

Challenges and Lessons Learned: Kirkwood Community College

One of our challenges in the career pathway programming is helping students make the transition from non-credit training to credit training. The pathway system is designed to support students in having multiple on ramps into training and off ramps into employment post earning credentials. We are finding that students who earn short-term training credentials are enticed to enter the workforce to stabilize their households' financial situation. While these individuals are increasing their income, it may not be at a wage sufficient for the family to be financially stable long-term (dependent upon their household size). The college has implemented two strategies to address this challenge:

1. We implemented an Exploring Your Next Steps Event on campus to introduce students in non-credit pathway training to what continuing within their educational pathway would look like. The event introduces the students to career services, credit training facilities, financial aid, Pathway Navigator supports, and learning from students who are successful in credit pathway training. This strategy is slowly resulting in more students making the transition and therefore we will continue to offer this event.
2. Pathway Navigators follow up with students who exit training for up to one year post training. The goal with this contact is to ensure that individuals know of the training pathway they can continue on to increase their earning potential.

A non-programmatic challenge is tracking students. Kirkwood Community College utilizes one database to track the outcomes of non-credit training and a separate database to track students in credit training. This complicates the continuity of tracking student outcomes and services. Kirkwood is designing a central data tracking system that will ease the tracking of students across non-credit and credit training, and document support services accessed, credentials earned, and employment placement and retention. This database is scheduled to be implemented by July 1, 2015.

More recently, the program is challenged to recruit students into cohort training and short-term certificate training. Businesses represented on the Industry Sector Boards have provided input on strategies they would like to pursue to address this. Strategies include businesses being active promoters of available training. For example, some businesses are sharing training opportunities with their employees to spread among their personal networks and other businesses are also communicating the available training to candidates that are not offered employment. We look forward to evaluating the results of these and other strategies.