Northern Virginia Community College

Community College Library Support for Student Success

Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC), leading a diverse partnership of seven community colleges and a not-for-profit research service, proposes to develop and assess a series of concepts for new library services to improve support for student success.[1] This Community Anchors research project will generate two public research reports, one on student perspectives, practices, and needs broadly and a second providing specific assessments of the service concepts. It will also yield a toolkit that can be used by additional community colleges to test these service concepts themselves or develop and assess other service concepts that are more relevant to their population.

The National Need for the Program

Higher education institutions across the United States are being called upon to provide greater assurance about student outcomes. Community colleges have taken up the challenge and are at the vanguard of adapting their approaches to ensure student success for a diverse portfolio of students, including New Americans, first-generation students, workforce development, and the academically underprepared, as well as high-achieving students seeking transfer opportunities. Community college libraries are essential partners and leaders in this vital work, bringing together a variety of academic support services, including creating learning commons, engaging with faculty in support of OER to increase access and reduce cost of college, and spearheading initiatives to demonstrate library value such as ACRL's Assessment in Action.

To continue evolving in support of students, community college libraries need strategic intelligence about how to adapt their services. The partnership proposes to develop and test a series of concepts for new student academic support services for the community college library. It will generate several public research outputs, including at least one major national publication, as well as a toolkit that individual colleges can use for their own local assessment and service development. The project will identify new service opportunities for community college libraries, allowing them to align resources and programming in support of students.

The project is organized as a partnership of community college libraries that is diverse in student population, geographical location, programming, and type of system affiliation, in collaboration with Ithaka S+R, a not-for-profit research service with expertise studying faculty and students to inform future roles for the academic library and analyzing educational transformation to support student success. The partner organizations will serve as research sites, prove the value of the method, and test the resulting toolkit. A senior leader from each partner will serve on the steering committee, as will the Ithaka S+R team.

NVCC is an Achieving the Dream Leader College. In addition, NVCC has led national community college consortia with grants from the Department of Labor, the State Department, HHS, and the National Science Foundation. The co-Project Directors are Dr. Braddlee-Dean of Learning & Technology Resources at NVCC and Roger Schonfeld with Ithaka S+R. Dr. Braddlee has a decade of experience leading innovation and assessment initiatives in academic libraries and technology in higher education, and, has held leadership roles in library grant projects supported through Title V, and the Gates and Hewlett Foundations.

There is no existing representative sample of community college student contact information for a large-scale research study, so this partnership is designed to conduct research at a broad group of institutions. The project recognizes the different types of community college students, such as adult learners interested in changing careers, noncredit technical training workforce development, and traditional-age students looking to transfer to four-year

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[1] Confirmed partnership members include these community colleges: Borough of Manhattan, Bronx, LaGuardia, Monroe (NY), Northern Virginia, Pierce (WA), and Queensborough. We include multiple institutions from the same system (City University of New York) to ensure that our toolkit will offer value to multiple colleges choosing to run the toolkit as a cohort and thereby test the opportunity for common or shared services. It will be adapted for this context.

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institutions. The intent is to explore different student types, stratify findings to reflect them, and guide community colleges to the right mix of innovative services in support of their actual population.

Research Questions

The project will begin with a qualitative stage, designed to explore in an open-ended fashion students' educational objectives, their academic and information usage practices, and the barriers they face. The steering committee will then meet to review the findings and collaboratively develop a series of concepts for library-provided services that could reduce barriers and increase student success. These service concepts will be assessed in a survey phase, to test the breadth of demand for these services and how it may vary by student type, institutional type, and other factors.

Workplan

December 2017 - February 2018. Develop interview protocol and review it with the steering committee. Develop standard language for institutional review boards. Seek and receive formal campus approvals.
Spring 2018. Interview 5-10 students from each institution, seeking a broad array of student types rather than scientific representativeness. Analyze findings using grounded theory and publish a report. Based on these findings, convene partnership in a workshop to design service possibilities for community college libraries. Draft survey instrument and iterate with steering committee to finalize.
Summer 2018. Test survey instrument and outreach/incentives via cognitive interviews and pretest, to maximize engagement. Develop protocol for fielding survey. Develop marketing and outreach materials.
Fall 2018. All participating institutions field the survey and receive a report of findings (ie assessment results).
Spring 2019. Review findings via partner workshop. Develop local action plans for each campus. Analyze aggregate findings. Publish research report and issue brief. Host external briefing about findings.

Project Deliverables and Communications Plan

Interim and final research reports. Qualitative phase findings will be published via an interim report. The final report will include details on methodology and project process, qualitative findings, a meta-analysis of survey findings from the participants, and reflections resulting from the workshop.
Blogposts and issue briefs. Regular blogposts will examine aspects of student success, project progress and challenges, and share our service concepts in draft form for community input. One issue brief will be published on survey best practices in community colleges.
Presentations. The co-PIs and steering committee members will present at a variety of conferences, such as ACRL, Library Assessment Conference, METRO, and the League for Innovation in Community Colleges.
Toolkit. All research protocols, questionnaires, and support materials, as well as guidance on how they can be used, will be packaged into a toolkit, allowing other community colleges to replicate the work of the project.
All deliverables will be reviewed in draft form by the steering committee, published to the Ithaka S+R website, under CC-BY license and with unique DOI, and publicized widely with the support of the partnership. The survey dataset will be submitted to the ICPSR repository for preservation and access.

Estimated Budget

Our budget supports the full work of the partnership. It includes salaries and wages ($65,500) and fringe benefits ($5,010) for NVCC. It includes sub-awards for the partners, including the other colleges and Ithaka S+R ($287,000). It includes travel for workshops, planning meetings, and dissemination ($30,526), and supplies, material, and equipment ($6,550). Indirect costs are budgeted for the NVCC components at 18 percent ($19,365). In total, NVCC requests $413,951 in support from IMLS to fund the proposed research project.