



Achieving the Dream™

PREPARING FOR SHORTENED ACADEMIC TERMS COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT

Waukesha County Technical College

More Students Complete a Credential in a Timely Manner

THE “WHY”

“We are built for the students we don’t have”

WCTC was looking for a way to keep the students they already had at their institution. The college looked at data and saw that 85% of their students were part-time and took, on average, 6 credits in a 16-week semester. Less than 6% of their students completed 30 credits in an academic year. Many students were not completing a credential, which made sense; it would take five years or 10 semesters to complete a degree part-time in that manner. Employers in the community were asking for more qualified candidates, and WCTC was struggling to meet the demand.



WAUKESHA
COUNTY TECHNICAL
COLLEGE

Hands-on Higher Ed

“Our internal design has forced many students to go part-time”

AHA MOMENT

They had started on a year-round calendar, and after hearing a presentation at the DREAM conference, they decided to work toward an 8-week academic calendar as well. They felt that this would help their students get to completion faster. Students could still take six credits per term, which would bring them to full-time status and allow them to complete 30 credits in a full academic year.

THE WORK

“For employees who will live these changes every day, give them as much authorship as you can for how they execute their work.”

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

They took three years to build support through intentional communication that involved sharing their data. They gave a clear timeline with a lot of communication early and often. This helped make the case for the change and helped engage employees collaboratively across the college. They had a steering committee that included representatives from all areas affected and could not stress enough the importance of having a financial aid representative included from the very start. The college engaged champions in each functional area to help communicate the work. The deans and student service managers ran the work, created the structure in the functional areas, and selected the people. This work was aligned with their guided pathways work, and that was important for them. WCTC was working on domain one of guided pathways while they were looking at parameters for converting courses to 8 weeks. They tied all their work back to their vision statement, of all students completing a credential in a timely manner.



WCTC had a communication team that went all over campus with a consistent message. They started with the high-level vision for the work and then asked the departments to share what support they would need to make this a reality. These conversations were time consuming but were critical to building trust and momentum.

“Mission Possible”

COURSE CONVERSION

WCTC used professional development, workdays, and stipends to give faculty the opportunity to redesign courses that would be successful in an 8-week format. They used their learning objectives as their guide and “unpacked and repacked” their courses. Faculty took a critical eye to their content and worked to balance the “passionate and the practical.” They also did not worry about designing the perfect 8-week course. Departments created an opportunity for courses to be created and taught, and then later, improved. New faculty are now matched with faculty mentors and are onboarded with delivery of coursework at the center of their training. Adjuncts have access to all the training materials available to full-time faculty and are paid for this training. Part-time faculty are not expected to develop their own courses and are given access to courses that have been created by full-time faculty.

Their guided pathways domain three team has been helping faculty be responsive to nonacademic needs in class. Faculty have been working on advising (with a small “a”) to understand, address, and enhance noncognitive skills in class. The college has a homegrown early alert system and continuously work to train faculty to connect students to supports.

“It was a lot of work but a good time to change things.”

NONACADEMIC CHANGES

WCTC recognized that transitioning to an 8-week term would change everything about how they do business as a college. In order to be prepared for this transition they started by building and adapting their infrastructure. They added staff in key areas and looked for ways for technology to enable their processes. They changed their staffing model and advising structure by creating an admissions counselor role and a financial aid counselor role. These roles allowed the college to be more responsive to students entering the college in any of the five terms. Previously, students who navigated the onboarding process without dedicated guidance, and the college lost about 50% of prospective students before the first day of class. WCTC also created a physical welcome center on campus, with dedicated space and focused interactions for both prospective students and current students.



Behind the scenes, they restructured their CRM and upgraded their Banner system. They also changed how they disbursed financial aid (with one disbursement per term) and attached their winter and May terms to a semester to make them eligible for financial aid. They have requested additional technology and staffing for this work going into the future and will continue to help build college capacity in support of their students.

LESSONS LEARNED

To make this transition work, it needs to be a priority from the top of your institution. Make decisions around the budget table to support this work and stick to them.

Know why you are making this change and have the data in place.

Work to understand your stakeholder groups and what motivates and scares them. Speak openly and honestly about these issues.

Keep the students at the center of every decision you make.

