

SUCCESS AND COMPLETION AT CUYAHOGA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C), located in and around Cleveland, Ohio, opened in September 1963 and was Ohio's first community college. It now serves more than 50,000 credit and noncredit students each year at four traditional campuses located throughout Cuyahoga County, as well as two corporate college locations, the Manufacturing Technology Center, the district office, the Hospitality Management Center at Public Square, the Brunswick University Center, the Advanced Technology Training Center (ATTC), and more than 50 off-campus sites (Figure 1). Over its 53-year history, Cuyahoga Community College has provided high-quality, affordable education and programs to more than 900,000 members of our community.

Each semester, Tri-C offers more than 1,000 credit courses in more than 190 career and technical programs, with more than 600 courses offered either fully online or in a hybrid format. The College awards five associate degrees—associate of arts, associate of science, associate of applied business, associate of applied science, and associate of technical studies—as well as short-term certificates, one-year certificates, and post-graduate certificates.

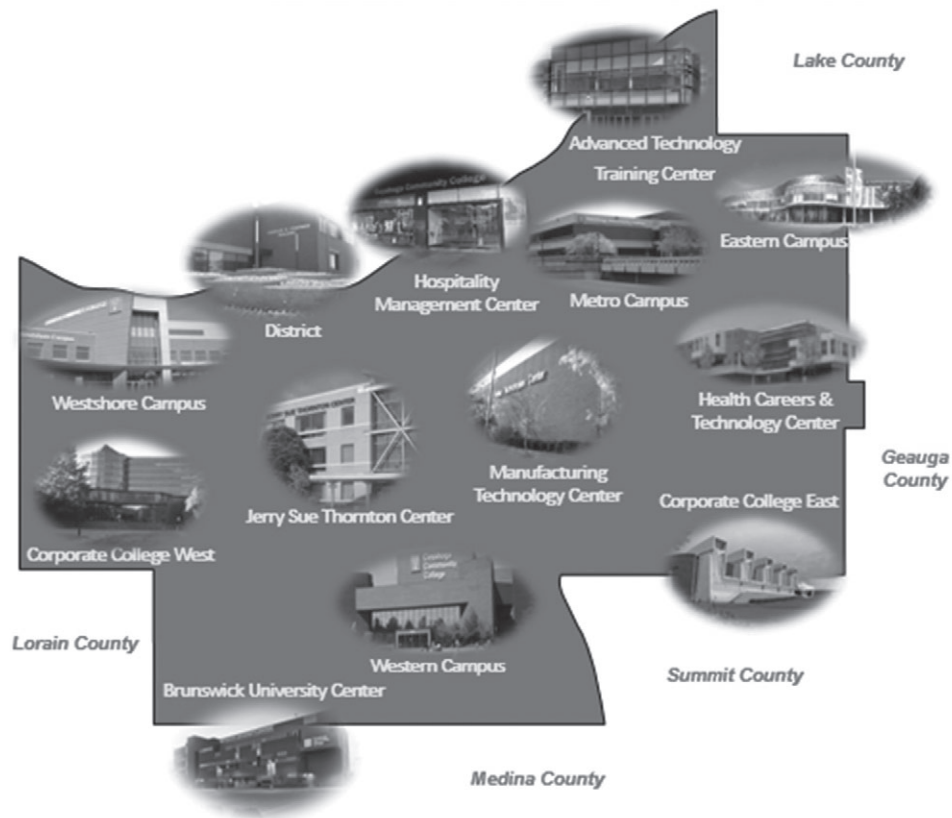
Cuyahoga Community College serves an extremely diverse population, reflective of the diversity that exists in Northeast Ohio. Over 38% of Tri-C students are from a minority group, with African-American students making up 29% of the overall student body at

the College. Students range in age from high school students to senior members of the community, with 27 being the average age of a Tri-C student. Sixty-eight percent of students are enrolled part time, with 11% enrolling in weekend or evening classes.

Tri-C has been a leader in innovation in the national community college movement for many years. Although still fully committed to remaining an open-access institution of higher education, at the heart of many of these innovations at the College is a commitment to help students complete what they have started, a certificate or a degree, and to do so within 3 years, in accordance with the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) metric, the national standard for graduation rates at community colleges. Although this time frame may not be realistic for many community college students given the many outside challenges and distractions they face along the way, it is the component of success by which our institutions are measured. Colleges owe it to students to help them become successful within the shortest possible time frame.

As one of the country's largest multicampus community colleges, Tri-C is fortunate to have the support of the local community and the financial resources necessary to improve the learning environment for students. Passionate and dedicated faculty and staff are committed to student success and seek opportunities to improve the student experience and student

Figure 1. Map of Campuses



outcomes. Just as other institutions have struggled to determine how best to support students in and out of the classroom to promote their success, during its early years as an Achieving the Dream institution, Tri-C piloted promising interventions with great enthusiasm but few positive results—until now.

In response to the call from President Obama to increase the number of students receiving degrees and certificates in a timely manner and the need to boost the number of college graduates in Ohio, Tri-C leadership defined specific and targeted goals around progress, retention, and completion to help focus the College's efforts. Given that Tri-C comprises four campuses, two corporate college locations, and several centers across Greater Cleveland, this is no small task. Additionally, Tri-C President Alex Johnson encouraged the administration to form a strong partnership with faculty—not only on leadership teams but also managing the day-to-day efforts on each campus. In order for Tri-C to meet its newly created goals, administration

and faculty would have to work together not only in designing new programs and initiatives, but in implementing them on the ground.

With this reenergized focus on student success and completion, Tri-C could no longer simply offer pilot interventions at single campuses or individual programs administered in isolation or with little coordinated support. Administration could no longer ask staff who were already stretched to their limits with increased responsibilities to do more, as they had done in the past. The College needed to step back, look at the big picture, and realign dollars and team members to create structured and coordinated interventions that reach students where they are, when it matters, and at scale.

With Dr. Johnson's new completion and retention goals in hand, faculty and administration purposely and intentionally worked to find new ways to collaborate and partner that aligned funding sources, strategic goals, and personnel resources. One of the ways the College promoted this new partnership is by including

more faculty on administrative and executive committees, recommitting to a shared governance model of decision making. For example, Tri-C enhanced the role of the Joint Faculty Senate (JFS) by reenergizing the President's Council, composed of the President's executive administrative leadership and the officers of the JFS. All major student success initiatives are presented at this monthly meeting for faculty input and guidance prior to implementation. The College also has seven contractually mandated governance committees, made up of administrators, faculty, and staff, that cover areas such as curriculum and degree requirements, enrollment management, technology, planning and institutional effectiveness, human resources, governance, and campus safety. Each year, each committee is given a charge by the provost, and the committee meets throughout the academic year and issues a report on recommended changes in the above-enumerated areas.

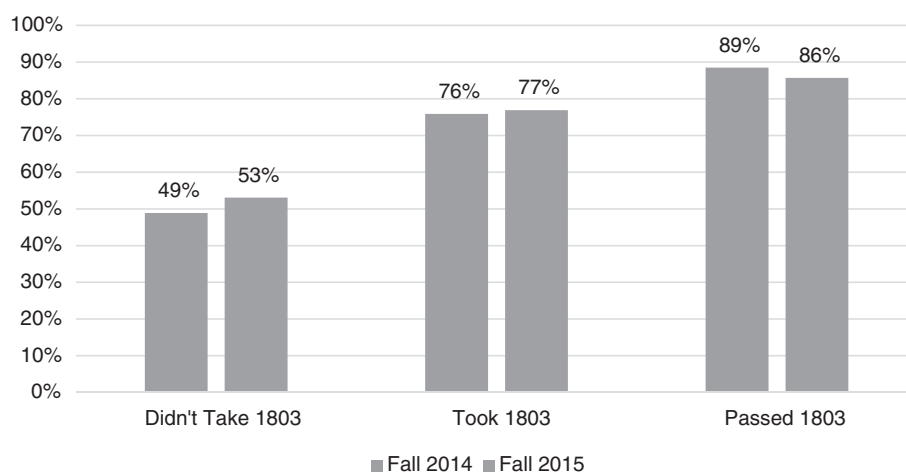
Additionally, through discussions by the provost, president, and the College's chapter of the American Association of University Professors, the College created ways and incentives for individual faculty to become more active in College-wide projects that are directly tied to student success and completion. More opportunities for faculty to earn equated semester units (ESUs), the standard College-wide unit of measuring direct instructional time outside the classroom, have been created. Faculty can use ESUs to replace part of their contractual teaching load or receive extra pay. Over the years, faculty have earned ESUs from working

on committees with administrators on topics such as the creation of academic pathways, prior learning assessments, and the creation of a yearlong College-wide academic schedule.

This enhanced partnership has been the backbone of recent institutional initiatives. One of these is a newly created, robust, and nontraditional First Year Experience (FYE) for all new students. Previously consisting of only a mandatory orientation experience, the new experience consists of several linked, mandatory, in-person activities. An improved New Student Orientation introduces students to Tri-C policies, procedures, and resources. Additionally, students receive an individual counseling session, campus tour, and assistance with course selection and registration. New Student Convocation is a celebration of the start of students' Tri-C journey and a formal introduction to the campus community. Students learn about campus life and college expectations, and connect with campus resources, faculty, and other students in their programs. The First Year Success Seminar (GEN 1803) is a one-credit course that develops lifelong learning skills and connects students to College resources. Course topics include time management, budgeting, study skills development, career exploration, and more. Students will also develop their academic plan.

In FYE's second year of implementation, the term-to-term retention rate and overall GPA for students completing the full experience is higher than for those students either not participating or not successfully completing the course (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Fall to Spring Persistence Among Students Taking, Passing, and Not Taking GEN 1803 in Fall 2014 and Fall 2015



Tri-C has also implemented a variety of initiatives in an effort to encourage completion among upper-classmen—those who have accrued at least 30 college-level credits. Program requirements and curricula have been updated to shorten time to completion, and the College encourages students to take the most direct path to completion by offering priority registration. Tri-C offers incentives for students who take 15 hours of coursework per semester and has introduced a technology solution for degree mapping, which helps to keep students on their academic pathways. Some of the most successful efforts and results are highlighted below:

- *Completion Scholarships.* In the fall of 2014, nearly \$80,000 was awarded to students who had completed 45 or more college credits, were registered for at least 9 credit hours, and had a minimum GPA of 2.5. The College had identified this student population as students who had high potential to graduate but may have encountered financial difficulty during their last few semesters of College. The need for this type of financial support in the last semesters of a student's academic career has grown, and the College's Foundation has been focused on highlighting the need for completion dollars. Students who meet the criteria are invited to apply for these scholarships. Early results have indicated that these funds have been well spent—for instance, of 236 students who received completion scholarship dollars between fall 2012 and summer 2014, 96 percent have either graduated or are still enrolled. The College's goal for 2017 is to raise and award close to \$700,000 in completion scholarships.
- *American Graduation Initiative (AGI).* With regard to President Obama's call to increase the number of certificates and degrees granted by America's community colleges by 2020, Tri-C is now well positioned to meet its share of that challenge by awarding 13,000 additional credentials over the next few years. As leadership works to determine yearly goals through 2020 to reach the College's target for the AGI, Tri-C has already been able to increase the number of certificates and degrees granted by an impressive margin, and the

momentum is beginning to pay off. In 2014, the College surpassed the goal of 3,334 graduates by 315, and surpassed the 2015 goal of 3,601 graduates by more than 700, granting a total of 4,348 degrees and certificates. In 2016, the College again exceeded the goal it set for awarding certificates and degrees by over 300 graduates.

- *IPEDS.* The creation of new roles to support completion, in combination with intentional case management and proactive degree and certificate auditing and awarding, has helped the College improve its IPEDS graduation rate from 4.2% and 4.4% in 2012 and 2013, respectively, to 5.2% in 2014 and 9.1% for the cohort graduating in 2015.

The College chose a case management approach for the IPEDS cohort, focusing case managers on each individual student in each cohort. Case managers are able to put their arms around individual students in the cohort, and work with them on degree audits to find paths to completion, as well as assist in connecting individual students to college and other resources for issues that may otherwise prevent a student from completing. Case managers have also helped identify IPEDS cohort members who have transferred from the College, and worked with them to transfer new credits to Tri-C so that they may be awarded a degree or certificate from this institution. This case management approach facilitates degree audits after each semester, works directly with Registrar's Office staff and counselors to triage students and their academic progress, serves as a liaison between students and financial aid to award completion scholarships when federal aid is exhausted, and provides information and support to campus success teams to organize outreach for students by campus.

For the cohort graduating in 2016, the College improved that graduation rate to 12.8%. Although the numbers remain relatively small, the size and structure of this large, multicampus system makes moving the dial on IPEDS graduation rates a significant challenge. And based on this case management method of student support, the College added two more retention specialists to work with specific student groups: students of color, students from the Cleveland Municipal School District, and students in developmental math.

Student completion is, without a doubt, the College's top priority—for the success of both students and the institution—and increasing the IPEDS graduation rate will continue to be a main focus.

Simply focusing on access was not benefitting students; the national community college movement has recognized that to truly serve students, they must complete their educational goals. As suggested in the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) 21st Century Report and by national leaders at the forefront of the community college movement, Tri-C has reinvented and aligned institutional roles to meet new objectives and continue efforts to redesign the student experience to assure student success.

Faculty participation in and endorsement of college-wide leadership decisions was crucial to the process that led to the creation of these roles and programs. One of the innovative programs the College has used to move important student success initiatives forward is summer scale up teams. These teams, composed of administration and faculty leaders, focus on projects that would otherwise make little to no progress over the summer semester, when many faculty are away from campus. This past year, faculty were a part of several important projects, such as the creation of a college-wide yearlong schedule, the process for awarding prior learning credit, and the definition of academic pathways, that continued to meet and work over the summer months. As a result, these faculty-led initiatives made significant progress over the summer months and were able to be implemented earlier than if work resumed in the fall. Additionally, working closely with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to provide faculty members with the ability to participate in and lead these projects outside of their regular teaching loads was crucial.

Faculty- and staff-led success teams at each campus and at the district administrative office are focused on improving student success and completion. The College has created intentional initiatives at scale to guide and support students. Dollars and staff have aligned with the necessary and intrusive work both on the ground and behind the scenes to support completion. For example, several years ago, the College identified \$1 million in student success funding in each yearly budget. This financial resource is spent on

projects and purchases that directly impact students and their academic progress. Examples of student success-funded projects include financial support for a redesigned developmental math program, additional dollars to expand tutoring services and availability at the campuses, and financial support for student members of the Black American Council.

Other cross-functional teams, led by faculty and administrators alike, are now working on a new student engagement model, "One Door, Many Options for Success," which aims to reinvent the student experience by providing structured educational pathways and support to reduce the time to college completion and increase the number of students who obtain degrees, certificates, and other credentials. "One Door, Many Options for Success" means that regardless of where the student enters the institution, whether for credit or noncredit courses, for certificate or degree programs, and so on, we will serve students where they enter, and provide consistent and coordinated support and service necessary for success. This faculty-inspired program, from all disciplines across the College, is designed to be the umbrella under which individual initiatives are now created that are intended to change the way students enter the institution; the way support is leveraged and built around the student journey; and the way faculty, counselors, and support teams interact to help students succeed. The One Door project has allowed the College to create success initiatives and projects such as the First Year Experience; the One Record software system, which provides a single record in a single system for each student, allowing counselors, financial aid administrators, faculty, and staff to see a comprehensive student record; and the implementation of DegreeWorks, a College-wide degree audit system. All of these projects are created and implemented to improve the student experience, and ultimately encourage greater persistence and completion.

Although Tri-C celebrates the progress made to date, the initial success is just a starting point. The College is keenly and completely focused on one goal: student success and completion. Administration, faculty, and staff are unified in confidence that this is the right path, and the direction is a positive one. With current momentum, the College is energized and excited to see where it leads.

Karen Miller, PhD, is the Executive Vice President/Provost of the Access, Learning & Success Division at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C). She previously served as the Vice President of Institutional Research and Enrollment Management, overseeing recruitment, enrollment, retention, and completion initiatives for the College. She also managed the Evidence and Inquiry department, leading initiatives such as the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, IPEDS relationship and research, and data requests from throughout the College. Dr. Miller serves on several College-wide administrative leadership teams, and has contributed to the development and implementation the College's strategic plan, the enrollment plan, and all of Tri-C's student policies and procedures to enhance student success. She has led numerous College-wide initiatives, including the cross-functional team that developed the Strategic Enrollment Plan, College Credit Plus, and Veteran's initiatives. Additionally, Dr. Miller and her team were instrumental in the 400% increase in the IPEDS graduation rate over the past several years, and she worked closely with administration and faculty to implement the new DegreeWorks software, which will help students create academic plans. Dr. Miller has been with the College since 1998 and has served in a number of positions that have made a positive impact on our students and their academic experiences. Dr. Miller joined Tri-C as the Director of Student Affairs, becoming the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, and eventually serving as Dean of Student Affairs at our Metropolitan Campus for over five years. As dean, Dr. Miller managed the campus division of Student Affairs, including recruitment, admissions, registration, counseling services, student life and athletics, and career services. Dr. Miller is also a statewide and nationally recognized leader in higher education, and has presented at numerous conferences and conventions, including the American Association of Community Colleges Annual Convention, the Institute for Higher Education Policy & Lumina Foundation, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers Strategic Enrollment Conference, and the National Noel-Levitz Retention Conference. As a chancellor-appointed position, Dr. Miller served on the Ohio Transfer & Articulation Network (as well as the OTAN Oversight Board and she also serves on the National Enrollment Management Advisory Board for the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Offices. Dr. Miller is also a graduate of the League for Innovation in the Community College's Executive Leadership Institute. Prior to Dr. Miller's arrival at Cuyahoga Community College, she worked at both Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, and DeVry Institute of Technology in Columbus, Ohio, in various roles within Student Affairs. She has a PhD in higher education from the University of Toledo, and also holds a bachelor of science degree in technical education and a master of science degree in technical education with a specialization in guidance and counseling from the University of Akron. Email: karen.miller@tri-c.edu