Community College Support and Engagement of Servicemembers, Veterans, and Military Families

Kathy McMurtry Snead, Ed.D., and Andrea Baridon
Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges

When asked why they joined the military, enlisted personnel consistently answer that the opportunity to get a college education along with the funds to pay for it is one of their top three reasons for entering military service. This generalization is borne out by Office of the Undersecretary of Defense voluntary education statistics which document that 376,759 servicemembers enrolled in more than 736,000 undergraduate courses funded by federal Tuition Assistance in FY 2009 (OSD, 2010). For the majority of servicemembers, the associate degree diploma is the most frequently earned educational credential using DoD Voluntary Education funding. In FY 09, over 63% of the active-duty graduates who earned a credential (GED/high school through doctoral-level education), earned an associate degree (OSD, 2010).

Other servicemembers elect not to use DoD Tuition Assistance while on active duty to fund their voluntary education, but rely instead on Veterans Affairs educational benefits or federal financial aid. It has been reported that 43% of all military undergraduates and 39% of those receiving veterans' education benefits have selected public, two-year institutions as the place to achieve their academic and career goals (Alvarez, 2008; U.S. Dept. of Education, 2009). Dr. Stacie Hitt, Operation Diploma Director for the Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University, postulates that "the nation's community colleges have traditionally provided leadership in addressing the postsecondary needs of non-traditional students." Looking at the statistics above, it is evident that community colleges are a key resource and access point for servicemembers, veterans, and their families pursuing postsecondary education.

Community colleges are an attractive educational option for military families because of affordability, program choice (certificate, career-entry diploma, vocational, and academic transfer programs), and convenience and flexibility of class offerings (evenings, weekends, and off-campus locations). For adult learners who have no experience in a postsecondary educational setting or have been out of school for several years, community colleges also provide a variety of support services, refresher courses, and readiness programs to prepare them for the academic rigors of college-level education. For those servicemembers who confide that they were not academically focused during high school, community colleges' open access policies afford them a chance to improve their skills and establish a proven postsecondary educational track record before transferring into a four-year university.

Special campus programming for Servicemembers and Veterans

Because of their adult learner and community-based focus, many community colleges have been among the first institutions to welcome Post-9/11 veterans and servicemembers to their campuses. *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus,* a first-of-its-kind survey summary on how colleges and universities are facilitating the transition of veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq into the college environment, found that public two-year (66 percent) and four-year (74 percent) responding institutions were more likely to have programs specifically designed for military veterans than private not-for-profit colleges and universities

(36 percent) (Cook & Kim, 2009). According to more than three-fourths of colleges and universities, financial aid and student retention/persistence toward degree completion are the two most pressing issues facing military/veteran students (Cook & Kim, 2009).

Institutions with a longstanding history of serving military students that award two-year degrees include: Central Texas College, Coastline Community College (CA), Excelsior College (NY), Pierce College (WA), Thomas Edison State College (NJ), University of Maryland University College, and Vincennes University (IN). Due to limited state funding and low profit margins of community colleges, some institutions report that creation and expansion of additional veteran services and programs are dependent upon external funding. Nearly 42% of the two-year public institutions responding to the national campus survey identified locating funding sources for added campus programs/services as one of their top three institutional issues related to serving veterans.

To encourage institutions to establish model programs and services for veterans enrolling in postsecondary education, philanthropic organizations have established institutional grants. One such organization is the Wal-Mart Foundation which donated $3.6 million to support successful veteran assistance programs on college and university campuses during 2008 and 2009. In 2008, ten academic institutions that provided successful services and programs to their enrolled veterans received $100,000 each from the Wal-Mart Foundation to develop new programs and enhance existing ones to help veterans access and transition into institutions of higher learning. Four of the recipients were community colleges: Montgomery College (MD), Citrus College (CA), Florida Community College, and San Diego Community College (CA).

Montgomery College (MD). The Combat2College program "pairs a Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center and a community college to enhance and adapt existing campus resources to help OEF/OIF veterans through college. The program focuses on viewing military training and experience as positive assets that can help students develop behaviors and attitudes necessary for academic success" (McBain, 2008, p. 10).

Citrus College (CA). The Boots to Books program combines a credit-bearing course for the veteran student and a non-credit course for their family, friends and other supporters. Course content includes interpersonal communication, coping skills, managing the transition from military to civilian life, and other areas affecting returning veterans.

Florida Community College at Jacksonville partners with the Wounded Warrior Project to provide courses for wounded warriors through TRACK, a residential college preparatory and vocational skills program.

San Diego Community College (CA). The grants will support the development of new and existing programs and provide resources to assist veterans with access to education, adjustment to civilian life, and success in completing their degrees. SDCC's military education program currently provides instruction to more than 50,000 at 30 military installations throughout the United States.

Wal-Mart Foundation awarded the American Council on Education a $2.5 million grant to support successful veterans education programs across the country in 2009. Through a competitive grant program using the Wal-Mart Foundation funds, ACE identified and recognized 20 institutions that operated model programs advancing access and success in higher education for veterans and their families. The aim of program was to provide needed resources to expand and enhance existing veteran services provided on these 20 campuses, and to support the dissemination of lessons learned to other institutions.

Twenty institutions were awarded $100,000

grants in the spring of 2009 to document their methodologies, measure success outcomes, and quantify features of each program so that other institutions could replicate their efforts with positive results. Nine community colleges received $100,000 each from ACE and the Wal-Mart Foundation through its Success for Veterans Award Grants program (See Appendix A for descriptive program information). While military and veteran family services were not specifically included in the grants, all programs have encouraged spouse and family participation.

ACE has yet to publish a summary report of the outcome measures and programmatic success factors that resulted from the Veteran Success Grants but those data should be forthcoming. Data-driven outcomes demonstrating program success and replicability to other campuses were requirements for program selection.

The Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education recently released the application package for institutional grants for Centers of Excellence for Veteran Students. Open to all institutions of higher education, this funding source should increase campus programming and specialized services for the broad spectrum of military students enrolled in postsecondary education.

The following initiatives have been proposed by experts in the field of student success as strategies to ease the transition of veterans and their families to campus and have been incorporated into existing veteran programs:

- Promote reintegration programs for families, and act as a conduit to family assistance centers and on-campus veterans' centers as a joint initiative of community colleges and the military (Brown, 2008);
- Create offices that provide a single point-of-contact or "one-stop shop" for information about campus resources (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell,

2009; Cook & Kim, 2009; Persky, 2010);
- Provide on-campus housing for families of veterans experiencing TBI, PTSD, mild to moderate burn injury, amputations, and other disabilities that may place a student veteran at risk. Students in healthcare professions provide services, creating a secondary gain by increasing the pool of providers with knowledge of combat-related injury and disability (McBain, 2008; Redden, 2008);
- Raise awareness and knowledge among faculty and staff of issues facing student service members and veterans and their families (Cook & Kim, 2009; Ford, Northrup & Wiley, 2009; Persky, 2010; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009);
- Develop collaborations to enhance campus engagement between academia and student veterans' organizations and other military family supports (Mangan, 2009; Ruman & Hamrick, 2009);
- Institute flexible academic programming, scheduling, and availability of student services (Cook & Kim, 2009; Ford, Northrup, & Wiley, 2009);
- Identify and track student service members and veterans and their families to monitor progress and facilitate targeted communication (Lokken, Pheffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009).

DoD and Community College Programs for Military Families

In this decade characterized by military deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, the Department of Defense has made military family support a top priority (Baker, 2010). DoD has implemented numerous Military Community and Family Programs and has improved national efforts to enhance the quality of life for military families.

The implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in August 2009 significantly reduced a major financial barrier to veteran and servicemember

enrollment and college retention. Current funding levels of military Tuition Assistance and/or veterans education benefits make college enrollment affordable for the overwhelming majority of military students. The DoD Transfer of Educational Benefits (TEB) option for select servicemembers also allows individuals to transfer unused educational benefits to spouses or children. Despite this monumental change in educational benefit policy development for the Department of Defense, financing postsecondary educational goals remains the chief enrollment obstacle for military spouses. With more than 55% of the armed forces married, the mobile lifestyle and high operations tempo of military families frequently affects educational paths and completion patterns for family members. "For military spouses, who are frequently re-located as the result of their family's service, the ability to transfer skills to new employment opportunities or to earn credentialing or certification in a career that is portable and in demand nationally is an important factor in the overall well-being of the military family," says Dr. Hitt of MFRI (Hitt, MFRI, 2010).

One DoD initiative that focuses specifically on the educational challenges of military spouses is the **Military Spouse Career Advancement Account (MyCAA).** The initiative initially was established in 2008 as a shared demonstration project of the Departments of Labor and Defense. In 2009, the initiative transitioned completely to the Defense Department and provided eligible military spouses of active-duty servicemembers worldwide up to $6,000 in financial assistance to help pay for licenses, certifications, training programs, and education in high-demand portable career fields. Naturally, community colleges have served as the dominant education provider for many of these programs, both because of their longstanding adult learner orientation, and the diversity of their vocational, technical training, and educational offerings.

The goals of the MyCAA program are to:

- Provide targeted military spouses with financial assistance to pursue education, training, and credentials/licenses required for obtaining/retaining employment and advancing in their careers;
- Provide highly-skilled, well-trained workers to employers in high-growth, high-demand industries and sectors;
- Increase the financial stability of military families; and
- Support the retention and readiness of the U.S. Armed Forces.

An indicator of the program's success was that within its first six-month phase, 136,853 spouses enrolled in courses. With an external funding source to augment the military family budget, spouses demonstrated their desire and drive to pursue educational goals. Due to current and future fiscal realities the Department of Defense has made programmatic modifications to the eligibility requirements, effective October 25, 2010, as follows:

- Available only to spouses of active-duty servicemembers in pay grades E1-E5, W1-W2, and O1-O2;
- Offer a maximum financial benefit of $4,000 with a fiscal year cap of $2,000. Waivers will be available for spouses pursuing licensure or certification up to the total maximum assistance of $4,000;
- Require military spouses to finish their program of study within three years from the start date of the first course; and
- Limited to associate degrees, certification, and licensures.

For more information on the program, see: <https://www.militaryonesource.com/MOS/Find Information/Category/MilitarySpouseCareerAdv ancementAccounts.aspx>

Further evidence of the positive impact that educational funding initiatives have on military spouse enrollment is Coastline Community College's (CA) Military Spouse Program. In

late Fall 2007, Coastline committed funding to provide a worldwide tuition rate of $59 per unit and free textbooks for military spouses. In that first year, military spouse enrollments grew by 600%. After that, program enrollment doubled each session and has grown to a point that the college can no longer afford to continue the free books promotion. Beginning this fall, Coastline Community College's spouses program will offer a $79 per unit enrollment fee and $50 maximum for all textbooks required for a course (See Appendix B: Military Spouse Enrollment Growth at Coastline Community College). Providing educational funding for military spouses, even at modest levels, helps overcome the key obstacle to educational goal attainment that military families face.

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) is another DoD program that was created to provide access to educational opportunities for servicemembers and their families who, because they frequently move from place to place, had trouble completing college degrees. SOC, established in 1972, helps coordinate voluntary postsecondary educational opportunities for servicemembers by helping the higher education community understand and respond to special needs of servicemembers; advocating for the flexibility needed to improve access to and availability of educational programs for servicemembers; and strengthening liaison and working relationships among military and higher education representatives. Within the SOC Consortium there are approximately 900 community colleges that pledge to:

- **Be reasonable in the acceptance of transfer credit.** Since mobility makes it unlikely that servicemembers can complete all degree program requirements at one institution, a SOC Consortium institution designs its transfer practices for servicemembers to minimize loss of credit and avoid duplication of coursework, while simultaneously maintaining the integrity of its programs.
- **Limit academic residency**

requirements for active-duty servicemembers to no more than 25 percent of the undergraduate degree program; allows servicemembers to satisfy academic residency requirements with courses taken from the institution at any time during their program of study, specifically avoiding any "final year" or "final semester" residency requirement.

- **Credit Learning from Military Training and Experience.** A SOC Consortium institution provides processes to determine credit awards and learning acquired for specialized military training and occupational experience where applicable to a servicemember's degree program.
- **Credit Extra-Institutional Learning.** Recognizing that learning occurs in extra-institutional and non-instructional settings, a SOC Consortium institution provides processes to evaluate and award appropriate undergraduate-level credit where applicable to a servicemember's degree program.

For the complete list of SOC Consortium member institutions, go to SOC's Web site at <www.soc.aascu.org>.

A subset of the SOC Consortium, the SOC Degree Network System (SOCAD, SOCNAV, SOCMAR, and SOCCOAST) consists of degree-granting colleges and universities that have pledged to help servicemembers and their adult family members complete college degrees by adopting military-friendly policies that in some aspects exceed those of the larger SOC Consortium. Many courses offered by Degree Network System (DNS) Core member institutions have two-way guaranteed transferability, making it easier for servicemembers to complete associate and bachelor's degrees no matter where they move during their military careers. These military students do not have to be re-evaluated each time they go to another military installation or if they take courses from a college other than their

home college. As long as servicemembers complete the academic residency requirements of the home college, they can take approved courses from other colleges to complete the degree plan as they relocate during their military careers. The Student Agreement issued by participating DNS colleges provides a complete evaluation of the servicemember's prior learning, including courses from other colleges and universities, military training courses, military occupational experience, and nationally-recognized tests, as well as clearly identifying requirements for completing the degree. Spouses and adult children of servicemembers are also eligible to participate in the SOC Degree Network System and receive Student Agreements.

In FY 2009, over 45,800 military students received SOC DNS Student Agreements that provided them with a degree plan and helped them chart their academic progress toward degree completion. Their degree-granting institutions cumulatively recognized and awarded more than 619,450 college credits from non-traditional credit sources (military training, military occupational specialty, nationally-recognized testing programs, certification examinations, etc.) toward graduation requirements for enrolled military students. For the Armed Services, these credit awards translate to a cost avoidance of $154,863,500 in Department of Defense tuition funds that can be diverted to other efforts because colleges and universities have applied non-traditional credits from other instructional sources. For servicemembers or their family members, credit for their prior learning jumpstarts their academic progress and reduces the amount of coursework required—and, therefore, the total time required for them to complete their degrees—which motivates them to strive seriously toward degree completion. Impressive though those cost-avoidance figures are, the numbers SOC captures for the SOC DNS are just the tip of the iceberg—those credit awards are from 160 institutions, fewer than 10% of the total SOC Consortium membership. Granted, they are the institutions with the largest number of undergraduate military Tuition Assistance

enrollments and thus have well-established procedures and award policies for serving military students. While it is difficult to extrapolate just what the cost avoidance numbers might be for all SOC Consortium institutions, those numbers are potentially enormous. And regrettably, they are not officially captured by any organization or government agency.

Central Texas College in Killeen, Texas, serves as a exemplary model of how a community college within the SOC DNS specifically addresses the retention and degree completion issues of the military student population. Recognizing the importance of high-engagement strategies outside the classroom, CTC has developed a student communication system that provides early warnings, classroom feedback, and education/career counseling to its students. One of the initial efforts using student communication system that integrates e-mail, telephone, and instant messaging communication with a student adviser/mentor was an outreach to soldiers enrolled in online classes who were issued an incomplete or failed a class (See Appendix C).

A wealth of anecdotal information and descriptive documents about institutional programs and services surfaced in conducting research for this issue brief. The amount of data-driven evidence providing outcome measures of program success, however, was limited. We attempted to collect demonstrable data that could document the impact and outcomes of specialized programs and services developed to meet the educational needs of military students from subject matter experts. Dr. Hitt from the Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University summarized our data search aptly, "The limited amount of data-driven evidence of supporting student servicemembers and veterans and their families at both two- and four-year institutions is alarming in light of the large numbers currently enrolled, as well as those expected to take advantage of educational benefits. Due to their historical leadership in serving the educational needs of non-traditional students and the large

proportion of military students enrolled on their campuses, the nation's community colleges are in a unique position to initiate steps immediately to document and assess the progress being made in this area." We concur that greater institutional efforts need to be expended in quantifying the positive results these initiatives have on military student lives and to identify replicable programs that can further advance educational attainment among this adult learner subpopulation.

As summit participants further explore the issues surrounding veteran, servicemember, and military family enrollments at community colleges, we pose the following questions to help shape the discussion:

- Greater retention and degree completion metrics and outcome measures need to be collected for military students (servicemembers, veterans, and their families), as well as all adult learners. Who (what associations, agencies) should engage colleges to collect "success" data on who enrolls, what academic programs are selected, and quantitative measures of academic progression and success? What retention and degree completion benchmarks can be identified to measure successful pathways and programming toward graduation attainment?
- What articulation models or partnerships could further assist and accelerate military students in their transfer from two-year to four-year degree programs?
- Servicemembers and veterans, as well as other adult learners, come to institutions of higher learning with prior learning experiences (transfer credit, non-traditional learning, and documented college-level military training). Optimizing college-level credit awards for prior learning that apply toward graduation requirements will accelerate servicemembers paths to

graduation. How might the acceptance of non-traditional credit for prior learning become a national standard of good practice for community colleges? For all of higher education in the United States?
- What funding sources might be identified to help diminish the financial barriers for military spouses, and the broader population of adult learners?
- Community colleges provide educational programs in portable and transferable career fields as well as career guidance and counseling services. What more can be done to attract, communicate, and motivate military spouses to pursue these educational opportunities? Are there other adult learner populations who might also benefit from knowing about access into portable career fields?
- How can we build greater capacity at community colleges so that more adult learners can benefit from quality educational experiences at an affordable price?

REFERENCES

Ackerman, R., DiRamio, D., & Mitchell, R.L.G. (2009). Transitions: Combat veterans as college students. In R. Ackerman & B. DiRamio (Eds.), *New Directions for Student Services: Creating a Veteran-Friendly Campus: Strategies for Transition and Success* (pp. 5-14).

Alvarez, L. (2008, November 2). Continuing an education: Combat to college. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/02/education/edlife/vets.html?_r=1.

Baker, C. (2010) Developing a 21st Century Total Force: A Matter of Honor. Department of Defense brief presented as CCME Keynote Address, Nashville, TN, Feb. 2010. Retreived from http://www.ccmeonline.org/nashville10.aspx.

Brown, S. (2008, November 13). Illinois National Guard, community colleges launch statewide programs for deployed military and families. *ICCTA News.* Report retrieved from affiliates@communitycolleges.org.

Cook, B. and Kim,Y. (2009) *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Servicemembers on Campus.* American Council on Education: Washington, DC.

Ford, D., Northrup, P., & Wiley, L. (2009). Connections, partnerships, opportunities, and program to enhance success for military students. In Ackerman, R. & DiRamio, D. (Eds.), *Creating a veteran-friendly campus: Strategies for transition and success. New Directions in Student Services,* 126, pp. 61-69.

Hitt, S. (August 23, 2010) RE: Community College Summit: Military Families and Veterans [Electronic mail message].

Lokken, J.M., Pfeffer, D.S., McAuley, J., & Strong, C. (2009). A statewide approach to creating veteran-friendly campuses. In R. Ackerman & B. DiRamio (Eds.), *New*

Directions for Student Services: Creating a Veteran-Friendly Campus: Strategies for Transition and Success, pp. 45-54. doi: 10.1002/ss.

Mangan, K. (2009). Colleges help veterans advance from combat to classroom. *Chronicle of Higher Education* (October), pp. A1-A28.

McBain, L. (2008, Summer). When Johnny or Janelle comes marching home: National, state and institutional efforts in support of veterans' education. *AASCU Perspectives.*

Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness). (2010) DoD Voluntary Education Fact Sheet-FY 2009. Retrieved from http://www.dantes.doded.mil/Dantes_web/DANTESHOME.asp.

Persky, K.R. (2010). Veterans' education: Coming home to the community college classroom. Unpublished dissertation. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss/31.

Redden, E. (2008). 'Symbiotic' approach to veterans' needs. *Inside Higher Education,* retrieved from http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/10/10/veterans.

Ruman, C.B. & Hamrick, F.A. (2009). Supporting student veterans in transition. In Ackerman, R. & DiRamio, D. (Eds.), *Creating a veteran-friendly campus: Strategies for transition and success. New Directions in Student Services,* 126, 25-34. doi: 10.1002/ss.313.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2009). Issue tables: A profile of military service members and veterans enrolled in post-secondary education in 2007-2008. NCES 2009-182.

APPENDIX A: Community Colleges with American Council Education/Wal-Mart Foundation Grants for Programs Recognized for Serving Veterans and Military Families

Fresno City College (CA) built on a partnership with Pacific Gas & Electric Co. to train veterans for employment, including preparation for pre-employment testing and access to counseling.

Los Angeles City College (CA) created a formal mentoring program, publish a veterans' handbook, and train faculty and staff to increase awareness of the challenges confronting student veterans.

Southwestern College (CA) established a veterans' welcome center to provide more comprehensive counseling, support services, job placement and faculty development.

SUNY Empire State College (NY) expanded and enhanced educational support services and improve training of faculty, mentors, and staff to create awareness of challenges faced by student veterans.

Onondaga Community College (NY) established a visible presence to welcome veterans, increase awareness/knowledge of unique veterans' issues, and expand and enhance services to current and prospective veteran students.

Clackamas Community College (OR) expanded outreach to veterans and develop standards for awarding credit for military training and experience.

Lane Community College (OR) expanded its Lane Integration of Vets in Education (LIVE) program to deliver first-year experience, including learning communities, advising, supplemental instruction, and early intervention systems.

Trident Technical College (SC) created Project VETS (Veterans' Educational Transition Services) to provide a continuum of services from pre-college through graduation, including a veterans-specific orientation program, faculty and staff development, veterans' task force, and veterans' student club.

Madison Area Technical College (WI) provided streamlined veterans services, veteran student orientation, and expansion of programs and services to veteran families through its Success and Access for Veterans Education (SAVE) project.

APPENDIX B: Military Spouse Enrollment Growth at Coastline Community College

Term	Spouse Enrollments
Fall 07 session 1	123
Fall 07 Session 2	261
Spring 08 Session 1	387
Spring 08 Session 2	661
Summer 09	599
Fall 08 Session 1	860
Fall 08 Session 2	930
Spring 09 Session 1	1138
Spring 09 Session 2	1187
Summer 09	884
Fall 09 Session 1	1266
Fall 09 Session 2	1292
Spring 10 Session 1	1552
Spring 10 Session 2*	1156
Summer 10	1083
Fall 10 Session 1	1248

Note: The suspension of MyCAA funding had an impact on enrollment.

APPENDIX C. Central Texas College – High-Engagement Strategies

With over 40 years of experience working with military students, spouses, and family members, Central Texas College (CTC) works to understand and meet the unique needs of military families through education programs, services, and initiatives. Approximately 75% of all CTC students worldwide are military affiliated.

CTC recognized that military affiliated students needed the ability to complete their education regardless of their physical location. CTC's leadership in distance education, as evidenced by the repeated recognition by *U.S. News and World Report* as a top online degree-granting institution and *G.I. Jobs* as a Military-Friendly School, substantiates our commitment to our students. Also, in order to support our large mobile population, CTC has established articulation agreements with over 25 institutions that also serve large military populations.

Recognizing the importance of high-engagement strategies outside the classroom, CTC has developed a student communication system that provides early warnings, classroom feedback, and education/career counseling to our students. Initial efforts with the student communication system that integrates e-mail, telephone, and instant messaging communication with a student adviser/mentor was an outreach to soldiers enrolled in online classes who were issued an incomplete or failed a class. Through the GoArmyEd program, trends indicated that many students did not know how to resolve an incomplete or the process for appealing grades even though the information is posted in classes, on the CTC web site, and in the CTC catalog. This outreach was later expanded to all distant learners to include other branches of the military, military spouses, and family members.

Our next effort was our Student Success Initiative (SSI), which was the result of students' concerns about class overloads and retention concerns addressed by the administration, faculty, and staff. First-time freshman and students with cumulative GPA's of less than 2.0 were identified and monitored for participation and demonstration of continuous progress. Those students who were not meeting expectations were contacted by the student mentor to provide guidance and support. The results of SSI were overwhelmingly positive and indicated that over twice as many students receiving the outreach were retained.

This summer, the student communication system was expanded through the purchase of retention software. A new initiative was implemented to serve those students enrolled in face-to-face classes. Resulting data reflects an opportunity to increase student retention and successful completion through a system that tracks instructor communication with students, early warnings, and guidance for resolving key educational issues such as incomplete grades, scheduling, and student success.

CTC's first system-wide focus on classroom high-engagement strategies began with the design and implementation of PSYC1300 Learning Framework that is intended to serve as a freshman orientation. This course is designed to help students identify their temperament, learning style, level of motivation, decision-making style, personal values, and principles. Student progress has been validated by retention rates and grade point averages of those students who participated in PSYC1300.

CTC is currently involved in a Texas pilot of Postsecondary AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination). Several of the local independent school districts within the CTC service are all Department of Defense schools utilizing the AVID program. AVID is one of the most successful college readiness programs serving approximately 400,000 students, nearly 4,500 schools, 45 states, and 16 other countries/territories. AVID Postsecondary is a system initiative to support students who are under-prepared for college by providing a year-long academic training program to develop college success skills needed for academic success, persistence and graduation, reducing barriers that traditionally limit levels of academic achievement, and facilitating professional development using student success pedagogies applicable across academic disciplines and student services. In addition, one of the AVID Postsecondary essentials includes implementation of a freshman year experience course that includes all of the elements currently utilized in PSYC1300.