Promising Practices

Career Planning for SUCCESS

The NCTN Promising Practice Series presents detailed descriptions of strategies from the field that are designed to promote the successful transition of students from ABE to postsecondary education.

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Program Context

The Adult Collaborative of Cape Cod for Educational and Support Services (ACCCESS) provides free educational services on Cape Cod, Massachusetts for individuals 16 years of age and older to improve their reading, writing, listening, speaking, math, science, and social-studies skills. We serve approximately 500 adults yearly.

ACCCESS offers adult basic education (ABE), GED, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, career planning and placement services, a Welfare-to-Work Program, PACT (an adult college transition program for ESOL students), and SUCCESS (Students Utilizing Cape Cod Educational Support Services). SUCCESS is an intensive, regional GED-to-college transition program designed to open the doors to higher education for adult learners who have attained a GED or adult diploma.

Rationale and Background of the Practice

Career planning has always been a part of the SUCCESS program. We firmly believe that it is critical for students to have a solid understanding of the required coursework for the specific fields in which they are interested, and for students to know the whole sequence of preparing for, getting into, and succeeding in college, and then getting a job afterwards. Because the SUCCESS program is housed at Cape Cod Community College, we have been able to take advantage of the many resources available at the college to advise students about career choices and pathways to college.

Description of the Practice

The SUCCESS program is designed so that career planning is integrated nearly seamlessly into the overall college transition program by providing ongoing guidance and support to students in their career research, by connecting students to college and career information, and by introducing students to the college departments, staff, and faculty that can provide them with the support they will need once they enter college.

During the program, the students take the information they get from these various sources and combine it with skills learned in the classroom to create a PowerPoint presentation on a possible career path. This PowerPoint presentation serves as the students' final project and allows the students to complete the SUCCESS program with a self-designed road map for their transition to college.

For an example of how a final project might look, here is an example of the PowerPoint presentation created by a student who was interested in pursuing a career in dental hygiene.

The Career Planning Questions

We talk to students about their final project during the intake process, even before orientation to the SUCCESS program. At orientation, students are given the career planning questions that they will need to address in their PowerPoint presentations:

1. Why did you choose this particular career?
2. What will you study to reach your goal? (Prerequisites and requirements for degree)
3. Where are the job opportunities? Will you have to relocate in order to get a job in this field?
4. Will this career align with your family responsibilities?
5. How much money will you make in this career? Will it be enough for you to live on?
6. Are there other opportunities with this degree in case you choose a different job/career in the future?

Researching and answering these questions gives students concrete information about what jobs pay, how they will have to adapt their life to do this work, and how their chosen degree is transferable.

Classroom Instruction

The SUCCESS transition program requires students to take three classes that meet once a week for three hours each: Computers, Study Skills, and Math. While students are expected to complete much of their final project outside of class
time, they are also able to work on their projects in the Computers and Study Skills classes. In addition, we create many informal opportunities for students to receive counseling and guidance both before and after class, and over the telephone.

In the Computers class, students learn how to use PowerPoint, and they can actually begin developing their presentation in this class. They also receive instruction about how to begin doing their research, which is mainly done through the internet.

The Study Skills class includes much more than its name implies. Students in this class are improving their skills in reading, writing, and career planning, and building their knowledge about how to enter and succeed in college. It's where students get all of the "nuts and bolts" they will need to develop and complete their final projects. This course is structured so that students can do some of the writing for their final projects during that class time.

We also invite many members of the college community to come into the Study Skills class to meet with students and share information.

**Career Counselor**
One important element of the Study Skills class is helping students identify the types of careers they may enjoy. About four weeks into the class, a career counselor from Cape Cod Community College comes into the Study Skills class to do the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Test with SUCCESS students. This counselor helps students understand what the different personality types mean and how they apply to making career choices.

The counselor also distributes two important publications, both of which are published by the Career Planning Office of Cape Cod Community College. One is Careers for Your Personality, which helps students see what careers match up with their Myers-Briggs type. A second is the Career Choice Guide, a college career-planning booklet that provides an overview of job outlooks and salaries. Students also receive and review several college catalogues and their class schedules. All the materials students receive in this class are put right into class binders so they are organized and accessible to the students as they put together their PowerPoint presentations.

It's important to note that in addition to this career information presented in class, we also offer formal, individual counseling sessions with the students.

**Financial Aid Director**
For each cohort of students, the director of the Financial Aid department provides an in-class workshop on filling out the financial aid forms. Having the Director there, in person, is particularly important since many students’ financial situations are complex and she can provide answers to their questions on the spot. The director also sends a packet of additional information and forms for scholarships that students can review to determine which they are eligible for. Some scholarship programs are designed for specific types of students (women, for example) or a specific career pathway. In a later class, we fill out the scholarship program applications selected by each student.

**Academic Support Programs**
SUCCESS students are also introduced to two different support programs within the community college that they may take advantage of when they enter as college students. Each program provides workshops to SUCCESS students covering what is available in terms of academic help, tutoring, mentoring, and other forms of support intended to help students persist in college. Even if students choose another college to attend, these workshops familiarize them with the kinds of support they are likely to find at other colleges that will help them successfully reach their career goal.

**Administration, Faculty and Staff**
We include visits from deans and the college president in the Study Skills course. In addition, we introduce students to the staff from the academic advising center and other people within the administration to get students comfortable with who is in the college.

One faculty member in particular is very committed to meeting each of the SUCCESS students and she provides a wonderful role model for them. This faculty member received her GED, went to Cape Cod Community College, then to Wellesley College, and finally to Harvard for her master’s degree. She is now a professor of English Composition at Cape Cod Community College. All of these meetings serve to familiarize students with people and resources at the college and build their knowledge of what to expect when they get to college.

**Challenges**
The main challenge we've had is that this information is still very new to students and it's hard for them to integrate it. Even though we start talking about it as soon as they enter the program, and work on it throughout the program, students really don't understand the value of what they are learning until they are actually ready to register for their college courses. It is at that point that they see how important it is. Students might say, "Oh my gosh, I can't get the class at the time I want it!" or, "Now I understand why you kept talking about prerequisites." Many times I hear students say they're going to pursue nursing only to suddenly realize that they have many prerequisites. It is at that point that they take a second look at the time involved to pursue their career choice. Often students change their minds as they really begin to focus on the realities of college.

Figuring out how much the students could handle was another early challenge. When the SUCCESS program started in 2001, we had students write a college-level paper and present a PowerPoint presentation on the career-planning process.

However, we found that writing the paper was overwhelming for students. Few students were familiar with the process of citing sources and using the Modern Language Association (MLA) system that writing the paper required. And while some students were very proficient with word processing, others were not able to work quickly on the computer, which
made writing the paper very time-consuming. Also, students generally needed to first build additional academic skills to be able to write at a college level.

In the end, we found even after completing the project, students did not know enough about career options. Students were spending so much time trying to write the paper that it was overshadowing the benefits: learning about careers and preparing for the college experience. The process of writing the paper was not helping students develop a basic understanding of what they could expect when they went to college, how their studies would relate to career decisions, and what to expect when looking for a job after college.

So we decided to drop the paper assignment and just have the students complete PowerPoint presentations as their final projects. This approach has been much more successful.

**Cost and Funding**

There is no direct cost to our program for implementing this practice because it is integrated into the transition program. Additional costs that a program may incur, if they cannot access existing college resources, may include costs for administering the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test. There is career exploration software, such as DISCOVER, that programs may wish to purchase. Programs may find the free website, College for Adults, helpful because it walks students through the career choice process.

It is not necessary to have any particular constellation of classes to do this practice. What is important is to identify career planning resources and to integrate career planning within your existing program.

**Evidence of Impact and Effectiveness**

The SUCCESS career planning component helps students focus on what they have to do to get to college and to understand what will be expected of them once they are there. As a result of the integrated career counseling in the SUCCESS program, students are more prepared to enter and succeed in college. Most students follow through by pursuing the major that they've been researching and students seem to be sticking with it better. From the fall 2005 cohort, 10 out of 13 students are actively involved in college and on target with their career plans.