

TAACCCT Career Coaches

Findings and Observations

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INTRODUCTION

Colorado's community colleges serve over 162,000 students throughout the state, providing them with programs and services designed to prepare them to participate in the job market or to continue their education in four-year academic institutions.¹ Reflecting the Colorado community colleges' devotion to serving the needs of the state, 89.5 percent of Colorado community college students are Colorado residents.² The colleges act not only as the first opportunity for students to engage with higher education, but in many areas are the only option for students seeking to further their education and develop critical skills for the changing job market.

Colorado's community colleges serve students from a broad cross-section of the state — fully 28 percent of the state's minority undergraduate students are enrolled at community colleges.³ Sixty-seven percent of Colorado community college students are enrolled part time, many of whom are nontraditional students working full or part time.

Mirroring national trends, close to 60 percent of students who are first-time enrollees in a certificate or degree program at one of Colorado's community colleges have required remediation in one or more subjects.⁴ However, only 16 percent of students needing remediation graduated within two years, compared to 21 percent who did not need remediation.⁵ For all first-time enrollees, continuation into the second year of their programs was only about 55 percent.⁶

The costs of a student's noncompletion of credit-bearing certificate and degree programs are significant in terms of time, missed opportunity to gain knowledge and skill, and lowered potential to increase earnings over the course of the individual's life. Further, the tax benefits of increased income can be significant to the state and federal governments. To illustrate the scale of difference, research by the conservative American Enterprise Institute found that nationally, a 50 percent reduction in noncompletion of community college programs would result in an

¹ Colorado Community College System. (2013). *Colorado's #1 Source of Higher Education Access and Opportunity*. Retrieved from <http://www.cccs.edu/>.

² Colorado Community College System. (2012). *Academic Year 2011-2012 Fact Book*. Retrieved from <http://www.cccs.edu/Docs/Research/Academic%20Year%202012%20Fact%20Book.pdf>.

³ Colorado Community College System. (2009). *Who We Serve*. Retrieved from <http://www.cccs.edu/Docs/Communication/sb/Who%20We%20Serve.pdf>.

⁴ Colorado Commission on Higher Education. (2012). *2011 Legislative Report on Remedial Education*. Denver, Colorado. Retrieved from http://highered.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Remedial/FY2011/2011_Remedial_relfef12.pdf.

⁵ Colorado Commission on Higher Education. (2012). *2011 Legislative Report on Remedial Education*. Denver, Colorado. Retrieved from http://highered.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Remedial/FY2011/2011_Remedial_relfef12.pdf.

⁶ Colorado Commission on Higher Education. (2012). *2011 Legislative Report on Remedial Education*. Denver, Colorado. Retrieved from http://highered.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Remedial/FY2011/2011_Remedial_relfef12.pdf.

additional 160,000 graduates, who would increase their earnings by \$30 billion over their lifetimes, and contribute \$5.3 billion to federal and state tax revenues.⁷

Increasing retention rates is thus a critical educational, social, and economic challenge for the nation and for Colorado's community colleges. A number of strategies for increasing rates of retention have been identified, including the transformation of curriculum into online and hybrid formats, the delivery of developmental education (DE) to accelerate students' progress, and the provision of an array of student-supportive services to address both academic and nonacademic issues that can inhibit a student's ability to successfully complete his or her course of study.

In 2011, Colorado received a three-year, \$17.3-million Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant from the United States Department of Labor. The project, the Colorado Online Energy Training Consortium (COETC)⁸, has two principal goals. The first is to enhance energy-related programming in the state through the transformation of curricula into more accessible formats using technology and mobile learning labs. The second is a complete redesign of DE in the state. Two other, perhaps less explicit, goals of the grant are to increase rates of student retention and to facilitate students' transition from degree and career and technical education (CTE) certificate programs into the job market. To realize these additional goals, each college was to employ a career coach to provide the following assistance to students:

- Guide students through career exploration and present energy training opportunities
- Advise and support students as they complete the DE needed to succeed in the energy programs
- Help students navigate the college's processes
- Provide referrals and support for nonacademic issues⁹

This report prepared by COETC's third-party evaluator, Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations' Education and Employment Research Center (EERC), complements EERC's

⁷ Schneider, M., & Yin, M. (2012). Completion matters: The high cost of low community college graduation rates. *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research Education Outlook*, 2, 13.

⁸ The colleges in Colorado involved in the grant project include all the community colleges in the Colorado Community College System (CCCS): Arapahoe Community College (ACC), Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC), Community College of Aurora (CCA), Community College of Denver (CCD), Front Range Community College (FRCC), Lamar Community College (LCC), Morgan Community College (MCC), Northeastern Junior College (NJC), Otero Junior College (OJC), Pikes Peak Community College (PPCC), Pueblo Community College (PCC), Red Rocks Community College (RRCC), and Trinidad State Junior College (TSJC). Two local district colleges, Aims Community College (Aims) and Colorado Mountain College (CMC) are also part of the consortium.

⁹ Colorado Community College System. (2011). *The Colorado Online Energy Training Consortium* [Grant proposal to the United States Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration].

other reports.¹⁰ The current report discusses the institutional placement and integration of career coaches and within the context of “intentional or intrusive advising” explores the function and impact of career coaches across the COETC. It also identifies some promising advising strategies and the challenges faced by career coaches. It concludes with recommendations for the future, including further areas for research. The paper uses quantitative and qualitative data collected through the Electronic Student Case File (ESCF); coach forums; interviews with project leads, coaches, and students; and brief surveys and document reviews.

RECRUITMENT AND EMPLOYMENT OF COACHES

The TAACCCT-COETC grant stipulated the employment of a career coach at each of the consortium colleges. After receiving grant funds each college identified from within, or recruited from outside, a project lead and career coach. The Colorado Community College System (CCCS) provided guidance for the career coach position through a general job description to be adapted to meet a college’s specific needs. Qualifications for the position included a college degree, with preference for individuals with two years of professional “experience with non-traditional students (adult basic education/GED include non-traditional/academically under-prepared/high school graduates” and “experience with at-risk populations.”¹¹ In addition to requiring the more typically stipulated strong interpersonal, organizational, and problem-solving skills, the job requirements also included “attitude of optimism/able to inspire confidence.” Making this explicit in the job description is somewhat unusual, but to this writer, having had the opportunity over the past two years to meet all the coaches and to hear about their work with students, faculty, and staff, perhaps this trait, along with a commitment to student success, stands out.

Between March and August 2012, 15 coaches were recruited, employed, or reassigned as career coaches. All coaches had at least a bachelor’s degree. Five had one or more master’s degrees. The coaches had earned academic credentials in psychology, counseling, education, communications, English, human resources, management, public administration, social services, career development, planning, business, and marketing. Most had worked for more than two years subsequent to earning their last degree. A few coaches had themselves been nontraditional students, returning to college or graduate school after their twenties.

One coach was a retired teacher of auto mechanics, another a high school science teacher, and yet another a community college English teacher. Several coaches had worked with veterans, the disabled, dislocated workers, or poor and disadvantaged individuals and families. A number had been involved in job creation and job placement, and at least five had work

¹⁰ Rutgers University Education and Employment Research Center. (2013). Students Served, and Academic Attainment Redesigned Course Outcomes (10/13); Preliminary Findings as of June 2013, Observations, and Next Steps (12/13); Career Coach Caseload Analysis: Supplemental Tables – As of 9/30/13 (11/13); Pre-Course Survey Evaluation (12/13), and college case reports (12/13).

¹¹ Colorado Community College System. (2012). *COETC Career Coach Description*. (Unpublished document).

experience at a regional workforce center (WFC). Despite the position's emphasis on career advising and planning, only one coach, at CMC, had a master's degree in education with an emphasis in collegiate career development. This coach was also certified as a global career development facilitator and was certified to administer and interpret assessments related to personality and to aptitudes for specific careers.¹²

COACH ORIENTATION AND INTEGRATION

Mandates such as COETC's to employ a career coach can be perceived as a real opportunity, and many colleges welcomed the coach and integrated him or her into the fabric of their college community. However, mandates across diverse community colleges with different student populations and varying resources to meet student needs can also create real challenges. To what extent will the career coach position duplicate or perhaps even undercut what was already in place? And, recognizing the time-limited funding, what are the benefits or costs of real integration—if not institutionalization—of coach services? Given extant resources, what is the most effective way to integrate and utilize the coach? Concerns about duplication in fact led two energy colleges (NJC and RRCC) to express concern about the position. These colleges suggested that the funds be reallocated and used for other educational purposes. However, given that the career coach was an integral part of the grant to be factored into the comparison cohort study, the grant's mandate prevailed. As a result, both colleges hired coaches, in the case of NJC a three-quarter-time coach.

Several of the career coaches came from within their institutions and were well versed in the resources and services of the college, and also knew and were known by faculty and staff (e.g., PPCC and CNCC.) In fact, CNCC's coach "added on" her responsibilities as career coach to those of the college's director of counseling services. At CCA, the coach was a member of the faculty. She had her teaching responsibilities decreased and her advisement activities increased. Of note, over the last two-plus years, each time a coach left his or her position, the new coach came from within the respective college (e.g., LCC, MCC, and NJC).

Retuning to coach orientation and integration, newly employed coaches participated in a range of activities to help them learn about the college and the Banner or comparable database system, and become oriented to administrative offices and student services. Some coaches, such as the coach at ACC, shadowed other counselors and/or advisers to gain a stronger understanding of how to best serve students in a college environment.

The coach at Aims was required to participate in a formalized orientation/training period, an Aims tradition for all new faculty and staff. Aims's coach thus spent six weeks training in such areas as financial aid, admissions, FERPA regulations, and student assessment and advisement,

¹² The Highlands Ability Battery aptitude assessment; the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality assessment, and the Strong Interest Inventory

using a variety of methods including supervisory meetings, workshops, and shadowing, before she began to work with students.

INSTITUTIONAL LOCATION OF THE CAREER COACH

The physical location of the 15 career coaches varies across the consortium but appears to be based upon (a) the college's interpretation of the role of the coach, (b) if it is a TAACCCT energy college, (c) the target population to be served, (d) the structure of the college's other student-support services, and (e) available space. As expected, the majority of coaches are situated within student services or the advising departments where students come for academic and career advising.

At PPCC the coach is located in the Office of Retention Services, which also houses a coordinator of multicultural affairs and an interventions specialist. At Aims the coach is located in the same building that houses the student testing center, the financial aid office, the cashier, the admissions office, and the campus bookstore. The coach feels that the central location has made a big difference in terms of her visibility and student access to her, as well as her ability to serve the needs of TAA-eligible energy and DE students. The coach at ACC has an office that adjoins the student testing center where students take the ACCUPLACER exam. Her physical presence in the testing lab or in her office next door has facilitated her ability to engage with students immediately after they take the exam and get their scores. She helps students interpret the scores and then discusses academic options, helping them to decide on next steps.

At MCC the coach is part of student services, whose staff have been generally helpful and supportive, but her office "is down the hall and 'hidden' down another small hallway," requiring students to ask others how to find her. The office was selected to give the coach more privacy in her meetings with students, but she feels "I could better serve the students by being closer to them, and when a student would drop in, shut the door."

Three of the seven coaches working at an energy college (CMC, RRCC, and FRCC) are primarily involved with energy students and have offices in close proximity to their program's classrooms. The location of these offices is "strategic and purposeful," and offers "increased visibility, student access, and interaction." As one coach said, "They walk by my office every day for class, they become familiar with my face and presence and are more likely to come talk with someone they recognize. Additionally, because I see them in the halls frequently, I am able to have short coaching moments on the fly."

The coach at NJC, another energy college, however, is located within NJC's counseling services suite, which is on another campus, a five-minute car ride from the wind-energy program's classrooms. The counseling center location provides access to the coach for NJC's DE students, but it has made her contact with energy students more difficult. At TSJC the coach is housed on the Trinidad campus and is accessible to DE students as well as the residential students enrolled in TSJC's associate degree line tech program. However, he is two hours away from the students

enrolled in TSJC's Colorado Springs–based Rocky Mountain Lineman certificate program. This has made it difficult for him to provide face-to-face services to this cohort of energy students, many of whom are older than the associate degree students.

A number of other coaches report that it has been a challenge to serve the needs of students at their colleges' multiple campus. For example, once a month the coach at CNCC travels the 90-plus miles from her home base in Rangely to the Craig campus where she provides assistance to DE students. FRCC and Aims also have other campuses to which the coach on occasion travels, but these are within a much shorter driving radius. Still, as the coach at FRCC commented:

Machining classes are held in Longmont, so students really have to make an effort to come see me (it is a 45-minute drive), but they are very eager for help so I get quite a few of them here. I have had to make much more effort with these students in my face-to-face time and these interactions usually are in the form of a workshop for an entire class, or by appointment only.

Distance, however, has made it impossible for the two part-time coaches at PCC to provide any services to PCC's energy students enrolled in the college's training programs for incumbent workers in southwest Colorado. As it stands, the two coaches have split their caseloads. One coach is located within student services and sees DE students. The other coach is located in another building and is a member of the college's Economic & Workforce Development Division staff. This coach mostly sees students enrolled in one of the college's energy-related CTE certificate programs and those in her Advancing Academic Achievement (AAA) classes.

Of note, although it was planned that the coaches would work with *both* energy and nonenergy DE students at the seven energy colleges, in the majority of cases, the coaches at these colleges principally see energy students. The exceptions—and in both cases, the inverse situation as noted above—are at NJC and PCC.

For many coaches, location, determined by the college's target student population, has in turn expanded or limited whom the coach sees and how he or she has been able to develop a caseload. No doubt the dialectic of location will need to be considered as colleges plan for the future of the coach position—and/or the coach—beyond the grant (see below).

Separate from location, many coaches are involved in college committees, including student success, retention, and safety, and regularly meet with or attend faculty and staff meetings for TRIO and STEM programs. At nonenergy colleges coaches have been part of the DE redesign committee and have contributed insights about student challenges and reactions to coursework (e.g., LCC, PPCC). Coaches spoke to the Rutgers team about the importance of participating in these committees and interacting with colleagues outside their particular areas. They have gained knowledge about college resources as well as identified potential faculty and staff contacts for student referrals. Participation has also raised awareness of who they are and the academic and nonacademic services they can provide to students.

INTENTIONAL ADVISING AND THE FUNCTIONS OF CAREER COACHES

The literature on student retention—especially of community college students, many of whom are first-generation college students, many of whom are balancing work, family, and school responsibilities, and many of whom are poorly prepared for college work—suggests that advising makes a significant difference.^{13,14,15,16,17} Advising facilitates the engagement of students in the college experience and provides a sense that the college cares about the student's progress and success.¹⁸

There are different forms of advising, including the ad hoc advising that often takes place during the thick of registration. In these situations, neither the student nor the advisor gets to know the other; the focus is the student's schedule and little else.^{19,20} At the opposite side of the continuum is "intentional" or "intrusive" advising—proactive, action-oriented interactions with students.^{21,22} During this type of advising the student is aided in identifying and setting academic and career goals and developing strategies to reach these goals.²³ In fact, research has found that a career focus as an integrated part of advising increases student academic motivation.²⁴ Intentional advising is "systematic and directive" if not, at times, prescriptive and developmental.²⁵ It

¹³ Cuseo, J. B. (2003). Comprehensive academic support for students during the first year of college. In G. L. Kramer & Associates, *Student academic services: An integrated approach* (pp. 271–310). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

¹⁴ Cuseo, J. (2005). Decided, Undecided and in Transition: Implications for Academic Advisement, Career Counseling and Student Retention. In Robert S. Feldman (ed). *Improving the First Year of College: Research and Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

¹⁵ Lotkowski, V. A., Robbins, S. B., & Noeth, R. J. (2004). The role of academic and non-academic factors in improving college retention, ACT Policy Report, retrievable online at:

http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/college_retention.pdf

¹⁶ Upcraft, M. L., & Kramer, G. (1995). Intrusive advising as discussed in the first-year academic advising: patterns in the present, pathways to the future. *Academic Advising and Barton College*, 1–2.

¹⁷ Varney, J. (2007). Intrusive advising. *Academic Advising Today*, 30, 3.

¹⁸ Varney, J. (2007). Intrusive advising. *Academic Advising Today*, 30, 3.

¹⁹ Cuseo, J. (2005). Decided, Undecided and in Transition: Implications for Academic Advisement, Career Counseling and Student Retention. In Robert S. Feldman (ed). *Improving the First Year of College: Research and Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

²⁰ Cuseo, J. (2003). Academic Advisement and Student Retention: Empirical Connections and Systemic Interventions. Posting to the website of the National Academic Advising Association. <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse>

²¹ Drake, J., Jordan, P, & Miller, M.A. (2013). Preface. *Academic Advising Approaches*. Strategies that teach students to make the most of college. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

²² Varney, J. (2007). Intrusive advising. *Academic Advising Today*, 30, 3.

²³ Earl, Walter R. (1987). Intrusive advising for freshmen. *Academic Advising News*, 9, 3. Retrieved from <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Intrusive-Advising-for-Freshmen.aspx>.

²⁴ Bean, John P., & Metzner, Barbara S. (1985). A Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition. *Review of Educational Research Winter*, 55(4), 485-540; and Metzner, B. S. (1989). Perceived quality of academic advising: The effect on freshman attrition. *American Education Research Journal*, 26(3), 422-442.

²⁵ Upcraft, M.L. & Kramer, G. (1995). Intrusive advising as discussed in the first-year academic advising: patterns in the present, pathways to the future. *Academic Advising and Barton College*, 1-2.

involves assisting and supporting student success, including identification of nonacademic issues and facilitation of referrals for needed services or resources. And critically, it frequently involves the adviser connecting with students “before a situation occurs that cannot be fixed.”²⁶

“Intrusive advising” was identified in the original COETC proposal as the means by which career coaches would provide “wrap around services to support retention and achievement”²⁷: career counseling and referrals, academic advisement as it related to career choices, and counseling and referrals for a wide range of social and financial supportive services. The decision to call the position “career coach” will be addressed later in this report, as will the use of “intrusive” versus “intentional” advising. However, we will use “intentional advising” here in reference to coach activities.

ACADEMIC ADVISING

Typically a community college student is assigned to an adviser from student services or academic advising or, if they so declare, general studies until the student declares a specific major or is accepted into a CTE certificate program, at which point a faculty member from the subject area or discipline is assigned. Many students only seek out their assigned adviser during the registration period or when they are doing poorly. At some colleges, such as CCA, students taking DE courses are assigned to their course instructor, who helps them with academic problems as well as nonacademic issues that are impeding their academic progress.

Under the COETC grant, all 15 coaches were involved in some form of academic advising. The point at which a coach became involved with a student reflected the organizational structure of the college’s advisement services, the departmental assignment and physical location of the coach, whether it was an energy or nonenergy college, whether the coach was integrated into the college’s early-alert system, and whether coach contact was mandated or voluntary (see later discussion of student caseloads). For those coaches who taught either an AAA course (such as the coaches at OJC, LCC, and PCC) or a DE course (as was the case at CCA), advisement was integrated into the course requirements.

A number of coaches reviewed students’ ACCUPLACER scores and discussed with them an academic plan including the appropriate DE courses (e.g., FRCC, ACC, OJC, Aims). Note: with the implementation of the new state Developmental Education Task Force math pathways model, this will no doubt become an increasing focus for both career coaches and other college advisers.

Coaches often helped students make decisions about course load given students’ responsibilities outside college. They made themselves available to assist with registration as well as after initial

²⁶ Varney, J. (2007). Intrusive advising. *Academic Advising Today*, 30, 3.

²⁷ Colorado Community College System. (2011). The Colorado Online Energy Training Consortium [Grant proposal to the United States Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration].

registration, informing students that schedules could be modified: *“If you feel overwhelmed or underwhelmed or whatever, it might be throughout the first couple weeks of a semester.”*

Student goal setting and tracking student progress were principal areas of the coaches’ activities. Students often needed help making the connection between their career goals and the courses—including basic math, English, and reading—they needed. This work integrated academic advising, soft-skill development, and career advisement—the need for students to commit to the work, manage time well, and keep track of where they are and where they want to go. One coach observed:

The average major change is five times in the course of a career. I think luckily when you’re working with students at that juncture a lot of what they can do will go towards anything they desire to do, and I think that’s a big part of it, . . . creating short and long-term goals so that they’re more committed to it and also just reading people and helping them to understand what their limitations and also what their powers are in order to complete what they’re setting out to complete so that it’s actually successful rather than a failure.

Coaches also meet with students identified as being at academic risk, such as students in Aims’s Emerging Scholars and Starfish programs, as well as students who have already been placed on academic probation or are close to being suspended. Research indicates that early-alert systems used at many colleges have “a positive effect on students’ course completion and re-enrollment rates.”²⁸ The integration of career coaches into these systems at CNCC, LCC, and OJC suggests the critical role coaches play at these colleges. They help students and faculty “determine [the] causes of poor academic performance and identify the next proactive steps for the student to engage in.” For example, one coach shared her work with a student who was having difficulty getting “back in the saddle” and getting the help he needed after falling behind in a particular class.

His math class, he just kind of—he didn't understand it, he wouldn't go to tutoring, he quit showing up. So then he's like, “I don't want to go back to class because I haven't been there for so long.” And I said, “Well, what about tutoring?” He’s like, “I don't know, I don't know.” And so, I finally realized that he was just embarrassed to go to tutoring. He didn't know anybody there, so we went down there together. We introduced him, and I actually went to tutoring with him.

This coach understood the difficulties some students experience with using existent resources. Physically going with a student to the college’s tutoring center makes a big difference and results in greater utilization of tutorial services by students. This has emerged as a best practice at many colleges.

²⁸ Bourdon, C., & Carducci, R. (2002). What works in the community colleges: A synthesis of literature on best practices. *Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Graduate School of Education.*

STUDENT ORIENTATION AND TRANSITIONS

As noted above, one goal of intensive advising is to provide the student with a sense that he or she has been “embraced by the college” and that faculty and staff are there to help him or her be successful. The more the student has a “sense of inclusion or belonging on campus”²⁹ or identifies as a member of the college community, the more he or she will make use of available services as part of his or her college experience and the greater his or her potential for academic success.^{30,31}

A number of coaches were asked to participate in their college’s formal orientation activities for new students (e.g., PPCC and CNCC). Other coaches were active in various activities designed to “help students negotiate the college.” They “escort[ed] them through college admissions processes, including financial aid and student services, and connect[ed] students with campus support programs.”³²

Helping students’ transition is another activity in which coaches have engaged, for example, from high school or the work world into the college, from DE courses into college-level courses, or—at energy colleges—from DE to energy programs (e.g., Aims, FRCC, TSJC).

From our interviews it is apparent that coaches actively sought out other departments and services offices, and in some cases fostered strong working relationships that enabled coordinated case management. In addition, coaches recognized the importance of knowing the name of the person to whom they were referring a student, not just the office number where he or she should go. Coaches said that they would often call the relevant person prior to sending a student, or—better yet—walked with the student down the hall or across the campus for the first meeting. Such actions helped to foster relationships with students as well as make the coach become more visible, thereby in some cases stimulating bidirectional referrals.

TEACHING

The coaches at ACC, LCC, OJC, and PCC have all taught sections of AAA courses, frequently building the majority of their caseload from these classes. In fact, several coaches observed that

²⁹ Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, referenced in Bickerstaff, S., Barragan, M., & Rucks-Ahidiana, Z. (2012). “I Came in Unsure of Everything”: Community College Students’ Shifts in Confidence (Working Paper No. 48). Retrieved from Community College Research Center website: <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/shifts-in-confidence.html>

³⁰ Heisserer, D. L., & Parette, P. (2002). Advising at-risk students in college and university settings. *College Student Journal*, 36(1).

³¹ Bickerstaff, S., Barragan, M., & Rucks-Ahidiana, Z. (2012). “I Came in Unsure of Everything”: Community College Students’ Shifts in Confidence (Working Paper No. 48). Retrieved from Community College Research Center website: <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/shifts-in-confidence.html>.

³² Colorado Community College System. (2012). *COETC Career Coach Description*. (Unpublished document).

teaching a course yielded more students than making a presentation in someone else's classroom. Coaches observed that teaching the course provided a chance for students to get to know them as a resource, and someone "whom they felt was genuinely invested in their success and overall well-being." The coaches believed that this led to the students' "sense of trust and a high quality of rapport" with them. Coaches who taught also observed that they were generally more involved with students in their classes than those referred to them, unless the referral was predicated on a specific issue that required extensive advising and referrals.

Anecdotal reports from students confirmed that students felt AAA was helpful. They liked the supportive atmosphere in the class and the sense of community that developed.

CCA's model for DE classes includes faculty serving as both instructor and student adviser. Thus, CCA's coach, who previously was an English instructor, teaches subject-matter area courses including developmental English. She believes that her dual roles complement one another. As expected, given the workload of teaching and advising, the majority of the CCA's coach's caseload comes from her own classes. At times, however, in her capacity as "career coach," she receives referrals from other instructors for students who need more intensive advising.

Being in the classroom teaching students was mentioned by ACC's coach, who shared that there is a commitment among ACC's senior administrators to teach at least one course each year as a means of staying engaged with students. In the classroom one learns the "realities of students' lives." Given the dual skills required by dual roles, this is an area for further exploration—a real possibility, given the assigned dual roles of coaches under the Round III Colorado Helps Advanced Manufacturing Program (CHAMP) grant.

SOFT SKILLS

Research has identified that academic goals, motivation, "time management skills, study skills, and study habits (taking notes, meeting deadlines, using information resources)," concentration, and general maturity are factors that contribute to student

Some coaches worked with DE faculty and held soft-skills workshops during regular class time. This initially worked well at many colleges. However, as more accelerated syllabi were introduced, DE faculty expressed concern about taking critical class time away from an already packed syllabus. Coaches sought alternative times for workshops, including evenings and weekends. However, coaches discovered that while students expressed an interest in some of these workshops, attendance was generally poor if the workshop was outside of a student's regular college schedule.

Anecdotal feedback from students indicated that these workshops were valuable to them. However, a number of coaches reflected that often the very students who needed the workshops the most did not participate if the workshop was not part of a regularly scheduled

class. This is a commonly recognized challenge³³ and needs to be addressed across colleges.

NONACADEMIC STUDENT SUPPORT AND COUNSELING/CASE MANAGEMENT

As noted earlier, academic goals, motivation, time management, and study skills are generally included in the literature as nonacademic factors³⁴—but we see them as an integral part of the coaches' academic functions. In this section we therefore turn to what some have framed as “environmental” factors. These challenges affect many students, but especially those who are older, attend part time, or are commuters.^{35,36} They include finances; childcare; balancing home, work, and school demands; medical issues; domestic violence; transportation; and inadequate housing and homelessness. Coaches reported that nonacademic issues tended to emerge as crises, and so coaching for these factors is often on an emergency basis.

Somebody comes in and says this happened. I had a student pop in yesterday and say, “My friend died, I’m not able to go to class, and what do I do?”

The coach from PPCC shared stories of students living in their cars, or the student who called the coach because his car broke down and he could not get to class. This coach, as did others, went out of the way to help the student, in the latter instance picking up the student and bringing him back to campus. Other students with whom coaches worked were dealing with pregnancy or domestic violence. One coach told of a student who “went to prison for five months, and I communicated with him before, during, and after, and I wrote a couple letters of recommendation to parole boards.”

Many of the coaches brought to their positions a wealth of knowledge or professional connections to community-service providers including workforce centers and domestic violence, mental health, and housing services. This knowledge facilitated their ability to help students access and utilize needed resources, and was the foundation of their case-management services, referrals, and follow-up.

³³ Cuseo, J. B. (2005). Decided, Undecided and in Transition: Implications for Academic Advisements, Career Counseling and Student Retention. In Robert S. Feldman (ed). *Improving the First Year of College: Research and Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

³⁴ Lotkowski, V. A., Robbins, S. B., & Noeth, R. J. (2004). The role of academic and non-academic factors in improving college retention, ACT Policy Report, retrievable online at:

http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/college_retention.pdf

³⁵ Bean, J. P., & Metzner, B. S. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research*, Winter, 55(4), 485–540; Metzner, B. S. (1989). Perceived quality of academic advising: The effect on freshman attrition. *American Education Research Journal*, 26(3), 422–442.

³⁶ Bickerstaff, S., Barragan, M., & Rucks-Ahidiana, Z. (2012). “I Came in Unsure of Everything”: Community College Students’ Shifts in Confidence (Working Paper No. 48). Retrieved from Community College Research Center website: <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/shifts-in-confidence.html>

At the colleges with residential student populations (LCC, OJC, CNCC, NJC), some coaches helped students deal with homesickness.

CAREER COUNSELING/ADVISING/PLANNING

To achieve the goals of COETC—the expansion of a skilled workforce for jobs in energy related fields—the career coach position was established to recruit students into certificate and degree programs, to support students during their studies, and to help the students secure jobs. Career coaches were to serve as a pipeline for energy programs at their home institutions and/or for one of the designated COETC energy colleges that was transforming its program into an online and hybrid format.

The focus of career counseling at the energy colleges differed significantly from that at the nonenergy colleges. At the energy colleges most caseloads were dominated by students already enrolled in the energy certificate or degree program. For most of these students, a career path had been decided and they were actively working to achieve their career goals. As a result, these students needed only limited career or academic advising, and at many of the energy colleges' faculty rather than coaches provided much of the career-related guidance.

PCC was an outlier amongst the energy colleges. PCC's energy training located in Durango and southwestern Colorado targeted incumbent workers, as well as unemployed individuals interested in gas and oil mining. The training did not result in a degree and only sometimes in an industry-recognized certificate (e.g., safety). Further, PCC's two part-time career coaches were located 275 miles away at the college's main campus in Pueblo. As such the coaches worked principally with DE students enrolled at the Pueblo campus or students enrolled in non-grant-funded energy-certificate programs on campus.

Separate from the situations identified above, coaches across the consortium provided an array of career advising and planning services. The following subsections discuss four overlapping areas in which the coaches have been involved: (a) assessment of interest and advisement about possible career pathways, (b) identification of courses to help students meet their career goals, (c) activities related to job readiness and the process of employment, and (d) assistance with job placement through employer networks and/or workforce centers.

Advisement about possible career pathways: For some students just entering community college, many of them of traditional ages, a discussion about career pathways seemed to be somewhat premature. Yet, the literature on retention suggests that student “commitment to educational and career goals is perhaps the strongest factor associated with persistence to degree completion.”³⁷ Thus, even when students sought out coaches for more immediate

³⁷ Wyckoff, S. C. (1999). The academic advising process in higher education: History, research, and improvement. *Recruitment & Retention in Higher Education*, 13(1), 1–3.

problems such as registration, fulfilling college requirements, or passing standard or DE courses, many coaches tried to make connections between academic and career planning.

For example, a student came to the college's coach because she was doing very poorly in DE math. The coach met with the student and her mother and explored "career options that don't require math." They looked at the possibility of a "skill-based certificate where she can get hands-on skills and recreate that in the workplace and make more than minimum wage."

In our interview this coach described the essence of the work many of the coaches have been doing in this area:

What I do is motivating and being a rock for people to sound off of and sort of guiding them as they pursue that. Some of it is career exploration and what are your different options and really what does that degree lead to as far as their career. I think some of it is retaining students that aren't going to be successful in college reading, English, or math and providing them a new outlet rather than—a lot of them don't think there are other options. They think that the bachelor's degree is it or they're not gonna be able to do anything and so sort of catching them, building that relationship as they're testing those waters and then catching them before it's a loss so that they do complete something and make it worthwhile. Rather than creating debt that they can never pay off, because they're not gonna get a job that's at the level to incur that debt. . . . I'm not saying that this student in particular is going to be a rock star in one of these, but getting her feet wet in some real-world stuff might change her motivation in doing it and cause some different outcomes and application on her part. We have our—we have some that require lower levels of English and reading and then no math.

At another college when a student was deemed ineligible for a nursing program the coach helped the student to explore a secondary interest, counseling. The career coach reached out to a local mental-health facility and set up a meeting for the student to meet with the facility's staff to discuss opportunities in counseling. Through this intervention, the student gained confidence about counseling as a career option and quickly made the necessary changes to her academic plan.

CNCC's coach often works with student athletes who either have been injured or have not qualified to continue in the college's athletic programs. These students often feel discouraged and need help to refocus both their career and academic goals.

At some of the smaller colleges where there is not a dedicated career office, coaches provide information about career opportunities and jobs in the region. For example, at OJC the coach initiated a program called "vocational voyages," in which she recruits professionals from the region to talk to students about what they do, the skills that they need to do it, and "how they got to where they were and how they ended up in the career—the career and education path they had taken to get there and what students really need to be focused on while they're in school to make that a possibility."

To date the guest presenters have spoken about their careers in nature conservancy and biotech as well as jobs as medical navigators and medical lab techs. These sessions, open to faculty and staff as well as members of the La Junta community, also allow the college to showcase and recruit students for OJC's medical lab tech and medical records certificate programs.

LCC's first coach (she left in the summer of 2013) organized a very successful career fair in which college students and students from regional high schools met industry representatives. Prior to the fair students were required to complete an assessment instrument modeled after the Career Clusters Assessments.³⁸ This fostered students' more strategic engagement with the representatives.

Referrals to energy colleges: The COETC plan to have career coaches across the consortium guide students toward energy programs at other colleges has not been realized. The development and implementation of hybrid and online formats has been far slower than anticipated. Energy programs have transformed some courses to online formats, but—with the exception of RRCC's water quality management (WQM) program—not whole programs. In addition, several of the planned mobile learning labs designed to increase training opportunities in more remote areas were not ready for use until summer 2013. As a result, career coaches have been unable to promote remote-learning opportunities for students attending their home colleges. Further, most students are unable to relocate to participate in even a hybrid program, and so there have been few intercollege referrals and no enrollments to date.

The absence of energy jobs in a geographic region has also been identified as a disincentive for students to transfer to an energy college. Students stated that they were not interested in careers in energy programs if it meant they would need to relocate for either training or future jobs.

Job readiness and job searches: Process-technology programs prepare students to work in a variety of industries. CMC's coach has therefore been engaged in helping students connect with a variety of industries that can use their specific skills. However, in general, coaches at the energy colleges have focused much of their attention on job-readiness activities and postgraduation employment. Through workshops and individual sessions, coaches have helped students improve their résumés and write more effective cover letters. They have also worked with students on interview skills. Some coaches have set up mock interviews or role-playing to help students anticipate employer questions, practice responses, and gain some confidence.

At RRCC, the coach initiated the use a proprietary online curriculum called "Bring Your 'A' Game to Work." This program focuses on student accountability, including timely completion of assignments, attendance, etc., as well as job preparation:

³⁸ Middle Tennessee State University. (n.d.). Career Clusters Interest Survey. Retrieved from http://www.mtsu.edu/career/Career_Clusters/-ClusterInterestSurvey.pdf.

It's called the A Game because everything starts with an A. . . . We implemented it in Water Quality 100, 124, and 125. . . . They had [to] evaluate résumés, and based on the résumés [they chose] who [sic] would they want to bring in to interview. And then . . . in the discussion part of the online learning, they have to discuss with me and with everyone else what their thoughts are. And so far we've done it on attitude, and we've had some really good conversations. It's been a peer-to-peer learning, and it's based on goals and different things like that.

RRCC's coach has used the program in three classes. Participation is voluntary, but a carrot has been extended to students—they can earn five additional percentage points on their course grade if they attend. While most students participate, some do not. The coach observed that some of the students who could benefit the most from participation had not.

Finally, coaches have helped their students be more proactive in their job searches. Moving them beyond just looking at newspapers, they have mentored students' development of job networking and "personal marketing strategies."

Anecdotal feedback from students indicates that the above activities have been very helpful. However, at this time we do not have more formalized cross-consortium data. Rutgers will collect this data in spring 2014. In addition, the comparative cohort study to be completed in summer 2014 will include employment and wage data analysis and may provide some further insight about the possible impact of coach interaction and students' participation in one or more of the above activities on student employment outcomes.

INTERNSHIPS AND JOB PLACEMENT

Internships provide students with opportunities to apply their growing knowledge and skills and to gain field experience. At times an internship helps an individual get a foot in the door, and the intern is hired. Coaches at several of the energy colleges were active in helping students to identify internships either directly or through a college internship office (e.g., RRCC, Aims). They have helped students with job applications and/or to make contact with the "recruiter."

Many coaches have been active in networking with local employers either through advisory boards or through outreach activities both within and outside the energy sector. Some coaches have also connected with human resources (HR) personnel as well as shop stewards at specific companies in their services region and/or the midmanagement—program managers, operations managers—who often make employment decisions (e.g., MCC, CMC). These connections have enabled coaches to learn about the job skills a new employee needs to have, and to learn about immediate and anticipated job openings. Through their interactions with industry contacts, coaches have become more familiar with the nomenclature for different job titles and the specific skill requirements needed for employment in these titles. In addition, at some colleges, coaches have organized job fairs (e.g., Aims) and/or facilitated on-campus recruitment of graduating students through the use of rodeos (e.g., TSJC) and on-site interviews (e.g., CMC).

As one coach stated, “It’s a great experience for everybody; [even] the ones who don’t get offered a job, it’s [a] great interview experience, employer interface experience.”

At times, the coach has actively worked with a student to overcome barriers to employment. A good example of this is the work that CMC’s coach did with students who had a police record or had served time in jail.

Part of being in rural Colorado, the real-life part, is that folks have gotten in trouble. These young guys who are 22, 24, 26, maybe there’s a DUI in their background. Maybe they’ve been arrested at a misdemeanor level or they’ve stole [*sic*] something and it was a minor felony. Now, it sounds terrible, but it’s kind of what my world is. I don’t think it sounds terrible, but maybe it sounds terrible just hearing it off the cuff. And so, I’ll be talking to HR and I’ve written letters of recommendation on folks’ behalf and I’ve had those letters steered appropriately to the people who are doing the reviews in HR. So, it usually always falls back to HR. And then the whole drug-testing thing is huge.

COLLABORATION WITH THE WORKFORCE CENTER

In general the relationship between colleges and their local/regional WFCs has been good—even if not always as productive as hoped. Coaches have worked with WFC staff to market the consortium energy programs, to share information, and to establish bidirectional referral procedures. They have discussed ways to complement one another’s services (e.g., resume writing, job preparation). Many coaches have standing meetings scheduled with WFC staff. For example, until very recently, Aims’s coach was going weekly to the local WFC’s “emergency unemployment compensation orientations and just spending a few minutes talking about Aims and the programs that we offer.” She continues to work closely with the WFC case managers and has “basically” become the TAA person, “so anybody who’s coming through and seeking services for their education by TAA, they have to see me.” CMC’s coach also attends a quarterly meeting of the multiple WFCs that cover the 12,000-square-mile service area of the college.

WFCs have referred unemployed and underemployed individuals to the coaches. The coach provides the referred individual with information about the college’s certificate and degree programs and, as appropriate, facilitates the individual’s application process. Aims’s coach reported that the Weld WFC only funds students enrolled in certificate programs, so they love “the fact that the oil and gas introductory certificate is one semester.” However, other coaches registered concern about finding needed educational funding for referred unemployed individuals interested in enrolling in college programs. They have discovered that most financial aid is not available to students enrolled in nondegree programs. Further, they have discovered there often is not enough time to get Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding for an individual who applies for a program; and potential students who already have a degree are not eligible for WIA funding. For the most part, unemployed individuals are unable or unwilling to take out loans to pay for their education, so they don’t enroll.

It felt like a challenge for students to go back, and they would hear there was no funding for them because they – the semester was too close to starting, but they got sent here to hear about the program but there was no way to catch them or make the connection.

The coach from ACC identified another issue her college has observed. ACC as a public institution is less expensive than many private, often proprietary, trade schools:

But I can't sit down with somebody and tell them what the next four years is going to cost, whereas a private institution says, "Look, we'll take the six grand that the Workforce Center gives you and we'll give you x , y , and z , no matter how long it takes you, or you can do it in three months if you want." And they know exactly what Workforce's budget is and they make it work, whereas I can't change the cost of tuition based on what Workforce will give a student and independent schools absolutely can and do all the time.

Coaches also have had the experience that many individuals seek a fast-track certificate of some type and are disappointed when they discover the certificate program is at least a year. This was the case with a number of Lamar's WFC referrals to LCC's coach. After learning that LCC did not offer a certificate but only an energy associate's degree, the young men left disappointed. They lacked both the time and the money to make such a long-term commitment.

One coach observed: "While I'm getting the numbers for referrals, it's not doing anyone any good if no one is enrolling." For example, out of the 23 referrals of people interested in RRCC's WQM program, only four actually enrolled. Consortiumwide the numbers of referrals may also reflect staffing issues at WFC – seemingly frequent rotations of assignments and/or actual staff shortages. It may also reflect pregrant referral processes that remain unchanged; some WFCs do not send their referrals to the coach but instead to other departments at the college (e.g., DE at TSJC). However, many coaches observed that the absence of sufficient funding was a big issue for many potential students. As one coach stated, "No one goes to the WFC seeking an energy job, because there hardly are any in this service area."

On the other hand, coaches do frequently refer students for WFC services, including job searches; educational training plans; job-readiness and other workshops; and applications for WIA, V-WRAP, and other public benefits as well as social services. The resources available at many WFCs have been a significant help to many coaches and referred students. In fact, Aims's coach has linked the Larimer County WFC website with the college's career services pages. She refers students to the page where they can access and download a variety of materials (e.g., job searches, résumé writing, interviewing, and networking). Students have reported that the website has been very helpful to them when they cannot physically attend a WFC workshop.

Coaches with knowledge of procedures and forms sometimes help students to complete needed WFC paperwork or steer students to specific WFC staff "so that those students didn't [*sic*] have

to jump through quite the hoops the other individuals in Workforce would when they initially walk through those doors.”

A number of coaches stated that when they refer a student to the WFC they ask the student to report back what happened. In some cases, the coach will follow up if he or she has not heard back from the student. However, there is no standardized mechanism separate from input on the ESCF to capture the nature of the referrals or the outcome of the referrals. And, until an individual has enrolled in the college he or she is not counted as part of the coach’s caseload and often not entered into the ESCF to be counted as an interaction. This has led to inconsistent follow-up of individuals who were referred to or from the college or WFC, even those who later enrolled in a course of study. In the months ahead we will look at the number of WFC referrals and the numbers of individuals who subsequently enroll in a certificate or degree program.

While many coaches had ongoing active relations with local WFCs, several experienced an uneven pattern of activity. Often when the person with whom the coach had built a relationship was reassigned or left the WFC, there was little or no activity. This suggests that personal relationships were very important, but institutional coordination had not occurred, at least with the coach.

We have not yet interviewed WFC staff and so cannot report on their experiences and what records they have kept.

Moving forward, a number of coaches observed that there is some overlap between what they do and what the WFC does. Others have seen new possibilities for more collaboration. For instance, PPCC is working to enhance the coordination between itself and the local WFC. Ideas circulating include working jointly on the new “soft landing” model—PPCC would provide faculty for soft-skills training at the WFC. In addition, there is discussion about the WFC administering ACCUPLACER or its replacement. PPCC and the WFC are also exploring funding streams that could support these collaborative endeavors.

NETWORKING BEYOND THE COLLEGE/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS

Know the players in your business community—that is where some of the most important resources that can assist students will come from, e.g., placement opportunities, internships, experiential learning, employer informational panels, guest presentations, on industry-relevant topics.

In addition to coaches knowing community resources to facilitate their case-management and referral services, some coaches were assigned to be the college’s liaison to one or more community organizations. In some cases, coaches also joined the boards. For example, ACC’s coach sits on the local community board. She believes her participation on the board helps her “keep a pulse on community needs and changes in needs for remediation.” Other coaches have also been active in getting to know regional employers and industry councils.

We're in the Piceance Basin of rural Colorado with oil and gas and shale. And, if you want to train students in these areas, you need relationships with these companies. This is where your students are coming from. This is where . . . the good adjunct instructors are going to come from. This is where the experienced opportunities come from.

This coach further remarked that it would be good if coaches had some discretionary funds to buy community contacts a coffee or to take them to lunch.

INTERCOLLEGE COACH CONNECTIONS

One of the goals of COETC was to expand opportunities for individuals across the state to enroll in online and hybrid energy program supported by the grant. It was thought that coaches would play a critical role in recruiting prospective students in their service areas and then facilitating their enrollment in the selected energy program. Given the delayed transformation of energy courses—only RRCC's WQM program is now fully operational as a hybrid certificate—coaches were unsuccessful in this particular function. For example, the coach at OJC referred a student interested in solar energy to CMC's coach—the solar course instructor agreed to reduce required hours for the hands-on portions of his class, and stated he would help the OJC student find inexpensive housing for the weekend sessions. However, even with these accommodations, the student's work responsibilities precluded his traveling the 356+ miles from La Junta to Rifle necessary to participate in the remaining lab sessions.

Separate from acting as liaisons to each other's energy programs, a number of coaches have connected via email and phone to exchange strategies and to discuss potential field locations for the mobile labs that were constructed under the grant (e.g., CMC, Aims, and RRCC). Coaches have shared resources for student assessments such as the one for learning styles. Coaches also have increasingly used Basecamp, a project-management site established by the CCCS coach coordinator for all the career coaches, as a means to inform one another about events (e.g., line tech rodeo), to disseminate materials, and/or to ask for assistance.

Coaches have also shared information about job openings in their service areas that may be relevant to students graduating from one of the energy programs. For example, a student graduating from RRCC's WQM program was helped to get a job on the Western Slope near Rifle as a result of collaborative work done by the coaches from RRCC and CMC.

Finally, on CCCS conference calls and hosted forums (see below), coaches have exchanged experiences and shared best practices in regard to their work with students and employers.

PROJECT LEAD/MANAGER

In addition to their other responsibilities, a number of career coaches have also taken on the role of project lead. At CNCC, the coach has been from the beginning also the project lead for the

grant. At FRCC, the original career coach was promoted to project lead and a new coach was hired.

CNCC's coach/project lead has been part of the college's senior leadership coordinating the school's counseling services. She believes that despite a full plate, the overlap between the various roles has enabled her to be successful with each one.

At CMC, the coach was hired prior to the project lead, and since the project lead went onto part-time status in summer of 2013, the coach has stepped in and out of the project lead role as needed. CMC's coach is concerned about the changing staffing in both the energy and DE programs, and the change in the project lead's schedule. It is unclear at this time if and how many of the project lead responsibilities have been shifted to CMC's career coach.

STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Early and preventive or anticipatory advisement—mandated or “intrusive advising”—has been found to be important for retention and academic success.³⁹ In this context, many community colleges require students to see an adviser at some point early in their academic career, often during orientation or during registration. However, much of this mandated advising is focused on academic issues and may not address or anticipate other issues that may affect the student's ability to be successful with his or her studies. As discussed earlier, the career coach position was designed to complement principally academic advising or advising “after the fact” when the student was already having difficulties.

Across the 15 colleges in the COETC consortium, the majority required DE students and students registered in an AAA course to see an adviser. However, only five colleges mandated that these students or students in the grant-funded energy programs see the career coach. Career coaches thus need to be proactive in building their caseloads, including such activities as presentations at orientation activities, presentations in DE and energy courses, workshops on time management and other soft skills, and workshops on job readiness and employment searches. As noted earlier, some coaches integrated into a college's early-alert system have added students identified by the system. At CCD, while not part of the early-alert system, the coach sent out emails to students flagged in Banner. At TSJC the coach sends a letter each term to all Southern Colorado Line Technician Program students, and tracks their use of the program's online orientation course, following up when a student fails to log in or provide necessary documents. At FRCC, the coach introduces herself to the college's energy students by reviewing the files of the incoming class and sending students emails inviting them to meet

³⁹ Cuseo, J. (2005). Decided, Undecided and in Transition: Implications for Academic Advisement, Career Counseling and Student Retention. In Robert S. Feldman (ed). *Improving the First Year of College: Research and Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.; Upcraft, M. L., & Kramer, G. (1995). Intrusive advising as discussed in the first-year academic advising: patterns in the present, pathways to the future. *Academic Advising and Barton College*, 1-2; Varney, J. (2007). Intrusive advising. *Academic Advising Today*, 30, 3.

with her. Coaches at other colleges, however, observed that they have found sending out emails to be ineffective, as are many other strategies they have tried. Students do not check emails. They change their phone numbers without warning, or do not regularly attend class. They are often difficult to contact without connecting with them in person through some venue.

In-person contact and recruitment efforts have included coaches sitting in their college's testing center (ACC); "hanging out" in student labs (TSJC, ACC), attending DE classes (MCC), and, as described earlier, contacting students in the courses they are teaching. NJC's first career coach worked part time as a volleyball coach. In this position she frequently interacted with students and became known as both accessible and helpful. The TSJC coach has found the most effective way to educate students about his services is spending time in their yard and lab environments. When he does this, students often talk to him when they are on break and subsequently become part of his caseload.

Over time, as coaches became better known on campus, faculty and staff increased the numbers of students they referred to them.

At this time, there is insufficient data to compare and contrast the efficacy of the coaches' different recruitment strategies. However, in our interviews with a number of coaches, informational classroom presentations were generally found not to be a significant source of referrals. Coach-led workshops during class time were found to be much more effective in fostering student follow-up with coaches, but as noted, it has been difficult for faculty to schedule these workshops in already crammed class time. But some solutions have been developed—at OJC the DE English instructor now requires her students to meet with and interview the career coach as part of a writing assignment. When asked about these "interviews," the coach commented that she thinks the assignment is helpful in many ways—but its greatest benefit is its "normalization" of the coach. Her caseload has significantly increased as a result of this strategy.

STUDENTS SERVED

The TAACCCT grant required coaches to work with students who meet one or more of the following criteria: TAA-eligible, TAA-like, in a redesigned energy course or program, or in a redesigned DE course. Caseloads were to include only students who met the eligibility criteria. At times, however, coaches work with others, including individuals referred by WFCs who want information about the college's certificate or degree programs but are not yet enrolled. Coaches expressed concern about accounting for nonstudents as well as about the students who did not meet eligibility but who came to their doors. As a group, coaches stated they could not turn away a student in need—especially if they were not meeting targets for eligible students.

The ESCF was developed by Rutgers as the mechanism for the coaches to record and track their activities with students. Each new student with whom the coach met was to be registered.

However, it is important to note that registration does not indicate the type or extent of interaction the coach had with any student—just that they had met at least once.

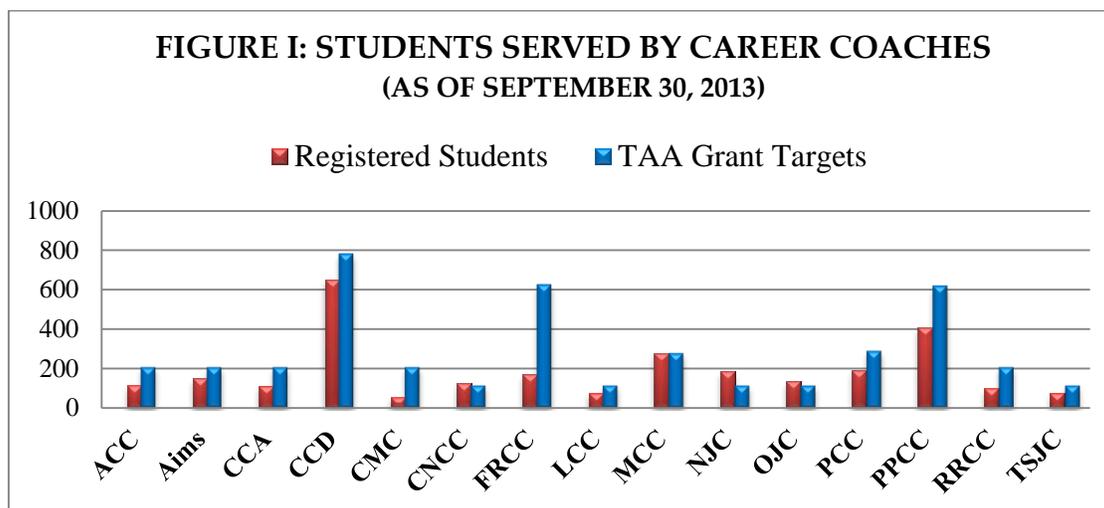
As of September 30, 2013, the end of the grant’s second year, coaches had registered 2,817 unique students in the ESCF. In addition, an additional 407 students had been registered but were dropped from the registration logs if grant eligibility could not be determined. A breakdown by eligibility is presented in Table I. Some of these may be referrals from WFC whose enrollment at the college was pending.

TABLE I: ELIGIBILITY OF STUDENTS REGISTERED BY COACHES		
	September 2013	
Eligibility Criteria	Percent	N
TAA-Eligible	2.0	64
TAA-Like	11.7	373
DE Redesigned Course	54.9	1769
Energy Redesigned Course	1.9	62
Energy Redesigned Program of Study	4.9	158
Energy Redesigned Course + Energy Redesigned Program of Study	0.8	27
DE Redesigned + Energy Redesigned Program of Study	0.8	27
TAA + DE Redesigned Course	6.1	198
TAA + Energy Redesigned Course	1.9	60
TAA + Contextualized DE Course	0	0
TAA + Energy Redesigned Program of Study	2.3	74
Multiple Redesigned	0.1	4
Total	100.0	2817

At the end of the second year of the grant, coaches had registered 70 percent of the total target for the consortium. This is slightly above a target of 66 percent if there was an even distribution of registrations over the three years of the grant. However, as Figure I indicates, there is great variability across the colleges. The percent of the targets in fact ranges from a low of 26 percent at CMC to a high of 340 percent at MCC. There are a number of possible explanations for the variability. The first has to do with the targets themselves. It is unclear how CCCS/the colleges arrived at the targets. Within the framework of an ongoing relationship between a coach and a student in which support and advice are provided, some college targets seem realistic—or, as one coach stated, set the stage for a caseload that allows her to “remember the names and faces of the students she serves.” However, despite the large size of some of the colleges, caseload targets such as 780 at CCD, 625 at FRCC, and 619 at PPCC may not have been realistic. Coaches at colleges with caseloads much over 200 stated that too-big caseloads “sabotaged” the very work they were trying to accomplish, the “formation of a personal relationship” that is the

“foundation for effective developmental advising.”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, coaches often felt pressure to meet grant targets, and thus registered as many students as they could.

Some college projections for their targets, however, may have been too low. For example, MCC had a fall 2012 headcount of 1,875 but a target of only 82 students to be served. This contrasts with NJC, with a head count of 1,456 students and a target of 115 students, or LCC, which had a target of 115 with a student headcount of 916.⁴¹



Overall the large number of DE students at colleges in comparison to the number of students enrolled in energy programs is reflected in the consortium breakdown of eligibility: 55 percent of all students served were deemed eligible solely on their enrollment in a redesigned DE course, as compared to 7 percent of students whose eligibility was based solely on their enrollment in a redesigned energy course or program. In this context, coaches at energy colleges who were not well integrated into their college’s DE program tended to have low numbers. The absence of any redesigned DE courses at CMC no doubt contributed to the very low numbers for this coach. It is not clear, however, if there may have nonenergy students served who met other eligibility criteria (e.g., unemployed). Energy programs that were separated in an area without general student traffic including DE students, in another campus building, or even on another campus also contributed to some low numbers compared to targets (e.g., RRCC and FRCC). At PCC, the number of energy students was zero because, as indicated above, the energy program was removed from the main campus in Pueblo where the two part-time coaches were located.

⁴⁰ Cuseo, J. (2005). Decided, Undecided and in Transition: Implications for Academic Advisement, Career Counseling and Student Retention. In Robert S. Feldman (ed). *Improving the First Year of College: Research and Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 18.

⁴¹ Colorado Community College System (2013). College Fact Sheets. Retrieved from <http://www.cccs.edu/Docs/Communication/sb/College%20Fact%20Sheets.pdf>.

Interviews with some of the coaches suggested that another reason for lower-than-expected numbers of students served was the fact that some coaches were in fact providing intensive advising (ACC and CCA). The fact that there was an array of other available support services for students enabled some coaches to maintain smaller caseloads.

The opposite end of the continuum was the CCD coach's caseload of over 600 students, with whom she had very minimal contact.

No doubt there are many other factors that contributed to variations in caseload, including the perception of the role by faculty and students (see below), the culture of advising at the college, availability of other services at the college or in the community, residential versus commuter students, and percent of traditional and nontraditional students in the college population. Finally, there are the coaches themselves. Some came with energy and enthusiasm for a new position. Others had comparable job tenure and experience. Some were more comfortable in front of groups of people, while others were more comfortable working one-on-one. Given the mix of characteristics among the coaches and across the colleges, it is clear that no one factor made the difference in "meeting targets." More importantly, meeting targets did not ensure that a coach was effective in terms of providing *intrusive advising*.

RECORD KEEPING—THE ELECTRONIC STUDENT CASE FILE

Complementing the goals for numbers of students served by career coaches and/or by the redesigned energy and DE programs was the goal to assess "intrusive advising" and its impact on student retention and completion. As noted earlier, the ESCF was developed to collect student issues/problems and coach interventions to allow for a comparative cohort analysis. The ESCF was constructed to include demographic information and academic and nonacademic goals and issues, as well as coach interventions and referrals. The goal was to have a single document that could be completed for each student seen, avoiding duplicative record keeping.

The ESCF's Qualtrics format was designed and instituted in the fall of 2012. Banner information was to be "cross-walked" into the ESCF to provide coaches with critical demographic and academic information, thereby eliminating the need for them to ask students for this information. Coaches had access to this data directly through their institutional resources. Due to a request to redesign the ESCF instrument, the migration of demographic data into the ESCF was postponed until the ESCF 1 and ESCF 2 instruments were merged by Rutgers (January 2014) following the validation of redesigned courses by CCCS (October 2013) and student eligibility confirmation by the coaches (September 2013). As noted, the original Qualtrics instrument (ESCF 1) presented a number of unanticipated technical problems (e.g., limited views per student, ease of review). This caused frustration all around.

The ESCF was redesigned in summer 2013, and the new instrument was launched in fall 2013. The new ESCF addressed technical problems with the exception of the need to always use the same computer to access the ESCF. The new ESCF cut down the number of questions and

focused principally on student goals/issues and coach interactions. In summer 2013, the coaches were given training, and assistance from the Rutgers team has continued as needed.

Since its launch, however, the ESCF has not proven to be a reliable means to capture coach activities, student issues/goals, or coach interventions including referrals. Coaches generally open an ESCF and register the students they see—probably because of the pressure of meeting student targets—but most coaches have been inconsistent about what they record on the ESCF.

Rutgers takes responsibility for the early difficulties regarding access to and use of the ESCF. No doubt the technical problems coaches initially encountered with the ESCF have continued to resonate in coaches' "lack of enthusiasm" to use it. Coaches have told members of the Rutgers team that they felt overwhelmed by the number of informational queries contained in both versions of the ESCF. They also had concerns about confidentiality and compliance with FERPA regulations. In addition, coaches were not sure how much or little to record on the ESCF.

When I go into the case file, I never know what's important enough or what I should leave out or what's too much information. And sometimes I base what I put in there—if I elaborate or not, it just depends, and I never know what's too much and what's too little.

During the first year of ESCF use, coaches also expressed significant concern that they were expected to use the ESCF to structure their interactions with students—form following content—to gather the requested information. Rutgers and senior CCCS staff repeatedly responded to this concern by stating that interactions should not be shaped by the ESCF but rather be an interactive dialogue with the student about his or her presenting concern or issue.

Most coaches take notes during their sessions with students, and often keep paper files on their work with students, inputting data into the ESCF at a later time. This is understandable if the coach wants to maintain eye contact with a student. Coaches also have told us that they don't register and/or input data until a second visit—too many students seem to drop "off the planet." Other coaches state that they lack the time to transfer data from their personal files into the ESCF. No doubt the personal or parallel files most coaches keep are a rich trove of data, even with inconsistencies of breadth and depth. To mine this data source, this spring, Rutgers will request case files from a group of coaches and review them to inform our final analysis of the work the coaches have done.

All the same, we have reviewed and tried to analyze the data recorded by the coaches in both the first and second iteration of ESCF. Some coaches, such as the ones from Aims, CNCC, MCC, FRCC, TSJC, and OJC, have been fairly consistent in entering demographic as well as narrative data (e.g., student goals, actions taken, and follow-up status). Other coaches have included in their ESCFs rich data on some students, but little data on many others. No doubt some of the gaps and the variations within the whole set of files per coach reflect the degree of ongoing contact with each student. But it also suggests that the coaches may not have fully appreciated the importance of keeping comprehensive, accurate, and up-to-date ESCFs.

As a whole, given many gaps and variations in what has been documented on the ESCFs, we are unable to present ESCF data at this time. Until we can spend more time with the data we have as of September 2013 and access new data, we believe it is premature to report out, infer meaning, or interpret the data. Instead, as part of the comparative cohort analysis, we will produce a separate analysis of ESCF data as well as include significant findings in Rutgers' final report to CCCS.

MEASURING IMPACT AND SUCCESS

Now, in the third and final year of the grant, the question needs to be asked, what is the impact of the coaches, or the "value added" to students' experience? Has the model of intensive advising been successful? Before we can address any of these, we need to define "success." If success is meeting grant targets for students served—then as discussed above, most of the coaches have met or exceed the prorated targets at the end of the second year of the grant. And yet, as one coach commented,

The number of students that we've met with, . . . that doesn't really tell you—it tells you that we've met a deliverable, but it doesn't tell you what the impact was or how we got there or what the students feel worked and didn't work and if they found value in the career coach or not.

If we use the standard measure of success used by colleges, student retention and completion, then we need to see if there are different outcomes between those students who did and did not have at least one contact with a coach. To determine any differences, however, we need more time to track outcomes and complete the comparative cohort study. Yet, when we do the multiple regression analysis, even if it reveals differences, it will be difficult to identify what about the coach, his or her services, intervention, resources, or referrals made the difference. That is, it will be difficult to quantify possible factors and determine how much weight should be given to each. Was it the action the coach took or the manner in which he or she related to the student—the process—or the fact that at a critical time in the student's life the coach was there to listen while the student talked, and that gave the student the support needed to continue on; or perhaps the combination of the two?

Helping students to identify and access needed resources and then to refer them are significant activities in which coaches have been involved. However, even if we could count all completed referrals, the absence of consistent documentation of outcomes on the ESCFs makes it impossible for us to use referrals as a means to measure the positive impact of referrals on a student's ability to stay in college and succeed.

Can frequency of contact with the coach make the difference? Perhaps, yet again there is insufficient documentation on the frequency of contacts. In addition, multiple visits that are not

focused may not make an impact, while a single strategic one can help a student reinvest in his or her studies, or take a needed action to facilitate greater success.

In general, while retention and completion might be a standard for “success,” for some students and coach interventions, “success” can also mean something very different. Success can be the student who meets with a coach to discuss his struggles keeping up with his studies given the demands of a job and child care. The coach may explore what resources the student needs to reduce the stress of balancing so much. The student might decide that rather than messing up his GPA, he needs time off to arrange for better child care. Once that is done he will return to his studies and pursue his goal of becoming an engineer, including a planned transfer to a four-year college.

Success might also mean helping a student with a traumatic brain injury reframe his failures on exams. It is not his lack of commitment, but rather the effects of his injury on cognition and memory. A degree program in medical technology is probably not a good fit for him. Instead the coach explores with the student less-demanding certificate programs that would still provide a good income.

Each of the above students will be counted as drops or withdrawals, and yet the intervention may have been very successful in assisting the student to make some more realistic life choices—at least for the time being.

Can we use referrals to the coach from other college staff and faculty, and/or from the WFC or other community agencies, as a proxy of success—recognition that the coaches’ services have impacted a student’s college experience? No, not only because these referrals were not collected in any standard way, but also because the number of intracollege and external referrals may reflect many different reasons, including the range of other student services the college offers, the size of the student population, and the coach’s pregrant history at the college.

Given these challenges, we have decided to go to the students and ask them both to define their own success and to indicate if and how the coach helped them. This data collection will occur in spring 2014.

We also have turned to coaches—to get their insights and observations. Over the last two months in interviews and at a coach forum we asked the coaches how they define success, how they measure their impact and success.

Coaches’ first responses spoke to their own struggles to define and measure their impact and success. They noted that the definition for one student may not be the same for another. But when asked to focus on their own experiences they quickly began to share specific cases with us.

One of my most successful students dropped out, or flunked out, and she was the one who I was saying had really, really strong writing skills and then these other holes in her writing. But the reason she's one of my most successful students is because she was living in the house with her boyfriend's mother, and the boyfriend's mother was hurtful. I'll say that. I don't know what went down. And the boyfriend was in jail and she had a three-month-old baby, but she ended up with housing assistance. So that was a huge success because she could have easily put her baby up for adoption or left her baby with this—with the grandmother, the maternal grandmother, or left the baby with her mother, who was a drug addict. I mean, on and on and on.

Coaches referenced students who got internships or jobs as the measure of their success. Helping a student get a scholarship was another measure of success: "When you can get somebody a \$1,500 scholarship, it goes a long way."

Success with student-defined goals was identified as another measure of impact:

I feel successful when I have student after student come to me and say, you know, "Hey, thank you so much for your workshop on résumés, I completely redid my resume and I got a job last week." When I can help a student meet their goal, whatever it is, to me that feels like success. . . . Now, every student's goals are different and you know sometimes like I said just getting through one class and passing it with a C is gonna be enough for one student, whereas you know getting to a university is gonna be another student.

Other coaches noted that helping a student see alternative options and watching him or her successfully progress down a different course was their evidence of impact.

He got hurt and the doctor said, "You might not be able to do that anymore. Your back might not be able to handle it." And so I remember him coming through and sitting in my office and us going over testing scores and English classes he tested into and math classes he tested in, and he just sat there and he was like, "I never wanted to come to school. I don't know what I'm going to do. I never thought I'd be here. I don't know if I can do it." And he's—I mean he's pretty dang close to done with his degree, and he is now coming into my office going, "God, I got a B in Animal Science. I'm so mad."

Helping a student believe in himself or herself can make a big impact, especially for students who come from "chronic low expectation, or chronic incidences of just inconsistent situations and survival situations." One coach observed that she sees a difference in students when she says hello in the hallway and asks them how they are doing: "You look a little pale today—are you okay?" Such interactions help students to feel visible and noticed, compared to a common perception that "no one knows I am walking around here, or cares." Or as one coach observed, a real difference can just be providing students with a "sounding board because that's all that was needed for them to feel like it's not just in their head but it's something that is real and can be labeled. . . . Somebody listened to them and supported them."

Some coaches described how acts of gratitude beyond their own assessments provided definitive signs that they had made a difference. For instance, the student who “dropped off flowers for me because she became employed after I helped her with her résumé” or “the jar of candy for me because she wanted to thank me for being there for her and that she couldn’t do this without me and for me taking five and ten minutes here and there, as well as advising her.”

The coach from OJC talked about living in a small town where she may see someone from the college or a member of a student’s family. When “people in the community tell her that have heard good things about her, so when they say—I hear you are doing a good job—means a lot.”

Finally, one coach commented that while she feels good about helping a student get a job, a tangible sign that she helped a student, she has come to recognize that often she “doesn’t even realize I help them.”

COACH INTERACTION

Research on retention has indicated a correlation between commitment to educational and career goals and degree completion.⁴² Advisers provide students with information and resources and also help them to make decisions. Structurally many colleges have separated the two—academic and career advising. Research, however, suggests that “integrated” advising, combining academic and career issues—is preferred by students and “potentially provides better outcomes than ordinary academic advising.”⁴³ COETC used this as the model to construct the role and functions of the career coach. This is evident in the array of activities described herein in which the coaches have been engaged.

This is the “what” of the career coach—but we were also interested in the “how.” We therefore asked the coaches to tell us about the “process of engagement” and the dynamics of interaction with students.

The first factor that the coaches spoke about was the need to be visible and accessible to students. This was a challenge for coaches whose offices were a distance from the places students congregated, attended classes, or used a lab. Coaches said that they tried as much as possible, even when it got cold, to keep the door of their office open. They also were attentive to

⁴² Wyckoff, S. C. (1999). The academic advising process in higher education: History, research, and improvement. *Recruitment & Retention in Higher Education*, 13(1).

⁴³ Van Wie, K. (2011). Chapter 7: Academic Advising and Career Development for Undecided Transfer Students. In M. A. Poisel & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Transfer Students in Higher Education: Building Foundations for Policies, Programs, and Services that Foster Student Success*. The First-Year Experience Monograph Series (pp. 89–98); Mottarella, K. E., Fritzsche, B. A., & Cerabino, K. C. (2004). What do students want in advising? A policy capturing study. *NACADA Journal*, 24(1&2), 48–61; Tennant, A. (2013). *Intrusive Advising and Its Implementation in Residence Halls*. (Unpublished master of science degree requirements report). Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas.

students' schedules. If students were generally on campus late afternoons and evenings, they tried to be on campus at those times, at least several times a week. This would enable students to stop by before or even after an evening class.

The literature discusses two models of advising, prescriptive and developmental. Prescriptive advising tends to be more concrete, focused on providing information and resources (e.g., courses to be taken, registration procedures). Developmental advising generally refers to advising that is growth promoting and involves exploration of a student's interests, values, and goals as well as helping students with social and emotional problems.^{44,44}

A few coaches shared that they initially worried that they were too prescriptive, and gave more advice than truly engaged the student, trying to solve the student's problem for him or her rather than facilitating the student's problem solving and choice making. In group meetings and interviews conducted in fall 2013, it appeared that coaches were generally attuned to the balance of advising and exploring, being prescriptive and developmental in their work. They helped students discover what they needed, helped them to identify goals. One coach stated that her counseling was more goal-oriented, focused on achieving personal academic and career goals rather than solving problems.

They get to decide, you know, what does success mean to you? Maybe it's just finishing one class, maybe it's going on, you know, transferring on to a four year, so it's different for every student.

Building relationships and establishing trust take time, and the coaches were acutely aware of the processes that are involved. So they tried in all interactions to make the student feel as comfortable as possible, knowing in many cases that this might be the only meeting they would have with the student.

One coach stated that when she first meets with students, she does some "intake" work that helps the student get to know her and the services she can provide. She thinks that this fosters a sense of comfort and confidence in sharing personal issues. Another coach reflected:

I think you just really have to have those good people skills where you can put people at ease. You don't come on too strong, but yet you are also confident because if you're not confident a student's not gonna feel comfortable coming to you to help solve some of their big life issues that sometimes they have going on. And being sensitive to everything that could possibly be going on—and I've seen everything under the sun, so there's nothing a student can say to me that's gonna surprise me and I think that they take some solace in that, knowing, like, "Okay, I can tell her whatever I need to tell her and get through this." So, just being able to build rapport and get along with anybody.

⁴⁴ Crookston, B. B. (1972). A developmental view of academic advising as teaching. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 13, 12-17.

Coaches said that to facilitate problem solving it was important to communicate a sense of optimism. At the same time they were clear that it was important to help students identify realistic goals and expectations. They needed “to be honest with the students so they’re fully prepared for the future” —to explore what is practical for them, given their academic and personal strengths and weaknesses, and their responsibilities outside of college (e.g., work and family).

A number of coaches discussed the need to be firm and set clear boundaries, and not to be afraid to hold students accountable. At the same time they knew that they had to hold themselves responsible, to be reliable and do what they said they would do with or for the student.

Several coaches talked about the importance of preparing for meetings with students whom they were meeting for a second or third time. They cited the importance of calling students by name to personalize their interactions—especially important in larger institutions, where students sometimes feel they are only perceived as a warm body occupying a seat in class.

Coaches also talked about taking the time to go with a students to the offices to which they were referring them, introducing them to the contact person, or going with them to the bookstore or library. These extra steps demonstrate an interest in the student, and help to build relationships. Coaches said they ask students to stay in touch:

I asked them to let me know what’s going on. “If you think about it, send me an email. If you get a chance and can, stop by and tell me how that interview went.” I don't know. I care—I care about their success. I want them to get jobs. I want them to do well in all of those things.

Coaches also spoke to the importance of recognizing students outside their offices—in the hallways and in other buildings. One coach even stated:

I’ve seen students downtown when I’m having a beer with my husband or out to dinner. I’ve seen students then, and I make a point to say hi, and you know I can read them if they don’t really want to talk to me, you know if that happened, but if they didn’t wanna talk to me you know I’d let them be or whatever. Just making sure they’re somebody that I care about inside and outside of work.

Honesty with students was also important. Sometimes there is not a good fit between a coach and a specific student. The student might have already established a good relationship with another member of the staff or faculty. To be explicit and say out loud, “It is okay to go to the other person for help, but my door is always open to you,” gives a student permission, and might in the end facilitate a return to the coach. These exchanges make a difference for the

individual student and also help to establish a sense of positive support and community on campus.

Students who feel they have been taken seriously often come back, and sometimes bring another student with them.

I had a student who walked into my office with a friend of his and said, “She has a problem. She needs help with something.” And so we sat down and talked through it and worked through it, and he was like, “I told you [name of coach] would help. I told you she’d be able to help you.”

Finally, personal warmth and a sense of humor were commonly mentioned by the coaches as important to establishing and maintaining relationships with students as well as with other members of the college community.

SKILLS A COACH NEEDS

The United States Department of Labor has funded additional workforce development projects in Colorado⁴⁵ that utilize career coaches. In this context, we decided to move beyond the “what” and the “how” of their work, and ask the coaches about the experiences and skills they feel are needed to succeed as a coach, as defined by their specific college. Such information might help inform both recruitment and training of other grant-funded career coaches.

Coaches were therefore asked to review CCCS’s original suggested job description, and to send us a revised list of the skills and/or experience they felt were necessary. Coaches could add, delete, and edit. The most common responses—experience, knowledge, skills, and affective traits—are listed below. We have organized them into a number of categories, but recognize there is a fair amount of overlap.

Personality/Affective Traits/Basic Skills

- Commitment to serving a culturally diverse student population
- **Passionate about student success and tangible outcomes**
- Highly motivated and a self-starter
- Capacity to work both independently and as a member of a team
- Strong sense of responsibility
- Ability to maintain a high level of confidentiality
- Flexibility
- Resourceful
- Enthusiasm, energy, and creativity
- Ability to do outreach work
- Strong organizational and interpersonal skills

⁴⁵ Colorado Health Education Online (CHEO) and Colorado Helping Advanced Manufacturing Program (CHAMP).

- Good leadership skills
- **Comfortable speaking in front of groups**
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills

Advising

- Basic understanding of the philosophy of two-year colleges
- A commitment to advance students' holistic development
- An understanding of the DE model and sequence
- Ability to help students understand reading, English, and math assessment scores, and choose the best pathways for their needs and interests
- Experience with individual advising or case management
- Experience as a high school or college counselor
- Experience working with at-risk populations
- Experience with a WFC case
- Ability to understand the range of student challenges
- General knowledge of testing procedures
- Knowledge of academic advising strategies and techniques
- Strong understanding and skill in a variety of interview techniques
- Ability to hold students accountable and not to be afraid to discuss uncomfortable issues
- Ability to help students set goals
- Ability to develop students' repertoire of skills, including time management and problem solving, through workshops and one-on-one sessions
- Knowledge of financial aid
- Ability to respond to crisis situations in a rational, appropriate manner

Career Counseling

- Knowledge of career assessment and career exploration activities
- Ability to interpret personality, aptitude, or occupational-interest assessments
- Ability to engage employers about their industries and the skills employees need
- Ability to teach students to write effective résumés and cover letters
- Knowledge of rural-area challenges in respect to career development and employment
- Willingness to learn about the energy-related industry of the college's certificate and/or degree programs

Administration, Program Management, and Evaluation

- Project-management and strategic-planning experience
- Ability to market and promote programs and services to students
- Demonstrated ability to absorb and analyze information quickly and to translate ideas into action proactively
- Basic knowledge of data-collection methods in relation to program evaluation

- Ability to assess program effectiveness and implement continuous program improvement
- Ability to coordinate with institutional research on tracking students

SUPERVISION AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

As part of our interest in best practices and our attention to future professional development, Rutgers asked the coaches to talk about the supervision they received, the CCCS meetings and workshops they attended, and other professional-development activities in which they participated.

Supervision: In all cases, for at least administrative purposes, coaches reported to their college's grant project lead. For many, the project lead also provided program direction and was the person to whom the coach turned to discuss specific student cases. However, many project leads did not have a background in counseling and therefore could only provide minimum, if any, help in respect to the "clinical" aspects of coach caseloads. In fact, some coaches stated that their project lead was primarily focused on meeting grant targets, and not on the "what" and "how" of their work. At several colleges, the project lead did not have line authority over the coach. Instead, that authority was vested in a senior administrator. The opposite was also true, where a senior administrator was the project lead and had line authority but someone else provided day-to-day supervision of the coach.

Coaches assigned to counseling or advising services were often supervised by the director of that office, or one of the senior staff members. These coaches reported that their supervisors were helpful, and that they had learned a lot from them.

Colorado Community College System workshops: A senior CCCS staff person was assigned to be the coordinator for the coaches. In June 2012 she held an orientation session for new coaches, during which the role of the coach, intensive advising, and strategies for case management were discussed. In addition, two to three times a year, she led coach forums using different colleges as the venue (e.g., RRCC, Aims, CMC). At these meetings coaches reported on their activities; shared experiences, ideas, and challenges; and engaged in joint problem solving. Sessions were also used to introduce the ESCF as a mandated case-record tool, to get feedback on it, and to provide further guidance about its use (e.g., the change from ESCF I to II).

Coaches reported that most meetings had been helpful to them. They particularly liked the chance to interact with their peers, and to learn about their experiences. A number of coaches felt it would have been very helpful to have more actual training during coach meetings, suggesting sessions devoted to assessment tools and "career coaching or career facilitation or case management or something more in depth . . . what works, what doesn't work." One coach suggested it would be helpful to have outside trainers come into their meetings to provide more expertise, to add to the experience and knowledge of their peers.

In addition to in-person sessions, the CCCS's coach coordinator convened a series of monthly conference calls to discuss issues and concerns. However, due to poor rates of participation these calls were discontinued about halfway into the grant.

In March 2013, Basecamp was inaugurated as a mechanism to encourage and enable ongoing communication among the coaches, and among the coaches, CCCS staff, and members of the Rutgers team. Coaches have used Basecamp to make announcements about events at their colleges (e.g., TSJC's line tech rodeos), or to share created materials (e.g., RRCC videos about the WQM programs). Coaches have used Basecamp to query other coaches for information and resources and to inform one another about training conferences. CCCS and Rutgers have used Basecamp to schedule meetings and provide directions for the ESCF, as well as to conduct surveys.

CCCS's coach coordinator also visited each of the 15 colleges at least once, and some colleges multiple times. These meetings have included reviews of a coach's caseload and his or her other activities, assistance with student issues, and discussions of any challenges faced by the coach. As needed the coordinator has intervened with and on behalf of the coach. For example, CCD's coach was assigned to work with all students who came into the CCD academic advising office, not just those eligible under the grant. The coach was unable to effect a change in her functional role, so the coordinator set up a series of conference calls and in-person meetings. As a result the coach's assignment was changed to conform to grant parameters.

Lastly, the coordinator made herself available to all coaches on an as-needed basis. Coaches said they found the coordinator helpful and supportive, and they appreciated all the work she did with them. In October 2013, this coordinator was reassigned to the CHAMP grant and thus a new coach coordinator was assigned to COETC. The new coordinator has reached out to the coaches and is in the process of setting up a winter meeting with the coaches at PPCC.

Other professional training: Several coaches attended one or more National Association of Colleges and Employers training workshops. One was a career coach intensive and another was entitled "LifeBound Academic Coaching." The latter workshop focused on interviewing techniques and "how to empower students and how to ask them the questions that kind of awakens [*sic*] that skill within themselves." One of the coaches who attended both conferences commented that the first conference was not very informative, but the second one was "phenomenal!"

SUSTAINABILITY

Although the end of the grant is nine months away, issues of sustainability have been raised by the colleges and by the coaches themselves.

In general, consortium colleges have accepted, if not welcomed, the arrival of the grant-funded career coach to help address student needs. As this report has demonstrated, there is growing

anecdotal evidence that the coaches have provided significant service to the colleges in the ways they have supported and helped students. College administrators have recognized the work, and faculty and staff have referred increasing numbers of students to them. Yet without concrete data, it may be hard to argue that any difference in completion or retention rates is due to the activities of the career coach. Further, there is a perception that the cost of comprehensive student services is, in a climate of declining educational funding, too high to sustain them, the return on investment not sufficient to warrant allocating shrinking dollars to comprehensive services, in which we include the career coach.

In this context it is interesting that the colleges that have spoken about the future have more often spoken about continuing to employ the person who is the coach than maintaining the coach position.

Aims from the beginning structured the coach position so that the coach would “meet her clientele and her case-management goals, and continue to provide services to the broader audience within the campus.”

OJC has stated its intention to employ its coach postgrant and expand her responsibilities as a counselor. PPCC, which has restructured student services into “student success and retention services” and enrollment services, wants to separate the functions of career planning from advising services. They are not certain in this new configuration where, postgrant, the current coach will fit, but they want to keep her at PPCC.

This fall the CCA coach moved into a full-time faculty teaching position, and a new coach is being recruited for the duration of the grant.

At the same time, a number of colleges are working on plans to integrate the coach functions into their student services; they want to make “sure students are successful once the grant’s over and that we’re not just leaving them high and dry, that they have the tools and they know how to navigate campus services.” For example, MCC is looking at the navigator model now being instituted under the Round III CHAMP grant.

At other colleges, coach role ambiguity and the existence of faculty advisement, as well as limited funds, have raised questions about the need for, and feasibility of, the coach position. For example, PCC does not expect to continue the coach position.

Over the next few months we will gather information about plans to continue, expand, or eliminate the coach position based on student needs, existent services, and available funding. We will also document which coaches will be retained, in what capacity, and the thinking that led to these decisions. These findings will be included in our final report.

PROMISING/BEST PRACTICES

Embedded in the above discussion have been a number of promising practices. In this section we highlight some of the practices we believe are promising and should be considered by colleges in the final months of the grant and/or as they move forward postgrant.

Orientation and training: While many colleges provided ad hoc orientation, coaches preferred more formalized orientation that included an introduction to student services and resources, the Banner system, and guidance about FERPA, etc. Coaches felt they benefited from the opportunity to shadow other advisers and staff in their first weeks on the job. As they were introduced to staff and faculty, they also had a chance to explain their new roles and services, and to identify potential contacts to whom they could refer and from which they hoped to get referrals.

Supervision: Coaches work with students on academic issues but also on social and “environmental” issues that can impede a student’s ability to engage in schoolwork: homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse, and physical illness. Each of these issues requires sensitivity and some clinical skill. Even seasoned clinical practitioners benefit from talking with someone else about their cases. Such case discussions provide alternative perspectives and strategies that might be used to help the client/student. Sharing difficult cases also relieves the emotional stress that can build when one becomes involved in the lives of others. Coaches who had a “clinical” person with whom to review cases spoke about the value of this supervision to their professional if not personal growth, to their ability to do their jobs, and to their emotional well-being.

Early-alert systems: Early-alert systems provide an opportunity to intervene and help students when their work falls below a specified course standard. Colleges that integrated the career coach into their early-alert system have found this practice helpful in serving their students. Early-alert systems resonate with the philosophy of intensive advising, providing students with an adviser who can work with them over time. Coaches’ unique capacity to integrate academic and career foci has, as discussed earlier, proven to be an effective strategy to improve rates of retention.

Coaches as classroom instructors: Across the consortium the model of coach as teacher either in AAA courses or in DE courses has been very successful. Ongoing class interaction provides opportunities for students to get to know the teacher/coach. The trust that can be built within the class gets transferred into the advising relationship. This model can reduce the anxiety many students experience seeking out or sitting down with a stranger to discuss academic or personal issues. In addition, reviewing class work enables the teacher/coach to identify struggling students and intervene more quickly. At the same time, the teacher/coach gains some control: “They had to see me in the classroom. And if they cared about their grades or the financial aid or the repercussions, they weren’t going to skip class even if they didn’t come to see me in a meeting.”

Within the changed DE landscape, colleges might consider using career coaches to lead soft-skills workshops during orientation as a means to increase coach visibility and help students to get to know a coach before they “need” him or her.

Mandated coach advisement: The literature repeatedly mentions that the students who often could most benefit from the assistance and support of an adviser are the ones who don’t seek it out. The reasons may be many, but early intervention can make a big difference to the ongoing academic success of a student. Mandated advising provides the opportunity for at least an initial check-in with someone who can provide support and address any emerging problems. Mandated advising also normalizes advising and can remove the stigma of “needing to go to a counselor or adviser,” a deterrent for many students. However, to work well, mandated advising needs to be integrated into a college’s student service and advising systems. Institutional capacity—staffing and space—might limit this as an option for some colleges.

Learning style assessments: Learning and social style assessments were found to be good strategies to recruit and engage students. The assessments helped students identify their unique learning style and related study skills that maximize their strengths and conform to their learning style. Both students and faculty reported that these assessments helped students to be more successful in their studies.

Workforce centers: Regularly attending workforce meetings was found to be a helpful strategy to stay on top of labor force and job market issues, to learn about workforce procedures, to maintain visibility, and to engage with WFC staff. In addition, the coaches’ presence at sessions with clients facilitated referrals.

CHALLENGES

As discussed earlier, the coaches have experienced real successes in their work with students. However, there have been acute and chronic issues that have challenged the ability for the coaches to do their work and to be integrated into their respective programs and colleges. We now turn to the challenges we believe have had the greatest resonance or impact on the work of the coaches.

The title “career coach”: The TAA grant specifies the position of the “career coach.” The title, however, has resulted a great deal of confusion on the part of the coaches and their colleges, and has often been an impediment to marketing their services, attracting students, getting buy-in from instructors, and/or receiving referrals from staff and faculty. Much of the work of the coaches is focused on academic or educational issues and choices students need to make. Given the large numbers of DE students on many coach caseloads—and students’ recent entrance into college, coaches say they do far less in terms of career planning and employment issues than their title would imply. Even at many of the energy colleges, coaches do more job readiness than career planning. Coaches’ internal titles have been changed to “case manager,” “student success

counselor," "life coach," "student adviser," and "resource counselor." When asked what they would call themselves, coaches reflected a concern about having "counselor" in their title, as that would imply clinical or psychological practice. One generally goes to a counselor if something is very wrong, and for mental-health problems. As such there is stigma attached to seeking out a counselor. "Case manager" is used frequently in social-service agencies and therefore also tends to have a stigma attached to it.

"Coach" was thought by some coaches to make sense, but without "career." The word "coach" is associated most often with athletes, the person who is there to help, support and cheer, and to train students. Of all the titles discussed, coaches thought "student success coach" and "classroom-to-career specialist" best represented the work they do.

Ambiguity of role: Role ambiguity is related to the coach title but goes far beyond that. As one coach stated, "The biggest challenge is just figuring out what I'm supposed to do. Honestly, where I really fit, how I fit into [my] college and the grant at the same time." Over the course of the grant, at least 40 percent of coaches shared with the Rutgers team some level of concern in respect to the parameters of their role. As discussed, to "impose" a coach on preexistent institutional resources created overlap and duplication of services. In these situations many colleges struggled to define the parameters of the role. For example, some energy colleges shifted the coach function away from career planning and into job readiness.

Large coach targets in themselves were a challenge for coaches to meet, but in terms of coach roles presented a real dilemma. How can the practice of intentional advising be achieved if a coach and/or the project lead are anxious about meeting coach targets? Intentional advising tends to be intensive and requires a medium-size caseload so the coach can get to know students, provide in-depth advising/counseling, and engage in regular follow-up.

Caseload size: As noted, some of the caseload targets seem to have been from the start unrealistic, given student enrollment numbers and the intentional advising model. Yet, some of the colleges have caseload targets in the hundreds; little or no ongoing counseling can occur with such large caseloads. Often numbers put into a proposal reflect the college's view of the funder's expectations, rather than what is possible given the population, existent resources, and needs. It is far better strategy to include lower targets and exceed them, than to fail to achieve inflated ones.

Delayed launch of online and hybrid energy programs: The delayed start of the online and hybrid energy programs affected the coaches' ability to carry out one of their explicit role functions—the referral of students into certificate and degree energy programs. In addition, coaches reported that most of their students cannot commute long distances because of family and work responsibilities, and/or cannot relocate. Therefore even hybrid programs were not a realistic option for many students.

Competition for students: All college advisers must report the number of students they serve to their funding sources. This results in competition for students to meet project targets. As one person noted, many advisers are overloaded with students but unwilling to refer students elsewhere and risk decreasing their numbers. Maintaining high numbers often equates to keeping their jobs. In addition, coaches who refer students to other colleges are essentially reducing their college's revenue (tuition and state FTE reimbursement).

ESCF documentation: The ESCF was designed to document coach interactions in order to collect data on student issues and coach interactions and activities including referrals, and to measure the potential impact of coach advising on student lives. The initial design of the ESCF proved to be unwieldy for coaches. While the revised ESCF II was seen as more user friendly, coaches still were not consistent in recording their work with students. Both the Rutgers team and CCCS staff tried to assist the coaches with technical problems and to impress on them the need to consistently record their work with students. It is not clear what other interventions would have helped or where more accountability should have been exercised. But the result is an absence of consistent data, compromising any analyses of coach activity and effect.

Activity logs: The ESCF only captures the coaches' work with eligible students. However, coaches also engage in noneligible student advisement (e.g., WFC referrals, class presentations, job fairs, work with WFCs and other community resources; as well as outreach. These activities have not been captured in any standard or organized way and thus cannot be analyzed as part of the effectiveness and legacy of the coach role within a college and across the consortium.

Gender: All but two of the fifteen coaches are women. The clear majority of students enrolled in energy programs are male. There is only anecdotal information at this time, but a number of the female coaches questioned if their gender may have affected the number of male students who sought them out to discuss personal issues. Of greatest concern were the non-traditional students who may have felt uncomfortable "getting help from a "girl", sharing personal issues with a woman, often one who was much younger.

Time limited position: All grant funded programs face the fact that funding is time limited, and that subsequent to the grant, a program or position may disappear unless new resources can be leveraged. Career coaches were welcomed by many colleges as an important resource. However, in addition to the ambiguity of title and role, the coaches' relatively short shelf life – at most 36 months from the date of hire to the end of the grant, affected "buy-in" or investment in the coach position. As a result, some coaches were not integrated into the fabric of some colleges, and in some cases there was a missed opportunity to test out a new model for student services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The COETC grant ends in less than nine months' time. Major changes in the placement, use, and integration of career coaches is unlikely to occur. This section therefore focuses less on recommendations for COETC career coaches, and more on what might be considered for coaches (career navigators) working under the CHEO and CHAMP projects.

Training and professional development: Individuals came to the coach position with different credentials, skills, and experiences. While coach forums did focus on case management and intentional advising early on, over time the coach meetings tended to be updates and problem solving. We believe that more professional development would have been helpful.

Greater use of the unique skills and expertise of some of the coaches would have been helpful—especially around vocational testing and guidance and crisis-intervention strategies. We thus recommend that coach skills and expertise be inventoried, and either CCCS or the grant project director convene peer-to-peer training at some of the coach meetings.

When asked, many COETC coaches said that it would have been helpful to have more training on career advisement and planning—including bringing in outside trainers. We suggest using faculty from career-counseling programs and/or someone from the National Career Development Association.

Clinical supervision: In addition to administrative supervision and general project support, all coaches should have access to someone at their college who has training and experience in counseling. The coach should have regular meetings with this individual to discuss difficult cases and/or the challenges of working on a diverse range of issues.

More-realistic targets: As indicated above, if the advising model to be used is intentional advising, then coach caseloads should be moderate in size to enable sufficient time for coaches to establish and maintain relationships with students.

Mandated advising: All students would benefit from having someone on campus they know is available to them, who is tracking their progress, and who can provide needed support and/or resources. Mandating student-coach assignments would normalize advising and facilitate the engagement of all students—especially those who would not otherwise seek out help. Given current fiscal constraints this may, however, be an unrealistic recommendation.

Role definition and integration into the college's student-service structure: Clarity of the coach's role—including a title change—is essential to the success of the coach within the college, and for any analysis of the coach function and impact across a consortium. Coaches are rarely in the position to negotiate their roles. We therefore suggest that in the first quarter after the coach's arrival, a meeting is scheduled between the CCCS coordinator and/or the grant director to review the coach's assigned location and responsibilities. This can help insure that the coach role and activities are congruent with grant goals.

Accountability: Coaches have to be accountable for their documentation. Early and frequent reviews of data collection and entry must be scheduled, with necessary guidance and support, and consequences to insure compliance.

Further research: In listening to the coaches and putting together this report, it has become clear that “success” and “impact” can have multiple definitions that expose the “Rashomon effect” – different perspectives and interpretations based on who you are and where you stand. We therefore encourage a larger discussion about defining and measuring success for students enrolled in community-college certificate and degree programs.

NEXT STEPS

In the months ahead, the Rutgers team will engage in the following activities in an effort to further understand the role, the success, and the impact of career coaches at their respective colleges and across the consortium.

Student survey: A survey will be sent out to a stratified random sample of students registered in the ESCF. Survey questions will include reason for meeting with the coach, referrals made, outcome of referrals, satisfaction with coach interaction, outcome of any issue or problem discussed, and the student’s current status. Because coaches have stated that students do not regularly check their emails, a mixed-mode survey delivery would be ideal. Unfortunately, budget limitations mean the survey must be delivered electronically.

ESCF analysis: Rutgers will review and analyze quantitatively and qualitatively the data available on all ESCFs. This analysis will be able to identify types of referrals and student goals and problems, and suggest possible trends and patterns. Still, this analysis will be limited by the available data. Additionally, given inconsistencies in data entry, the analysis may not be able to yield actual patterns.

Alternative coach files: Rutgers will request case files from a group of coaches and review them to inform our final analysis of the work the coaches have done.

Comparative cohort analysis: As part of the project evaluation Rutgers is currently working to compare students who received services from a career coach and those who did not, looking at academic progress and employment status. As indicated above, establishing a causative relationship is close to impossible, but we will attempt explore whether any associations between coach interaction and student outcomes are observable.