’s own culture, as they explained: “Encouraging students to relate content to their culture”, “Being able to teach in cross-culture or multicultural setting. Teachers who are able to encourage other students to use their culture to help them in a subject matter”, “teaching in a multicultural environment.” In addition, honoring heritage speaker students seems to be important for one of them; as to them, CRT consists of: “Teaching that is done bilingual”.

There are also students who are unsure of how to define CRT as the following responses show: “Never had one”, “No clue”, and “I do not know”. However, one response shows that they would be interested in finding out more about CRT: “I would love more diversity training available”. Throughout the past months, several students from various courses have reached out to instructors to tell them about their current situation as they adapted to this new normal. Some students are still confused about the course format, as stated in this response: “CRT is when classes are taught by a teacher both online and in person?”. Therefore, it has been noted that students are confused about the concept of CRT through the variety of responses, such as: “Recognizes the importance of including all aspects of learning”, or “how someone identifies themselves gender-wise”, which remains vague.

Other students have interpreted CRT as “an accommodation for teaching during times where the normal standards for teaching students cannot and will not work. An example is using online teaching for a global pandemic. It is being responsible while teaching in a time where there are bigger issues than school work being done.” Therefore, besides taking courses, students are seeking flexibility and understanding from their teachers as they are navigating a new routine. Another student includes the concept of diversity in their definition of CRT: “A term that people use so they can give special privilege to people that are too lazy to do their coursework so that they are not labeled as racist or homophobic. Which is not fair to any student regardless of color or sexual orientation that actually does their work and applies themselves in class.” Therefore, there seems to be a need to redefine the concept of CRT so that students are aware of what CRT entails, particularly in an online environment.

The next question then asked whether prior to the Spring 2020 semester, students had ever taken any fully online classes. This third graph shows that pri-

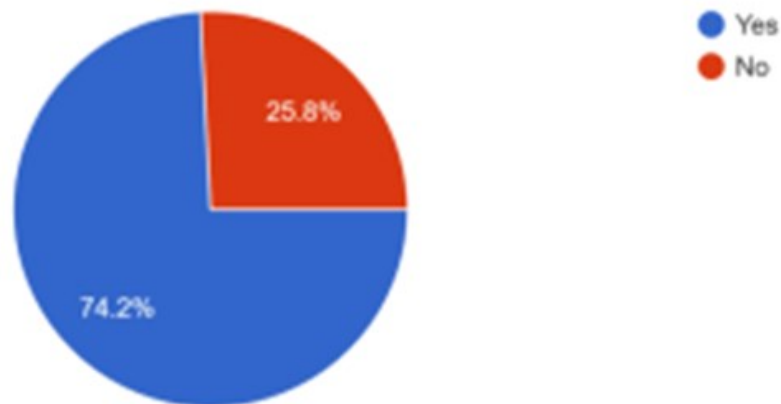
or to the COVID-19 pandemic, over the majority of the students have taken an online course. With 74.2% there should be some familiarity with being a student in an online class. At this community col-

lege, it is noted that students can take one class online or their entire degree online. This creates a narrative for student opportunity and student success regardless of where students are located.

Graph 3

Responses to question 5 of the student survey

Prior to the Spring 2020 semester, have you ever taken any fully online classes?
31 responses



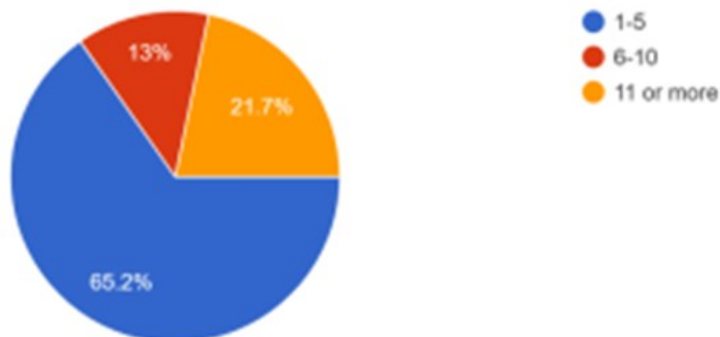
In the following graph 4 however, over half of the students stated that they had only taken 1-5 fully online courses, and almost a fourth of them have taken 11 or more. Therefore, it can be concluded

that students are still getting accustomed to fully online courses and need additional guidance in order to navigate their new schedule.

Graph 4

Responses to question 6 of the student survey

If you answered yes to the above question, how many class have you taken fully online?
23 responses

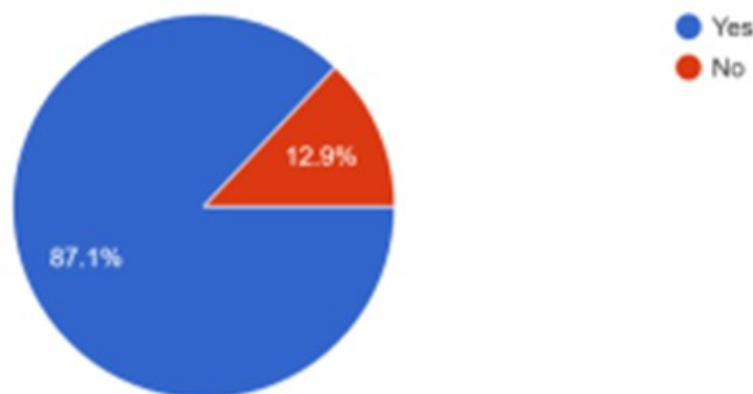


On the next question, how prepared were you to switch from face-to-face to fully online courses, responses greatly vary, from seventeen students affirming that they were either “very prepared”, or “somewhat prepared”, to fourteen of them stating that they were “not very prepared, it was a sudden adjustment for [them]”. Though this community college has provided access to online learning,

Graph 5

Responses to question 8 of the student survey

Did you feel like your instructors were accommodating and flexible?
31 responses



Graph 5 shows that overall, they have received positive impacts from their professors as despite the fact that the majority of students were not as prepared to switch to a fully online class format, 87.1% of them affirmed that their instructors were accommodating and flexible. As such, this result aligns with the faculty’s responses in Graph 1 and 2, which highlight that over the majority of them had experiences teaching online courses. Additionally, faculty affirmed that training on CRT was taken, which intentionally aims to support students’ needs in an online or hybrid environment. This confirmed the level of comfort students expressed.

The next question asked them to explain how students were prepared. There were a variety of ways that instructors had prepared their students, such as through the flexibility of re doing an assignment that four students noted: “The instructors would give you extra time to complete or redo an assignment if you give them a heads up before the assignment was due”. Attendance was also optional in the event that

Graph 4 shows that the majority of the students in this sample had only taken 1-5 courses online prior to Spring 2020. This could potentially indicate a lack of confidence in the students’ ability to learn online depending on their previous lack of experience with online classes and where they are in their degree path.

an online course was mostly synchronous: “If the classes were hybrid, they made it optional to attend in person classes or they did not take attendance as a grade”. In addition, eight students stated that instructors were “very helpful”, “very flexible and accommodating to respond back to [them] in an email” and “were willing to work on extensions and what not”, which shows that instructors wanted students to succeed. A student stated that instructors “have tried to help me in anyway probably”.

Two students noted the challenges involved in the use of technology: “I don’t have many video calls to distract myself with, so I would say I’m doing okay. My classes anyways were supposed to be taken online, so it didn’t really change what I needed to do. My instructors gave me lots of resources to use and help myself with. I personally don’t mind teaching myself the material, so that was never the issue”. When students are accustomed to taking online courses and are autonomous to manage their time, it appears that they felt more confident throughout

the semester. Students are also understanding that taking an online course is challenging on both ends: “My teachers did the best they could to accommodate our classes online but it is hard to teach how to operate machines online.” Another student noted that: “Online classes is just like in person classes, the instructor expects everything to be turned in on time. There really isn't a difference. I'm not too sure if it was the instructors really being flexible, but having online classes allows you to have a more flexible schedule”. Therefore, taking an online course can still appear as challenging for students who are not fully prepared to taking them, as the next question of the survey focused on.

As such, when students were asked to talk about what challenges they faced when switching to fully online courses, four people responded that they did not have any. One stated that they had been doing it “since sophomore year of high school”. Another challenge that was noted is the access to the internet. As four students stated, “access to internet, “computer crashing”, and the lack of “ability to complete in person assignments” were the main issues to be able to keep up with the course.

Understanding the material and contacting the instructor was another aspect of preparedness to online learning, as this student noted: “I struggled at some points because I'm not use to doing online classes and not all of my teachers were as helpful as others. I tried my best but, in some classes, instructions were vague and I didn't completely understand what I needed to do”. Ensuring students that instructions are clear and maintaining constant communication with them seem to be missing, but paramount.

In line with the difficulty to understand the course material, time management seemed to be an issue for the majority of the students. “PROCRASTINATION”, typed in capital letters, was one of the responses, which shows that instructors are not the only culprits for giving too many assignments. Two other students stated: “Trying to understand more complex studies mostly alone was challenging, and time management”, and that “[they] struggled with time management because I had to learn the material on my own plus complete the assignments.”

Additionally, some students noted “distractions at home” were part of the challenges, and another one mentioned a heavy daily schedule that impeded them to fully focus on school work:

“My first issue was doing work while so many different issues were going on. School is ultimately not my first priority in the world. I have other things that I am dedicated to and issues I have to worry about as a human being. I am human before I am a student. And despite me having these worries and things I already am prioritizing before school, I still am grateful to have online courses.” Another affirmed that a: “Heavy workload in classes, little help with turning in late assignments, no work-school-life balance with heavy workload” was challenging.

Lastly, for some students, the main challenge was a lack of in-person interaction with faculty. “My main challenge was just getting used to not being in a classroom where I could ask the instructor my questions.” There is a need for students to have some face-to-face interaction, as one noted that “instructor accessibility” was an issue. In addition, one noted that: “We cannot learn how to properly operate a machine and how to do everything we need to accomplish on it, online. It has to be seated otherwise we are being cheated out of our education.”

The next question asked students what benefits were noticed in taking fully online courses. Although three responses stated that they unfortunately did not notice any, nineteen students noted their “schedule [were] more flexible”, had “more time to spend working and being with [their] family and friends”. Others stated that they had more “independence, advocating for [themselves]”, “saved more money on gas and food”, and “more sleep”.

As far as the courses themselves went, one student noted that her instructor “worked closely” with them and “was very helpful”, while another stated that “attendance is getting better. Participation is more engaging” in an online course. Therefore, virtual interaction seems to come back as being an important benefit of online learning.

The last question asked students to give their input on how they think instructors can be more accommodating. Thirteen students included positive comments and affirmed that they could not think of any, that instructors “have done everything they can”, “did great”, and “have been accommodating as they could be”.

Then, adaptability seems to be coming back the most, such as in the following response: “lighter workload along with more empathy from instructors about how much students also have going on in

their lives”. Being flexible and understanding with students is ultimately key to provide students with a sense of reassurance. In addition, some students state that instructors could “respond back to emails more quickly (if they had a slight bit of time to answer my questions during “school time” hours)”, as well as “having more conversations”.

Synchronous options were also suggested, such as in this response: “Offer optional live lessons in classes that are a little more complex like maths. Also, more tutoring options”, “have a meeting set up at a later time during 10 A.M. - 12 P.M. as many people do not wake up around 8 A.M. or 9 A.M.”, and “allow zoom to see and show to explain better instead of just emailing messages”. Nonetheless, asynchronous accommodations such as through “post [ing] lectures”, “offer study sessions”, “post videos and more explanations on certain topics of the chapter/modules”, and “offer extra resources to better understand the material at hand”. One student affirmed that “not everyone can learn material on their own by just reading chapters and looking at power-points. Just because we are assigned multiple assignments each day, and we turn them in successfully, it does not mean we are learning. We’re just trying to get by right now. Be lenient and understanding when grading”. Therefore, a blend of synchronous and asynchronous options in the courses seemed to be the most effective solution in order to fit every student’s schedule in the most flexible way.

Limitations

When this research study was conducted at the end of 2020, the pandemic was still ongoing and active. Therefore, there was a sense of uncertainty and lack of training on online practices and CRT training awareness during the global pandemic, particularly for community colleges.

Another limitation that was noted is that the study was conducted in a rural community college, this Southern community college accounted for a little over 150 faculty members. For the purpose of our study, the ones teaching humanities, communication and social sciences were invited to participate, as those fields accounted for the majority of online classes offered in the college.

In addition, enrolling a little over 10,000 students in total. Nonetheless, students who were invited to participate in the study had to fulfill the following criteria: they had to be studying humanities, communication and social sciences; as well as identifying as LGBTQIA+, non-native English speakers and/or

needing special accommodations. As previously stated in the Student Demographics section, only 25 student responses were reviewed for the study, according to the criteria that the authors decided to focus on.

Sample Size

Additionally, while a larger sample size does provide better representation of the population (Andrade, 2020), it should be noted that smaller sample sizes still provide data that could be used to further the research in this area. Prior to the pandemic highlighting barriers to success, such as consistent Internet access, was already a topic of conversation. However, as noted by some of our participants, this was exacerbated as access to the Internet, computer crashing, and the lack of ability to complete assignments in a computer lab on campus may not have been an option. This accessibility barrier is in alignment with economic mobility. There is often a link between education and income; typically, the more education a person has, the more income they make. This brings forth the question of how can students in a community college utilize their campus resources in order for more economic success? Especially in North Carolina, economic mobility is low (Richardson, 2019). Is it reasonable to expect more increased economic mobility during a pandemic when there are less resources for academic support? An assumption would be that students who are enrolled in higher education would have consistent access to the Internet. However, as indicated by our participants in the survey, daily access to the Internet may have been a challenge.

Discussion

At that particular Southern community college, it appeared that most faculty were working full-time and over the majority of them had been teaching several online courses, prior to the pandemic. Faculty also stated that training on CRT was received, which shows that the institution is aware of the need to address and implement CRT in the courses. Regarding students’ experiences, Gómez-Rey et al. (2018) suggested that a limitation of having students assess learning is that they are not subject matter experts, and sometimes their experience is limited to their own motivations; however, that does not mean that students cannot have valuable information on a course. When answers were compared with students’, it appeared that many students were unaware of the concept of CRT and willing to learn more

about it. In the results, it was noted that several students were willing to represent more cultures in the course content and enable students to showcase their own backgrounds, so they can have the opportunity to build an online community with their peers and the instructors. This reveals that instructors are to facilitate this collaboration so students fully feel included in an online learning environment. As the COVID-19 pandemic required all community college courses to switch to an online format, implementing CRT in this setting became paramount to ensure students' success during an unprecedented time. Due to the pandemic, the shift to fully online courses forced community college students to become fully online students regardless of whether they wanted to be or not.

New challenges arose for many students as they navigated positive learning strategies and new challenges for faculty. One participant expressed that there were inconsistencies from faculty in their instructions to the students. While faculty participants reported that they had previous training on CRT, the pandemic was unexpected, so training about communication, expectations, and other practices that could be followed during a pandemic to ensure CRT in an online format were nonexistent. As noted by Garrett et al. (2021), community colleges in North Carolina still need to implement further CRT strategies into their pedagogy, particularly focusing on underrepresented students. An area for future research and professional development is to continue to highlight the need for communication and other areas of CRT in an online environment. Funding and other support from the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) should take initiatives for faculty to include other training to help support and appropriately align CRT in their online classes.

As such, the intent of this study was to address the challenges that contributed to fully online learning for NCCCS during the pandemic. On one hand, the goal is to uncover ways in which administrators and instructional designers can focus on ensuring that CRT is a priority in unprecedented transitions. On the other hand, as community college educators are to provide a positive learning experience, at the conclusion of this study, the intended outcome is to establish the important connections with students that provide them the support that is needed. Despite the awareness and the knowledge that faculty have on CRT, there remains to be more efforts to be

done for community college instructors to implement more inclusivity in their online courses.

As most students appear to be less trained and knowledgeable on CRT, but wish to learn more about it, one standardized way to catch students' attention and raise awareness on CRT would be to include a definition of it in the syllabus. Faculty can then ensure that students fully read and understand the syllabus by including a short activity such as a scavenger hunt in the syllabus, where they would have to find the correct responses.

As it was found in the results, students wish to receive constant feedback and support from the instructors through a blend of synchronous and asynchronous virtual options. Therefore, it may be in the best interest to include a variety of options in the course, throughout the semester. Synchronous sessions, however, may be optional and recorded for students whose schedule does not allow them to log in on time. As every student has had different experiences with online courses, it is paramount for instructors to provide them with different options to access the materials, lectures, and the instructors themselves.

As far as the assignments are concerned, it was found that students requested more clarity and directions. Therefore, a way to address this need could be through clear sentences, perhaps with bullet points or even a short video instruction or announcement from the instructor. Showing students that the instructors are available to them in order to build some relationships with them. In addition, in order to account for all students' different backgrounds, instructors should ensure to include more diverse materials in the curriculum. For instance, incorporating visuals such as pictures and videos from different cultures and places may be one way to make online students feel included, as well as opening their eyes to other cultures. In addition, instructors may focus on activities that present intentionally structured environments, ensuring that each student is accommodated accordingly, and facilitating critical reflection. In an online environment, instructors mentioned the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), understanding students' multiculturalism and English as a Second Language (ESL) as needed, and establishing a connection with students in order to know who they are. Allowing them to introduce themselves through a video could be a fruitful way to understand students more. Additionally, students who are for in-

stance first generation students may need different accommodation and guidance than students with disabilities, or socioeconomic diversity. Therefore, it is the instructor's role to ensure that each student feels included in the online environment, to increase their confidence and their sense of belonging.

Recommendations

As Smith and Ayers (2006) suggested, "Internet-based technologies offer an unprecedented opportunity for aboriginal languages and cultures to showcase their perspectives and accomplishments" (p. 406). From our participants' responses regarding CRT in the online environment, it is clear that there was a disconnect between what was offered in a course's online environment and what was needed.

As it was found in the results, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, community college students wish to receive constant feedback and support from the instructors through a blend of synchronous and asynchronous virtual options. Therefore, it may be in the best interest to include a variety of options in the course, throughout the semester. Synchronous sessions, however, may be optional and recorded for students whose schedule does not allow them to log in on time. As every student has had different experiences with online courses, it is paramount for instructors to provide them with a variety of options to access the materials, lectures, and the instructors themselves.

A challenge that educators may face when utilizing CRT in an online setting is design and implementation. As Smith and Ayers (2006) suggested, "for community college educators, responsiveness to cultural uniqueness must emerge in the planning, design, implementation, and assessment of learning experiences, particularly those offered at a distance through instructional technologies" (p. 405). This indicates there may be a need for additional funding allocations in order to ensure community colleges have access to any necessary technology as well as development in planning, design, and implementation. When addressing CRT in an online environment, it is also imperative to remember that there is a perceived Western bias and "...spoken or written words, images, activities, and body language may be assigned diverse meanings by individuals of different cultures" (Smith and Ayers, 2006, p. 406). Since NCCCS has an open-door policy for the student population, representation of cultural diversity is necessary for student success.

As far as the assignments are concerned, it was found that students requested more clarity and directions. Therefore, a way to address this need could be through clear sentences, perhaps with bullet points or even a short video instruction or announcement from the instructor. Showing students that the instructors are available to them in order to build some relationships with them. In addition, in order to account for all students' different backgrounds, instructors should ensure to include more diverse materials in the curriculum. For instance, incorporating visuals such as pictures and videos from different cultures and places may be one way to make online students feel included, as well as opening their eyes to other cultures. In addition, instructors may focus on activities that present intentionally structured environments, ensuring that each student is accommodated accordingly, and facilitating critical reflection. In an online environment, instructors mentioned the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), understanding students' multiculturalism and English as a Second Language (ESL) as needed, and establishing a connection with students in order to know who they are. Allowing them to introduce themselves through a video could be a fruitful way to understand students more. Additionally, community college students who for instance identify as first-generation students may need different accommodation and guidance than students with disabilities, or socioeconomic diversity. Therefore, it is the instructor's role to ensure that each student feels included in the online environment, to increase their confidence and their sense of belonging.

Other ways to promote CRT in an online setting could be done through interviewing students if they are willing, bringing guest speakers through a synchronous meeting, gamifying lessons, encouraging students to propose ideas of projects, and engaging them in run problem-based scenarios. Students will then feel empowered and responsible for their learning experiences, and will have an active role in their courses (Brown University, 2021).

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to bring new challenges for community college instructors in the courses, it is important to ensure that not only instructors but also students are fully prepared to receive high quality higher education, despite studying in a virtual environment. As training was available for instructors to transition from hybrid/in-person to online courses, there is still a need to fill

in the gap between the students' vague knowledge of CRT, as some stated that they did not feel fully included in their courses. Therefore, more inclusive practices should be implemented as Neville et al. (2013) also affirmed. All students and faculty's identities should be acknowledged and further CRT opportunities may have a positive impact on fostering a more diverse environment. Aligning both students and instructors' preparedness for an online learning environment will contribute to student success and enrollment increase in community college institutions.

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Appendix 1: Faculty Survey Questions

1. Years of experience teaching at [this community college]

Less than 5 years; 6- 10 years; 11-15 years; 16 years or more

2. My faculty rank is: Adjunct Instructor; Instructor or Lecturer; Department Head

3. Prior to the Spring 2020 semester, have you ever taught any fully online classes? Yes; No

3.1 If yes, how many? 1-5, 6-10, 11 or more

4. Have you received training/professional development on culturally responsive teaching or diversity and inclusion in online teaching? Yes; No

4.1 If yes, please explain what you have learned (open-ended)

5. How would you define culturally responsive teaching - CRT -before COVID-19? (open ended)

6. How would you define CRT teaching during COVID-19? (open-ended) 7. How would you define CRT after COVID-19? (open-ended)

8. How prepared were you to switch from hybrid to fully online courses? (open-ended)

9. What challenges did you face when switching to fully online courses? (open-ended)

10. What benefits did you notice when teaching fully online courses? (open-ended)

11. Besides CRT, what other inclusive instruction methods do you employ for your students to have an equitable online learning environment as possible? (open-ended)

Appendix 2: Student Survey Questions

1. Age: 18-25; 26-30, 31-35, 36 or older
2. Gender: Male; Female; Transgender or other; Do not wish to respond
3. Sexual orientation: (open-ended)
4. First language spoken at home if different than English: (open-ended)
5. How would you define culturally responsive teaching (CRT)? (open-ended)
6. Prior to the Spring 2020 semester, have you ever taken any fully online classes? Yes; No
 - 6.1 If so, how many? 1-5; 6-10; 11 or more
7. How prepared were you to switch from face-to-face to fully online courses? (open-ended)
8. Did you feel like your instructors were accommodating and flexible? Yes; No
 - 8.1 If so, please explain: (open-ended)
9. What challenges did you face when switching to fully online courses? (open-ended)
10. What benefits did you notice in taking fully online courses? (open-ended)
11. How do you think instructors can be more accommodating to you? (open-ended)

We Have to Challenge the Community College Stigma

Dr. Ryan Bradshaw



Sharing and telling stories are fundamental cornerstones of education that date back to antiquity. I tell my students: 'People do not care until it affects them personally. When you make that connection, then people start to care.'

When I was getting close to graduating from high school, I remember many of my friends having plans to go off to a four-year institution. One of them asked me about my plans, and I confidently replied, 'I'll probably start at our local community college,' which was five miles from my house at the time. I had won a few local scholarships, and attending the community college meant I could get a year or two of education for free (or close to it).

My friend sneered. They made fun of me, but it really didn't bother me that much. I knew what I was doing. I was going to get a low-cost, high-quality, local education. While at the community college, I enjoyed small classroom sizes, engaging faculty, and great customer service. I ended up attending five different institutions throughout my academic career, but I truly enjoyed and appreciated the start I got at my local community college.

It's been 25 years since I was a student at that college, and the same stigmas that were present then are still present today. For decades, our society pushed the narrative of, 'Everyone must get a four-year degree,' and parents—on the whole—didn't take community colleges seriously. 'Community colleges are for other people's kids. My kid is going to a four-year college.'

But one thing has changed in those 25 years. We find ourselves in an environment where higher

education has become prohibitively expensive and a burden on students and families. Student loan debt is a real factor that changes how individuals live their lives, including, in some cases, delaying marriage, having children, purchasing a home, and a list of other considerations. Additionally, we live in a time where we need skilled technicians and workers to perform a host of tasks, whether it be nursing, welding, cybersecurity, HVAC, truck driving, accounting, law enforcement, or a host of other skilled trades; the community college is the definitive resource.

Rising higher education costs, coupled with the need for skilled technicians, make the value proposition for the community college higher than ever. However, we still have that stubborn stigma about community colleges that has existed since before I was a student. I tell my prospective students: 'If your goal is to be at a four-year institution, you can still have that goal. You are just making the sensible and smart decision to start at the community college, where you will save money and likely have a life-changing experience.'

I believe that every student should start their higher educational journey at a community college. The late teens to early twenties (and sometimes later) timeframe in someone's life is filled with tremendous pressure to make what seem to be life-time-impacting decisions: 'What's your major? What type of job are you looking to get? Where will you live? Have you thought about retirement? Because even though you are just getting started, it will be here before you know it.'

The community college setting allows for low-

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cost career exploration in the convenience of students' local community. It gives the students more time to discern what careers they may or may not like. As a parent of three, I am encouraging all of my children to get their start at a community college.

So, how do we change the stigma, though? The answer starts with you. You have to help me and all the other advocates for the community college to spread the word about the good works we do in the community college system. Word of mouth is the best validation for what we have to offer, and we need to share with our friends, family, and neighbors that the community college is the best-kept secret throughout our state. I encourage you to freely share the good work that you and your institutions are doing and tell the story of why the community college should matter to those around you. Or, we can wait 25 more years...

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Why I Champion Professional Learning, and Why You Should Too!

Dr. Grant Jolliff



In the 2018 Dallas Herring Lecture, Achieving the Dream President Dr. Karen Stout exhorted North Carolina community college leaders to “empower faculty to lead changes in pedagogy, rethink and align course and program student learning outcomes, build coherent and clear course and program sequences, and engage in advising in new ways.” Stout went on to say that “Teaching must be made more dynamic, relevant, culturally responsive, and engage and cultivate students’ ownership of what they learn.” Dr. Stout’s lecture catalyzed the North Carolina Piedmont Teacher and Learning Hubs, which provides all 58 community colleges with professional learning opportunities. Still true today as in 2018, Stout’s words inspire a focus on professional learning among North Carolina community colleges. I encourage all of us to reflect on the ways professional learning impacted our own journeys, and look for ways to strengthen this connection in the future.

My own journey as full-time faculty member at a community college began in the Fall of 2019, approximately a year after Stout’s address and when the North Carolina Teaching and Learning Hubs existed only in a nascent stage. After a standard Fall 2019 semester followed a virus, shutdowns, lockdowns, online learning, and the response to the murder of George Floyd. We lived through a sea change in the way we looked at the world, and our classes were a microcosm of these shifting perspectives. Our classrooms – mostly online or hybrid – felt like ground zero for new ways of reaching our students. Technologies once viewed as supplementary became foundational to our

work. We focused on kindness and compassion while also remaining true to academic standards and rigor. “Culture of care” no longer a buzzword, we all relied on each other – our students relied on us to practice care just as we relied on grace from others.

We all lived through this pandemic we’d love to forget but are too often reminded of, and I mention it now not to be trite. But, in forgetting about the struggles of Covid-19, we run the risk of forgetting what that sea change brought to us in its surf, how we adapted to meet the needs of students, and how these changes align with what Stout exhorted us to in 2018 and with what we must always seek – a “more dynamic, relevant, culturally responsive” and engaging teaching practice. Indeed, these techniques and their champions were located in different places along the horizon, but the pandemic brought with it a unique exigence.

For me, the sea change brought a new way of thinking about sharing pedagogy and practice through a community of professional learning. By listening to colleagues and taking advantage of the professional learning opportunities, my awareness of the connection between instructional design and student success grew. I saw the power of clear yet kind words in a syllabus – students didn’t want policy talk any more than an adult wants to read an auto policy. Student well-being wasn’t just something discussed in a counseling center or health center, because well-being was everyone’s concern. However, these weren’t my ideas, nor did they develop spontaneously in a classroom. The very best

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ideas that resurfaced in the sturm und drang of 2019-2022 years were ideas tested, validated, and disseminated in research long before pandemic. Timely, in-depth, research-based, and practice-oriented professional learning informed my practice most during the pandemic.

The professional learning opportunities continue, and I call on faculty to take full advantage. As faculty, our learning must continue. Educators, more than any other professionals, exemplify lifelong learning and continuous improvement in our subject matters and our pedagogy. More importantly, perhaps, our students and their needs are in constant flux. Our students need us to be examples of professionalism and our teaching practices to respond to their needs – personal, professional, and academic. I call on all community college faculty and their leadership to think about ways they can contribute to the community of professional learning in North Carolina. One way to contribute is to attend professional learning events offered by your college, or the North Carolina Student Success Center, or the North Carolina Teaching and Learning Hubs. Another way to contribute is to communicate about professional learning opportunities you'd like to see offered to your colleagues, your college's Center for Teaching and Learning staff, or North Carolina Teaching and Learning Hub representatives. Lastly, talk about the wonderful work you are doing in your classroom –

share with your fellow faculty, share with your campus leaders, or share with your North Carolina Teaching and Learning Hub representative. Your teaching innovation might be the seed for a presentation! The “homegrown” presentations – those by North Carolina faculty – are often the best received amongst faculty. I look forward to many great conversations with you and your colleagues about professional learning opportunities.

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The Potential for Discord in the Higher Education Classroom

Olivia C. Buzzacco



DISCORD

It's easy to say the 2020 pandemic changed the realm of higher education with a surge in virtual classes, with platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WebEx coming in hot to convert face-to-face courses into a synchronous environment. I was only halfway through my second year of full-time teaching when colleges and universities drastically switched to finish out Spring 2020 as best as possible with the little time and resources they had. Fall 2020 was the same. So was Spring 2021.

By Fall 2021, we started to seep back into the classroom, but classes were only half filled with the other half attending via Zoom. Spring 2022 worked similarly—it was clear that synchronous learning was here to stay, and while I was less than thrilled, I did what I do best: think outside of the box. How can I make this work best for me and my students?

I stuck to Zoom in the Spring and Fall of 2020 but started to switch gears before the Spring of 2021. By this time, I was an active streamer on Twitch—a popular live streaming service that started in 2011, allowing users to create their own space and stream games, entertainment, and more. My partner was on and off streaming on this site for years, and in the boredom of social distancing, I decided to give it a try. While I had a blast meeting new people, playing new games, and making friends, I did not expect streaming to affect the future of my teaching.

An integral part of the streaming world is the additional use of Discord (2024), defined as "...a voice, video, and text communication service used by over a hundred million people to hang out and

talk with their friends and communities." Ayob et al. (2022) put it this way: "In Discord, users can create a server and inside the server, several channels can be created and classified. The concept of server and channel in Discord is like the concept of house and room. In a house we can have several rooms and inside a room people can sit together having conversation and only people inside the room can listen to each other."

Discord originated in 2015 and worked to serve the gaming community by giving gamers a place to talk outside of a Twitch stream. As 2020 progressed in unexpected ways, studies and research began to emerge about the potential this service had in higher education. Could this be a way to hold synchronous classes? I decided to give it a go myself and see what others had to say.

For the Spring 2021 semester, I got the okay to hold my would-have-been Zoom courses on Discord. I taught a total of seven courses; four were asynchronous and three were synchronous using Discord instead of Zoom: a British Literature II course and two sections of English Composition II. Here are some takeaways from my experience aligned with current research.

Ease of use

Many of my students already knew Discord before the class began, so their integration into my created servers was quick and easy. Several articles can agree with this statement (Ayob et al., 2022; Odinokaya et al., 2021; Thornton, 2021). Students found this platform comfortable to use in their classes, as noted by Arifianto and Izzudin (2021), "They tend to feel happy because the relaxed at-

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mosphere while playing games or chatting with their friends is carried away in their learning activities.” Discord can be used easily on a laptop, tablet, or phone, and the bandwidth requirements are low, which is another positive compared to applications such as Zoom (Arifianto and Izzudin, 2021; Lauricella et al., 2024; Vladoui and Constantinescu, 2020).

Communication

Several studies noted the improvements in student-to-instructor communication through Discord, noting how the platform fostered community and engagement (Craig and Kay, 2023; Jannah and Hentasmaka, 2021; Lauricella et al., 2024). One noteworthy comment came from Oliver Bills at the University of Southampton, who reported in the term he used Discord with this classes, he received a total of 4 emails from students to his work email, compared to the 518 student emails from the previous term where he did not use Discord (2021). In my own experience, I sensed students were more likely to contact me via Discord than via email. When it comes to communication, Discord has a feature similar to Announcements on LMS platforms, where you can use the command @everyone and all members of the server will be notified (Ayob et al., 2022). In Odinokaya et al.’s (2021) study, their student Discord users had “...4650 text messages, 6823 emojis, 981 links, 432 videos, 856 pictures.”

The multiple forms of communication on Discord hold strong potential as a higher education tool, as students can talk through text, voice, and video. While other platforms have similar features, Fonesca Cacho (2020) noted the difference by stating “While...Canvas and other discussion boards already allow public student interaction, the technology of message boards and threads is outdated and a very slow way to exchange information. Discord is essentially a public instant messaging system that allows a live discussion and exchange to happen with multiple messages exchanged per minute between potentially a large number of individuals.”

Active Learning and Gamification

Many instructors are looking for ways to engage students in active learning, and Discord could be a gateway to this achievement through the idea of “gamification.” Di Marco (2021) noted, “The idea is to bring a playful dimension to certain learning activities in order to engage students in active learning.” Arifianto and Izzudin (2021) also noted Discord’s potential with gamification as a way to keep

students engaged and motivated in the class. When brainstorming the possibility of using Discord to teach my synchronous classes, gamification was something that interested me, as I constantly look for ways to keep students interested in a required course, such as Composition or Literature.

Noted Drawbacks and Solutions

While students familiar with Discord experienced easy navigation, those who were new to the platform had their share of struggles. This is supported by various articles that also noted newcomers to the platform experienced some confusion and complications as they familiarized themselves (Arifianto and Izzudin, 2021; Lauricella et al., 2024). My solution was to provide students with a “getting started” user guide to provide as much of a smooth transition as possible. As with most programs, they take time to get used to. Thornton (2021) backs this up by noting his experience with Discord: “...as a new user of Discord, I found the user experience overwhelming. However, after spending more time on it and reading the server guides it started to make more sense.” Just as students learn an LMS when starting classes, Discord will take time to get used to.

Like many programs, there were times when students had internet connectivity issues, which could cause them to drop out of the middle of the class session (Wulanjani, 2018). I noted instances where students would reach out to me about their poor connection, which could be due to the weather, or general location in a rural area. Jannah and Hentasmaka (2021) also noted similar problems. These same issues are common when using applications such as Zoom, Teams, etc.

While I piloted the use of Discord in my Spring 2021 classes, I was met with a challenge that did not arise in the studies read: usage restriction. Several of my students were dual-enrolled at their high school, where most of their work is done on a school-issued laptop which barred several websites and applications. This problem was solved by talking with the local schools and informing them of this pilot program, in which Discord was permitted on the students’ laptops.

Supplement or Total Replacement for LMS?

While my pilot of Discord was as a supplemental material for the course (students were making regular use of Moodle LMS for submitting assignments, accessing resources, etc.), Vladoui and Constantinescu (2020) made a case for Discord to po-

tentially replace LMS, as their study had success with incorporating attendance-taking abilities, checking grades, homework assignments, etc. Lauricella et al. (2024) explored Discord in a fashion like my own, as a supplement to the course instead of a replacement for LMS. I believe testing Discord as an LMS replacement requires further studies and pilots.

This being said, Discord has taken note of the educational use of the site and has since made updates to the platform with their onboarding of “Discord for College” and “Student Hubs”. “Student Hubs” is a way for students to use their school-issued email to instantly connect with others from their college, which can lead to community, connection, and potential study groups. “Discord for College”, on the other hand, is more geared towards college organizations and clubs to have a meeting spot, instead of something like a Facebook group. During Spring 2021, I was a co-advisor for our college’s Writer’s Club, where the members pushed for creating a Discord server to host their meetings though, which was met approval.

In closing, Discord has vast potential to change the game of higher education. In a study written by current students, Dayana et al. (2020) made a clear call for schools to make use of Discord after the success noted in their ideas: “Thanks to this experience, we were able to find a platform that would suit our communication needs and with a friendly interface.”

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Lighting a “SPARC” and Fanning the Flames of Change at Gaston College

Melissa M. Armstrong, Susan B. Whittemore, Ashley M. Hagler, Patricia Williams, Jodi V. Zieverink, Marguerite Bishop and Heather M. Woodson



Abstract

In 2009, Gaston College launched the SPARC (Student Persistence and Retention through Curriculum, Cohorts, and Centralization) initiative to improve student engagement and enhance transfer student success. The initiative sought to revamp curricula by integrating inquiry-based instruction and introducing a research methods course, centralize STEM student support services, and provide scholarships to cohort students with unmet financial needs. To implement these services and offer scholarships to low-income, academically talented U.S. citizens or permanent residents, the College secured three National Science Foundation (NSF) S-STEM grants. The SPARC model has yielded promising results, with participating students experiencing increased fall-to-fall retention rates and three-year graduation rates.

Keywords: curriculum redesign, STEM student persistence, retention and graduation rates, undergraduate research, S-STEM scholarships

Lighting a “SPARC” and Fanning the Flames of Change at Gaston College

Beginning in 2009, the Arts and Sciences Division at Gaston College embarked on a major reform of the Associate of Science program with a focus on improving student engagement and enhancing transfer student success. This divisional improvement project spanned multiple years and was informed by a variety of sources, including national research, internal assessment data, and the documented needs of professional fields. Additionally, suggestions from

program advisory committees, industry partners, transfer institutions, and faculty and staff were considered. As part of these efforts, Gaston College's 2012 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) data was also examined.

CCSSE data from Gaston College's 2012 administration of this survey indicated that 69% of associate degree-seeking students at the College desired to transfer to a four-year college or university. State performance measures indicated that students who transferred from the College to a four-year institution were successful; however, retaining students until the point of transfer became a focused concern. Internal data from Fall 2011 to Fall 2012 showed that the retention rate of Associate of Science (A.S.) students was 45%, and the three-year graduation rate for students beginning in the fall of 2009 and graduating by Summer 2012 was only 12%. The CCSSE data also indicated that nearly 8 out of 10 students attending classes worked for pay, with over 53% of those working more than 21 hours per week. These data indicate that financial support could reduce the need for full-time work giving students additional time to focus on academic endeavors.

A review of primary literature revealed Gaston College Associate of Science students would likely benefit from centralized support services such as advising and mentoring. Advising has been shown to be vital for student persistence (Seidman, 1991) as well as for the transition from community colleges to four-year institutions (Allen, Smith, & Muehleck, 2013). Advising can assist first-year college students who are most likely to have difficulty navigating the

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higher education environment (Gilroy, 2003) and who are shown to need additional support services to achieve success (Roach, 2009). Mentoring has also been shown to produce positive student outcomes such as increases in GPA (Crisp et al., 2017) and persistence in education (Clutterbuck et al., 2017). Additionally, students who engage in a mentoring relationship are more likely to develop professional skills and confidence, possess more self-efficacy, and experience increased psychological adjustment and higher satisfaction during their educational experience (Johnson, 2016).

To improve course success rates (grades of C or higher) in foundational Associate of Science courses such as biology, chemistry, and mathematics, program faculty proposed to redesign curricula with a focus on inquiry-based active learning strategies and undergraduate student research. According to Nunaki et al. (2020), inquiry-based curricula increase student performance by fostering science process skills. Inquiry-based curricula also increase exposure to primary literature (Elgren and Hensel, 2006). Early involvement in independent research has been shown to be important for performance level and persistence in the sciences, particularly for minority students (Jones, Barlow, and Villarejo, 2010; Lapatto, 2004; Nagda et al., 1998).

College leadership and program faculty worked to develop a comprehensive plan to bring these elements of financial support, social support, and curricular improvements together. This plan, known as SPARC (Student Persistence and Retention through Curriculum, Cohorts, and Centralization), was formally launched in 2010. The goal of the SPARC initiative was to (1) transform curricula through the integration of inquiry-based instruction and development of a research methods course with an undergraduate research component as a capstone experience; (2) centralize STEM student support services that included advising, mentoring, cooperative work experiences and undergraduate research experiences; and (3) reduce the unmet need of cohort students by providing scholarships. The target of these interventions was to increase the fall-to-fall retention rate and the three-year graduation rate of participating students.

To implement the SPARC model, the College has used institutional funds and sought and ultimately received three National Science Foundation (NSF) S-STEM grants to help fulfill these goals. Specifically, these grants have allowed the College to implement

services for students and to offer scholarships to students of up to \$10,000 annually based on unmet financial need. All scholarships followed the NSF guidelines requiring students to be low-income, academically talented, U.S. Citizens, or permanent residents. A private donor provided additional scholarship support for talented students who did not meet the financial need or citizenship requirements. Funds from the private donor have allowed the program to serve a greater number of highly qualified students, particularly undocumented Latino/Latina students, who are ineligible for federal student aid. Participating students, known as SPARC Scholars, are enrolled in the College's Associate in Science (A.S.) or Associate in Engineering (A.E.) programs.

Methods

To address curriculum transformation, the College initially partnered with Finger Lakes Community College as part of the Community College Undergraduate Research Initiative (CCURI) funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF TUES Type III grant, NSF ID 1118679). As a CCURI partner, Gaston College focused on the creation of curriculum strategies and materials for a capstone research course, as well as curricular improvements to foundational biology, chemistry, and mathematics courses in the Associate of Science program (General Biology I and II, Genetics, Microbiology, General Chemistry I and II, Organic Chemistry I and II, and Statistics).

The partnership with CCURI offered professional development opportunities for science faculty to either gain additional laboratory experience or begin implementation of inquiry-based instructional methods in their classrooms as a pathway toward course-based or independent undergraduate research. Faculty shared what they learned from these professional development activities at the annual SPARC Professional Development Day, started in 2013, which annually drew up to 120 educators from secondary schools, community colleges, and universities across North Carolina. As professional development allowed faculty expertise and confidence in new instructional methods to increase, faculty implemented numerous research opportunities for students.

Research projects that were implemented in science courses at Gaston ranged from water quality testing of student's home water supply and surface water testing, nitrification testing of wastewater effluent, participation in the Tiny Earth project (for-

merly Small World)—where students look for antibiotic producers in soil in Microbiology, bone density testing, a national maleate dehydrogenase (MDH) project, and student-designed independent research projects in General Biology II and Genetics. Before the pandemic, many students chose to work concurrently on independent research projects of their own design with a faculty mentor such as work with jellyfish, freshwater sponges, and microbes. Since the conclusion of the CCURI project, SPARC faculty have continued to work on curricular improvements and more widespread adoption of undergraduate research in the sciences, engineering, and psychology. While the COVID-19 pandemic did have a temporary impact on the completion of undergraduate research experiences as the College turned to online instruction only, SPARC scholars, as well as other students enrolled in the A.S. and A.E. programs, have resumed research projects. Research projects and equipment for research have been funded by institutional funds, several smaller grants and a National Institutes of Health Bridges to Baccalaureate (NIH B2B) grant (1R25GM128571-01) in partnership with the University of North Carolina-Charlotte (UNCC). This grant provides funds for equipment and supplies for research and pays a stipend as well as travel to professional conferences for students who participate in research both at Gaston College and after transfer to UNCC.

Twice annually, the College hosts the Research and Creativity Symposium where students present their research projects. This event was developed as a part of the SPARC program. Many scholars participated in local, state, and national poster presentations where they were able to share their research results on a professional level, which helped them gain experience communicating with a broader audience. These conferences included the State of North Carolina Undergraduate Research and Creativity Symposium (SNCURCS), the National Conference for Undergraduate Research (NCUR), and National Science Foundation-hosted events. All student expenses for these conferences were paid by grant funds or sponsoring agencies.

Centralization of Services

Gaston College coordinated the centralization of services to STEM students, including the appointment of a director of undergraduate research, targeted advising, mentoring, and the hiring of professional tutors for math and science. SPARC students see an advisor each semester to create and monitor an

academic plan and prepare for transfer to a four-year program after graduation from Gaston College. Students meet with their selected mentor a minimum of three times per semester, however, many meet more often. Mentors also work with students on undergraduate research or other engagement activities such as volunteer work. The SPARC director monitors student grades each week and refers students for professional tutoring services when their current course average falls below 75%. As the SPARC project progressed, feedback from scholars after transfer to a four-year institution indicated a need for continuing mentoring after transfer due to a phenomenon long known as transfer shock (Hills, 1965, Santos Laanan, 2003 and 2007). Thus, in 2018, post-graduation mentoring was incorporated into the project to help students manage transfer shock and the accompanying decline in academic performance.

Professional tutors in math and science were added to help facilitate course comprehension skills, however, since the pandemic finding such tutors has been difficult. As a result, Gaston has hired former SPARC scholars who had recently graduated from a four-year STEM program as program assistants. These assistants have been able to both serve as near-peer mentors and tutors while they are preparing to enter graduate school in the STEM fields. This practice has been in place since 2021.

As students enter their third semester in the program, a meeting with a program advisor focused on graduation and transfer is required. This meeting ensures students are on track for graduation and are being prepared for the next step in their academic career. This advisor has also worked with students on applications to four-year institutions as well as applications for transfer scholarships.

In addition to undergraduate research experiences, students were offered many different STEM educational and career experiences to help build their STEM identity. Students participated in community STEM presentations such as a National Geographic lecture series presented by the Discovery Place Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina. Students also attended Charlotte Area Science Network lectures. During the pandemic, students were encouraged to participate in virtual ‘science cafes’ and lectures presented by Discovery Place and the N.C. Natural History Museum. Students also served as volunteers at the college’s annual sciVisit event until it was put on hold during the pandemic. This event, which drew over 1000 high school students and their teachers to

campus each year will be returning in April of 2024. Students have also served as judges and volunteers at local and regional science fairs.

An important 'lesson learned' from the pandemic was that students particularly liked having local daytime on-campus options for their STEM-identity building activities. As a result, we now provide several on-campus STEM-specific opportunities beyond undergraduate research. On-campus panels of different types of engineers have been offered twice. These engineers spoke about their careers and what it took to become an engineer. Several of the engineers were former SPARC scholars who shared their experiences moving from college into a working STEM profession. A similar panel was held for students interested in life sciences and another is being planned for spring semester 2024.

SPARC leaders organize travel opportunities for scholars including four-year college visits and other events. Before the pandemic scholars had the opportunity to tour several N.C. universities including overnight trips to Appalachian State University (ASU)/Western Carolina University (WCU), and N.C. State University/ UNC-Chapel Hill. During the pandemic, we held virtual transfer sessions with former scholars who had transferred to these universities. Since resuming seated instruction in 2021, in-person visits to universities have resumed.

As an example of STEM identity-building-related travel, a highlight of the 2022-23 academic year was a trip to Florida to the Kennedy Space Center, Blue Spring State Park (to observe manatee behavior in a natural environment), and Sea World's rescue facilities. As with research presentations, all student expenses for these trips were paid by grant funds. Students also had the opportunity to attend SNCURCS in Wilmington, NC (with a tour of UNC Wilmington) and the NCUR conference in Wisconsin, even if they were not presenting at the conferences. A trip to the Florida Keys is being planned for April 2024. This trip will focus heavily on marine ecology and coastal management, but will also provide an opportunity for students to learn about the engineering of the bridges and roads that link the Keys, particularly the Seven Mile Bridge.

SPARC Learning Community and Scholarships

The third element of SPARC is a scholarship-based learning community that has supported a new cohort of 15-30 scholarship students each year since 2014. These scholarships have been funded by the three NSF S-STEM grant awards and were open

initially to students enrolled full-time in the A.S. program with priority given to members of under-represented populations. The A.S. curriculum is a 60-hour program of study including 30 hours of general education courses and 30 hours of math, science, and computer science courses. Since 2018, the SPARC program has also offered scholarships to students enrolled in the 60-hour Associate in Engineering (A.E.) program. The A.E. degree is similar in composition to the A.S. curriculum, with a greater focus on engineering and upper-level mathematics courses. Students have traditionally been enrolled in cohort classes together during the first 30 hours of the program.

Student responses to surveys showed that the cohort structure was one of the greatest strengths of the program. Students reported that the cohort structure provided them with a core peer group that held similar interests, helped them hold each other accountable, and encouraged them to participate more fully in group activities. However, the cohort structure became impossible once the onset of the pandemic as almost all academic work suddenly moved exclusively to online formats.

Student demographic changes post-pandemic have also had an impact on our SPARC scholarship program. The College enrollment is shifting to a majority of part-time students. We have also discovered that many of our full-time students work more than 30 hours per week. As such, the learning community experience post-pandemic has changed dramatically. Based on changing student needs, the required 30-hour on-campus curriculum cohort is no longer a possibility. Scholars need greater freedom to choose online courses rather than seated courses based on changes in family household structures and work requirements. Scholars also had expectations that they would be able to continue choosing online courses post-pandemic.

To provide more flexibility for students, we now provide flexibility in course scheduling of non-STEM courses. This includes student choice of on-campus or online sections. Initially, SPARC scholars completed a STEM-focused college transfer success course together as a cohort to help provide information and strategies necessary to develop clear and professional goals beyond the community college experience and to begin building community. However, one casualty of this increased flexibility is the STEM-focused section of the college transfer success course (ACA 122). Most sections of this course

are now taught online, and our students are scattered into many different sections. The topics taught in that course have been integrated as much as possible into the SPARC informational and team-building meetings. We still strongly encourage students to take as many seated STEM courses as possible, and many scholars have been required to take seated courses in their second year. Currently, physics and upper-level math courses as well as organic chemistry are only offered on campus. Those scholars returning to seated courses have tended to take the courses together, so natural cohorts are now reforming. Similar natural cohorts are also forming between students who regularly attend weekly information and team-building meetings.

SPARC Recruitment and Student Orientation

Many avenues have been used to recruit underrepresented populations, such as women and learners of color, into the SPARC program. Personalized letters were mailed to all graduating seniors from surrounding counties. News articles and advertisements appeared in local print, radio, and social media. A “SPARC of Genius” award was given annually at a regional science and engineering fair, recognizing first-year individual student projects that showed ingenuity and creativity. Regular presentations were made to local county school officials and career fairs to bring awareness to administrators, faculty, and students about the scholar’s program.

Additionally, program banners were strategically placed around campus to help make all students on campus aware of the program. SPARC program administrators also worked with academic advisors to recruit potential scholars. Referrals also came from the college’s TRiO program and the financial aid office. Once students were recruited, orientation activities were provided to share program expectations; enjoy team-building exercises; introduce students to mentors and advisors; and explore possible undergraduate research opportunities, volunteer outreach opportunities, and opportunities to participate in various STEM clubs across campus. This is done before the start of the fall semester as well as ongoing activities throughout the beginning of the semester.

Expansion of the SPARC Model

In 2017, Gaston College worked to expand the SPARC model to two additional colleges in North Carolina, the University of North Carolina-Charlotte (UNCC) and Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC). The expansion project, and accompanying

NSF grant funds, provides scholarships of up to \$10,000/year for students pursuing A.S. degrees at Gaston College or RCCC and transferring to complete bachelor’s degrees in biology at UNCC. Students are awarded support for up to two years at Gaston College and then an additional two years of support at UNCC. The partner institutions are committed to working together to increase associate and bachelor’s degree completion and reduce transfer shock. Program leaders have also worked with faculty and administration at other colleges in North Carolina and across the United States to share the SPARC model and assist with the implementation of similar projects.

Results

The SPARC program has served 191 scholars since 2014 with 44 still currently enrolled at Gaston for the 23-24 academic year with 30 expected to graduate in the spring of 2024. The average NSF award for scholars ranged from about \$4000 in the Fall 2014 Cohort (award limit \$6000) to \$8600 in the Fall 2023 Cohort (award limit \$10,000). Excluding currently enrolled students, the program has shown an overall 87% fall-to-fall retention rate and 85% of the scholars have completed an associate’s degree within two years of their program start. The average GPA of our scholars is 3.5. Our scholars have transferred to four-year colleges at a rate of 70%. As a comparison, data released in 2022 by the National Student Clearinghouse found that the fall-to-fall retention rate at community colleges is 59% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022). Additionally, the National Center for Educational Statistics reports that the 2018 cohort of community college students nationwide showed a 36.4% graduation rate within three years of entering college (National Center for Education Statistics, nd). Before the pandemic, we saw over 80% of our scholars transfer to four-year institutions. Several of our scholars have been recognized with national and regional scholarships. Two SPARC scholars were awarded Jack Kent Cooke transfer scholarships, and one scholar was awarded the highly prestigious Goldwater Award for research. We’ve had two scholars awarded Goodnight Scholarships at N.C. State University. As of June 2023, 47 scholars have completed bachelor’s degrees in a STEM field. Seven others have completed bachelor’s degrees in non-STEM fields such as accounting, nursing, and business administration. Six scholars are currently en-

rolled in graduate school or have completed a graduate degree.

Conclusion and Lessons Learned

The SPARC project successfully met and exceeded all stated goals during the first grant period, which ended in 2019. The two additional SPARC grants are in no-cost extension years from the NSF and will end within the next 18 months. These grants have also met or exceeded all goals to date. The project team has disseminated results widely through numerous conference presentations and one publication (Ariyo, Hagler, Armstrong, & Miller Woodson, 2018). In 2016, the College and the SPARC project gained national attention when awarded the annual Community College Futures Assembly's Bellwether Award for innovative instructional programs and services. The project was one of ten finalists in the 2018 Bellwether Legacy Award competition and has again been selected as a finalist for the 2024 Legacy Award.

A number of the interventions piloted by the SPARC program have been institutionalized at Gaston College such as the expansion of the intrusive advising model, success coaching for all students, and ongoing revision to the honors program. In addition to replication at RCCC and UNCC, the project team has consulted with community college and university faculty from across the nation to discuss how the program can be replicated at their institutions.

Although our timeline illustrates the unique journey of Gaston College, some basic elements are universal and can be adapted to meet the unique needs of other communities. To implement the SPARC model at other institutions, Gaston College recommends following the steps below:

1. Define the Need (Your College's Need and Your Community's Need)

- Read the literature
- Gather information from advisory committees
- Examine job projections

2. Get the Right People Involved and in the Right Position

- Hire enthusiastic, knowledgeable people
- Promote from within
- Consider diverse perspectives
- Professional development may be required

3. Establish Your Plan (Short Term and Long Term)

- Brainstorm ideas
- Define your mission
- Be flexible
- Be willing to push the envelope
- Set short-term goals
- Set long-term goals

4. Seek Assistance and Form Collaborations

- Gain internal support
- Look for partners on and off campus
- Look for opportunities for funding
- Look for low-cost opportunities

5. Assess Progress and Learn from the Feedback

- Qualitative measures – faculty and student surveys, focus groups
- Quantitative measures – grades, persistence, graduation rates
- External assessment – accreditation, performance measures

As noted on numerous annual internal and external reviews, the SPARC project continues to meet high benchmarks set for student retention and graduation rates, as well as transfer and bachelor's degree graduation rates. Former SPARC scholars are contributing members of the STEM community in diverse fields such as education, biology, chemistry, engineering, and human and veterinary medicine, both in the service area of Gaston College and beyond. While the most significant positive impact has been seen in the scholarship recipients, the impacts of SPARC have been felt more broadly at the College. Undergraduate research is now a common practice at the College well beyond scholarship recipients. Additionally, curricular improvements have affected all students who complete these courses, and retention rates in these courses have improved since the implementation of SPARC. The total student population in the Associate of Science and Associate of Engineering programs has also grown significantly from less than 30 students at the onset of SPARC to over 700 students currently. While the project initially began with three goals—to improve curriculum, centralize services, and provide scholarships—SPARC has since grown and evolved. This transformation has been driven by changing conditions, feedback from students revealing new needs, and the lessons learned along the way. These chang-

es have allowed the project to continue to thrive despite the changing educational landscape.

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Students First, What about Millennials?

Laquanna T. Sledge



In the last five to seven years, the term "millennial" carries a dual nature, akin to a double-edged sword. On one side, this specific generation, including myself, has collectively reshaped and redefined society as we know it. Through their continuous advancements, innovation, and unprecedented creativity, they have presented the world with a new paradigm. However, on the other side of this divide, millennials frequently face criticism, characterized as entitled, lazy, and inattentive. Nevertheless, the millennial generation has undeniably attracted considerable attention due to its distinctive characteristics when compared to preceding generations (Phillips et al., 2014, 519). What is a millennial? Or Who could be defined as such? Millennials, typically born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s to early 2000s, depending on interpretation, are a demographic group known for their digital fluency, inclusive values, and emphasis on achieving a balanced lifestyle. Raised amidst rapid technological progress and significant societal shifts, they embody a generation marked by transformative experiences.

As a higher education professional and an even more ardent student advocate, I possess a variety of perspectives when discussing millennials. I contend that throughout history, every generation has seen both praise and critique from their predecessors, encompassing the positive, negative, and indifferent aspects of each evolving generation. When working with students, it is essential not to make sweeping presumptions about them, as this can impede the potential for nurturing meaningful relationships. In my line of work, fostering such connections lies at the core of our mission when interacting with stu-

dents in our institutions. Among the positive attributes I have observed millennials bring to organizations are boundless energy, unfiltered honesty, and, most notably, a penchant for asking insightful questions.

Millennials infuse workplaces with an unparalleled surge of energy that can genuinely inspire anyone on their team to believe that they have the power to effect positive change in the world, even through small efforts. I can consistently rely on my students to provide straightforward and candid feedback about their experiences, whether it relates to a particular class, instructor, or the quality of the cafeteria food. They do not shield their opinions behind titles or roles; they are forthright and sincere in their expressions. The most significant contribution I believe millennials can make to an organization, however, lies in their curiosity.

They boldly inquire about matters that others might shy away from during staff or departmental meetings, as they seek to uncover the fundamental issues at hand. This inherent inquisitiveness distinguishes them (and us) from our parents and grandparents. This inherent curiosity sets millennials, as well as us, apart from our parents and grandparents. Unlike previous generations, millennials tend to exhibit an ardent desire to explore, question, and seek out current information and experiences. This curiosity is reflected in their approach to technology, culture, and social issues, driving them to constantly adapt and innovate in a rapidly changing world. It is a distinguishing trait that shapes their outlook and behavior, influencing everything from career choices to personal relationships.

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For millennials, a crucial aspect of their approach to work involves efficiency — how to accomplish tasks in the most streamlined manner possible. A clear understanding of their role within the broader vital context is equally critical. As an employee, I expect trust from my employers, coupled with the latitude to make mistakes and learn from the vital context. As an employee, I expect trust from my employers, coupled with the latitude to make mistakes and learn from them. Most importantly, I value the absence of unwarranted assumptions. This desire for trust and autonomy arises from the frequent labeling of millennials as entitled, lazy, and inattentive. In my role, I see it as my responsibility to help my students discover their purpose in their pursuits, guiding them in identifying their motivations and crafting their personal narratives to shape their career aspirations and broader educational goals. My objective is to ensure that they are the focal point of their own journey, which may indeed be facilitated by the perception that they are entitled.

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The Stigma of Tutoring

Dr. Brandy R. Daingerfield



Abstract

The following is an opinion piece on the perpetuation of negative associations with tutoring in the educational environment. The author challenges all educators to seek opportunities of exploration to avoid inadvertently perpetuating a negative stigma of tutoring. The author suggests creating an open dialogue between faculty and staff to improve connections and participation rates in tutorial services.

Keywords: tutoring, stigma, holistic learning, faculty and staff cooperation, developmental learning, remediation

The Stigma of Tutoring

In the United States today, tutorial services are often stigmatized as a simple intervention strategy that provides remediation to prevent academic failure (Dadgar, Nodine, Reeves-Bracco, & Venezia, 2014; Daingerfield, 2020; Gordon & Gordon, 1991; Ticknor, Shaw, & Howard, 2014). While trying to improve outreach and increase participation, many educational institutions may inadvertently perpetuate the negative perception of their tutoring services in names and marketing, which could unintentionally brand such services as remedial in nature (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014). This further propagates the growing stigma attached to the tutorial profession and other academic assistance programs (Daingerfield, 2020).

At its core, a tutor's responsibility is to promote and encourage academic self-confidence, but how can that be done if the culture of the school perpetuates this sense of tutoring as an afterthought for students? When educators only promote tutoring for

the student when they deem it appropriate, that educator is essentially saying that they know more than the student does about the student's own academic efficacy and independence. Additionally, when a faculty member encourages the student to discard suggestions for improvement by the tutor, they unknowingly label tutors as less effective than the instructor, when research suggests that tutors build bridges between classroom instruction and practical application of learning objectives (Daingerfield, 2020; Herrmann, 2014; Linden, Teakel, Van der Ploeg, 2022; Marx, Wolf, & Howard, 2016; National Tutoring Association, 2016; O'Brien, Freund, Jantzi, & Sinanan, 2014; Oswald, 2016; Vick, Robles-Piña, Martirosyanm, & Kite, 2015). "The pedagogical value of tutoring is now well established, and technology has evolved, allowing the ancient practice of one-on-one tuition to become more widely available" (Linden et al., 2022, p. 42). It is imperative that the culture of schools and tutorial programs implement unique perspectives into planning and marketing. Every student that walks through the door brings their own individual circumstances, situations, and solutions into the lives of the staff and faculty with whom they interact. Educational professionals have experience that can assist students with whom they work, but the students also have something to offer that can enhance the educational professionals' learning experiences.

Colleges and tutoring programs need to take full advantage of the circumstances that put students in their path. If a student has taken the initiative to request tutorial support, all educators should do everything in their power to honor that initiative and en-

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courage the student. This may mean completing a referral for the tutorial program, even if the student has not yet stepped foot in the instructor's classroom. It is not the faculty member's responsibility to decide that the student does or does not "need" tutorial support—that sort of thinking further perpetuates a negative stigma of tutoring that maligns services meant to help improve student retention and completion rates.

It should be every educators' goal to help the student become comfortable with being an independent learner; if the educator prevents the student's opportunity to grow by delaying that, then the educator may be the reason a student decides not to come to tutoring, or, even worse, decides to drop out of school altogether. That student gathered the courage to ask for help and to maximize usage of available campus resources; denying that request offhand could destroy any chance that educator had of establishing a positive working relationship with that student. To break down barriers, educational institutions must break down their own. Educators must stop perpetuating negativity and encourage positivity; programs need to reach across the discipline, resource, and even faculty/staff differences to remember that every educator's goal is to help the student reach the student's educational goal. How can that be done without all educational professionals supporting one another and encouraging students to use the resources available on campus?

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Community College Student Issues Solved with HyFlex (Hybrid Flexible Attendance)

Michelle A. Payton



Abstract

The HyFlex course model, an iteration of various course delivery methods developed over time, offers a versatile approach to enhance student learning experiences. By allowing students the option to attend classes in person, remotely, or view recorded lectures, HyFlex (Hybrid Flexible Attendance) courses cater to diverse learning preferences. This study examines the impact of HyFlex on student success and retention rates at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, revealing an average retention rate of up to 85% for first-year English students and up to 95% for second-year students. Additionally, a university offering hybrid courses experienced high student satisfaction and minimal withdrawals, indicating the effectiveness of inclusive attendance options. Student services data identified common withdrawal issues, such as family obligations and work conflicts, which correlated with the benefits of HyFlex observed in qualitative student feedback. Despite its strengths, instructors may encounter challenges with managing communication channels, content coverage, and adapting teaching methodologies. While HyFlex and hybrid teaching offer numerous benefits, it is essential to consider potential weaknesses and conduct further research to inform course design and institutional practices.

Keywords: HyFlex, hybrid flexible attendance, hybrid teaching, inclusive attendance

Community College Student Issues Solved with HyFlex (Hybrid Flexible Attendance)

The HyFlex course offering is not new but rather a

transformation of course delivery methods developed over many years. HyFlex, hybrid courses with inclusive attendance, and flipped classrooms have been developed to enhance student learning experiences, achieving significant successes but also presenting some challenges. Flipped classrooms prioritize active learning with hands-on strategies in face-to-face settings, requiring students to review materials outside of class before attending in person. HyFlex and other hybrid courses with inclusive attendance offer students multiple ways to engage with course content, both in the classroom and remotely, during and after live class meetings. While students may appreciate the flexibility, instructors may face challenges managing multiple communication options in real-time for HyFlex and hybrid courses, concerns about content coverage in flipped courses, a preference for face-to-face instruction, and the need to reconsider their teaching approach and overall course design. While HyFlex, hybrid courses with inclusive attendance, and flipped courses offer strengths, they also have weaknesses.

Following the mandatory pandemic quarantines in 2020, teaching in the United States underwent a rapid transformation. Both students and instructors had to adapt to technology and explore new ways of experiencing courses effectively. This resulted in the emergence of hybrid course designs, such as HyFlex (Hybrid Flexible Attendance), which allow students to attend classes physically in person, remotely during live sessions, or by viewing recorded lectures afterward. This flexibility, known as inclusive attendance, accommodates students' varying life situations from week to week and has become a key factor in

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student success and retention. For example, at the Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech), HyFlex courses led to retention rates of up to 85% for first-year English students and 95% for second-year students, regardless of their attendance choice (Payton, 2023, p. 26; Table 2). Similarly, a university offering hybrid courses with inclusive attendance saw significant success, expanding from 18 courses in 2001-2002 to 131 courses in 2013-2014 due to high student satisfaction and low withdrawal rates (Alexander et al., 2014). The success of HyFlex and hybrid courses with inclusive attendance can be attributed in part to their ability to address students' top challenges. According to Terry Brasier, Vice President of Student Services at A-B Tech (personal communication, May 25, 2023), common reasons for student withdrawals in spring 2023 included family issues, work conflicts, course load issues, and medical concerns (Table 1). Qualitative student feedback over three semesters at A-B Tech further supports this correlation, with many students noting how HyFlex courses helped them overcome these challenges and complete their coursework successfully. By allowing students to choose their attendance format on a weekly basis, HyFlex and hybrid courses with inclusive attendance increase the likelihood of course completion.

HyFlex, Hybrid, and Flipped Classrooms

The HyFlex course offering represents the evolution of learning experiences in flipped, hybrid, and other seated classroom designs. HyFlex, along with other hybrid and flipped courses, aims to facilitate active learning both online and in person. As Bauer and Haynie (2017) explain in their work on fostering deeper disciplinary learning with the flipped classroom, the flipped model enables content coverage to occur outside of class, allowing in-person class time to focus on active learning strategies that promote mastery of disciplinary concepts (pp. 31-32). In a flipped classroom, students typically engage in preparatory reading outside of class, followed by hands-on learning activities during class sessions. Unlike traditional seated classes, no additional technology investments beyond the norm are required for a flipped classroom experience.

Hybrid courses, as described by Alexander et al. (2014), combine synchronous and asynchronous technologies to offer students the flexibility of both in-person and online learning (p. 20). This approach provides multiple avenues for students to engage with course material, including attending class ses-

sions remotely and accessing recorded lectures. In a university study, hybrid courses demonstrated significant success, with high student satisfaction and minimal dropout rates (Alexander et al., 2014, p. 17). However, challenges exist for HyFlex, hybrid, and flipped courses. For instance, while some accommodations, such as teaching assistants, may enhance the hybrid learning experience in university settings, they may not be feasible in community college environments. Additionally, the success of flipped classrooms relies on students completing assigned readings before class, which can pose a challenge if not achieved.

Furthermore, instructors may face resistance to implementing active learning strategies in traditional face-to-face courses, fearing a trade-off between content coverage and student engagement (Bauer & Haynie, 2017, p. 33). Concerns also arise regarding providing lecture notes to students, with some instructors viewing it as potentially detrimental to student attendance and performance (Landrum, 2010, p. 221). However, student preferences for receiving lecture materials differ from instructor perceptions, highlighting the need for a balance between traditional teaching methods and innovative approaches.

While HyFlex and other hybrid models offer opportunities for enhanced learning experiences, they require educators to adapt their teaching practices and course designs. Addressing the challenges associated with these formats is essential for maximizing their effectiveness in meeting the diverse needs of students in today's educational landscape.

Community College Student Withdrawals

While there are strengths and weaknesses associated with offering HyFlex, hybrid with inclusive attendance, or flipped courses, another prominent issue is how to assist students in overcoming certain challenges to improve overall retention rates. To assess withdrawal trends, students who withdraw from classes at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech) are required to select one primary reason for withdrawal from each course every semester. Data from spring 2023, comprising 3,638 courses, was collected by the student services department. According to Terry Brasier, Vice President of Student Services at A-B Tech (personal communication, May 25, 2023), the top five reasons for withdrawal, which accounted for over 62% of cases, were as follows: family issues (17.26%), high school initiated (13.08%), heavy course load (12.12%), work conflicts (10.31%), and

medical issues (9.68%) (see Table 1).

To potentially mitigate family issues, course load concerns, work conflicts, and medical issues, implementing HyFlex or a hybrid with inclusive attendance is one strategy to address these challenges.

Methods

At Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, data and student feedback were collected over several semesters to evaluate the effectiveness of HyFlex courses, a hybrid with inclusive attendance. The same instructor taught nine English courses with the HyFlex format for two semesters in 2022 and one semester in 2023.

English Course Participants

Student feedback was gathered from nine community college English classes: one required course for first-year students and another commonly required for second-year students. Feedback was collected over three semesters: spring 2022 (3 courses), fall 2022 (4 courses), and spring 2023 (2 courses), involving a total of 179 students after the census. These courses spanned 14-16 weeks and were instructed by the same individual at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College. The instructor handled all technology aspects. Students provided feedback on the HyFlex with inclusive attendance during the final four weeks of the course offerings. Additionally, feedback questions were posed at the beginning of one semester prior to students experiencing the full HyFlex with inclusive attendance format.

Equipment

A remote webcam served as the primary tool throughout the semesters. The online web conferencing platform Zoom was utilized for synchronous course delivery. The cost of the remote webcam was moderate, approximately \$135. Specifically, a Logitech webcam model C925e, with an approximate retail cost of \$75, was employed and plugged into the front panel port of the classroom desktop. An additional Snowball microphone device, costing approximately \$60, was also connected to the front panel port to enhance audio quality for recordings. All students, whether seated, remote, or viewing recorded lectures, had access to all overheads presented by the instructor. While seated students could see those attending via Zoom on the overhead screen, Zoom students were unable to see the seated students.

Student Questions

Within the first four weeks of the semester, prior to students fully experiencing the HyFlex with inclusive attendance offerings, students were asked, “Based on what you’ve learned about HyFlex in our first class session, how do you anticipate this model will help accommodate your specific needs (e.g., work, childcare, academic workload, etc.) this term?” This survey was not anonymous. Additionally, in the last approximately four weeks of the semester, students completed an anonymous survey regarding the HyFlex with inclusive attendance processes and policies. One question focused on Zoom and recording offerings, and their contribution to student success: “a. Please share how attending Zoom Live during face-to-face class increased your success. b. Please share how watching the lecture recording after the face-to-face meeting increased your success. c. Did having these options matter to you?” Student feedback on how HyFlex with inclusive attendance addressed their issues was consistent with the most prevalent issues cited in the student services data.

Results

To overcome family issues, course load, work conflicts, and medical issues, HyFlex with inclusive attendance was one way to address these issues according to student qualitative feedback.

Addressed Family Issues

The course offering addressed the need of caring for children; a specific issue many students cited. This included needing to be flexible for their school-aged children, caring for children who get sick, caring for younger siblings, staying at home with children, and accommodating unexpected events.

First four-week impressions feedback

I anticipate that this model of classes will help to accommodate my needs by allowing me to continue working while my children are in school. ...I will not have to take time off of work [in] order to attend classes. ...I will not have to miss any lessons if one of my children gets sick or is out of school.

... Accommodate my needs, with having such a busy schedule and 3 younger brothers, I can see how if I ever missed any course material I can just look it up with just a couple of clicks.

This model might be very useful for me some days when I have to stay at home with my daughter.

The only way I see myself needing to use this resource is if any unexpected things come up with work or family.

I have a pretty heavy work schedule and am struggling to afford gas... On top of this, I often am in charge of watching my younger siblings, as my parents also work a lot...

I think it will accommodate my heavy work schedule, as well as my need to take care of my younger siblings while my parents are at work.

Addressed Course Load Issues

The course offering provided relief to create more balance with school and other life demands. This included taking classes from two community colleges, balancing school and other commitments, managing a heavy course load and homework, and feeling HyFlex with inclusive attendance was a key to passing the course--not retaking and adding to a future course load.

First four-week impressions feedback

...I am taking classes from two community colleges so having a class that I can attend from home will allow me to work on all my classes...

I hope to start attending most of the classes in person, however with work and other school commitments it can help make certain days more manageable to attend class from my apartment... will make class less stressful.

[T]his model will help accommodate my life when have a busy academic workload/busy work s[c]hedule.

On days when I want to be active and move around outside, but I also have a tight class and homework schedule, being able to stay home for my last class of the day gives me more time to walk outside, clean around the house, stretch, and study.

[I]t will help me because I'm taking...full-time classes so the option to do things online is a nice option.

Because I am a full[-]time student, I will attend every class face-to-face. If I fail to show up, I will either attend through zoom or catch up by watching the videos depending on my circumstances. I am grateful that you have made so many accommodations...

End of semester feedback

You helped with one on one, giving feedback, and made sure I was included. I was able to go back and watch what I needed help with and refresh my memory... I would've failed English.

Addressed Work Conflict Issues

The course offering accommodated many work conflict issues; the most commonly cited issue for students. This addressed saving time driving and when having transportation issues, going to work for those who were on call or working nights, companies not always accommodating class schedules, making sure students were able to fulfill work schedules, demanding schedules working 5-6 days per week, being able to go to work immediately after class or attending class from work, and fitting the course in when having two jobs.

First four-week impressions feedback

...It will really help[ed] me by being able to get the most hours out of my job that I can while also being able to be fully participate and not miss any lectures in your class.

Hyflex will help me out a whole lot this term, because I do live about 40 mins away from the school... makes it easier for me to also accommodate working into my schedule.

Hyflex...will be very beneficial to me on some days when I'm 30 [minutes] out of Asheville and still at work and won't be able to attend f2f class.

I usually work nights... so it will help a lot that I have an option of doing it online instead of coming to class every time.

I gave my managers my school schedule and they said they would be able to work me in around my class times, although if there are any mix-ups or confusion, I will be able to synchronously join the class and do it from work, or before!

[T]he HyFlex model will be helpful to me because I work weird and long hours some days and currently my car isn't working well and can't guarantee I will have a ride to in person classes until I buy a new car.

Since I work outside and don't always have time to get to class physically, this system will allow me to [be] present.

I am a manager..., so I work mostly 5-6 days a week. Most of the time there's weeks where I have to manage by myself or during school hours.

My physical presence is required in lots of places outside of school, one of those places being work. I could choose to finish homework and watch recorded zoom online once I get off. Additionally, I don't have a great source or transportation right now.

I have a full-time job... This course format allows me to attend class virtually then go to work immediately after.

I think having the option of being asynchronous will be helpful if I ever get called into work, or if the family I nanny for need [s] me in case of an emergency.

I work full[-]time at one job and part[-]time at another right now to afford my living needs, on top of being a full[-] time college student. It is easy for me to become exhausted, and sometimes being able to sit in my own room to attend class is relieving.

End of semester feedback

I was able to join the class basically no matter what I had to do.... Some days I was called into work early so I didn't have time to come to school... helped me not fall behind.

... a little easier because I could do class from anywhere even while I was at work.

Addressed Medical Issues

The course offering also accommodated medical issues. This addressed having health issues when battling fatigue and being weak, chronic illness, flare-ups accompanied with exhaustion and pain, and managing less serious illnesses.

First four-week impressions feedback

...I have a lot of personal health issues & often find myself feeling extremely weak & tired. ...being able to zoom in on my bad days will be quite helpful.

...I have a chronic illness... I may want to either be on Zoom or perhaps not attend at all...

Sometimes it's more difficult for me to do work on certain days because of a flare-up in my symptoms, such as ex[h]austion or pain, so being able to get more work done when I'm not feeling as sick allows me to stay on track in this class.

End of semester feedback

I was able to know what was going on in class when I was sick or had to go home.

Overall, while addressing family issues, course load, work conflicts, and medical issues can be complex, HyFlex with inclusive attendance is one way to address these top cited issues according to student qualitative feedback.

Conclusion

After the 2020 pandemic quarantines, both students and instructors embraced technology, facilitat-

ing greater participation in various modes of course delivery. This included the option to be physically present in classrooms, attend remotely during class meetings, and access recorded lectures after class sessions. Known as HyFlex (Hybrid Flexible Attendance), this approach has effectively addressed some of the key issues associated with student retention. For instance, at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, retention rates for first-year English students averaged up to 85%, and for second-year students, up to 95% (Payton, 2023, p. 26; Table 2). Similarly, a university hybrid course with inclusive attendance witnessed significant success, expanding from 18 HyFlex hybrid courses in the 2001-2002 academic year to 131 courses in the 2013-2014 academic year, accompanied by high student satisfaction and low withdrawal rates (Alexander et al., 2014). Interestingly, top withdrawal reasons identified at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College included family issues, work conflicts, course load issues, and medical concerns (Table 1), all of which correlated with solutions provided by HyFlex with inclusive attendance, as evidenced by qualitative student feedback.

This correlation was further validated by data from student services and qualitative feedback from nine English courses at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College. Students consistently reported that HyFlex with inclusive attendance effectively addressed their week-to-week challenges, contributing to a high likelihood of course completion. For instance, students cited HyFlex's assistance in managing family responsibilities, balancing heavy course loads, accommodating work schedules, and addressing medical issues. These findings underscored the alignment between student withdrawal issues and the solutions offered by the HyFlex with inclusive attendance format.

While changing course design and protocols offers strengths, it also presents challenges. While flipped courses offer simplicity, they lack full inclusive attendance options. In contrast, the key to student success in HyFlex or hybrid with inclusive attendance courses lies in flexibility, with options for seated, remote, and post-recording viewing attendance without penalty. While the cost is contained for flipped classrooms compared to seated ones, the investment in equipment and staff for hybrid models can be moderate to substantial. Additionally, instructors may face challenges in managing multiple communication options, ensuring content coverage in

flipped courses, and adjusting to new teaching protocols and course designs. Despite the strengths of HyFlex and hybrid courses, it's essential to consider their weaknesses and explore further research to optimize their effectiveness. This analysis did not delve into other best practices for enhancing student success with HyFlex or hybrid with inclusive attendance models, suggesting the need for additional research in this area.

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Table 1

Reasons for Student Course Withdrawals in Spring 2023

Student Reason for Withdrawals	# Withdrawals	% Withdrawals
Family Issue	628	17.26%
High School Initiated	476	13.08%
Course Load Too Heavy	441	12.12%
Work Conflict	375	10.31%
Medical Issue	352	9.68%
Other	208	5.72%
Lack of Motivation	200	5.50%
Changed Program or Goal	179	4.92%
Course Too Difficult	163	4.48%
Course Not What Expected	135	3.71%
Lack of Academic Support	68	1.87%
Housing Issue	64	1.76%
Financial	63	1.73%
Unknown	58	1.59%
Personal/Life issue	54	1.48%
Child Care	48	1.32%
Transferring	37	1.02%
Poor performance	34	0.93%
Transportation	14	0.38%
Deceased	12	0.33%

Table 1 contd.*Reasons for Student Course Withdrawals in spring 2023*

Student Reason for Withdrawals	# Withdrawals	% Withdrawals
Dissatisfied - Instructor	11	0.30%
Misadvised	11	0.30%
Don't need	4	0.11%
Administrative	3	0.08%
Total Responses	3638	100%

Note. Information is based on data collected by Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College Student Services for withdrawals from spring 2023 courses. Students were asked to “Select One Primary Reason for Withdrawal” from one course, according to Terry Braiser, Vice President of student services (personal communication, May 25, 2023).

Table 2*Comparison 2022 and 2023 semesters by first and second year English courses: C or Better and Withdrawals*

Withdrawals and C or Better	Spring 2022 First Year English	Fall 2022 First Year English	Spring 2022 Second Year English	Spring 2023 Second Year English
Withdrawals	10% (4 of 40)	20% (15 of 75)	17% (4 of 23)	20% (8 of 41)
C or Better	75% (27 of 36)	85% (51 of 60)	95% (18 of 19)	94% (31 of 33)

Note. Information includes data collected in Payton, M. A. article (2023) and updated information for second year English students in similarly measured HyFlex studied courses at the Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College.

One College Model

Mary McIntosh, Johnnie Mickel,
Janice Stowell, and Roslyn Bethea



One College Model—A Literature Review

Community colleges are crucial in providing accessible education and workforce development opportunities to diverse student populations. The "One College Model" represents a shift in organizational structure and philosophy, aiming to integrate various departments and programs within community colleges to enhance student success and institutional effectiveness. Key themes emerged from a review of existing literature, which is outlined in this review.

Throughout higher education, the idea of one college model has generated many definitions and perspectives with numerous inconsistencies. In our research, several critical components to implementation appeared throughout the literature: establishing a shared vision and mission, integrating governance structures, facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration, a renewed focus on student support services, and enacting data-informed decision-making processes (Achieving the Dream, 2020; Bladen Community College, 2022; Cintrón, 2021; Fouts & Mallory, 2010; Methvin, 2023). These components will likely seem familiar to anyone with experience working in organizations. These steps (determining common visions, missions, and definitions) are typically part of the early stages of effective change management (Kotter, 2012). While various definitions arose through our literature review and stakeholder interviews, all definitions ultimately point back to the student experience and their success. For this literature review, the one college model is defined as the "strategic alignment of college resources and activities in collaboration with internal and external partners to enhance

student success" (Kelley, 2023).

A simplified readiness assessment tool kit was built for college administrators to use as a springboard to begin discussions of the one college model based on our literature review. The toolkit framework is the Bolman and Deal (2017) Four-Frame model: Structural (strategy, how-to), Human Resource (people and their needs), Political (stakeholder agendas, resource allocation), and Symbolic (sense of purpose and significance). The four frames provide a substantial blueprint to begin the brainstorming and decision-making processes needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the transformative one college model.

Structural Frame

Throughout the review, how different community college systems have restructured their various business functions and student experiences was a primary topic. Most system-level discussions focus on local versus state or system control and those changes' cost/benefit relationship (Cintrón, 2021; Sesanker, 2022; Mulvey, 2019). Individual colleges highlighted in the literature (Bladen, 2022; Ciancio, 2022; HAC-C/CPCC Press Release, 2020; Hahn, 2020; Sherrill, 2021; Spriggs, 2020) note the necessary adjustments to their credit and non-credit academics, business, and fiscal services, as well as student services such as admissions, advising, and career services. Bladen Community College defined the one college model as an "organizational structure that combines curriculum and continuing education programs and supports into an integrated system of operation" (BCC, 2022, p. 5). Dr. Janet Spriggs, President of Forsyth Technical Community College, encouraged her fac-

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ulty and staff to “imagine without boundaries” with a vision of the college’s future success rooted in the alignment of credit and noncredit programs (Spriggs, 2020). Conversely, the current literature does not provide many suggestions for the best reorganization practices.

Human Resource Frame

Similar in scope to the Structural framework above, the Human Resources framework provides the basis for how the employees, students, and communities play into shifts in organizational practices. In the literature, significant emphasis is placed on changing the expectation that outsiders to higher education understand the language and structure of colleges. In a brief discussion with Dr. Jeff Cox, President of the North Carolina Community College System, highlighted that under a one college model, a “student wouldn’t be asked if she were Curriculum or ConEd—like she knows the difference” (Cox, 2023). Dr. Kandi Dedimeyer, President at Central Piedmont Community College, was quoted as saying that at her institution, the same staff will serve students “whether they are seeking a GED, workforce credential, associate degree, or transfer degree” (Hahn, 2020).

Changes in delivery methods, expectations, goals, and structure maintain a significant impact on the faculty and staff responsible for learning new processes. Although organizational charts can easily be adjusted, facilitating change must include the human element. Often, organizational culture, or “silos” as they’re often referred to as, may override the best attempts at change. In *Leading Change*, Kotter emphasizes that leaders should “anchor change” because “change sticks only when it becomes ‘the way we do things around here’...until new behaviors are rooted in social norms and shared values, they are always subject to degradation as soon as the pressures associated with a change effort are removed” (Kotter, 2012).

Political Frame

According to Methvin (2023), enacting best practices in student success can be stifled by leadership changes, financial challenges, or the failure to connect across divisions. Boleman and Deal (2017) even describe a “jaundiced view of politics constitutes a serious threat to individual and organizational effectiveness” but that “politics is the realistic process of

making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests.” Within the one college model, understanding the political landscape of a college as well as the players involved, may be the core step needed to begin conversations about adopting such a model. Various people, departments, groups, and viewpoints have agendas specific to their goals. While some of the goals and agendas are clearly explained, other situations and hidden agendas are likely not well known. Input from various stakeholders is central to the ultimate success of any significant change initiative (Kotter, 2012). In the case of colleges, efforts to unite disparate academic and service areas may prove challenging but necessary (Cinton, 2021).

While individual employees can create difficulty in implementing changes in the human resources frame, the political frame is tied to overall departmental, division, and leadership goals. A primary difference centers around how to orient faculty and staff to change. A person looking at the transition to a one college model from the human resources frame they are primarily concerned with helping someone understand the changes that have been decided. A leader using the political frame is more concerned about the decision-making process and alignment of each group’s vision and values. “Constructive politicians know how to fashion an agenda, map the political terrain, create a network of support, and negotiate with both allies and adversaries” (Boleman and Deal, 2017).

Symbolic Frame

Boleman and Deal highlight the symbolic framework as being tied to organizational storytelling (2017), and this is often seen in discussions surrounding student success, whereby the impact of a person, program, or college made in a student’s life is broadly shared. In the case of the One College model, the symbolic framework is the holding up of the lofty goals of education: a better life, a better job, and creating better citizens and doing so without barriers. Noted by Central Piedmont Community College’s president, Dr. Kandi Deitemeyer, students “should be able to come in one door, get exactly what they need, and proceed without having to understand the complexities and bureaucracy behind the scenes in higher education” (Hahn, 2020).

Disparate student experiences have led colleges to examine the different and often inequitable levels of

services. At Bladen Community College, this led to the creation of a centralized advising model with the development of a one-stop area for student services (BCC, 2022). The student experience highlights the story that a college is sharing, and when the story does not match the experience, neither group is fulfilled.

As each college has its own culture, strengths, concerns, and resources, administrators should be prepared for tough conversations such as the definition of continuing education, organizational structures, and other complex (or taboo) topics. The broader mission of student success informs a shared vision for defining the one college model and colleges change by “integrating evidence-based practices that create inclusive and coherent learning environments and by leveraging a student-centered mission, catalytic leadership, strategic data use, and strategic finance in a robust continuous improvement process” (Methvin, 2023, p. 2).

Recent literature emphasizes the need for comprehensive reform in community colleges by exploring various models, including the one college model, that can enhance student success (Bailey & Jagers, 2017). One college models are being used as an organizational framework to improve consistency in the student experience, therefore, it is vital to understand which aspects of the institution are essential to be consistent and which can be flexible to meet local needs at each campus (Baar, 2020). Across the nation, leaders at multi-campus community colleges are working toward creating a consistent one college model student experience while balancing autonomy (Baar, 2020).

Many multi-campus community colleges in the United States have adopted a one college model to improve the consistency of the student experience. Dr. DeRionne Pollard (2012), President of Montgomery College in Maryland, explained, “Becoming one does not mean becoming identical.” Instead, a one college model has been described as having standard processes, dependable access to services and information, and a uniform curriculum (HACC, 2020; Pollard, 2012). St. Louis Community College in Missouri is another example of a college that operates under the one college model. Four campuses acted as branches of the same tree rather than separate trees.

Multi-State System-Wide Adaptation

In certain regions beyond North Carolina, educational institutions are adopting a “one college” approach to amalgamate their resources. Instead of each campus having its own distinct admissions procedures, there is now a centralized process in place. Instead of each campus having unique admissions protocols, there was one centralized process (Addo, 2016). Dallas County Community College District provides another college that has restructured to a one college model in which the seven separately accredited campuses are unifying under a single accreditation to improve the student experience (DCCCD, 2020). The multi-campus organizational model promotes consistency in the student experience through standard processes, dependable access to services and information, and a uniform curriculum (HACC, 2020; Pollard, 2012). In Connecticut, a new system is merging twelve community colleges throughout the state (2016). Together, the colleges will enroll more than 32,000 students (2016). John Maduko, President of Connecticut State Community College, announced the merger is expected to be completed by the summer of 2023, establishing a “new normal” focusing on student affairs and wrap-around services (2016). The Connecticut system emphasizes authenticity with student success in academic and career programming (2016). Anticipated one college model outcomes include improved student retention, increased graduation rates, and enhanced transfer pathways.

Faculty and staff engagement looks different under the structure of a one college model. Achieving the Dream (ATD) highlights recent work in two key teaching and learning initiatives—Engaging Adjunct Faculty in the Student Success Movement and the Open Educational Resources (OER) Degree initiative—yielded deep learning for colleges (2020). Considerable insight into how educators and college leaders collaborated to create new opportunities for professional learning, how educators leveraged evidence-based practices to support student learning and success inside and outside of the classroom, and how institutions reinforced the centrality of teaching and learning to their student success mission through their policies and practices (ATD, 2020, p. 3). This involved changing pedagogy on a scale that required broad effort. Faculty adapted, tested, and refined new approaches to fit campus contexts (ATD, 2020). Faculty work must be understood as part of the larger educational ecosystem. Going

deeper to spur systemic change creates the conditions needed for individual and collective practice transformation (ATD, 2020, p. 10).

In North Carolina, President Kandi Deitemeyer of Central Piedmont Community College stated, “The goal for the one college model is for a prospective student to come into the college, tell us what they are hoping to accomplish in life, and our staff can then guide them (Hahn, 2020). Students should be able to come in one door, get exactly what they need, and proceed without understanding the complexities and bureaucracy behind the scenes in higher education” (Hahn, 2020). CPCC’s one college model goal is “that prospective students will walk through the front door of the college and will be served by the same staff through a similar process whether they are seeking a GED, workforce credential, associate degree, or transfer degree” (Hahn, 2020).

Notably, strong community partnerships address equity gaps and support underrepresented student populations. For instance, Bladen Community College (BCC) implemented a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to benefit students. The deepening connection between the curriculum and continuing education divisions is the starting point for many institutions. Disparate student experiences have led colleges to examine the different and often inequitable levels of services. At BCC, this led to the creation of a centralized advising model with the development of a one-stop area for student services (BCC, 2022). This adaptable holistic advising is underpinned by partnerships that positively impact student pathways and align with the one college model. Community partnerships are the building blocks of BCC’s one college model (2022).

System-wide efforts to combine credit, non-credit, and high school equivalency programs under one system-wide structure are needed (Cintrón, 2021). Colleges “transform by integrating evidence-based practices that create inclusive and coherent learning environments and by leveraging a student-centered mission, catalytic leadership, strategic data use, and strategic finance in a robust continuous improvement process” (Methvin, 2023, p. 2). An aim to expand student options and allow various departments to align gives students an understanding of the career and educational options in front of them (Cintrón, 2021). It will enable the colleges within the system to better align their offerings with industry

demand (Cintrón, 2021). One of the significant benefits of implementing a one college model is that all community colleges share a standard definition of credentials and a more straightforward process for getting new programs approved at a system college if another system college has already implemented the program. Part of this design merges the various data systems into one, allowing for greater automation and more transparent communication (Cintrón, 2021).

Transforming community colleges to improve student success means redefining institutional transformation as “the realignment of an institution’s structures, culture, and business model to create a student experience that results in dramatic and equitable increases in outcomes and educational value” (Methvin, 2023, p. 2). ATD (2020) released an Equity Toolkit to begin this transformation process. ATD declared that decision-making should be systematic (2020). The Equity Review Tool is a three-page guide to help institutions hold discussions, engage stakeholders, and use equitable, planning, and reflective practices (ATD, 2020). ATD defined key terms as equity, historically underserved students, student success, and opportunity gap (2020). Guiding questions are provided for exploration, data collection, and final decision-making. Ultimately, ATD (2020) aimed to help community colleges help their students achieve their goals and address biases by infusing equity. In the end, additional tools are needed to assess readiness for a one college model.

Challenges

While numerous institutions report the benefits of the one college model, several challenges exist in its implementation. Hurdles include resource constraints, resistance to change, lack of effective communication, bureaucratic obstacles, attaining faculty buy-in, and leadership voids. Much of the criticism of the one college model structure centers around large-scale, system-wide consolidation, as is taking place in Connecticut’s Community College System (Sesanker, 2022). Decisions on mass consolidation may be predicated on major resource constraints (Sesanker, 2022). Conversely, this paper focuses on the singular adoption of one college model by individual institutions.

According to a recent survey by Modern Campus (2023), results indicated that continued support and development of Continuing Education remains a

priority for 71% of college administrators. Revenue was cited as the primary factor at 90% of institutions surveyed (Modern Campus, 2023). However, 60% found that Continuing Education is not well integrated into college offerings (Modern Campus, 2023). Over half felt that Continuing Education was not sufficiently staffed to meet institutional goals (Modern Campus, 2023).

Any large-scale change is often only possible to enact with some adversity (Kotter, 2012). The blending of departments which may occur during a one college model implementation, requires changes (Cintrón, 2021). While some support the model, others quickly oppose it because complex changes are often necessary (Ciancio, 2022). For Front Range Community College, disunity was at the forefront, as evidenced by communication and procedural differences across the various campuses (Ciancio, 2022). In the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, cross-departmental presents the biggest challenge to the one college model (Cintrón, 2021). Before implementing the one college model, departments had not worked closely together (Cintrón, 2021). In broader research on student success, Methvin (2023) lists failure to connect across divisions as a barrier to student success. Bureaucratic issues include the delicate balance of prioritizing both autonomy and local needs across multi-site campuses while implementing one college model (Baar, 2020). Colleges must work to recognize unique campuses and programs during a one college model reorganization (Baar, 2020).

As outlined in Achieving the Dream's Teaching & Learning Toolkit (2020), "faculty work must be understood as part of the larger educational ecosystem" (p. 10). In a recent webinar hosted by Ahluwalia (2023), all panelists acknowledged faculty buy-in is considered a challenge. Potential job loss remains a tangible possibility during the one college model transition, as demonstrated at Central Pennsylvania Community College (HACC/CPCC Press Release, 2020). Positions may be eliminated under the one college model as they were at CPCC (HACC/CPCC Press Release, 2020). While it may not alleviate issues with buy-in, CPCC encouraged faculty and staff to reapply for newly created positions, as stated in the (HACC/CPCC Press Release, 2020).

Future research should measure the long-term impact of the model. As the model is in its infancy, no

current research addresses its impact. The efficiency of the one college model should be measured in terms of ROI pre and post-implementation at campuses of varying sizes and locations. The effectiveness of the one college model must be gauged across various institutional contexts. Technology must be noticed, not overlooked, in future studies. Ahluwalia (2023) notes that technology applied to traditional curricula may not apply to the Continuing Education sector.

Introduction to One College Toolkit & Acknowledgements

This literature review would not have been possible without a graduate group internship project through NC State's Community College Leadership program. What started off as an internship developed into a larger project and conversation with the NC Community College System Office to create a tool to benefit all the great 58 community colleges. Specifically, we would like to thank JW Kelley for his guidance and mentorship during the course of the project. Our original project team was made up of nine doctoral students. The main project deliverable includes the one college toolkit accessible here. College leadership wishing to implement a one college model can begin by defining the term, considering resources, garnering support, assessing readiness, and launching the model. Although the toolkit contains a series of steps to consider when introducing a one college model, it can be tailored to fit unique campus needs. In conjunction with the toolkit, we hope this literature review equips campus leadership for the successful long-term implementation of the one college model.

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Authors' Note

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Reflecting on Twenty Years Teaching and Working in the System

Ken Robol



As Lead Instructor of Digital Media at Johnston Community College, I have had the pleasure of teaching for 20 years and can attest to the many reasons why working at a community college is great.

One of the most rewarding aspects of teaching at a community college is the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young people who come from all walks of life. Many of our students face unique challenges that require personalized attention and guidance, such as first-generation college students, adult learners returning to school, and students who struggle with learning differences.

My own personal experience as a community college graduate has helped me understand the importance of providing support and guidance to our students. When I was in high school, my counselor told me that I was not smart enough to attend a university. However, I was fortunate enough to attend a community college where I discovered my passion for digital media and was able to transfer to a university and earn my degree. This experience has shaped my approach to teaching and inspired me to help other students discover their own passions and achieve their goals.

While teaching is never easy, it is always worth it to see the transformation in our students as they gain real-world skills and confidence to go out and make a difference in their communities. As an instructor of digital media, I am constantly challenged to stay up-to-date with the latest technologies and trends, which keeps me engaged and passionate about my work.

However, teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to our classrooms. With the increased use of portable media and virtual communication, many students appear to struggle with interpersonal communication and developing relationships. As instructors, we have had to adapt to new teaching methods and find ways to connect with our students in a more personal way. It has been a difficult time, but I believe that we have all become stronger and more resilient because of it.

Another great aspect of working at a community college is the support we receive as faculty. Our administration values and supports our work, and provides us with the resources we need to be successful in the classroom. Additionally, our colleagues are passionate and dedicated professionals who work together to provide the best possible education for our students.

Community colleges also play an important role in supporting our local economies by providing job training and continuing education opportunities to our communities. Our graduates go on to become skilled workers who are in high demand in fields such as healthcare, technology, and trades. By providing affordable and accessible education.

Author's Note

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