



LTC Title III Year 1 Stakeholder Interview Report

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
METHODS	1
FINDINGS	1
Holistic Student Support	2
Competency-Based Education	4
Business and Technology Systems	5
Grant Management	6
EVALUATION INSIGHTS.....	8
Appendix A. Stakeholder Interview Questions.....	9

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education awarded Lakeshore Technical College (LTC) with a Title III grant in the fall of 2019. The five-year grant is awarded to institutions of higher education to support them in becoming self-sufficient and expand their capacity to serve low-income students. The grant is being utilized to implement LTC Student Centered, which includes administering holistic student support and competency-based education (CBE), as well as assessing business and technology systems. The college is engaging with Pacific Research and Evaluation (PRE) to evaluate this project. The report that follows includes findings from initial interviews with faculty and staff working in different capacities on the grant.

METHODS

Evaluators conducted 13 phone interviews with LTC faculty and staff in June and July 2020. Staff participating in interviews included the following stakeholders: Title III Grant Program Coordinator, Vice President of Strategy, Vice President of Student Success, Vice President of Instruction, Director of Technology, Director of Advising and Retention, Director of Student Resources, Director of Student Outreach, Academic & Tutoring Specialist Lead, Course-taker Advisor, Flexible Instructional Designer, Business Office Manager, and Dean of Advanced Manufacturing, Agriculture and Automotive. Stakeholders were asked about their involvement as it pertained to each grant activity and progress that has been made around activities, institutionalization of grant components, grant successes and areas for improvement, additional supports needed for further implementation, and plans for institutionalization. The staff interview protocol is included in Appendix A.

FINDINGS

The report is structured around the three grant activities as well as feedback related to grant management. The

GRANT ACTIVITIES

Holistic Student Support: LTC improves its onboarding processes through two activities: 1) an intake survey and 2) a student success tutorial. The most significant activity for this component is holistic student support redesign (HSSR). HSSR maps the entire student experience from admission to graduation and creates an institutional plan for redesigning the entire student support model. Major improvements include first year student support; advisors' role from clerical to relational to scale successful TRiO interventions including financial literacy, career development, and 4-year transition services; facility redesign; and formalization of faculty's role in student support.

Competency-Based Education: Seven programs convert from traditional credit hour to competencies. Program conversions and specialized support remove systematic barriers for vulnerable populations and working adults to access and succeed in college.

Business and Technology Systems: Examination and improvement of business processes and technology used to onboard, instruct, and track student records make LTC operate and maintain technology efficiently and effectively in responding to student preferences and technological needs.

findings from the interviews are provided below, which includes summaries of open-ended responses¹.

Holistic Student Support



Key Findings

- ◆ LTC launched an intake survey (Student Success Questionnaire) during Year 1 to gauge student support needs, which aligns with the holistic student support redesign (HSSR).
- ◆ A student success tutorial was developed but had not yet been administered at the time of the interviews; there was some discussion from stakeholders regarding whether to make this tutorial a requirement for students.
- ◆ LTC planned to use findings from the intake survey to guide the HSSR.
- ◆ Students could receive 24/7 support through the adoption of online tutoring and interview preparation software, both of which received positive feedback from those who had experienced the services.
- ◆ Despite disagreements related to the student success tutorial, stakeholders were collaborative as it related to the Holistic Student Support activities in that a large committee selected the Tutor.com software with input from instructors, and stakeholders utilized input from a neighboring WTCS college and multiple LTC departments to develop the intake survey.

Intake Survey

Starting in Fall 2019, faculty and staff from different areas of the college—advisors, support services, accessibility—collaborated to develop a Student Success Questionnaire (SSQ) that incoming students would complete as part of the admissions process. The purpose of the survey is for LTC to learn what type of supports individual students need. One interviewee explained that the intake survey aligns with the holistic student support redesign (HSSR) in that the information allows advisors to have a more meaningful and individualized interaction with students rather than transactional relationships.

The team modeled the survey after one being utilized at a neighboring Wisconsin Technical College System institution and adapted it to fit LTC's needs. Both program students and course taker students can complete the intake survey. Program students complete it as part of a list of activities to complete during the admission process and course takers complete it with the application.

LTC started using the intake survey in Spring 2020 and the data collected thus far indicated that students' top concerns were related to access to technology, financial aid, and balancing work with school. In the early stages of the survey, stakeholders are planning to assess whether students' needs were met after a semester and adjust as needed. One challenge has been that not all students are completing the intake survey in a timely manner, and instead meeting with their program advisor prior to survey completion.

¹ Respondent comments were drawn from researcher notes and have been edited for grammar and brevity.

This takes up valuable time from the advising session and does not allow advisors to prepare accordingly. Stakeholders are aware of this obstacle and working to address it.

Student Success Tutorial

The Student Success Tutorial was developed in June 2020 but had not been launched at the time of interviews. The tutorial is an online Blackboard course that includes six modules that provide new students with information about LTC. The tutorial covers how to use technologies, how to be a successful student, information on learning styles, and available student support resources. Stakeholders invested in this grant activity view the tutorial as a means for retaining students by providing them with valuable information. Some stakeholders would like students to be required to complete the tutorial prior to registering for a second semester at LTC; however, other LTC faculty and staff viewed the idea of a requirement as an obstacle for students that could result in them choosing not to register at the college. In responding to this, one stakeholder explained: “When enrollment is down, you tend to lose students at the rules, and I’m fearful that will happen. We cannot be short-sighted though; we might get students in the door, but how long will they stay if they are not well-prepared to be a student? The tutorial follows a lot of best practices.” Stakeholders are working with staff and students to pilot the tutorial and plan to resurrect the topic of whether or not to require the tutorial with other staff soon.

Holistic Student Support Redesign

The goal of the HSSR is for the college to depart from a transactional system of working with students to one that provides students with wraparound services and engages in coordinated care efforts to determine student needs and connect them to relevant resources. One stakeholder commented that this is a large undertaking and that LTC had fallen a bit behind in its efforts related to this during Year 1; however, the college has made progress addressing the previously discussed activities—intake survey and student success tutorial—which are related to the HSSR. As such, as LTC gathers information from the intake survey, they plan to use that data to make improvements and build a stronger support system for students.

Additionally, two other ways in which students are being supported by the LTC Title III grant are through online tutoring and interview support; both initiatives take into consideration students’ busy schedules and the fact that many students take courses online. The tutoring and interview software are described in more detail below.

Tutoring Software

LTC launched tutoring software to students starting in June 2020. A 15-person committee with representatives from each department selected Tutor.com as a third-party tutoring application, because it offers students 24/7 support in any subject matter. The institution adopted a third-party tutoring platform, because it was becoming difficult to find peer tutors that could meet with students when needed; Tutor.com is “great when they are studying on the weekends or evenings” and benefits online students as well. Tutor.com was also selected, because their tutors reach out to instructors after reviewing the syllabus to ensure they are teaching what they are supposed to, and because the platform provides a transcript with every session, so instructors can see what was discussed and what questions were asked. The committee that selected Tutor.com did so after holding several meetings and incorporating input

from faculty. Thus far, feedback from faculty has been positive, particularly from English instructors. Tutor.com is being marketed to students through their instructors, academic support and tutoring websites, Blackboard collaborate, and other advertisements on campus.

Interview Software

LTC purchased interview software during Year 1 of the grant. This software supports students by enabling them to practice interviewing skills virtually at the time and place that works for their schedule, rather than trying to find a time to meet with the career placement office. The video-based interview tool can be accessed 24/7 from all devices. LTC piloted the software with students and employers in Spring 2020 and learned that both groups rated it as easy to use and would recommend it to others. Further, LTC is partnering with faculty to integrate this software into coursework to promote it to students. It is also marketed to students through a weekly student email, TVs on campus, and through advising meetings.

Competency-Based Education



Key Findings

- ◆ LTC hired an instructional designer to develop CBE programs.
- ◆ LTC has developed two CBE programs and submitted an application for approval from the Higher Learning Commission; a third and fourth program were planned for development.
- ◆ Evidence suggests that staff plan to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum in new CBE programs.
- ◆ The college is focused on student success in CBE programs as indicated by hiring a student success coach a year in advance in order to help transition students to the new format.
- ◆ Stakeholders indicated that student tracking software would be beneficial to the CBE programs, and a request to use carryover funds for this purpose was approved.

The Title III grant outlines that the college will develop seven CBE programs at the college during the five-year grant. LTC is new to offering this type of program to students, which includes mapping competencies from a traditional format to the CBE format. A stakeholder noted that these efforts allow students in the CBE programs to have “the same learning opportunities” as students in traditional programs. Along these lines, one interviewee was excited about the potential impact of these programs on students: **“I’m hopeful to see the CBE programs better serve our students.”** Another stakeholder added that converting these programs makes them “better and more efficient.”

During Year 1 of the grant, LTC hired an instructional designer to collaborate with faculty to develop curriculum for CBE programs that map to appropriate competencies. The instructional designer had the opportunity to attend conferences that provided professional development. LTC also worked with other colleges around the nation that were implementing CBE programs to understand best practices. As such, the college converted two programs from traditional format to CBE: CNC and Machine Tool. Once the

curriculum was developed, LTC submitted an application to the Higher Learning Commission to have the form of delivery approved. A stakeholder described this application as “substantial” but noted that this long process only needs to be completed for an institution’s first two CBE programs. The first CBE program will be offered starting in Fall 2020, and stakeholders discussed plans to “reevaluate following the first semester to determine what worked and didn’t work with the curriculum.” Evaluators commend this plan for ongoing assessment and can assist with these efforts by incorporating questions on a student survey for students participating in the CBE programs. At the time of interviews, LTC was planning to develop CBE curriculum for Ophthalmic Medical Assistant and Welding next.

In addition to focusing on the development of CBE programs, LTC has also been focused on support for students in these programs. Specifically, they hired a success coach who will serve as a CBE advisor. The success coach was brought on board Fall 2019 and has met with current students individually who will transition into the new format to describe expectations and answer questions. The success coach also met with prospective students. Further, this role is examining how students in CBE programs would be registered and receive financial aid. The instructional designer was working with faculty in order to help those instructors to come up with marketing strategies that promote programs to potential students.

A few interviewed stakeholders anticipate that LTC will need to purchase analytical software, such as Blackboard Analytics, to track students and their progress in CBE programs. This was initially included in the Title III grant but was removed to make room in the budget for other resources. The team has requested additional funds from the grant to finance this software program. Evaluators learned that the Title III advisory committee and the Department of Education Federal Program Officer approved this request to use carryover funds for the purchase of Blackboard Analytics.

Business and Technology Systems



Key Findings

- ◆ At the time of interviews, LTC was in the process of publishing a Request for Proposal to procure an IT consultant.
- ◆ The assessment of business and technology systems will identify gaps, unused capabilities, and duplication of resources, the latter of which could enable LTC to conserve resources.
- ◆ Findings from the business and technology systems assessment could strengthen LTC’s student-centered approach by assessing student-centered systems.
- ◆ It is a promising approach to utilize a consultant for a portion of this grant activity.
- ◆ Stakeholders were looking ahead to future years of the grant by noting a possible need for supports and resources to implement findings from the assessment.

At the time interviews were conducted, stakeholders addressing the grant activity related to business and technology systems were working to complete a Request for Proposal (RFP) that would be used to obtain

an IT consultant. Once selected by LTC through the RFP process, the role of this consultant will be to examine the institutions' IT systems and business processes to determine where there are gaps, unused capabilities, and duplication of resources in the systems. Stakeholders noted that a benefit of this activity is that it will allow LTC to be fiscally responsible and save resources for the college by identifying duplicated resources.

These business and technology systems that will be under review are those related to the student-centered approach, and therefore tie into the other grant activities. Specifically, the consultant will assess technology used to onboard, instruct, and track student records. PRE evaluators have worked with other Title III grantees that have technology components incorporated in their project, and these institutions sometimes face barriers relying solely on busy college IT departments to administer these grant activities. It is promising that LTC has incorporated a consultant to undertake a large component of this activity, which will ensure this activity does not face obstacles.

One interviewee noted that the team started the RFP process later than anticipated but was now on track with these efforts. A stakeholder explained that after the IT consultant has been procured and the assessment has been completed, the college will attempt to complete 5% of the recommendations by Year 4 and 25% by Year 5 but noted that staff may need additional supports or resources depending on the suggestions made—such as the purchase of software or hardware—due to limited staff and funding.

Grant Management



Key Findings

- ◆ Interviewees spoke positively about the grant in general and its ability to help the college meet student needs, suggesting grant buy-in from key players.
- ◆ Stakeholders had not discussed institutionalization at length but anticipated that grant activities would be sustained.
- ◆ Grant implementation has been facilitated by Title III advisory committee meetings, team collaboration, grant leadership, and clear objectives; the former three demonstrate that LTC is taking a collaborative approach to the grant.
- ◆ The COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected obstacle, but stakeholders adapted to the situation and continued with their grant implementation efforts.
- ◆ LTC expected carryover funds at the conclusion of Year 1 and anticipated that the Title III advisory committee would determine how to use these funds.

In general, stakeholders spoke positively about the Title III grant, with several noting that the grant provides additional financial resources that allows the college to undertake activities that faculty and staff have wanted to implement for some time. As one stakeholder explained, **"The grant has pushed us to do the things we know we need to do not only to keep doors open, but so we are helping students to be successful by graduating them on time with less debt and meeting their needs."** One stakeholder added that LTC was well-positioned with the grant to make the changes they needed to support students during

the COVID-19 pandemic, especially online students, because some of the grant activities support online learning.

Stakeholders were also optimistic that several grant activities would be sustained following the conclusion of the grant. Although the team was not holding explicit discussions around institutionalization during Year 1, which aligns with other Title III grantees with which PRE evaluators have worked, stakeholders explained that they anticipate several activities would be maintained. Interviewees noted that these activities represent a new way to meet student needs, and otherwise, students may attend college elsewhere. Thus, the conversation with interviewees demonstrated that stakeholders believe institutionalization is important.

Implementation Strengths

Stakeholders shared activities that have helped facilitate grant implementation. These project strengths are described in the table below, with three of them related to strong collaboration.

Table 1. Activities that facilitate grant implementation

	<p>Title III Advisory Committee</p>	<p>Stakeholders working on different components of the grant meet as a group monthly to share activity and budget updates, discuss issues, and ask questions. These meetings allow stakeholders from different departments to collaborate and understand what progress has been made by other faculty and staff.</p>
	<p>Collaborative Team</p>	<p>Stakeholders noted that the team working on the grant is “high-functioning” and works well together. The team is also supportive of one another with stakeholders explaining that they know they can reach out to others for support. Further, feedback suggests that the team communicates well as a group.</p>
	<p>Grant Leadership</p>	<p>Stakeholders also highlighted the Grant Program Coordinator’s efforts by noting that he reached out early to share stakeholders’ role with the grant. He is also responsive and available to answer questions.</p>
	<p>Clear Objectives</p>	<p>The grant objectives were written clearly in the grant, so stakeholders understand what goals they are trying to achieve.</p>

Barriers to Implementation

Stakeholders also discussed barriers to grant implementation. Overall, interviewees did not have a lot of feedback in this area. A couple of stakeholders did note that the COVID-19 pandemic “threw a curveball,” but despite this the team felt they adapted to this situation well and that the Title III grant allowed for some flexibility. Additionally, one stakeholder disagreed with others who had commented that the grant had clear objectives; this interviewee explained that they wanted a better understanding to what extent the college is supposed to reach an objective.

Financial Management

As noted previously, stakeholders receive a budget update monthly during Title III advisory committee meetings. The Grant Program Coordinator also receives a monthly projection for the remaining grant year and the overall grant budget. The team does not want too much carryover funding but noted that they anticipated a surplus following Year 1. The advisory committee approved a request to use these surplus funds for the purchase of Blackboard Analytics.

EVALUATION INSIGHTS

- ◆ **LTC did not use Year 1 as a planning year, but instead hit the ground running by addressing several grant activities:** Evaluators have learned this is not always the case with Title III grantees and commend these efforts. LTC's momentum may be attributed to its collaborative efforts and overall buy-in for adopting activities that support student success.
- ◆ The college anticipates having carryover funds following Year 1 of the grant. The advisory committee approved a request to use these funds for the purchase of Blackboard Analytics. **Given that a few stakeholders demonstrated a need for the Blackboard student tracking software to support CBE, evaluators commend this use of carryover funds.**
- ◆ Stakeholders were not in agreement regarding whether the student success tutorial should be required. **One stakeholder planned to pilot this tutorial, which evaluators believe is a promising step for determining how LTC should proceed.** Evaluators can assist in these efforts by incorporating questions on a Title III student survey that compares student experiences at LTC for those who completed the tutorial to those who have not.
- ◆ Stakeholder interviews also helped evaluators understand other ways in which a Title III student survey could be developed. **With approval from LTC, PRE will draft a student survey that assesses awareness of grant activities, ways in which they learned about activities, experience utilizing these activities, and perceived impact of these activities.** The survey could also assess student engagement at LTC and compare results for those who have utilized specific activities to those who have not.

Appendix A. Stakeholder Interview Questions

1. What are your primary responsibilities as it relates to the Title III grant?
 - Are you a member of the Title III advisory committee? If so, what is your role with that committee?
2. Which components of the Title III grant program have you been focused on over the past year? Please discuss progress made in these areas.
 - Such as, holistic student support
 - Competency-based education
 - Business and technology systems
3. What is working well with the Title III grant program so far?
 - What resources have contributed to the success of the program?
 - Have you encountered any barriers to implementing program components?
 - Do you have any recommendations for improvement at this point?
4. What supports are needed to further implement the Title III grant program?
5. What are your hopes for the Title III grant program in Year 2 of the grant?
 - While early in the grant project, what efforts have been made, if any, to sustain grant activities?
6. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the Title III grant program at LTC?