WYTHEVILLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In November 2015, Dr. Lorri Huffard (Vice President of Instruction and Student Development), applied for a Chancellor's Innovation Fund (CFI) grant entitled "Access Success: Creating Guided Pathways to Success". Upon receiving the grant funding, the timeline for completion was from January-July 2016. After assembling a Pathways Team and appointing a Faculty Coordinator (Tracy McAfee, Associate Professor of CST), work began on the WCC Pathways Project. WCC hired "Access" (firm out of Roanoke) to work with us to create the webpages and to coordinate the project. Access had created our WCC website and thought it would be best to have the same firm coordinate our efforts for the pathways project.

WCC invited Dr. Rob Johnstone (National Center for Inquiry and Improvement) to speak at our January 2016 Professional In-service Day as we introduced the project to faculty and staff. We looked at how we approached student success and why we needed this initiative. Many times, college-wide advising was inconsistent and often wrong. Creating Guided Pathways would take a new approach and focus on the end result which was either a student gaining employment or transferring to complete their studies. We decided that we needed to create a "student friendly" page that was career oriented.

WCC looked at our programs and CSCs and decided to come up with a plan to limit all the choices that students have. Typically, the student just wants to be told exactly what they need to take to get them to graduation. Sometimes all the choices that we give students can be daunting for them and they become overwhelmed… sometimes too overwhelmed and give up. A specific pathway to where they want to end up seemed logical as we tried to figure out the process.

After meeting with Program Heads and Lead Faculty, we created Meta-majors that would fit our institution. We started with ten meta-majors and narrowed it to six….. and ultimately seven after further discussions with faculty. We needed this project to be faculty driven since they know their programs better than anyone does. The Faculty Coordinator met with each Program Heads/Lead Faculty individually and talked about how we advise our students. In those meetings, we agreed that there was too much "self-advising" / lack of advising, too many choices for students, and some programs needed curriculum changes. We also discovered the need to revise the semester course structure and create "stackable courses" in the 1st semester so if the student changed their minds about their career, they wouldn't lose valuable time by taking extra courses that didn't help them complete their degree. Several programs underwent Program Reviews so that their curriculum was accurate as we created the pathway.

The faculty were given the assignment to map out their programs and CSCs with the focus on "careers" and not degrees. They created a Decision Tree using newsprint paper to create a visual pathway based on answers that they would give their advisee.

and not degrees. They created a Decision Tree using newsprint paper to create a visual pathway based on answers that they would give their advisee. We asked faculty to pretend that there was a student in front of them asking the common questions that advisors normally get. The Decision Tree was to map out the alternative paths depending on the student's answers.

While faculty were completing their Decision Tree, we had a campus-wide book discussion during the next few months. Our WCC Foundation purchased copies of Redesigning America's Community Colleges (Bailey, Jaggers, Jenkins) for each employees and we held informal discussions on chapters from the book. Participants ranged from the administration and faculty to classified and hourly workers. We felt it was important for all employees to understand what our focus will be as we concentrate on student success. We provided food and door prizes to entice employees and all discussions were well attended. These informal book discussions were held in our library with comfortable seating and created a nonthreatening atmosphere.

We reviewed all program Decision Trees with Access and choose two programs (PTA and Accounting) to begin the process of building the pages which included all options for students. After many meetings and "mock pages" designed by Access, we began to make progress. We tried to define what we really wanted and what would be beneficial to our students. We also concentrated on using layman's terms instead of "educationese" which confuses students. We also tested our layout and some pages on actual students to gain their feedback. The team received many valid concerns and preferences from the students and we continued to revise, revise and revise. The program pages are only as good as the faculty's information so it was imperative that faculty took the lead and responsibility of being directly involved.

Shawn McReynolds (Director of Technology) created a "fillable form" to collect the information from the program heads so that Access would have a uniform way of collecting data as they built the pathway pages. We also thought that students are interested in realistic salaries as well as possible regional jobs so we subscribed to EMSI to obtain current salaries and job opening without WCC having to worry about constantly updating information.

The WCC Guided Pathways went "live" at the end of August (2016) and we continue to tweak the webpages and give our faulty the responsibility to double-check their pages to insure that accurate information is readily available for students who are curious about a certain career. Reports from Student Services staff as well as students are praising the guided pathways for having simple, concise, and accurate information and advising is now consistent throughout the college.

WCC received another CIF grant (Jan-July 2017) for Phase 2 of our project. Phase 2 is addressing pathways for Workforce, marketing, and addressing specific pathways for transfer students or any program that needs additional training. Our dream (Phase 3) is to integrate SIS into the pages so students are able to see their progress towards completion which would aid in retention.

Submitted by:
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