

Fox Valley Technical College
Site Visit Observations
October 23-24, 2003

Introduction

The project of the College and Career Transitions Initiative (CCTI) at Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) reflects the values and practices of a state system, a local college, and a career program recognized nationally for commitments to and leadership in quality occupational education.

The Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) includes 16 districts, 47 campuses, and hundreds of outreach sites. The principal purposes of the technical college system are to: a) provide occupational education and training and retraining programs, including the training of apprentices, that enable residents to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment at a technical, paraprofessional, skilled, or semi-skilled occupation, and b) provide customized training and technical assistance to business and industry in order to foster economic development and the expansion of employment opportunities. An additional purpose of the System, particularly pertinent to this CCTI project is to “coordinate and cooperate with secondary schools to facilitate the transition of secondary school students into postsecondary vocational education through curriculum articulation and collaboration.”

With this strong emphasis on occupational education it is not surprising that 58% of the students in the statewide system are enrolled in associate degree programs leading to careers, 14% in technical diploma programs, 12% in basic education programs, and only 8% in liberal arts transfer programs. Even though the System has increased its emphasis on transfer programs in recent years, it is interesting to note that since 1991 more students have transferred annually from the University of Wisconsin System into the Wisconsin Technical College System than the other way around, reflecting in part the aspirations of students but also the quality of occupational education offered at the WTCS. In 1999-2000, 2,979 students from the University of Wisconsin System transferred into the WTCS; 2,576 students transferred from the technical system into the university system.

Fox Valley Technical College, the third largest of the 16 in the state system, serves over 50,000 students a year in courses offered in more than 70 different occupational programs. The college also provides an extensive service to business and industry by contracting with over 1,300 employers a year for training and other services. The College graduates over 1500 students a year with 92% employed within six months. In an annual survey, 96% of employers are satisfied with the skills of FVTC graduates. For its excellent programs, the College has won the Wisconsin Forward Award and the national Pacesetter Award for Quality in Education.

Fox Valley’s mission statement reflects the strong emphasis on workforce training mandated by the statewide system:

The mission of Fox Valley Technical College is to help individuals reach their potential by providing cost-effective education and training which meets their objectives for employment, continuing higher education, and personal enrichment.

We seek to build and maintain a diverse and effective work force that supports the economic growth and stability of our communities.

At this point Fox Valley does not appear to be very different from any other technical college in Wisconsin or perhaps any technically-oriented two-year college anywhere in the nation. However, it is a very different kind of institution from most others and has distinct characteristics that make it an especially effective institution in carrying out its mission. A brief review of these special characteristics will provide a framework for understanding how the current CCTI project has evolved and why it is likely to be successful:

Continuous Quality Improvement—In the 1980s, under the leadership of then president, Stan Spanbauer, FVTC embraced the theory and practice of continuous quality improvement (CQI) and became a national leader in this arena. The college and President Spanbauer produced a number of documents describing CQI processes that were widely distributed across the nation’s community and technical colleges. The president and other campus leaders often spoke at national conferences and consulted with many colleges interested in exploring CQI. Fox Valley was the laboratory for these ideas, and they had a profound impact on the college and its employees that is still evident decades later. One of the 6 values of the College noted in the Strategic Plan for 2003-2006 states: “We value continuous improvement of our programs, services, and processes through employee empowerment and professional development in a team-based culture.” In interviews with a number of key leaders, the college’s commitment to and practice of continuous quality improvement was evident in their conversations and citations of institutional behavior. It is generally understood and accepted that “quality” is the undergirding value guiding all staff members and all their work on projects, programs, and policies. It has become deeply embedded in their culture and permeates much of their work.

A Culture of Collaboration—Consistent with its emphasis on continuous quality improvement, which relies on team work and partnerships for success, Fox Valley has created a climate in which collaboration is so much the norm it is sometimes difficult to find the lines that often demarcate traditional organizations. While specific offices and specific programs exist on paper and in space assigned, institutional work is almost always a collaborative effort, drawing on the best skills and knowledge—as well as interest—available. For example, in the CCTI project, when the planning team had agreed to create a new course on career awareness as part of its primary strategy to improve transitions, the opportunity to create the course was offered to anyone interested under the assumption that many were qualified and that all would rely on others to assist. Quality is assumed; collaboration is the norm.

One of the other 6 value statements also emphasizes the importance given to collaborative partnerships: “We value partnerships with business, industry, labor, government, educational systems, and our communities.” This value is seen in clear relief in one of the 8 purposes listed in the Strategic Plan: “Collaborate with secondary schools, colleges, and universities to enable students’ smooth passage between educational systems.” The value and purpose statements reflect the mission of Fox Valley and pave the way for success of the CCTI project.

A Spirit of Entrepreneurship—The leadership of the College has set high expectations that all programs in the College will excel in serving the needs of local business and industry. Of the 16 technical colleges in the state system, Fox Valley generates 20% of the revenue of the system’s contracted services to business and industry—averaging \$6 million a year. Over the past 10 years the Criminal Justice Center of Excellence has been awarded over \$40 million in grants—perhaps a national first for a single program and one that far exceeds total grants awarded to most colleges over the last decade. The College has encouraged a collaborative approach to seeking resources for all programs, and there is a reservoir of talented personnel who know how to access these resources locally, regionally, statewide, and nationally.

A Culture of Evidence—Along with these other key characteristics of Fox Valley there is great value placed on assessing the work of the College. Annually there are surveys of faculty, student, and employer satisfaction. All programs are subject to an annual review and a review by external evaluators every 5 years. An annual Graduate Placement Report captures six-month and five-year follow-up results on a variety of key indicators noting rates of employment, salaries, satisfaction, etc. The Board of Trustees embraces the Carver model of governance in which the ends reflect the core purposes of the College. Staff produce a “monitoring report” on one of the purposes for each of the monthly meetings of the Board. In addition, “dashboard” indicators of trends and successes related to students, finance, and student outcomes are reviewed by trustees on a continuing basis. Focus groups of students and clients and feedback mechanisms to check progress, satisfaction, and success are the College norm.

However, while Fox Valley has created a culture in which staff members are aware of the need for assessment and participate actively in assessment practices, it is not clear that the College has figured out a good way to systematically use data to improve programs and student success. In the Pacesetter Feedback Report (February 25, 2002) provided by the Continuous Quality Improvement Network, the external evaluators noted the most significant opportunities for improvement:

- ♦ Although performance indicators are identified, it is not evident how the indicators from the purpose statements, the milestones, and the dashboard align and are prioritized. This may interfere with the College’s ability to focus its attention on the most important indicators for continuous improvement.
- ♦ Although data is (*sic*) collected and readily available, it is not evident how the data is (*sic*) systematically used to improve results.

In the CCTI project it will be important to see if staff can use the project experience as a laboratory for better using the data collected to improve programs and student success. These four characteristics: continuous quality improvement, a culture of collaboration, a spirit of entrepreneurship, and a culture of evidence (or at least of assessment) are the hallmarks of Fox Valley Technical College. The characteristics have been cultivated over a period of decades by a variety of leaders to the point they have become embedded in the culture of the College, probably impervious to any new president who might not appreciate their value. The characteristics have made Fox Valley a very special college recognized nationally for its innovations and quality programs, and they are reflected in many of the individual occupational programs, especially in the Department of Criminal Justice where this CCTI project is lodged.

The Criminal Justice Program

The Criminal Justice Program at Fox Valley is a microcosm of the mission and values of the College. The leaders constantly apply continuous quality practices to their work; collaboration among leaders and program units and with area agencies is the norm; entrepreneurship has been honed to a fine degree; and data are gathered on students and program outcomes on an ongoing basis. The program is in sync with the goals of the College and enjoys a great deal of support and flexibility from College leaders in achieving and expanding those goals.

The word “microcosm” suggests a smallness very different from the reality that has been achieved by this unique program. The program has been around for decades building a strong base of community support and involvement of leaders from local law enforcement agencies. In the last 10 years the program has built on this foundation to become one of the eminent “Centers of Excellence” in criminal justice in the United States. Several achievements highlight the strengths of this program.

- ◆ Largest law enforcement training program in the Midwest (In 2002, there were 45 full and part-time employees, 122 independent consultants, and 425 adjunct instructors.)
- ◆ Largest recipient of grants for criminal justice programming—over \$40 million in the last 10 years.
- ◆ Associate degree program ranked third in the nation for police graduates.
- ◆ Anticipated growth rate for programming is 20% a year.
- ◆ Programs offered in every state in the U. S., Canada, and Puerto Rico.

The criminal justice program has become a national, and increasingly an international, leader in preparing students for careers in law enforcement but also in training and retraining current employees in evolving areas such as homeland security and the protection of children. As the primary subcontractor for the National Missing and Exploited Children Foundation, the criminal justice program provides all of their training. The program houses the National Training Center for Crime Prevention and Community Leadership, co-sponsored by the National Crime Prevention Council and Fox Valley Technical College, as one indication of its national leadership.

The vision of program leaders is to expand the program into a worldwide center. In the 2003 Criminal Justice Strategic Planning Process (a model of self assessment that examines strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats with unusual candor) program leaders have proposed a new vision statement that reflects their past success and values and their future ambition:

We will be working from our new flexible, innovative complex delivering training worldwide. We will be one team utilizing an integrated data system and seamless processes. We will provide and receive the finest customer service.

We will have choices in what we do, engaging in sophisticated partnerships. The Criminal Justice Center planners of today will lead us to our status as the premier Criminal Justice Center in the world. Like the Internet, we will be everywhere and nowhere.

When a local program becomes a nationally-recognized leader there is always the danger that local needs may be overlooked in favor of national needs that bring more recognition and resources. The leaders of the Criminal Justice Program at Fox Valley appear to have a very realistic understanding of this dilemma. In interviews with both the former director and current director the same basic philosophy for managing the program was articulated: “Don’t ever forget where you came from.” “We don’t know the word ‘No’.” The leaders understand that their success is based on the reputation that has been created with support and partnerships with local law enforcement agencies working together to create opportunity. The leaders have been astute in leveraging their national success and connections to benefit their local agencies providing opportunities to bring in national consultants and resources and helping connect local agency leaders to national opportunities. It has been a classic win-win situation.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Criminal Justice Program was selected by College leaders as the venue for this CCTI project. The program already embraces, by philosophy and practice, the elements supported by OVAE related to ensuring that students make successful transitions from high schools to postsecondary education and on to work or further education.

The CCTI Project at Fox Valley

Responsibility for coordinating the project is housed in the Office of High School & College Transitions, an office that serves all programs in the College including the Criminal Justice Program. The philosophy of this office is captured in a School-to-Work Mission statement that reflects all the key elements supported by this OVAE project:

To meet the needs of the changing workplace, Fox Valley Technical College’s High School & College Transitions team, in cooperation with the K-12 system, universities and colleges, will provide students with an opportunity to participate in applied/integrated, sequential, non-duplicative coursework. This will lead to a seamless transition into postsecondary education and the world of work. Efforts will link

educators, employers, and the community to prepare local youth for life and work in a more competitive global economy.

The office and the CCTI project are coordinated by Joanne Pollock, Director of the Office of High School & College Transitions and Tech Prep Curriculum Specialist in cooperation with other professional staff who have responsibilities for youth options and youth apprenticeship programs, 4-year articulation programs, and KSCADE—a network of area high schools and other institutions of higher education that has delivered ITV courses to over 5000 high school students in the last 5 years.

These leaders in the High School & College Transitions office could have lodged this CCTI project in a number of the occupational programs at the College but selected the Criminal Justice Program because assessments had identified a need to expand opportunities for high school students to explore career options in criminal justice. Currently, high school juniors and seniors in area schools can enroll in a KSCADE ITV course on *Introduction to Criminal Justice*, a popular course that provides many students with their first understanding of what is involved in a law enforcement career. Most of the students enrolled in the course have indicated they would like more information on law enforcement and especially on the variety of career opportunities in the field. Instructors have also indicated a need for students to become more aware of the realities of the jobs to offset their sometimes romantic notions of law enforcement reflected in popular TV shows and other media.

One of the primary activities of this project will be the creation of a new course to be offered over KSCADE in the 12th grade *Introduction to Criminal Justice Careers*. The Department Chair of Safety and Security will be given released time beginning in January of 2004 to create the 3-hour credit course. He has taught the *Introduction to Criminal Justice* course and has converted the entire program of courses in Safety and Security to the Internet. A criminal justice consultant, used extensively by the Criminal Justice Program, will serve as a consultant in the development of the course. The course will include hands-on experiences built into course activities and optional experiences provided by the programs long association with an Explorer Boy Scouts troop focused on law enforcement. The course developer is also considering capstone projects that will involve personal research by students into several career specializations and mentorships with professionals through email. The primary purpose of this new course will address the CCTI project outcome: **increasing enrollment and persistence**.

To reduce the need for remediation, the project will target approximately 40 students enrolled in the *Introduction to Criminal Justice* course by administering ACCUPLACER, the instrument used by the College to place students in basic skills courses. While it might have been better to assess these students at the 9th or 10th grade level to allow more time for remediation, they do not begin taking criminal justice courses until the 11th grade. There is also the challenge of determining what kind of remedial interventions are available for those students deemed in need of remediation to succeed at Fox Valley. Project leaders indicated that the College's GOAL program, a self-paced program of remediation, would be available to students.

To improve academic and skill achievement, project leaders have proposed to a) improve articulation of applied high school courses with Fox Valley courses, and b) establish a field-based mentoring program for the high school students enrolled in criminal justice introductory courses. Although the College has worked for years to articulate courses between the high schools and the College, the courses are constantly changing to reflect new standards, new needs, and new applications of technology. The goal is to provide students with information regarding the coherent sequence of courses that will prepare them for success at the College. It may also be necessary to improve the articulation between “academic” courses in the high schools and the College.

Project leaders state “Research shows that students with hands-on career exposure understand the reason for academic and skill development and improve performance.” Informal studies at Wisconsin’s Department of Public Instruction were cited that suggest students in CTE courses (which include extensive opportunities for practical application) achieve at higher levels in academic courses. It will be challenging for project leaders to sort out the interrelationships between improving articulated courses and providing mentoring as indicators of improved academic and skill achievement. And it is not entirely clear that mentoring as an activity will include hands-on experience for the students.

To increase the number of degrees and certificates, project leaders plan to increase the marketing of the programs in criminal justice and the opportunities for careers. They plan information sessions with high school staff, mailings to 10th grade students and their parents, and a Criminal Justice Career Transfer Fair. It will be a challenge to track which of these activities are most effective in achieving the goal.

To improve entry into work or further education, an assessment of attributes and skills in criminal justice is planned. Project leaders are searching for an instrument that will help students in the introductory courses complete an assessment of their skills, attributes, and interests as an additional way to help students make decisions that will lead to future success in the field. This instrument is planned for use in the introductory criminal justice courses.

The overall plan for this CCTI project will evolve in the program of criminal justice and will include identifying needs for remediation in the high school, creating a new course to address interests, improving the sequencing of courses, establishing a mentoring program, marketing the program to 10th grade students and their parents, and creating a self-assessment instrument of interests and skills in criminal justice. The project is an integrated approach to improve the numbers and success rates of students with interest in criminal justice careers as they move from high school to Fox Valley and on into work in the field. As the project evolves it is likely that project leaders will revise some of these activities and add new ones. The continuing challenge for project leaders will be to determine what works and what does not work and what evidence can be gathered to support the outcomes.

