AIR Annual Forum, Orlando, Florida, May 29, 2014 (3-3:45pm)

Discussion Group: Skills Certificates– missing piece of the completions puzzle

Thank you for attending the session.

Presenters: by Ms. Elena Bubnova, Executive Director of Institutional Research, Analysis and Effectiveness and Ms. Cheryl Scott, Assistant Director of Institutional Research, Analysis and Effectiveness, Truckee Meadows Community College, a large urban college in Reno, Nevada.

Quick self-introduction of participants.

About TMCC
- TMCC is an urban community college in Reno NV
- FTE 6,246 and HC 11,686
- Over 100+ programs offered
- 1200+ Degrees and certificates awarded each year
- 21% GRS

Completions Puzzle, opening remarks, context for discussion

- Strong focus on completions in higher education today
  - In the era of accountability and strong focus on completions, many community colleges find themselves struggling to find appropriate measures that fully demonstrate mission fulfillment.

  - The commonly accepted benchmarks, such as IPEDS graduation rates, do not fully account for the success of a community college student with educational goals and enrollment patterns that are much different from a traditional university student.

  - Short-term and on-demand training, industry-recognized certifications – are important examples of how community colleges contribute to workforce development and job training. Yet these efforts do not always culminate with conventional credentials, such as an associate degree or certificate of achievement, thus, leaving a critical piece of the community college’s success story out of the performance discourse.

  - Under the leadership of the Board of Regents, the higher education system in the state of Nevada engaged in a discussion to examine the community college
curriculum with an eye for short-term training that results in the awarding of an industry-recognized certificate.

- These programs are less than 30 credits in length and some may only consist of 1 or 2 courses. However, students completing them are able to qualify for industry certification and go directly into a job. Examples of such short-term programs include, but are not limited to, Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), Phlebotomy, EMT, AUTO and Diesel Mechanics. After careful study and assessment of such pathways, the Board of Regents formally recognized these less than 30-credit credentials (referred to as skills certificates).
- We identified over 30 of such skills certificates embedded in the current curriculum, which proved to be half the battle.
- Developing an accurate and consistent tracking mechanism and incorporating these new credentials into the accountability framework in a meaningful way is a bigger challenge.

1) What criteria can be utilized in the academic review process to identify short-term skills certificates? (or workforce certificates)
   - Board gave flexibility to institutions
   - Primary field of study
   - Certificates of at least 9 and less than 30 credit hours that provide preparation necessary to take state, national and/or industry recognized certification or licensing examinations
   - Instructional Deans conducted “inventory” of their curriculum to identify course-sequences that lead to industry certification (CAN, for e.g.)
   - Some are on non-state side
   - Currently 25 are approved and published in catalog

2) How to define a completer?
   - Completion of required courses with C or better

3) How to track credentials of less than 30 credits
   - Initially, through enrollment records utilizing IR DW
   - Some challenges:
     - No up-front declaration of pursuing these credentials; they are always awarded upon completion of sequence
     - No capstone courses
     - Students taking courses out of sequence
     - Had to create logic where in order for student to be counted as completer they had to complete at least one of the required courses during the reporting year
- Reporting time frame: one year
- Preliminary counts: 1644
- Must have formal award to be eligible for IPEDS Completions reporting
- CAN, EMT, PHLB and such had departmental awards that are considered formal
- In 2013 reporting cycle, TMCC reported 534 of skills certificates to IPEDS
- Currently, system-wide, a process is being developed to post skills certificate to student transcript
- IR logic is being utilized

4) **How can short-term skills certificates advance the completions agenda of your college?**

- Community college students do not always experience their education in a traditional way: starting with clear ed goal and culminating in a degree or certificate earned within 150%
- They come for specific skills
- More complete representation of unique enrollment patterns of community college students
- Community College Mission fulfillment
- Responsive of business and industry expectations and realities of the market
- Pushing the boundaries of commonly defined outcomes and completions measures
- Helps educate the public and legislators on a variety of pathways students take to achieve outcomes

**Share your prospective and the experience at your college with the following:**

- Additional measures and evidence to tell the community colleges’ success story on completion
- Short-term certificates and credentials at your institution and how you track them

**Closing remarks**