



Strategies for Transformative Change

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH AND LEADERSHIP

Transformative Change Initiative Overview

The Transformative Change Initiative (TCI) is dedicated to assisting community colleges to scale-up innovations that improve student outcomes and program, organization, and system performance.

Transformative Change Definition

TCI defines transformative change as follows: Raising the individual, organizational, and system performance of community colleges to unprecedented levels without sacrificing their historic commitment to access and equity.

HEALTH CARE CORE CURRICULUM

Health Care Core Curriculum and the Health Professions Pathways Consortium (H2P)

The Health Professions Pathways (H2P) Consortium includes nine community colleges in five states. The colleges are implementing eight strategies, including 1) developing a core curriculum and 2) galvanizing a national movement to improve healthcare education via the widespread adoption of the core curriculum concept. Information in this report was gathered from interviews and documents gathered during site visits at El Centro College in Dallas, Texas, and Ashland Community & Technical College in Ashland, Kentucky, in Fall 2013.

Health Care Core Curriculum Definition

A core curriculum is “a set of interdisciplinary courses, clinical training, and other educational exposures designed to provide [health career students] . . . with the common knowledge, skills, and values necessary to perform effectively in the evolving health care workplace.”¹



¹ Pew Health Professions Commission. (1995). *Critical challenges: Revitalizing the health professions for the twenty-first century*. San Francisco, CA: University of California San Francisco, Center for the Health Professions.

Major Themes

H2P is advancing the notion that a core curriculum forms the basis for standardizing entry-level expectations and foundational knowledge and skills for health occupations. All H2P colleges have agreed to develop and implement a core curriculum (or enhance an existing model) and have leeway in selecting components based on local employer needs and institutional capacity. El Centro College (ECC) has a robust core curriculum model instituted in 1998 to better prepare health care students for the workplace. ECC serves as the technical assistance provider to the H2P Consortium. Informational background and selected advice based on the ECC experience follows.

- Faculty play a key role in developing a core curriculum. Faculty should be encouraged and supported to work across structural and perceived boundaries of programs and disciplines in order to develop the kind of cultural shift necessary in the education system that is replicative of an ideal, patient-centered health care delivery system.
- Establishing a sustainable core curriculum is optimally accomplished from the inside out, not top down. It takes time to establish trust among diverse groups of faculty, administrators, employers, and community members who each play a key role. Most groups will need to experience the phases of forming, storming, and norming until common goals are established and consensus is achieved. The ability of faculty to think and work across health career disciplines should serve as the model for students' learning and behavior.
- Developing a core curriculum involves identifying and aligning competencies within the skill and content areas of multiple health care occupations.

Employer and industry input is critical to ensure the rigor and relevance of the most current expectations in the workplace. H2P colleges crosswalk their draft competencies with the Department of Labor's Allied Health Competency Model.²

- ECC's core consists of six courses: Wellness and Health Promotion, Basic Health Professions Skills, Health Professions Skills II, Pathophysiology, General Health Professions Management, and Pharmacology. Each health care program at ECC has the latitude to decide which of the core courses is required. Program-level decisions about the core are essential due to limits on the number of credit hours allowed in each program and in gaining buy-in from the faculty.
- The core is designed as part of the larger Career Pathway concept, providing students with entry-level skills and credentials. The core includes hands-on learning and career exploration, expanding students' ability to make informed career decisions. Successful completion of a core course allows ECC students to earn points toward acceptance to some selective admissions programs of study.
- Core courses are evaluated regularly to ensure they are meeting the needs of occupations, employers, and students. Recent improvements include expansion of delivery modalities to include online and hybrid formats. ECC is developing videos and interactive modules that will be available widely as Open Educational Resources.

² Merclean, R. (2011, October). *Department of Labor's allied health competency model*. Retrieved from http://www.healthpronet.org/docs/2011-10_HPNClean.pdf

Selected Outcomes. ECC has identified several processes and outcomes of its core curriculum model.³

1. The curriculum contains well-thought-out concepts that are reviewed and realigned regularly. Concepts include the five major competencies published by the Institute of Medicine:⁴ provide patient-centered care, work in interdisciplinary teams, employ evidence-based practices, apply quality improvement, and utilize informatics.
2. Various accrediting agencies, including the Board of Nursing, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and other agencies, have grown to see the value of this interdisciplinary approach in the 15 years the core has been implemented at ECC.
3. Students applying to programs of study meet and interact in carefully designed, interactive instructional scenarios within core courses. They typically enroll in core courses before acceptance into a program of study, and in doing so, they broaden their knowledge of occupations in healthcare and are able to make a more informed career decision while learning to better communicate across disciplines.
4. Enrollment remains high in core courses; Fall 2013 enrollment was 886. All six courses are not required of all programs of study; the range is from one to six. Program faculty and administrators determine which courses best fit their program needs.
5. The core has provided ECC with educational efficiencies in utilizing faculty, especially important when facing faculty shortages in some programs.
6. Faculty enjoy teaching in interdisciplinary groups and sharing courses. They recognize many health care educators are well prepared to teach skills common to several occupations that were previously taught independently within discrete programs of study.

For more information about ECC's core curriculum, please contact Sondra Flemming, Vice President of Academic Affairs, sflemming@dcccd.edu.

³ Flemming, S. (n.d.). *Core curriculum for health programs*. Unpublished manuscript.

⁴ National Research Council. (2001, March). *Crossing the quality chasm: A new health system for the 21st century*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi:10.1177/152715440100200312



El Centro College students in a skills lab.

Ashland Community & Technical College Model

Two colleges in Kentucky are part of the H2P Consortium: Ashland Community & Technical College (ACTC) and Jefferson Community & Technical College. These two colleges held summits within the 16 colleges that are a part of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System to promote the concept of a core curriculum. System-wide adoption occurred in March 2013; any core course can be offered at any college. ACTC organized essential health care competencies into seven courses. The health care industry is the number one employer in the ACTC region, and successful completion of core courses helps prepare students for entry-level employment by offering two recognized credentials that indicate the attainment of locally and industry-recognized skills. Students completing four specific core courses earn a basic certificate that totals 9-11 credits, and students completing three additional core courses earn an intermediate certificate comprised of 16-18 credits. Though core courses have only been offered for two semesters at ACTC, faculty in various health occupations programs report that students completing a core course are better prepared for the rigor and expectations once they enter specific programs of study. Moreover, faculty report that because of participating in core courses, students have a broader view of the health care field and thus, a clearer picture of their potential fit in various occupations compared to students who have not taken core courses. Similarly, students who took core courses report an increased understanding of the health care field and feel more prepared in subsequent coursework.

ACTC Recommendations for Implementing a Core Curriculum

- Any college interested in implementing a core curriculum should consistently communicate with community and employer partners through multiple avenues to develop, maintain, and improve the core curriculum.
- The competencies included in a health care core curriculum should reflect locally valued skills and credentials in addition to nationally recognized competencies.
- There should be visionary and supportive leadership at the college and program levels to accomplish the adoption of a competency-based core curriculum.
- Faculty buy-in is critical. In a short amount of time, faculty at ACTC have seen the educational benefits of the core to students in the classroom. Additionally, they have recognized benefits to themselves including the efficiencies of non-duplication and having students who are better prepared in advanced coursework.

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