



**Minneapolis Community and Technical College
Internal Graduation Task Force:
Final Report**

Project Results and Recommendations

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PROJECT CHARTER

Problem Statement

Large numbers of students enrolling at MCTC do not earn a diploma/associate degree or transfer to another institution. Because of these factors, graduation and transfer rates at MCTC are lower than peer institutions. As a result, students are not earning credentials that will provide them with the education and training needed to obtain good jobs and to become productive community members.

Project Scope

- Identify Key Student Segment groups, their unique needs, and critical success factors
- Use a “Voice of the Student” approach to assess internal processes and systems that enhance or inhibit students’ ability to graduate or transfer.
- Use a “Voice of the Staff” approach to assess internal processes and systems that enhance or inhibit students’ ability to graduate or transfer.
- Use a “Voice of the Faculty” approach to identify instructional practices that enhance or inhibit students’ ability to graduate or transfer.
- Identify benchmark colleges with evidenced-based practices that contribute to increased graduation and transfer rates.

Goal Statement

Develop recommendations for improving graduation and transfer rates at MCTC that include:

- Target graduation and transfer rates based upon clearly defined set of measurable criteria
- Intervention and support strategies for key student segment groups based upon their unique characteristics, needs, and criteria for success
- Suggestions for internal process and system improvement in areas related to student success—e.g. student support services and instruction
- Benchmark “best practices” that could be implemented at MCTC.

INTERNAL GRADUATION TASK FORCE MEMBERS

African American Male Subgroup

- Jonathan Lofgren (Chair)
- Nasreen Mohamed
- David Everett
- Cheryl Saunders
- Tara Martinez
- Kathleen DeVore
- Robert Reese
- Jennifer Brookins-King
- Jackie Smith
- Edward Dillion
- Jesse Mason
- Lena Jones
- April Hanson

Career/Technical Education Subgroup

- Laura Fedock (Co-chair)
- Judy Canney (Co-chair)
- Lynn Perkins
- Jennifer Whitmore
- Harold Coulter
- Dionna Jones
- Mick Coleman

Developmental/ELL Subgroup

- Lisa Mohr (Chair)
- Carmen Buhler
- Ellen Lewin
- Jane Leach
- John Heinrichs
- Karen Hynick
- Kris Leveille
- Nicole Merz
- Sarah Dahl

BACKGROUND

In fall 2009, President Phil Davis convened a group of MCTC faculty, staff, and administrators (Internal Graduation Task Force—IGTF) and charged them with the task of developing recommendations that would improve the College's overall graduation, retention, and transfer rates. Specifically, the group was charged to come up with recommendations that would

- Increase percent of graduates who earn an associate degree to national level or above
- Increase overall graduation/transfer rates to national average or above
- Eliminate disparity between graduation/transfer rates of white students and students of color.

The IGTF divided into three subgroups: Developmental/ELL, Career and Technical Education, African American Males. Using a Project Management approach, subgroup chairs led their groups through a process that included the following steps: 1.) literature review on best practices; 2.) data review of subgroup characteristics; 3.) consultation with subject-matter experts; 4.) data review of student survey results (e.g. CCSSE, ACT, African American male student survey*); 5.) data review of MCTC focus group results. Each subgroup subsequently developed recommendations specific to the needs and characteristics of their student population.

The recommendations that follow are a culmination and synthesis of the three sub-group reports; extensive research into “promising” practices at other institutions; review and analysis of MCTC focus group, survey, and institutional data; IGTF meetings and discussions; review and analysis of the *MCTC 3-5 Year Directions* document; review and analysis of the MCTC *Master Academic Plan 2010-2015*. Definitions for the each of interventions recommended are included in Appendix 2.

It is the intent of this Final Report to show strong areas of “convergence” among the three sub-group reports and other MCTC initiatives. Alignment Matrix #1 (See Appendix 1) provides an overview of the recommendations set forth in this report cross-walked with the seven *MCTC Strategic Priorities* and the twelve *Master Academic Plan Goals*.

The context for all of these recommendations is **Student Success**. It is only when an institution focuses ALL of its efforts on this main goal that significant, systemic, and substantive change occurs. For MCTC to achieve the graduation, retention, and transfer goals set forth by President Davis, *all* MCTC stakeholders must embrace the notion that *Student Success is an Expectation!* The culture, climate, and community at MCTC must commit to ensuring that *all* students will succeed and that the institution will do everything it can to help *all* students achieve their dreams.

* This survey was created by Jesse Mason, Psychology faculty member at MCTC.

OVER-ARCHING RECOMMENDATION

MCTC should adopt *Achieving the Dream* as its “model” for improving graduation, retention, and transfer rates—especially for low-income students and students of color. Colleges participating in the Achieving the Dream (ATD) initiative work to increase the percentage of students who accomplish the following:

- successfully complete remedial or developmental instruction and advance to credit-bearing courses;
- enroll in and successfully complete the initial college-level or gatekeeper courses in subjects such as math and English
- complete the courses they take with a grade of C or better
- persist from one term to the next
- earn a certificate or associate’s degree.

By adopting the ATD framework and its five-step process for increasing student success through institutional improvement, MCTC will be able to address a key issue identified in sub-group reports and IGTF discussions—e.g. *data collection and analysis*. It is clear this issue must be addressed at MCTC so the college can “better measure and track student progression, allowing for greater accountability, and leading, ultimately, to identifying priority strategies to allocate student success resources.”

Information from the ATD website clearly parallels the charge President Davis made to the IGTF: “Achieving the Dream expects that by following its model of continuous institutional improvement over a sustained period of time, participating institutions will be able to:

- **increase the rates at which their students succeed**, and
- **close the gaps in performance** among different student demographic groups.”

In addition, they state “Colleges that participate in Achieving the Dream receive assistance from experienced practitioners in:

- **building a culture of inquiry and evidence**
- **using data** to identify problems, set priorities, and measure progress **toward increasing student success.**”

MCTC could be the FIRST two-year college in Minnesota to join the ATD network thereby positioning the College well for future grant-funding opportunities. Adopting the ATD model could be THE most important step MCTC takes to improve graduation, retention, and transfer rates. Unless a systemic approach is used to address these issues, MCTC will realize only marginal success in this effort. Implementing many different types of “benchmark programs” may lead to small gains initially but will not provide sustained, long-term gains in student achievement. The ATD continuous improvement philosophy and commitment to developing *incremental milestones* for students sets a tone and expectations for “a culture of inquiry, evidence and accountability.” Promoting student success will become the *MCTC Mantra!*

GENERAL AND TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

General Interventions

Four general *interventions* are being recommended (See Table 1) that appear promising for all student segments, that are applicable to the MCTC context, and that cut across all of the data sources reviewed (See Appendix 3). These interventions are considered to be those most likely to make a strong impact, not only with the targeted student segments, but across the entire MCTC student population. Also listed are the Best Practice Institutions where these interventions have been successfully implemented. It is recommend that pilots for these interventions be implemented as soon as fall 2010 but no later than fall 2011.

| Table 1: General Interventions and Best Practice Institutions | |
|---|--|
| Intervention | Best Practice Institution* |
| 1. Learning communities | Sinclair CC * Kodiak College * Valencia Community College * Broward Community College + |
| 2. Integrated advising | Broward Community College + Paul D. Kamp Community College + CUNY Community College System + |
| 3. Career planning services | CUNY Community College System (e.g. Borrough of Manhattan CC) + California Community College System (e.g. East Los Angeles CC; City College of San Francisco) + |
| 4. Strong learning support services (e.g. Supplemental Instruction, peer tutoring) | Coastal bend Community College + Southwest Texas Junior College + Tidewater Community College + |

Note: See Appendix 2 for definition of each intervention.

* Best practice institutions identified in subgroup reports.

+ Best practice research conducted by Jerri Brewer and Jessica Shryack, in particular of Achieve the Dream "Leader Colleges".

Another recommendation found, explicitly or implicitly, in all subgroup reports was for **intensive orientation or a summer bridge program** (see definitions worksheet). While that recommendation did not meet the criterion listed above, this is a promising practice that could be implemented with success at MCTC, especially for first-generation students, students of color and returning adult students.

Targeted Interventions

Each subgroup developed a set of recommendations targeted to their student population (e.g. African American males). While it would not be feasible, in terms of staffing, financial, research and other resources, to implement all of the suggested interventions, at least one intervention per student segment stood out as *key* to the academic success of each of the student segments. All of the targeted interventions (See Table 2) come from either the recommendations or best practice information from each subgroup’s final report. While it would be perhaps preferable to implement more than one recommendation per student segment, the following have precedence in research, are considered best practices at other institutions and are scalable. In addition, all of these interventions already are in the planning or beginning phase of implementation at MCTC as of the writing of this report.

| Table 2: Targeted Interventions and Best Practice Institutions | |
|--|--|
| Intervention | Best Practice Institution* |
| <i>African American males</i> Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) chapter | Consult with Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) organization |
| <i>Career-Technical Education</i> Contextualized Learning (e.g. Integrated Basic Education Skills Training or I-BEST) | Washington State Community College System * Community College of Denver * |
| <i>Developmental/ELL/ESL Education</i> Accelerated developmental education courses | CUNY Community College System *+ Cleveland State Community College + Danville Community College + Front Range Community College of Denver * |

Note: See Appendix 2 for definition of each intervention.

* Best practice institutions identified in subgroup reports.

+ Best practice research conducted by Jerri Brewer and Jessica Shryack, in particular of Achieve the Dream “Leader Colleges”.

In summary, both General and Targeted Interventions will have a strong and positive impact on student success at MCTC. Linking each intervention to target outcomes in retention, graduation and/or transfer, based on previous research and MCTC student characteristics, should be done in Phase II of this project.

Necessary Institutional/Organizational Supports

To assure that these efforts will be operationalized, it will be necessary to implement organizational changes in the following areas, which were identified in IGTF discussions, the organizational review of literature and the PACE survey:

1. **The coordinated efforts of all campus staff, faculty and administrators;**
2. **An information infrastructure that allows for easy and immediate inter-departmental communication;**
3. **Faculty and staff training that will ensure effective implementation of new interventions;**
4. **Methods in place to evaluate the interventions' impacts on student success, including faculty and staff training on evaluation.**

Importantly, all of these requirements would be facilitated by adoption of the Achieving the Dream model, as shown by the successes achieved by other Achieving the Dream community colleges.

NEXT STEPS

It will be important to move quickly into Phase II of the IGTF project so that momentum, interest, and motivation do not fade. Steps considered most critical to ensure the work completed thus far will lead to expected results include the following:

1. **Launch a *Student Success Campaign*** that clearly communicates the message that MCTC is serious about helping students achieve their dreams—e.g. persisting, graduating, transferring.
 - Form a *Student Success Task Force* that will take the place of IGTF
 - Name a Project Coordinator who will assure that the project stays on track and meets key deadlines.
 - Develop a Project Charter that defines the problem, the project scope, goal statement(s), and timeline.*
2. **Organize, prioritize, and select KEY sub-group recommendations** that can be implemented during the 2010-2011 academic year.
 - Select activities that are already underway at MCTC and/or that can be developed during summer 2010
 - Show alignment of ANY selected activity with Strategic Priorities and Master Academic Plan Goals
3. **Choose KEY “promising” or “best practice” institutions (4-5 maximum) to contact and invite** to attend MCTC faculty development week in August 2010.
4. **Investigate process, costs, and requirements for applying to be an *Achieving the Dream* college.**
5. **Convene a separate Information Technology Infrastructure Task Force** to study and make recommendations about how to improve the IT infrastructure at MCTC.

* *The next steps listed could certainly end up in the Project Charter developed by the Student Success Task Force.*

Appendices:

Definitions and Alignment

**Appendix 1: Alignment Matrix 1
Recommendations, Strategic Priorities, and Master Academic Plan Goals**

| Sub-Group Recommendations | MCTC Strategic Directions/Priorities | | | | | | | MCTC Master Academic Plan Goals | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Career Planning | X | X | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Integrated Advising | X | | X | X | X | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Strong Learning Support Services— e.g. tutoring, Supplemental Instruction | X | | | | X | | | X | X | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Contextualized Learning—e.g. I-BEST | X | X | | | | X | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Intensive Orientation/Summer Bridge Program | X | | X | | X | | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Learning Communities | X | | | | | X | | X | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Accelerated Developmental Coursework—e.g. ALEKS | X | | X | | X | X | | X | X | | X | | | | | | | | |
| Faculty Development and Support in online technology, pedagogy, developmental education, cultural competence | | | X | X | | X | | X | X | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Institutional Alignment/Inter-Departmental Communication | | | X | X | | X | | | X | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| External Partnerships - e.g. K-12 system, community-based organizations, business and industry | | X | | X | | | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | |

Appendix 2: Definition of Interventions

Accelerated developmental education

Across the country, students who begin community college at the lowest levels of developmental education are more at-risk for never entering a gateway course and dropping out, like college-level English or algebra. Colleges bypass the need for sequential, time-consuming developmental education by allowing students extra supports – e.g. skill labs, taking two developmental courses in one semester, etc. The **ALEKS** math course, which will be implemented at MCTC in Fall 2010, is a good example of an accelerated path through developmental math.

Career planning services

In student surveys conducted at MCTC, students state they would like more information on career planning. Careers offer a path through the college and research shows that undeclared students are less likely to graduate than declared students. A for-credit career course, group career planning sessions and/or mandatory major declaration by the end of the first year are all practices that have been implemented at colleges with moderate to high graduation rates.

Contextualized learning (e.g. I-BEST)

While the concept of contextualized learning is part of a broader set of ideas in education, here we mean the process of embedding basic skills into career-focused classes (e.g. apparel design, HVAC) such that students do not need to take developmental courses before entering into a career/technical program. This speeds time to degree and has been shown to strongly positively affect graduation from CTE programs. Teams of teachers (developmental education and career/technical education) co-teach the courses and completers are awarded a CTE award, just as in other CTE programs. A strong example of contextualized learning is the **I-BEST** model.

Integrated advising

Integrated advising or “holistic advising” suggests that advising can and does occur in multiple formats (in-person, online) and through multiple interactions (student-faculty, student-staff, even student-student). Intrusive advising models (somewhat distinct from “integrated advising”) assume that proactive and even mandated advising reduce college drop-out and stop-out. Integrated advising involves both a focus on proactive advising – intentionally reaching out to students – and doing so in progressive ways (e.g. using technology).

Intensive Orientation/Summer Bridge Program

“Summer Bridge” programs involve an extended (e.g. 4-week) campus experience for new college freshmen including academic study, counseling and other support services and study skills sessions. They set expectations for new students (often low-income or first-generation) in both academically and socio-culturally. Intensive orientations accomplish a similar mission in a shortened timeframe – e.g. a 2 to 3 day orientation. Both summer bridge and more intensive orientations have been shown to increase student persistence.

Learning communities

Learning communities are cohorts of students that take a common set of courses during an academic term, often surrounding a theme (e.g. social justice, global engagement, business). They are intended to “restructure the student’s time, credit, and learning experiences to build community among students, between students and their teachers, and among faculty members and disciplines.” Learning communities may be especially important for some non-traditional

college students who may benefit from a strong sense of social support as part of an academic program.

Strong learning support services (e.g. Supplemental Instruction, peer tutoring)
Learning supports help students achieve better learning outcomes in both developmental and college-level courses than they might achieve without these supports. For example, Supplemental Instruction involves peers assisting other students in reviewing course material for historically difficult classes – e.g. Biology, Algebra - and has been used as a successful course retention strategy. Strong learning services employ well-trained peers, staff and faculty who are experts in their respective subjects. (Note: These supports are different from other kinds of supports such as advising or counseling and are focused on learning outcomes only.)

Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) chapter on campus. This organization aimed at helping both African American and Latino males graduate from college uses professional, academic and social programming to increase engagement in their student population. SAAB chapters exist in four-year and two-year colleges as well as many K-12 schools. Research has suggested that as many as three times the number of African American males involved in SAAB graduate, compared to national averages.*

* Although the Student African American Brotherhood was a final selection for a targeted intervention in the IGTF Final Report, it does not appear on the subgroup recommendation because it did not show alignment across data sets in the Alignment matrix. This makes sense because it is a highly targeted program aimed at the success of a specific student population. Although it was not retained on the list of converging recommendations, it is nevertheless an important intervention for the success of African American males at MCTC.

Appendix 3: Alignment Matrix 2
Research-Based Interventions Identified Across Measures and Sub-Groups

| Research-Based Interventions | Focus Groups | Literature Reviews | Surveys (ACT, CSSE, PACE, AA Males) | AA Males Sub-Group | CTE Sub-Group | Developmental/ELL Sub-Group |
|---|--------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Career Planning | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Integrated Advising | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Strong Learning Support Services—e.g. tutoring, Supplemental Instruction | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Contextualized Learning—e.g. I-BEST | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Intensive Orientation/Summer Bridge Program | X | X | | X | | X |
| Learning Communities | X | X | | X | X | X |
| Accelerated Developmental Coursework—e.g. ALEKS | | X | | X | X | X |
| Faculty Development and Support in online technology, pedagogy, developmental ed, & cultural competence | X | | X | | | |
| Institutional Alignment/Interdepartmental Communication | X | X | X | X | | X |
| External Partnerships-e.g. K-12 system, community-based organizations, business and industry | X | X | | X | X | X |