

# *Kodiak College*

## *Case Study Report*

*Consortium for Healthcare Education Online*

**Education and Employment Research Center**

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Renée Edwards  
Audrey Mattoon  
Heather McKay

Education and Employment Research Center  
School of Management and Labor Relations  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
Janice H. Levin Building  
94 Rockafeller Road  
Piscataway, NJ 08854

[smlr.rutgers.edu/eerc](http://smlr.rutgers.edu/eerc)

**RUTGERS**  
School of Management  
and Labor Relations

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Renée Edwards  
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Education and Employment Research Center  
School of Management and Labor Relations  
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey  
Janice H. Levin Building  
94 Rockefeller Road  
Piscataway, NJ 08854

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## **ABOUT RUTGERS SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT AND LABOR RELATIONS**

Rutgers' School of Management and Labor Relations (SMLR) is the leading source of expertise on the world of work, building effective and sustainable organizations, and the changing employment relationship. The school is comprised of two departments—one focused on all aspects of strategic human resource management and the other dedicated to the social science specialties related to labor studies and employment relations. In addition, SMLR provides many continuing education and certificate programs taught by world-class researchers and expert practitioners.

SMLR was originally established by an act of the New Jersey legislature in 1947 as the Institute of Management and Labor Relations (IMLR). Like its counterparts that were created in the other large industrial states at the same time, the Institute was chartered to promote new forms of labor-management cooperation following the industrial unrest at the end of World War II. It officially became a school at the flagship campus of the State University of New Jersey in New Brunswick/Piscataway in 1994. For more information, visit [smlr.rutgers.edu](http://smlr.rutgers.edu).

## **ABOUT THE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH CENTER**

Rutgers' Education and Employment Research Center (EERC) is housed within the School of Management and Labor Relations. EERC conducts research and evaluations on education and workforce development programs and policies. EERC research expertise includes community colleges, state and federal workforce developmental systems, skills development, college completion, and innovative and technology-based programs.

## INTRODUCTION

The Consortium for Healthcare Education Online (CHEO) is a United States Department of Labor (USDOL) Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) funded grant project intended to develop new or redesigned online and hybrid courses leading to credentials in health care fields in high demand across the West and Midwest. CHEO is an interstate consortium consisting of eight colleges across Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Montana, and Alaska. The consortium includes Pueblo Community College (PCC), Otero Junior College (OJC), Red Rocks Community College (RRCC), Laramie County Community College (LCCC), Lake Area Technical College (LATI), Great Falls College Montana State University (GFC MSU), Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC), and Kodiak College (KoC).

Each of the eight colleges is required to integrate the following components into its program/course design/redesign: 1) open education resources (OER), 2) use of the North American Network of Science Labs Online (NANSLO), 3) a CHEO-funded career coach, and 4) use of the CHEO Health Career Hub.

Open education resources (OER) are teaching tools and resources that are licensed for free, public use. They include teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge.

Under the CHEO grant, consortium colleges are encouraged to use OER resources in the creation/redesign of their online or hybrid courses. Consortium colleges are also required to create or redesign their courses/programs so that they can be packaged and licensed OER for use by other educators and institutions. The CHEO colleges will package, license, and post their course material during the course of the grant. OER materials will be uploaded to a skills commons repository under MERLOT. The MERLOT skills commons repository consists of discipline-specific learning materials, learning exercises, and web pages, designed to enhance the teaching experience.

The North American Network of Science Labs Online (NANSLO) is a remotely operated robotic lab designed to innovate the distance lab experience for students through a web-based portal. CHEO partners will collaborate to develop lab exercises to be used in health- and science-related courses. Faculty in the designed/redesigned CHEO programs will incorporate the developed labs into courses, using one of the three NANSLO nodes. Nodes are equipped laboratories that remotely run the specified labs for consortium colleges. Three total nodes exist, one newly created under the CHEO grant at GFC MSU. The other two nodes are located at North Island College in Vancouver, British Columbia, and RRCC in Denver, Colorado.

The NANSLO science lab network is managed by the Colorado Community College System (CCCS). For the purposes of the CHEO grant, the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) in Boulder, Colorado serves as the public's primary resource for information about NANSLO. WICHE coordinates communication among the network's lab partners and coordinates the faculty discipline panels that plan and develop individual science experiments for the nodes.

WICHE additionally serves as CHEO's professional development coordinator, scheduling webinars and workshops for instructional designers, faculty and career coaches through three years of the grant. Specifically, in the first year of the grant, WICHE was responsible for one face-to-face workshop that included instructional designers and faculty members, a separate face-to-face workshop for career coaches, and four webinars (two for faculty and two for coaches). In the second year of the grant, WICHE was responsible for a face-to-face workshop for faculty and one for coaches, as well as six webinars (three for faculty and three for coaches). In the third year of the grant, WICHE is responsible for one face-to-face workshop for faculty and one for coaches, in addition to six webinars (three for faculty and three for coaches). If subsequent support during any grant-funded year is deemed necessary, the PCC CHEO administration team is responsible. For example, based upon project needs relative to employer engagement and job placement, a second face-to-face workshop was provided for coaches in year three. The PCC CHEO team also provides organization and facilitation of annual face-to-face meetings for project leads. Additionally, 10 trainings for the CHEO Health Career Hub are the responsibility of College in Colorado. Hub trainings began in year two and extend into year three.

Each college in the consortium is required to employ a career coach to collaborate with employer partners, local workforce centers, community and nonprofit organizations, and students to ensure student access to CHEO resources. Within each of these areas of collaboration, coaches work according to their institution's needs to build CHEO programs, recruit and retain students for CHEO programs, and assist students in multiple ways as each institution designates. Coaches also track their interactions with students to report outcomes based on a model of "intensive advising," assisting students throughout their education with multiple interactions and points of intervention to ensure student success and, ultimately, employment.

The CHEO Health Career Hub is a sophisticated regional and web-based portal that promotes and supports those pursuing a career in health care fields with a wide variety of high-impact interactive tools and services. PCC, the lead applicant and fiscal agent for the CHEO grant, has worked with College in Colorado hub development and Kuder, a company that designs online career planning systems, to create the CHEO hub. The hub is to be used as a case management tool by coaches and as an interactive career management tool for students in CHEO programs across all eight consortium colleges.

This report is one of eight created to highlight each individual college's contributions to the CHEO project to date. The purpose of this case study is to provide a summary of KoC's activities, successes, and challenges to date and to identify the best practices, innovative strategies, and unique contributions of the college to the CHEO project to date. This case study begins with an overview of its methodology and data sources and then moves on to the contextual frame—demographic and socioeconomic background information about KoC, its student population, and its service region. These sections are followed by a) a summary of the goals of KoC's CHEO program, b) a discussion of the baseline targets and subsequent changes relative to the CHEO project, c) the identification of KoC's emerging best practices, innovative strategies and unique contributions to CHEO, and d) a summary of successes and challenges to date along with next steps.

## **METHODOLOGY/DATA SOURCES**

This report examines the development and implementation of the first two years of the CHEO grant at KoC, including experiences of the project team members and participating staff, faculty, and students. As such, this report uses qualitative data and analysis. Subsequent EERC evaluation reports will include outcome measures and report on quantitative data collection and analysis.

The qualitative methodology for this report includes content analysis of consortium goals and activities to date, relevant proposals, and project- and college-specific statements of work, quarterly reports, career coach tracking spreadsheets (also called "stitched-in reports"), strategic plan information and materials, and websites developed by individual colleges. EERC team members have also conducted phone and in-person interviews with the CHEO coordinator, grant administrators, senior WICHE administrators, college project leads, NANSLO Discipline Panel participants, and faculty and career coaches. EERC team members have also been participant-observers at many project workshops including those for faculty, project leads, instructional designers, and career coaches. Finally, members of the EERC team have "observed" conference calls with project leads and career coaches and joined in webinars.

Most interviews were taped and transcribed; non-taped interviews involved extensive note taking. These transcriptions and notes as well as the documents cited above have been coded through the use of NVivo qualitative data management software and analyzed by EERC team members to represent each college's individual story relative to the CHEO project.

As noted above, while quantitative analysis will be presented in subsequent reports, this summary is meant for contextual purposes only and will only utilize data from qualitative analysis. For this reason, grant targets relative to each college, student counts, course counts, NANSLO lab counts, industry- and workforce-related targets, and other quantitative objectives will not be discussed as part of this report.

## COLLEGE DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW OF STUDENT POPULATION

KoC, a non-residential college established in 1968, is located in Kodiak, Alaska, a small city on Kodiak Island, situated in the south central portion of the state.<sup>1</sup> KoC has one campus, which employs 14 full-time faculty, 30–40 adjunct faculty each semester, and 25 staff members.<sup>2</sup>

KoC is located in an extremely rural environment; Kodiak Island can be reached by aircraft or boat only.<sup>3</sup> Kodiak Island is 257 air miles south of Anchorage, Alaska's most populous city. Kodiak has a population of 6,423, according to the U.S. Census Bureau estimates for 2013.<sup>4</sup> KoC also serves the surrounding Alaska Native villages of Ouzinkie, Old Harbor, Larsen Bay, Port Lions, Karluk, Ahkiok, and Chiniak. The combined population of KoC's service area is approximately 13,250. The non-central location of Kodiak and the geographical dispersion of surrounding locations create the need for online education of the local population. Another factor that strengthens the need for online education is the presence of one of the largest U.S. Coast Guard bases in the United States, located about five miles from Kodiak.<sup>5</sup> District 17 of the U.S. Coast Guard has bases in Juneau, Sitka, Anchorage, and Kodiak<sup>6</sup> and is represented by 2,500 active duty, reserve, auxiliary, and civilian staff.<sup>7</sup>

KoC is a community campus of the University of Alaska, Anchorage (UAA). Credits earned at KoC are considered University of Alaska Anchorage credits, which promotes transferability to one of the four-year universities located in Juneau, Anchorage, and Fairbanks or to any of the other University of Alaska community campuses throughout the state.<sup>8</sup> KoC offers one associate of arts (AA) degree and eight associate of applied science (AAS) degrees as well as five undergraduate certificate programs, three occupational endorsements, and a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program. The college also offers a bachelor of arts (BA) degree in Elementary Education in collaboration with the UAA College of Education.<sup>9</sup> During Spring 2014 semester, the college enrolled 968 students, 68 percent of whom were part time (N = 658).

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<sup>1</sup>Kodiak College. *About: Kodiak College*. Retrieved July 24, 2014, from KoC Web site: <http://www.koc.alaska.edu/about>

<sup>2</sup>Kodiak College. *Quick Facts: Kodiak College*. Retrieved July 24, 2014, from KoC Website: <http://www.koc.alaska.edu/about/quick-facts>

<sup>3</sup>*The Kodiak Island Archipelago*. Retrieved July 22, 2014, from Discover Kodiak Web site: [https://www.kodiak.org/the\\_kodiak\\_island\\_archipelago](https://www.kodiak.org/the_kodiak_island_archipelago)

<sup>4</sup>U.S. Census Bureau (2014, July 8). *U.S. Census Bureau: State and County Quick Facts*. Retrieved July 22, 2014, from U.S. Census Bureau Web site: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/02/02150.html>

<sup>5</sup>Department of Labor and Workforce Development. *Research and Analysis Section*. Retrieved July 22, 2014, from Alaska State Web site: <http://www.live.laborstats.alaska.gov/alari/>

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Coast Guard Newsroom. *17<sup>th</sup> District Alaska*. Retrieved July 22, 2014 from U.S. Coast Guard Newsroom Website: [www.d17.uscgnews.com/go/doc/4007/2156574/District-17](http://www.d17.uscgnews.com/go/doc/4007/2156574/District-17)

<sup>7</sup>U.S. Coast Guard. *17<sup>th</sup> District Alaska: Fact Sheet*. Retrieved July 22, 2014 from U.S. Coast Guard Website: <http://www.uscg.mil/d17/images/D17%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

<sup>8</sup>Kodiak College. *Quick Facts: Kodiak College*. Retrieved July 24, 2014, from KoC Website: <http://www.koc.alaska.edu/about/quick-facts>

<sup>9</sup>Kodiak College. *Degrees and Certificates*. Retrieved July 30, 2014, from KoC Website: <http://www.koc.alaska.edu/current-students/degrees-certificates>

## KoC'S CHEO GOALS

KoC's goals for the CHEO grant revolved around developing an Occupational Endorsement in Medical Office Coding to serve remote students through a fully online program and to simultaneously fill the industry need for a medical coding program. Many of the students targeted for this program are affiliated with the military, and the program is wholly online with the expectation that a few of the students will be physically located in the Kodiak area after program completion. As a result, both state and national labor market trends affect job growth prospects for students.

The Occupational Endorsement in Medical Office Coding and especially the title of a certified professional coder (CPC) opens employment opportunities in physicians' offices, hospital outpatient facilities, ambulatory surgical centers, and similar facilities.<sup>10</sup> In addition, this certificate may serve as a stepping-stone for those interested in nursing, case management, accounting, business administration, and hospital administration.<sup>11</sup>

The unemployment rate for CPCs nationally in 2013 was 2 percent, compared with the national unemployment average of 7 percent.<sup>12</sup> The unemployment rate for Kodiak Island Borough is 6 percent,<sup>13</sup> and the average salary for medical billing and coding in Alaska is \$40,900.<sup>14</sup> According to the personnel of the CHEO project at Kodiak College, there is a huge deficit of job applicants who are CPCs on the local market. Earning a certificate can result in an increase of 20 percent in the average salary of those employed via the certificate's use.<sup>15</sup>

The current trends in the labor market offer optimistic perspectives for professional medical coders. As in the case of other states in the United States, a large number of those employed in the health care industry are reaching the retirement age of 65, which will create expected vacancies. Alaska is projected to add 38,749 jobs by 2020, with health care and social assistance representing the highest growth of any industry in the state (31 percent).<sup>16</sup> Other factors that lead to the continual expansion of health care employment are the ongoing development of the

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<sup>10</sup>KoC. *Degrees and Certificates: OEC Medical Office Coding*. Retrieved July 24, 2014, from KoCWeb site:

<http://www.koc.alaska.edu/current-students/degrees-certificates/oec-medical-office-coding>

<sup>11</sup>KoC. *Allied Health Program*. Retrieved July 24, 2014, from KoCWeb site: <http://www.koc.alaska.edu/allied-health-program>

<sup>12</sup>Blackmer, D (2013, October). *2013 Salary Survey: Coder Employment on the Rise*. Retrieved July 24, 2014 from AAPC Website: <https://www.aapc.com/certification/cpc.aspx>

<sup>13</sup>Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis. *June 2014 Unemployment Rate*. Retrieved July 22, 2014, from State of Alaska Web site: <http://labor.alaska.gov/research/uimap/map.pdf>

<sup>14</sup>*Salary in Alaska*. Retrieved July 28, 2014, from Medical Billing & Coding Web site: <http://www.medicalbillingandcoding.org/salary/alaska/>

<sup>15</sup>*Certified Professional Coder (CPC)*. Retrieved July 28, 2014, from AAPC: Advancing the Business of Healthcare Web site: <https://www.aapc.com/certification/cpc.aspx>

<sup>16</sup>Martz, P (2012, October). *Health Care to Lead Industry Growth: Alaska Industry Forecast, 2010 to 20120*. Retrieved July 22, 2014, from the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Web site: <http://labor.alaska.gov/research/trends/oct12art1.pdf>

state's hospitals and clinics as well as the adaptation of new technology.<sup>17</sup>The highest growth in terms of number of jobs is expected to occur in the ambulatory health care sector—practitioners, outpatient care centers, and home health services—accounting for 37 percent, followed by hospital employment with 28 percent.<sup>18</sup>

The primary motivation of KoC when applying for the CHEO grant was to provide improved distance education and training opportunities in a critical allied health field. Part of improving distance education for KoC includes access to a fully online science lab experience. The robotics capacity of the NANSLO lab was of particular interest to KoC when choosing this solution.

## **CHEO PROGRAMS AND PROCESSES**

### **Development and Implementation**

The Occupational Endorsement in Medical Office Coding program is new to KoC as part of the CHEO grant. Prior to the grant, the program existed at other UAA universities, including Anchorage, Sitka and Fairbanks. The Anchorage program is offered in classroom, whereas Sitka and Fairbanks offer hybrid versions. Kodiak's program is the only fully online Occupational Endorsement in Medical Office Coding program in the state.

KoC's Medical Office Coding program is offered in collaboration with the University of Alaska, Anchorage's College of Health, School of Allied Health and extends over a three-semester period, equivalent to 18 months.<sup>19</sup> The program prepares students to take the national certification exam, administered by the American Association of Professional Coders (AAPC) to become certified professional coders. The national exam is not part of the program offered by KoC, and students are responsible for paying the \$325 cost; however, students are advised to prepare for and take the CPC exam. The medical coding instructor is CPC certified, a minimum qualification for the position; as a result, the instructor is able to help students prepare for the exam. The medical coding instructor and career coach both put considerable effort into helping students prepare for the national certification even though the test is technically taken outside the program.

The MA 101 (Medical Terminology), MA 104 (Essentials of Human Diseases), MA 220 (Coding for the Medical Office), and MA 320 (Advanced Case Studies in Medical Coding) courses were all created as new additions to the program through the CHEO grant. BIO 100 (Human Biology) had previously been offered at the Anchorage campus, but the course was completely redesigned for the CHEO program. KoC courses were redesigned by faculty and with input by

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<sup>17</sup>Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis. *Alaska's Health Care Industry*. Retrieved July 22, 2014, from State of Alaska Web site: <http://labor.alaska.gov/research/trends/oct12art1.pdf>

<sup>18</sup>Martz, P (2012, October). *Health Care to Lead Industry Growth: Alaska Industry Forecast, 2010 to 20120*. Retrieved July 22, 2014, from the State of Alaska Web site: <http://labor.alaska.gov/research/trends/oct12art1.pdf>

<sup>19</sup>KoC. *Degrees and Certificates: OEC Medical Office Coding*. Retrieved July 24, 2014, from KoC Website: <http://www.koc.alaska.edu/current-students/degrees-certificates/oec-medical-office-coding>

industry representatives. All the required classes have already been completed and placed online. The final two courses were added for Fall 2014. Due to the nature of KoC's relationship with UAA, the college had to seek permission from the School of Allied Health at the metropolitan campus to offer the program and to develop an articulation agreement.

A primary concern with the previous program offered at the Anchorage campus was the low success rate of students' passing the board certification exams. The development of new course offerings has gone hand in hand with close collaboration with other programs offered through other UAA schools to allow for a comparative analysis of success rates. The hope is that the success rate for board certification will be much higher with the new program. To this end, KoC developed a non-credit, six-week online exam preparation course that students will take in the spring semester just before their exam. It will be offered for the first time in January and February 2015, and the exam date for students taking the course at Kodiak is set for March.

Faculty involvement in the CHEO grant process at KoC has been high. There are only four faculty members in the program, three of whom are currently working full time in the medical field. The majority of faculty have taken or are planning to enroll in the Quality Matters (QM) Program for Distance Educators. QM is a certification course for educators to teach them how to design, develop, and assess state-of-the-art Web-based distance delivered courses. The certification process also encourages peer review as part of the learning model.

As mentioned above, faculty involvement was central to the decision for KoC to apply for the CHEO grant. Faculty were engaged in actively searching for an online science component before the grant became available and, because of this, were extremely excited about the opportunities NANSLO could offer as a teaching tool in their quest to enhance and improve distance learning. The small size of the program and the college has also allowed faculty to be central to the development and delivery of the new program courses.

### **Recruitment and Enrollment**

There was initially concern among CHEO staff and members of the University of Alaska Allied Health Alliance that adding the Medical Coding program at KoC would pull students from the other system colleges' existing programs. Early in the project, a staff member told the EERC team that CHEO staff were beginning to feel this would not actually be the case. This staff member stated, "There's such a high need for medical coders that I think once we start advertising this, that students would just really literally flood in." This did turn out to be the case, and KOC has generated an excess of students that has been referred to other colleges' programs.

To date, recruitment and advertising for the Occupational Endorsement in Medical Coding has targeted the larger hospitals as well as smaller clinics. The other major recruitment tactic that has been employed is sending marketing flyers to different institutions throughout Kodiak, with a special focus on nearby military installations; the college as a whole serves roughly 70

percent military-affiliated individuals, and the CHEO program as of Fall 2014 included roughly 50 percent military-associated students and two out-of-state students. The college also advertises in the local newspaper, the *Kodiak Daily Mirror*, and the local public and private radio stations.

College staff identified their most successful marketing effort as sending flyers or brochures and then following up with a phone call. The college's new career coach also uses Facebook for recruitment of military spouses.

## NANSLO

As mentioned previously, the North American Network of Science Labs Online (NANSLO) is a network of three science labs that serve the CHEO consortium and CCCS. KoC utilizes the Vancouver, British Columbia, node, which is housed at North Island College.

## Reception

Faculty buy in for NANSLO labs has been high. Students also report relatively positive experiences with lab activities to date. The faculty member instrumental in integrating the NANSLO labs developed several strategies for helping students understand the lab process before they take the lab. During the second year of instruction, students must pass a pretest to take a NANSLO lab. If they do not pass the pretest, the students cannot take the NANSLO lab until they do. Students are provided support at every step as they prepare for and complete NANSLO labs; students participate in a synchronous lecture and receive assistance from lab personnel during their participation. The instructor feels that the better students understand the process, the more prepared they will be and the more participatory they will be. She has created documents with detailed explanations of the scheduling process, screen shots of the labs, and tips to help student while using the labs, such as how to focus the microscope, how to gain and release control of the microscope, and how to communicate with lab techs and other students using the teleconference line.

Non-science majors, such as the medical office coding students, are often wary of science labs in general, a concern that can be compounded by students who have not been properly prepared. And because the NANSLO labs are adding another element—remote operation—to the science lab experience, this support and preparation is critical to student success:

[I] do a synchronous lecture. I say, OK, this is exactly what we're going to do, I take screen shots. This is how you're going to do it. Then after the lab, there's a follow-up. The next week, this is okay, now you're going to turn in your lab reports. Did anybody have any problems getting their pictures? I have a picture gallery as backup, just in case, right. So trying to limit their apprehension, because certainly I can tell you at first, that they are very apprehensive.

## **Use to Date**

To date, three labs have been incorporated into regular coursework for the program: the meiosis/mitosis lab, intro to microscopy, and a human diseases lab.

One of Kodiak's faculty members has been highly involved in the NANSLO process through sitting on the Discipline Panel for Biology, participating in group faculty calls, and putting together presentations and material intended to help other faculty understand the benefits of NANSLO and how to assist their students' learning through the use of NANSLO labs.

## **Future Plans**

There are also plans to incorporate new labs, time permitting, including the Hematology Lab. Regardless of which individual labs are used in the courses, faculty intends to continue using labs and supporting remote students' success with them.

## **OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCES**

As discussed above, open education resources (OER) are teaching tools, lessons, interactive activities, recorded lectures, or any other teaching element that can be shared openly without copyright or licensing. As part of the requirements for the CHEO grant, the colleges are to integrate as many open educational resources as possible into their courses and to design/redesign their courses in such a way that the pieces can be shared as open education resources. KoC faculty feel the quantity of OER resources available actually creates a challenge to their utilization in curriculum development. In other words, there is too much content, which is not sorted, and of highly variable quality.

One faculty member noted that "finding material that matters for the students is difficult. Faculty have to think creatively." She demonstrated several OER activities that she uses for her class during the Faculty Development Workshop (2014) in Boulder, Colorado, and the TAACCCT On! Conference (2014) in Topeka, Kansas. These activities include a blood typing activity, a virus game played on the computer, and a respirometer that students make at home.

Something else a faculty member has created as OER is the lab preparation material she uses for her coding students prior to their taking NANSLO labs. Because she has modified the labs to better suit her "non-science" students, the lab materials are particularly suited for students who might not have a background in hard sciences. These materials will all be licensed OER and placed in the CHEO repository.

## **CAREER COACH**

### **Background**

KoC transitioned in April 2014 from an off-campus interim career coach's working outside of the state to a permanent, full-time career coach based on-campus. The initial student and workforce outreach was undertaken by a faculty member prior to the interim coach's and subsequent permanent career coach's taking on this responsibility. Although three people have filled this role at different times during the course of the CHEO grant, the coach role at KoC seems to be well developed and integrated with both the college and the students.

KoC's career coaches have had diverse backgrounds; the interim coach, who is also a current faculty member, is a member of the AAPC and has a medical coding certificate with 25 years of experience, while the new coach's background is as a vocational counselor. The original career coach, who concurrently served as the interim project director, also actively works in the medical field and continues to teach in the program. The transition was carried out through close cooperation between the interim and permanent career coach; they had a number of conferences, and the interim career coach has made herself available to answer questions via phone and e-mail.

### **Role**

The new career coach sees her role as providing support to incoming and current students throughout their time in the program. This includes assisting with issues related to enrollment, registration, acquiring textbooks, navigating any difficulties in the courses, and securing employment. The career coach also works closely with faculty to develop communication that serves as an informal early alert system. As a result, she is regularly updated by faculty as to students who might have special needs or might require tutoring or additional skills study.

The interim career coach made extensive use of her background in the field to develop a number of processes that would be helpful for students; for example, she developed a course that students can take to prepare them for the American Academy of Professional Coders Certified Professional Coder (AAPC CPC) certification testing. It is anticipated that this course will be available to students in KoC's program and to those in other UAA programs. Student success rates in passing the certification testing have been a concern for existing programs in Alaska.

While the new permanent career coach is based at the Kodiak campus, the majority of contact with students remains electronic. Students primarily interact with the career coach via e-mail; the coach has found that students usually do not want to speak over the phone. In the past, the career coach has not made use of online "office hours" because students rarely used them. The new career coach set up a Blackboard shell to use with students as a single space for providing

them information as a group. She hopes to expand it in the future to “be able provide . . . little webinars . . . for them to be able to just learn some skills.”

The career coach’s current caseload is 37 students. She contacts these students at least once a week. When students miss labs, for example, she has contacted them to find out what they may need help with. She is also in contact with potential students who are interested in the program.

## **INDUSTRY/EMPLOYER/WFC INVOLVEMENT**

The entirely remote nature of the KoC medical coding program and the highly mobile nature of the student population it serves have limited the college’s ability to effectively network with students’ potential employers. However, all the faculty members in the program maintain close relationships with local industry in the Kodiak area. At least five students in the program are already incumbent workers in the local health care industry. Their career coach has also contacted medical facilities in the state but has received limited response. She is in contact with the local workforce center, which has distributed information regarding the program but, to date, KoC has not received any known student referrals.

The Occupational Endorsement in Medical Office Coding program does not currently have a clinical or internship requirement. Students may do a voluntary internship if they desire. There are no plans to require an internship or clinical component in the future.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

KoC’s current career coach has utilized a number of the WICHE professional development programs, specifically, the professionalization webinars and the recordings from the career coach workshop offered in 2013. Particularly of interest to her is the material focused on serving distance learning students because the program is fully online, and many students are not physically present in Kodiak. The coach noted that she was interested in “how to kind of create maybe a little bit of a community, even though everyone’s not in the same place, and it’s not the traditional classroom type of environment.”

Both KoC’s current and former (interim) career coach reported high satisfaction with the webinars. They promoted communication with other career coaches, allowing them to share their experience and compile valuable knowledge based on the experiences of other consortium coaches. One coach specifically stated:

We have some other career coaches who are in similar experiences as me, and then there are some who have—I have someone who’s similar to me as far as size of program and size of campus. And then there are others who have similarities with large campuses and a whole lot of students, and so it’s interesting to me to hear what troubles they’re having or what successes they’re having with so many students.

## KODIAK'S INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES

### Online Education

KoC's innovations during the course of the CHEO project have focused on how the college and faculty can develop and deliver quality online education for their students. KoC has accomplished this goal in a variety of ways, including through careful consideration of the students in developing delivery styles that best suit students' needs, building processes that set students up for success, modifying material to reflect learning objectives, and creating a "community" of students and faculty to help duplicate a classroom setting—no matter where the students might be.

Curriculum delivery for online courses has developed in a manner that is sensitive and responsive to student needs. Originally, the online version of Human Biology was taught synchronously, but there was low student attendance. Given the importance of the course, faculty were concerned with the low attendance and asked the students whether they preferred a different delivery method. Students' preferred modality was an asynchronous delivery, as it allowed them to fit class into their busy schedules. The course is now offered with prerecorded lectures so students may listen whenever is convenient for them. The course now only includes synchronous delivery around particular course events, such as exam reviews.

As mentioned above, KoC faculty enthusiasm for NANSLO has facilitated building processes around the labs to ensure student success. A faculty member "beta-tested" the Meiosis/Mitosis lab by having students take it in early November 2013. To be sure she understood her students' perceptions of the lab, she developed a survey and offered extra credit if students filled it out. She found that overall the students enjoyed the "robotics" experience and felt that the lab process went well.

Student access to computers and the Internet and basic technical issues that may prevent students from logging in to NANSLO labs were initially a big concern for faculty across the consortium. The online labs require an added level of student preparation that concerned faculty. As a result, the KoC instructor developed preparation materials for her class to view/read prior to taking the lab including a live lecture they accessed online, a rubric, a short instructional video, an explanation of the lab, lab report instructions, a summary of overall objectives, and a picture gallery. These materials were given to her students ahead of time, and they were told to read everything, look at the pictures, and watch the video. She felt that most of her students did review the material ahead of time and that this helped to contribute to the students' overall success with the lab experience. This is a promising practice; other colleges using NANSLO labs have experienced difficulties caused by students' lack of preparation. At other colleges, students have self-reported better outcomes when they read the preparatory material.

Because students taking the allied health courses are generally not science majors, faculty have felt some of the NANSLO labs would be too difficult and should be modified for allied health students who may not fully understand some of the terms or more complicated experiments that science majors would understand. A faculty member noted that it is easy to modify the lessons before giving the lab and suggests other consortium instructors do the same (or use her modified OER versions).

The program is designed to prepare students to take the national certification exam, administered by the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) to become certified professional coders (CPCs). Unlike the rest of the program though, the exam must be taken in person at a testing site. Test dates are available in Anchorage and Kodiak and for students who are taking the program from out of state; they can join a testing time at other physical sites. In this way, the flexible online nature of the program can allow students to complete their education through KoC and still not be required to travel to the campus to take the certification exam if a more convenient location is available.

## **SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES**

Funding delays due to the college's affiliation with UAA have been some of the primary challenges faced by KoC. KoC's program operated for nearly a year before the grant money was released to it from UAA—instead, institutional funding was used. The delay resulted from KoC's and UAA's trying to reconcile the grant with the university's processes and procedures. The college had submitted the CHEO grant proposal without following the usual channel through the Office of Sponsored Programs at UAA—the former college director of KoC did not realize the school could not submit a grant directly. The Office of Sponsored Programs must approve grants before submission. The grants office then submits a bill to PCC's CHEO project director, and KoC is reimbursed. The college finally received the grant account codes and permission from UAA Grants and Contracts for the program in December 2013. The resulted in part because of a visit by the CHEO project director to Anchorage to help speed up the process.

The transition of CHEO staff roles at the college has also presented something of a challenge. The first interim career coach also served as the interim project lead during the early stages of CHEO project activities. KoC's second interim career coach started July 2013. A new project lead came on in February of 2014, and the new permanent career coach began working remotely beginning in April 2014 and at the Kodiak campus in July 2014. Both faculty members who also performed CHEO staff functions continued with their teaching assignments following the hiring of the permanent career coach and assignment of KoC's assistant director—now college director—as project lead. The college has mitigated some of the difficulty caused by these changes through close collaboration among incoming and interim staff; there has been continuity of effort in projects such as creating the career coach Blackboard environment and having open communication among all staff and faculty, present and past. Because previous staff members are still at KoC, but in different positions, this has also made the transition—and communication—easier.

## **SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS**

The level of enrollment for the online program at KoC has been a huge achievement, especially in light of the presence of programs offering the same certificate elsewhere in the state. The program filled up quickly; the cap was 24 students, and there were more applicants than the program could place. Rather than the initial concern of taking students from other schools, in the end, KoC actually had to send student overflow to UAF, UAS, and UAA.

KoC's program benefits from a high percentage of faculty members who are also involved in the industry; as noted above, three out of four faculty are currently employed full time in the medical field. These practitioner faculty add great value to the program because they know how the field works and understand policy and practice. They also understand the complicated Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), privacy regulations, and the nature of the industry and have experience with the certification exam. This knowledge is highly beneficial to both curriculum development and delivery,

## **NEXT STEPS**

KoC intends to build on its success moving forward: "We're going to continue just as we are, prepping the students, running them through the labs, having them finish the program and get their certification, and supporting them along the way." Faculty plan to continue using NANSLO labs in courses, and if there is sufficient time to integrate new labs into the course design during the summer, faculty members plan to use additional labs next semester, including the Hematology Lab.

Employment opportunities for medical coders are changing on Kodiak Island itself, as Providence Kodiak Island Medical Center, a major medical services provider, has outsourced some medical coding jobs outside of Alaska. KoC anticipates that this will not diminish interest in the program but possibly draw more students from mainland Alaska and change career trajectories for students physically located in Kodiak. Program administrators expressed that "as long as the UAA School of Allied Health agrees to allow us to offer it in this way, I think the program will be sustainable, and we can keep offering it from Kodiak." The primary concern of UAA relative to continuing the program past the grant period is that it may create competition among UAA schools and pull students from other colleges. At this point, however, that is not occurring and, as previously mentioned, KoC has actually been sending students to other UAA schools after its program reaches capacity. As long as this continues to be the case, and the program is cost-effective for KoC, the UAA School of Allied Health is likely to continue to allow the KoC program to continue and to grow into the future.

KoC Medical Office Coding students were initially trained to use the ICD-10-CM code set during spring semester 2014. When federal legislation was enacted that postponed the mandated use of this new code set until at least October 2015, during fall semester 2014,

students were trained to use the ICD-9-CM code set. Thus, new graduates of the program are trained to use both ICD-9-CM and ICD-10-CM code sets. In the future, once the ICD-10-CM code set is the universal standard, students will be trained in this code set.