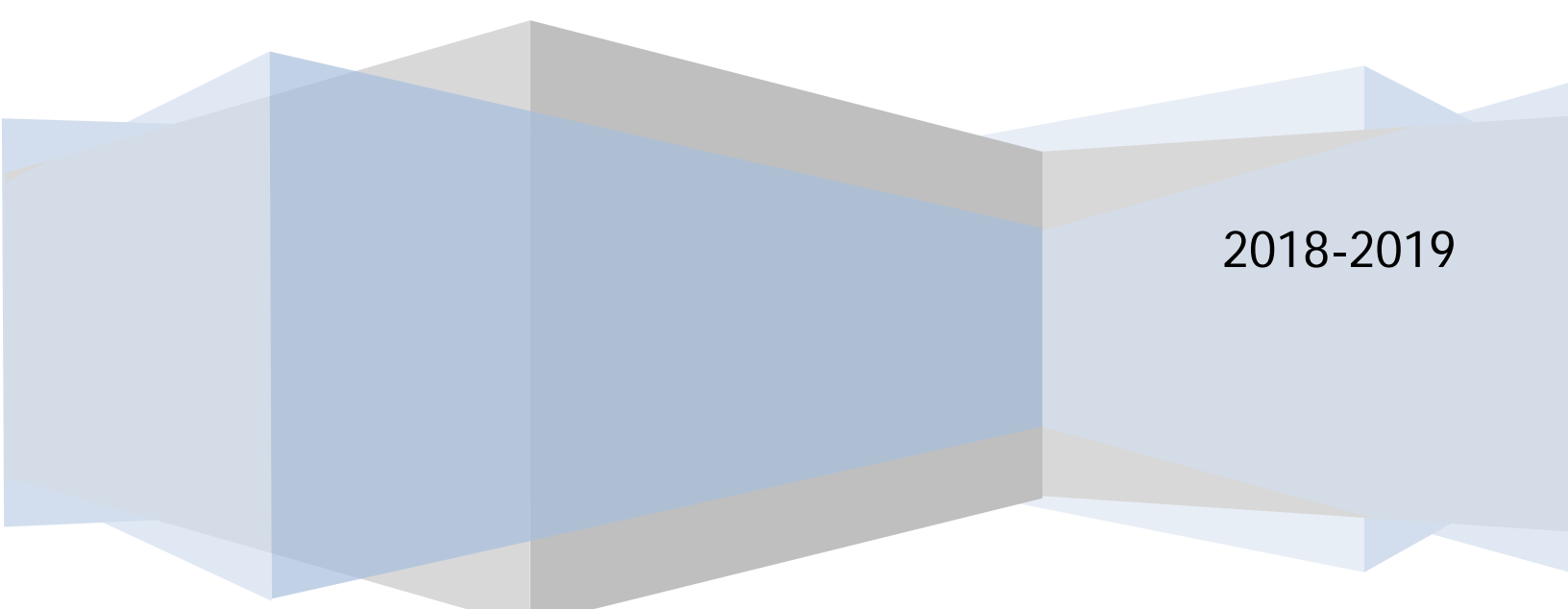


# Cambridge College

## Title III External Evaluation Year One Report Development Institute, Inc.



2018-2019

**Cambridge College**  
**TITLE III EXTERNAL EVALUATION**  
**Year One Report**  
**2018-2019**

Cambridge College began its Title III Strengthening Institutions project—*Pathways to Persistence and Success*—in October of 2018. The overall purpose of the project is to improve student achievement and retention through two inter-related components. The first component, *Transforming the Student Experience*, emphasizes the development of a continuum of support through: enhanced enrollment systems, while the second component, *Reforming Curriculum and Instruction*, creates a multi-tiered framework of outcomes assessments and instruction to gather meaningful data on how well students are attaining identified knowledge, skills, and attitudes. With a focus on achievement and engagement, the College will improve students’ commitment to academic goals by 10 percentage points, increase their planning for life and career goals by 10 percentage points, increase their fall-to-fall persistence by 14 percentage points, and increase their graduation rate by 8 percentage points.

During the inaugural year of the Title III project, the College contracted with Development Institute, a Boston consulting firm, with Dr. Katherine German, President, and her colleague, Dr. Philip Sbaratta, serving as the external evaluators. Drs. German and Sbaratta have been involved with the design and implementation of similar programs since 1980 and have held a variety of leadership roles within higher education over the past thirty years. They are currently working with numerous institutions in the development and evaluation of Title III and Title V projects as well as other change efforts within higher education.

Prior to the campus visit on November 13, 2019, the evaluators reviewed the College’s overall five-year project plan, insights from the interim visit in February, and other related documents. During the review, they outlined the evaluation criteria specified in the project implementation as indicated through project objectives, implementation strategies and anticipated results. These criteria have been incorporated into the evaluation report for use as benchmarks against which to measure the progress of the project to date.

While on campus for the evaluation, Drs. German and Sbaratta conducted structured interviews to assess the progress that occurred within the elements of the overall activity under development. During these discussions, the evaluators met with Jerry Ice, Title III Project Coordinator; Tracy McLaughlin, Activity Director; and President Deborah Jackson as well as the following faculty and staff to review project organization, management, development, and implementation:

<b>Evaluation Participants</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Mark Rotondo	Vice President of Innovation and Strategic Initiatives
Leili Ansari	Administrative Support
Robyn Shahid-Bellot	Systems Integration Specialist
Michael Dickinson	Director of Undergraduate Advising
Brooks Winchell	Director of the Center for Excellence in Learning & Teaching
Vera Dimoplou	Assistant Dean of Student Affairs
Michael Ransom	Database Analyst
Achal Khatri	Director of Information Technology
Jeff Hogan	Success Coach and Coordinator of the First Year Experience
Fetissa Albert	Success Coach
Tatiana Baez	Success Coach
Jean Lendall	Success Coach
Katie Shannon	Student Navigator
Kathleen Hartnett	Learning Specialist
James Lee	Dean of the School of Undergraduate Studies
Lucilia Valerio	Faculty
Jeff Lokey	Faculty
Michael Siegell	Faculty

Rebecca Heimel	Faculty
Carol Pepi	Faculty
Ronda Goodale	Faculty
John Spinard	Vice President of Finance and Administration
Dorothy Whalen	Controller
Sharon Deleskey	Assistant Controller

In preparation for the evaluation discussion, the project leadership prepared a robust compendium of materials documenting work to date. During the site visit, overall discussion focused on the achievements as documented, issues that have arisen, and plans looking forward. Throughout the evaluation, participants described their involvement, accomplishments, and enthusiasm for the project. Concluding the review, the evaluators shared perceptions of project implementation and recommendations for continued development with the Title III leadership team.

**Needs Assessment**

The College engaged in a thorough analysis of strengths, weaknesses, and major problems inhibiting self-sufficiency during the application development process. The analysis drew from multiple sources including the Strategic Plan, College Student Inventory, Graduate Student Surveys, NEASC Self Study and Review, IPEDS data, Institutional Research, AAC&U Best Practices, and Budget Analyses.

Building on the institution’s academic, management, and fiscal strengths, the project addresses the following significant problem that compromises student success:

*Four out of ten students drop out after a year;  
of those remaining, only four will graduate within four years.*

This problem and its underlying weaknesses are addressed in the College’s comprehensive development plan through improvements in course delivery and enhanced

student support services—all aiming to increase student achievement, retention, and engagement to graduation.

### **Scope of the Project**

A single activity, *Pathways to Persistence and Success*, melds curricular reform with a robust support system. To improve the student experience, a continuum of services and supports improves orientation and incorporate academic, personal and career assessments leading to a comprehensive First-Year Experience (FYE), which is designed to connect skill-building to learning experiences, personal strengths and career paths. This continuum is supported by early alert and interventions that deliver an expanded suite of timely support services coordinated by Academic Success Coaches through a student services portal to improve communication among students, faculty, and staff. To enhance instruction, the Activity will improve and inform the coherence of program design, and incorporate high-impact practices into the learning experience. Supported by a comprehensive professional development program coordinated through the College's Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), the reformed educational experience will prepare Cambridge College graduates for success in today's competitive global economy. By the end of Year Five, the Activity will produce increases in achievement, retention, and graduation measured against the baseline data provided.

### **Year One Assessment**

The inaugural year sets expectations and establishes the framework for a five-year development process. Cambridge College has hit the ground running, thereby creating a strong foundation. Guiding the first-year were the following two objectives:

1. Increase student commitment to academic goals from 42% to 47% as measured by College Student Inventory (CSI)

2. Increase student planning for life and career goals from 42% to 47% as measured by CSI.

As a result, it was anticipated that coaches, trained and certified, would deliver intensive coaching to 250 first-year students to produce an increase in the achievement of academic goals, while 250 first-year students also participated in enhanced assessment and expanded onboarding to intensify the achievement of life and career goals. During the year, the College hired three talented success coaches who worked diligently with colleagues throughout the community to deliver on these expectations. Additionally, the College hired a Systems Integration Specialist to assist with the installation of Starfish and an Administrative Assistant. With this team in place, the project moved forward apace!

### **Component One: Transforming the Student Experience**

During the first year of implementation, the first component of *Pathways to Persistence and Success*, focused on four interlocking initiatives addressing onboarding, coaching, technological support and portal access.

#### **Enhanced Onboarding**

To develop a revised onboarding process, the first step focused on an assessment of current practice assessed against a review of best practices from the literature leading to the design of a new student intake process map. In particular, the comprehensive analysis of the intake process identified five major steps: 1) students apply, complete application, and are accepted; 2) students apply for financial aid; 3) new students are assigned a success coach; 4) coaches create an academic plan; and 5) students register for classes and participate in orientation. With a pilot conducted in August 2019, the

enhanced process includes a meeting of each new student with a personal success coach before enrolling. After taking a writing assessment, students receive an academic plan that takes into consideration assessment results. Results from an intake survey and interview with their coach identify any needs or challenges students may have, allowing coaches to connect students with needed services or resources. During regularly scheduled New Student Nights, students register for classes and receive an introduction to the MyCC student portal, as well as a New Student checklist of the steps involved in the enrollment process. And finally, students participate in orientation where they receive an overview of the College and their program of study and connect with program chairs and student support staff. Going forward an online orientation and onboarding option will be developed as well as a targeted redesign of the student portal (MyCC).

### **Success Coaching Model**

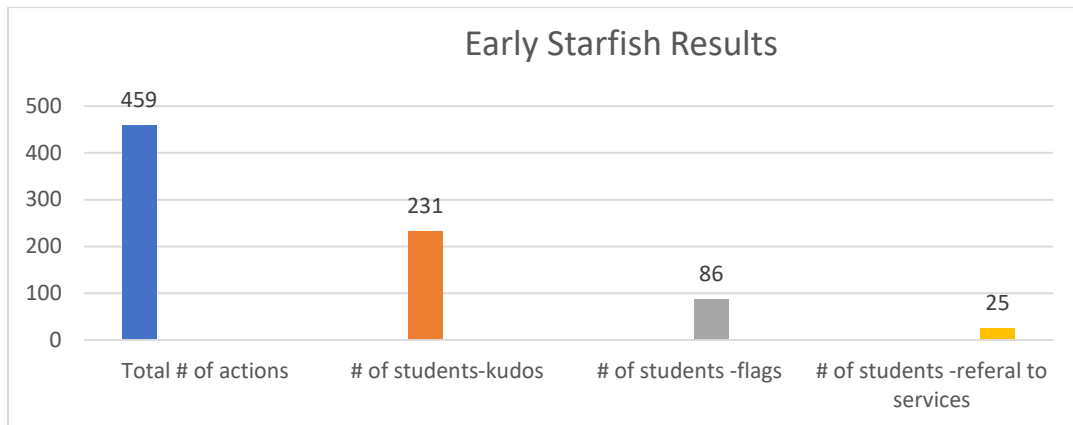
An important feature of the project is rigorous coaching. To that end, three success coaches, two full-time and one part-time, were hired with offices located next to the prominent One-Stop. In preparation for the development of the coaching model, the implementation team conducted a review of best practices and created a reference manual used for coach orientation, as well as continued training and development. After a four-week training and onboarding program, including job shadowing, coaches were certified by the National Tutoring Association. The coaching protocol ensures that all students have a personal success coach, assigned to them upon admission to the College, providing a single point of contact for information, assistance, and encouragement. Coaching services are based on the individual needs of the students, and coaches contact students regularly through their preferred medium (email, text, or phone) or in person.

Using a case management system accessed through the Student Success Platform, coaches urge students to schedule a minimum of three meetings during their first term. So far, the coaching system has proven invaluable.

### **Student Success Platform**

The Student Success Platform is largely centered on Starfish Early Alert and Connect, applications which were selected after a thorough review of various software options by a cross section of institutional constituency groups that included student affairs staff, advisors, and faculty. In preparation for the launch, student and staff data were uploaded into Starfish, followed by data quality checks and extensive testing of the platform. To promote the new system, a Starfish website was designed and published, Starfish training materials (handouts, videos, and live training) and promotional materials (flyers, posters, etc.) were developed, and communications were sent to staff, faculty, and students. Starfish Training included 4 live group training sessions with faculty, 6 live group training sessions for staff, and 60 classrooms visited to provide instruction, a massive effort across all campus locations.

Early data suggest an effective launch and training with 59 faculty using Starfish to raise flags or send kudos.





At the same time, success coaches conducted 141 coaching sessions, and tutors conducted 281 tutoring sessions, a tremendous effort to ensure student success. This data will be used as baseline data and comparisons will be made over the 5 year grant period.

### **Redesigned Student Portal**

And finally, reinforcement for student success is the development of a robust Student Portal. After a comprehensive review of the existing portal, recommendations for redesign were initiated. A significant accomplishment in year one was a single sign-on to the portal providing access to the online library, Starfish, registration, grades and all other services. Through a new Student Success Tab, students access Starfish, information about success coaching, tutoring, and academic and student services, all designed to improve the accessibility of timely student support to increase achievement and persistence.

### **Component Two: Reforming Curriculum and Instruction**

The second component of *Pathways to Persistence and Success*, focused on a single overarching initiative addressing the development of student learning outcomes across the curriculum.

### **Learning Outcomes**

To ground the work on student success, all program chairs at the School of Undergraduate Studies (SOU) participated in the development of college-wide outcomes under the leadership of the undergraduate dean. To begin the process, a team from the College that included the Activity Director, the staff of the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), and core full-time faculty attended the New England Assessment Conference. Thereafter, faculty decided that before assessment could begin the School needed to create and adopt a set of school-wide outcomes based on the

following core values reflective of the goals of the College: mutuality, authenticity, mission-centric, holistic, respect, creativity, flexibility, and personalization, leading to the ideal: innovation, diversity, excellence, access and lifelong learning. With the clarification of these core values, the proposed outcome statement developed is as follows:

In the interest of cultivating a mutually supportive, intellectually flexible, and ethically grounded student body, the School of Undergraduate Studies has identified the following school-wide outcomes for all graduates:

Successful students will:

- Approach complex issues through balanced intellectual consideration
- Demonstrate the ability to work collaboratively in highly diverse environments
- Express intellectual curiosity and a commitment to lifelong learning; and
- Communicate professionally and effectively.

Current efforts are underway to share these outcomes with the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, as the Project Team continues to address the issues of specificity and measurability. Once approved, faculty will review course maps to determine where these outcomes are reflected at the programmatic level followed by the development of assessments, the identification of assessment tools, and the collection and analysis of course data leading to potential curricular changes in targeted Cohort 1 programs and courses. This component has taken a significant leap forward on a journey that will continue for the next four years.

### **Outcomes**

In the overall, the first year has provided a very active, purpose-driven experience involving essentially the entire College community which resulted in the development and implementation of several key initiatives characterized by effective leadership and strong commitment. While no impact was anticipated this first year, in truth, 70 students

participated in the Enhanced Assessment and Onboarding Process and fall-to-fall persistence increased by four percentage points, from the baseline of 56% to 60%. Moreover, student engagement in planning for Life and Career Goals increased by eight percentage points, from 42% to 50% as measured by the *College Student Inventory* (CSI). Clearly, the success of this first year bodes well for continued success in successive years of the Activity.

### **Project Management**

Cambridge College's Title III project is strategically managed and fully integrated into the institutional structure, with the President of the College, Deborah Jackson, assuming overall leadership responsibility. The Title III Project Coordinator, Jerry Ice, reports directly to the President on the project with oversight for academic and student services, and works with the Activity Director, Tracy McLaughlin, to provide effective project management. The Project Coordinator's responsibilities include the organization, management, and oversight of the project in its entirety with full authority and autonomy to administer the project, managing all project initiatives, expenditures and personnel. In this capacity, he promulgates Title III policies and procedures, establishes and supervises data collection and reporting, approves all grant expenditures, oversees the evaluation process, and engages the College community's support for the project. Dr. Ice also serves as the institutional liaison with the Program Officer, Yolande Badarou.

A Title III Steering Committee, consisting of the executive staff provides high level oversight for the project, assesses progress quarterly, and provides input on implementation, modifications, and policy decisions as needed, addressing issues impeding progress as well as opportunities to accelerate and enhance impact.

Additionally, an actively engaged Title III Task Force that includes key stakeholders and is chaired by the Activity Director, meets monthly with direct responsibility for all components of the Activity, addressing project tasks and refining implementation strategies to meet challenges and ensure progress within the Cambridge College culture.

Both components of the Activity – *Transforming the Student Experience* and *Reforming Curriculum and Instruction* – are incorporated under the direct supervision of the appropriate institutional administrators. Guided by the *Title III Policies and Procedures Handbook*, developed to ensure effective project management, staff hired for Title III positions are selected in accordance with established hiring procedures at the College, with position descriptions on file for all program personnel. Those paid directly by the project or contributing their time in accordance with the project plan also maintain time and effort tallies to document their efforts as required by federal regulations.

All program expenditures are initiated by the appropriate individuals and processed through the Activity Director, approved by the appropriate College officers, and reviewed by the Title III Project Coordinator prior to submission to the Business Office for processing to ensure compliance with the approved budget. Both the Title III Project Coordinator and the Vice President of Administration and Finance or his designee approve all program expenditures to ensure compliance with federal and state regulations. Program records are maintained in the Business Office under proper standards of accounting, and the Title III Project Coordinator has direct electronic access to current statements at any time.

Prior to the start of the project the baseline database was established and all relevant data stored in a data warehouse to ensure appropriate benchmarks throughout the

implementation of the project. A comprehensive evaluation plan outlines the data to be examined to assess increased integration and accessibility, improved course completion, and increased persistence and retention to graduation. Additional metrics and predictive models may also be developed to augment the assessments outlined in the evaluation plan in the future as project implementation proceeds and the focus on impact intensifies.

Reports addressing program accomplishments are prepared monthly and shared with the President and the Steering Committee with presentations made at college-wide meetings and convocations. A Title III portal houses the project implementation plan and artifacts of the implementation process, including minutes of meetings, reports, and other documents, such as the annual performance and evaluation reports. And the first of many informative briefs on the project, *The SUCCESS CONNECTION*, has been released – a glossy eight-page update on all of the initiatives undertaken in the inaugural year. Clearly the project is fully integrated into the institution with widespread involvement and extensive support across all four campus locations from Massachusetts to California.

The budget negotiated for the first year of project implementation was \$449,395; during the first year, \$355,950.83 was spent leaving a balance of 93,444.17 to be carried over into the second year of project implementation. Going forward, the budget for the second year of implementation is \$449,733.00; with the carryover, \$543,177.178 is available to ensure the success of the implementation plan, fueling additional investments in the expansion of professional development opportunities to accelerate the approval, assessment, and integration of school-wide outcomes across the curriculum.

### **Conclusions, Commendations, and Recommendations**

Now at the end of the first year, *Pathways to Persistence and Success* has only begun to change the Cambridge College experience! The project is thoughtfully managed by an enthusiastic Title III leadership team under the guidance of Jerry Ice, Title III Project Coordinator, and Tracy McLaughlin, Activity Director, both highly regarded professionals fully engaged in the Cambridge College community. Key to the success of the effort is the full support of the College's President, Deborah Jackson, and the ubiquitous support of the Cambridge College faculty and staff. Critical decisions made to date regarding the selection and implementation of Starfish, along with progress made in the articulation of school-wide outcomes provides a solid foundation upon which the team can build for the future.

The first year of a Title III project always brings both challenges to be addressed and possibilities to be maximized. At Cambridge College the Starfish implementation was beautifully orchestrated, from the review of potential systems to the selection involving all key stakeholders to the integration with Jenzabar as the enterprise system and the training and development of all key users. Moreover, virtually all teaching faculty, both full and part-time, used the system out of the gate! Terrific! But it didn't stop there as a new coaching team picked up the alerts and moved forward apace to connect with students and address the issues and concerns compromising their progress. Bravo! At the same time, the faculty dove into the issue of school-wide outcomes, articulating both core values and outcomes with virtually everyone aboard – no small task! Going forward both of these key initiatives will continue to develop and expand, with the full involvement of the College community – just what is needed to ensure

increased student success and institutional vitality! To fuel intensive development into year two, the following recommendations might be considered to accelerate impact:

- First, the important work accomplished in the first year through Component One: Transforming the Student Experience will continue with training and professional development. To accelerate this effort the Project Team is encouraged to develop a state-of-the-art online orientation and training initiative which engages all faculty, both full-time and adjunct.
- Second, the identification of school-wide outcomes should move apace through the approval and implementation process with all faculty engaged in the mapping and assessment of outcomes in Cohort 1 programs.
- Third, as the Center for Career and Professional Development expands, it should be most useful in developing ways in which to bring career exploration forward into the first-year experience.
- Fourth, as part of the professional development activity, best practices presentations either live or online should feature effective users of new systems and approaches within the community, providing links to support and sustain peer contact to expand adoption.
- And, last but not least, investments should be made to improve technology by ensuring the capacity of Jenzabar to support Starfish through full implementation, including planning, communications, and reporting functionality, as well as a financial alert followed by insertion into the course syllabus template.

The Title III Team has a tiger by the tail and appears to be thriving on the challenge! *Pathways to Persistence and Success* has invited all members of the College community to pool their considerable talents on behalf of the students. The refinement of the enrollment process has already had an impact on persistence, while the development of school-wide learning outcomes begins to infuse curricula and the strategic expansion of the technological infrastructure promotes genuine collaboration. This is intense change with tremendous promise to transform the student experience at Cambridge College with all constituents at all campuses benefitting from improved technology, focused

communications, expanded professional development and training, increasing insight and collaboration.

Cambridge College has taken a huge step forward; now the challenge is to see just how far you can take the transformation! Congratulations on a terrific inaugural year!