ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

Tiffany Minard

The Graduate School

Morehead State University

April 16, 2020

PROJECT ELEVATION: AN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR A STUDENT
RETENTION PROGRAM

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Abstract of Capstone

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
College of Education
At Morehead State University

By

Tiffany S. Minard

Cincinnati, Ohio

Committee Chair: Lee Nabb, Associate Professor

Morehead, Kentucky

April 16, 2020

ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

PROJECT ELEVATION: AN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR A STUDENT
RETENTION PROGRAM

Financially challenged students with dependents face substantial hardships, which interfere with their academic success. Due to financial hardships, many students drop out of college. High dropout rates negatively impact student retention rates at higher education institutions. Research confirms that the majority of higher education institutions have retention programs, but these programs do not address student financial barriers, and student retention rates continue to decline. A review of the literature identifies why students drop out of college, reviews different types of retention programs, identifies strategies to increase student retention rates, and reviews recommended program development strategies. Based on the literature review findings, I implemented a financial support student retention program at Gateway Community and Technical College. I present a proposal to create a guide for implementing a financial student support retention program for higher education institutions.

KEYWORDS: retention, engagement, financial support, at-risk, case management

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PROJECT ELEVATION: AN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR A STUDENT
RETENTION AND ENGAGMENT PROGRAM

By

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DEDICATION

I thank God for giving me the strength, knowledge, and determination to complete this capstone. I dedicate this capstone to my parents and siblings for supporting me in my efforts to complete my doctorate program. They have been my backbone all of my life, and I greatly appreciate them. My parents have always encouraged me to never give up, they have served as great role models, and they inspire me to keep moving forward. My two sisters have always been there to give me advice and empower me to be the best version of myself. I would also like to dedicate this capstone to all the staff who work in student development services at higher education institutions.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF MODULES

Executive Summary

What Is the Core of the Capstone?

Higher education has been an accepted form of continued education and professional development for years. Education requirements are increasing in the workforce and forcing adults to pursue higher education. Adult learners' goal is to complete certificates or diplomas in their desired fields. However, today's college students face many burdens while attending college. Students' academic success can be negatively influenced by their nonacademic struggles. The review of literature shows financial challenges as the leading nonacademic struggle adult learners face (Zhang, 2013). There are many retention programs implemented in higher education. However, the review of the literature indicates that retention programs do not address students' individual financial needs effectively (Wu, 2015).

For the capstone, I developed an implementation guide for a financial support retention program called Project Elevation. Project Elevation was implemented at Gateway Community and Technical College. I created a guide for other institutions to implement Project Elevation. The guide includes, but is not limited to, an overview of the program, the mission, engagement strategies, target populations, primary program goals, suggested partnerships, program structure, and strategic meeting agendas for planning.

Problem statement. Many higher education institutions have a difficult time retaining adult learners. Not retaining students negatively impacts the financial stability of institutions (Mitchell & King, 2018). Gateway Community and Technical

College reported the college was suffering from low student retention rates. The college has a high number of students who are considered nontraditional (Duke-Benfield & Saunders, 2016). Nontraditional students are those students who did not attend college right after high school, working students, and students who have children (Duke-Benfield & Saunders, 2016). Nontraditional students are often labeled at risk of not completing college credentials due to nonacademic barriers, such as poor finances. Researchers have found that nonacademic barriers affect students' grades more than academic barriers (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2011). Duke-Benfield and Saunder (2016) noted that most of the students enrolled at Gateway are considered low-income.

Gateway needed a retention program to address and eliminate students' financial barriers. Bonet and Walters (2016) found that college students' financial barriers included childcare, housing, and food insecurity. Students often turn to student loans to help pay bills and for other financial needs while in school. Student financial aid was embedded in institutions to help students pay for college. Grant funding use to be offered in larger dollar amounts. Grants are considered government funding that students do not have to pay back. Students who received grants were motivated to complete their college degree. However, over the years, grant funding has decreased, and college students are forced to take out student loans (Chen & Hossler, 2017).

Students need financial funding outside of student loans. Research has indicated that student loan debt affects students' academic success and students stress

about not being able to pay off their student loan debt. The stress of student loan debt causes students to have less focus on their academics, and the lack of focus is reflected in their test scores and homework assignments. Eventually, students drop out of school with no motivation to complete credentials (Zhang, 2013). Researchers have recommended that college campuses implement on-campus financial support retention programs. Researchers reported that implementing such programs minimizes students' financial stressors and helps retain students (Britt, Cumbie, & Bell, 2013).

According to Mitchell and King (2018), student development services is the central location for retention programs. Students are often referred to student development services when they need nonacademic financial resources. Student development services are the least supported sector at higher education institutions (Reynolds, 2011). Staff who work for development services are left with little to no resources to implement retention programs. Mitchell and King (2018) stated that higher education institutions have not mastered implementation of strategic retention programs. Program development is an essential part of student development services. Staff and administrators who work in student development services need program development knowledge, which contributes to the ability of institutions to keep students in school until they graduate.

Purpose. Counseling staff at Gateway often work with students who need housing, food, and childcare resources. The common denominator between these students was their financial challenges. Duke-Benfield and Saunders (2016) noted

that college students who are considered low-income take out over $16,833 a year to pay for college. The money they take out for tuition does not cover their living expenses. Counseling staff noticed the impact that students' finances had on their academic success. Students were dropping out of classes frequently due to their lack of financial resources. According to Katrevich and Aruguete (2017), a lack of funds intensifies students' stress levels. Increased stress levels take away students' ability to successfully complete classes.

Half of the students who had financial barriers showed great money management skills. They paid their bills on time and spent their money wisely. However, they did not have much money left over to pay for other living expenses. Duke-Benfield and Saunders (2016) mentioned that students who depended on childcare were not able to pay their childcare bills. This resulted in these students missing classes. Many of these students also had to access the counseling department's food resources to feed their families. Other students showed poor money management skills. They had money at some point but were irresponsible with their spending. They neglected to pay their bills and needed additional assistance. A large majority of these students also dropped out of school due their financial stressors (Duke-Benfield & Saunders, 2016).

In 2011, Gateway's counseling department implemented a student success emergency fund program. The program was implemented to help fill the gaps in students' financial needs. The program allowed students to access loans up to $150.00. Funds from the loan could be used for utility bills, transportation, housing,

school, or mental health services. Basically, the funds address the nonacademic

financial barriers that students face daily. Students are required to pay loans back by

the time they graduate from the college. Students can set up payment plans to make

payment arrangements. However, students are encouraged to pay the funds back

when they receive their financial aid refund check. Students do not directly receive

money from the college to pay their bills. The college's foundation department makes

all payments. This helps the college ensure students spend the funds appropriately.

The student success emergency fund application references this intent to ensure funds

go directly to companies for payment.

      To be considered for emergency funds, students must be enrolled in at least

one academic credit hour, have completed at least one semester at Gateway

Community and Technical College, and have a 2.0 grade point average. Faculty or

staff can refer students to the program. Referrals are sent to counseling staff through

an online referral system or by emailing counseling staff directly. In addition,

students can request to complete the application by contacting the counseling staff.

Students must complete an application process to be considered for funding. The

approval process can take up to 72 business hours. However, it typically only takes

one day. For the application process, students must do the following:

- Complete an online application stating why the student needs funds, how the
  student can prevent the need for emergency funds in the future, and how the
  student plans to pay the funds back.

- Upload an attachment of the billing statement that needs to be paid.

- Sign an authorization of release of information form. The release form allows counseling staff to verify the student's information and gives Gateway Community and Technical College permission to contact vendors and make payments on behalf of the student.

- Complete an online financial literacy course called Cash Course. Cash Course teaches the student how to better manage money, plan for emergencies, and outlines strategies for saving money. The online course takes one hour to complete and assesses the student's spending habits ("CashCourse," 2018).

After the application is completed, two counseling staff and the student success coach review students' documented needs in their application. Student's needs must meet the student emergency fund qualifications. The emergency fund's qualified needs include housing needs, transportation needs, medical care, childcare, or food insecurity. After reviewing the applications, staff approve or reject students' requests and contact them by phone and email. Applications are rejected if students do not meet the student emergency fund qualifications and if students do not complete the application process.

The student emergency fund financially helped 75 students in 2016 and 57 students in 2017. However, there are some limitations to the program. First, the fund is extremely underfunded and does not fulfill the majority of students' financial needs. For example, students can access the emergency fund to pay their electric bills.

If the bill is $250, the emergency fund can only pay $150 of the balance. This leaves

the student with $100 more to pay on the bill. If a student owes more than $150,

Gateway Community and Technical College requires the student to pay the portion of

the bill exceeding $150 first. If the student cannot pay that portion of the bill,

Gateway Community and Technical College cannot make a payment on behalf of the

student. This policy is in place to eliminate partial payments. According to Hassler,

Meyer, and Seldin (1963), partial payments have late payment consequences and

result in people paying more than the initial balance due amounts. Partial payments

also still affect people's credit ratings.

The counseling department houses the student resource program. Students are

referred to student resources for help with financial barriers. The student resource

program helps students find community resources that can possibly assist with bill

payments. The program also has peer mentors who provide case management

services. The peer mentors are federal work-study students and they report to the

student success coach. The student success coach provides peer mentors with

extensive training for the position. Peer mentors are trained to assess students' needs

and refer them to appropriate resources. Peer mentors refer students mainly to

government-funded agencies with limited capital available to the community. Often,

students are not able to use the community resources due to agencies' lack of funding.

Second, the funds are loans, and loans are not the best means for financial

resolution for students. According to Tran, Mintert, Llamas, and Lam (2018), loan

debt causes mental decline among students. The more money they owe, the less they

are able to focus. The researchers noted that adults with student loans experience the

highest amount of stress due to financial debt compared to other adults. The student

emergency fund requires students to pay the loan back while they are in school. Wu

(2015) found that some students must make payments on their student loans while

they are attending school. Therefore, students at Gateway Community and Technical

College who access the student emergency fund have two loans they are required to

pay back while in school. According to Solis and Ferguson (2017), students fear they

will never be financially stable enough to pay their loans back. The student

emergency fund is another financial debt that hangs over students' head.

Third, the online financial literacy course does not provide peer-to-peer

interaction or interaction with a facilitator. Seyedian and Yi (2011) indicated that

financial literacy for college students is more important now than ever before. Due to

the increase in college tuition, students are depending on credit cards and loans

without understanding the financial consequences. In person, financial literacy

workshops give students the education needed to make better money management

decisions. Students need an opportunity to ask a financial advisor questions and get

feedback on their progress. Student learning is influenced by peer-to-peer

engagement, which increases students' motivation.

Due to these limitations, I wanted to implement a program to address

students' financial gaps related to housing, transportation, childcare, and food

insecurity. Therefore, I implemented a program called Project Elevation. The goal of

the program was to offer an on-campus financial retention program that provided

students with funding for their financial needs, financial literacy, financial coaching, and financial resources. Project Elevation was designed to support Gateway Community and Technical College's efforts to retain students because retention rates are higher for students who receive financial support and resources than for students who do not receive financial support and resources (Britt et al., 2013). To examine this statement, the following questions were considered: (1) can connecting students to financial resources increase student retention? and (2) what nonacademic financial support services are needed on college campuses?

Literature review. Student retention has become a leading concern for higher education institutions. Student retention is defined as the consistency of students registering for school, attending classes, completing classes with passing grades, and receiving credentials such as diplomas or certificates (Eitzen, Kinney & Grillo, 2016). According to Wilson et al. (2016), student retention rates continue to decrease rapidly and improving them is not an easy task. Low retention rates negatively affect higher education institutions. High student retention rates keep schools afloat since retention affects the financial stability of schools. The top sources of income for institutions are tuition and campus fees. Higher education institutions face financial hardship when they do not retain students (Solis & Ferguson, 2017).

Mitchell and King (2018) concluded that "enrollment is code for revenue. It describes the full range of admission and financial aid that define an institution's ability to put students in their seats. If enrollment is code for revenue, then student life is code for retention" (p. 37). Student life is a value added to students' college

experiences. Often, students will stay in school when they are pleased with their

student life experiences. Student satisfaction levels increase motivation, performance,

and retention. Institutions are responsible for offering quality services, which leads to

student satisfaction (Sasso & DeVitis, 2015). However, institutions struggle with

identifying strategies that satisfy students' needs, and this causes students to drop out

of school (Wilson el al., 2016).

Caffarella (2002) indicated that knowing the targeted population's needs is

essential to implementing programs. Knowing the population being served is a way to

tailor services that can minimize their needs. Institutions should conduct student

needs assessments to determine necessary services for retention (Vella, 2000).

According to Caffarella and Daffron (2013), needs assessments help program

developers identify student issues. Program developers should never assume they

know what students need. Students need services that can resolve their barriers.

Without identifying the needs of students, program developers will continue to fail to

address the issues at hand.

Caffarella and Daffron (2013) noted several steps that need to be taken when

creating a needs assessment. First, developers need to create questions that will

capture the needs of students. Brainstorming ideas with other professionals helps with

gathering information about questions to ask. Second, developers must consider the

target population and determine how much time students will have available to

participate in assessments. This step helps identify what type of assessment tool to

use. The most common tools used for assessments are questionnaires, observations, individual interviews, and group interviews.

The information collected, time available, and population will help developers determine which tool is best to collect data. Third, developers need to consider whether other staff members need to be involved in the assessment process and what their roles will be. For example, some institutions have a knowledge management department. Staff who work in this department analyze and sort assessment results and conduct analysis summaries. At least one staff person from the knowledge management department would need to collect data and evaluate the results (Mohamad, Manning, & Tatnall, 2012). After conducting a needs assessment, program developers should be able to identify goals they need to accomplish. The goals are responses to the barriers that the analysis indicated are top concerns. However, one individual should not address students' needs or implement a program solo (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).

According to Fogler and LeBlanc (2014), in addition to working with other staff during the assessment process, developers should also work with a team to implement programs. They should identify key players such as community partners, professors from different programs, and staff from different departments. Key players are people who play significant roles in students' success or people who have knowledge in areas that will benefit programs. People with different educational backgrounds and experiences bring different perspectives to problem solving, which is an essential component of building effective teams (Fogler & LeBlanc, 2014).

According to Caffarella and Daffron (2013), teams in higher education are often called advisory committees. To build an effective committee, program developers should allow time for team members to build relationships with each other. Relationship building helps teams with open communication, and members tend to feel comfortable offering suggestions. For program development, advisory committees are charged with the responsibility of developing the program goals, identifying the target population, determining the direction and structure of the program, and approving the content of the program.

Morrow and Ackermann (2012) noted that, in general, fewer students return to school and more students are not completing academic credentials. They found that colleges have been unsuccessful in identifying the exact reasons why students drop out of school. Researchers have found that earlier studies based on retention focused on academics only. Administrators did not consider nonacademic barriers as potential threats to student retention (Forsman, Linder, Moll, Fraser, & Anderson, 2014).

According to Harrell and Reglin (2018), institutions used to put more focus on academic support because academic structure was seen as the only reason for high dropout rates. Institutions made changes to improve academics by advancing tutoring services, improving program curricula, and revamping library services. However, students continued to drop out of school at high rates. Within the last decade, institutional administrators found that students drop out of school for both academic and nonacademic issues, and they were not considering all the factors that caused students to drop out of school.

Why students drop out of college. Heublein's (2014) review of the literature indicated that many studies examine why students drop out of college and do not complete credentials. Although some studies consider the student dropout rates of all students, the majority of the studies reference adult learners as the primary focus. Adult learners face many different challenges that interfere with their academic success. Some of their challenges include lack of support from others, lack of flexibility in their schedules, and financial challenges. Most adult learners are considered nontraditional students: adults who have been out of grade school for years, adults who have dependents in their homes, and adults who work for a living. Nontraditional students often face more nonacademic barriers due to their everyday life demands.

Sullivan and Pagano (2012) found that nontraditional students lack support. Nontraditional students struggle with finding others in their personal lives who understand college demands, and these students feel isolated during their college journey as a result. If students do not have connections to their schools, they have a difficult time building relationships to gain support. When students feel supported by peers, faculty, and staff, they are motivated to stay in school (Barouch-Gilbert, 2016).

Building support systems on campus is a form of student engagement. Student engagement includes getting students involved in the resources, activities, social gatherings, support networks, and services that institutions have to offer (Eitzen, Kinney & Grillo, 2016). Lack of engagement affects student retention, which is one of the reasons why nontraditional students drop out of school. Another challenge for

nontraditional students in building support systems is that they usually live off

campus. When students live off campus, it lessens their time and ability to connect

with people and make new friends (Sasso & DeVitis, 2015).

Nontraditional college students have demanding schedules due to their many

responsibilities. Aside from school, they have other obligations that take priority.

Students with children have to deal with the responsibilities of parenting. They have

to attend parent-teacher conferences and their children's afterschool activities, help

their children with their homework, and go to their children's doctors' appointments

(Rosario et al., 2014). Moreover, they have to take care of their homes by cleaning,

washing clothes, and cooking for their families. Those who work have to maintain

weekly work schedules and work required hours. Both job demands and home life

interfere with students' school schedules and limit the time available to complete

homework assignments (Lee & Matusovich, 2016).

In addition, some colleges do not offer courses during evening hours, causing

students to miss classes due to work or miss work due to classes (Oreški, Hajdin, &

Kliček, 2016). Hovdhaugen et al. (2013) noted that interference with school

ultimately causes students to drop out of school. They also found that students at

some institutions do not feel their institutions make the effort to keep them enrolled in

school. They found this plays a factor in students' feelings that they are forced to drop

out of school without receiving credentials.

Nontraditional students face financial challenges due to expenses such as

childcare, food, transportation, housing, and utility bills. Solis and Ferguson (2017)

identified finances as the leading cause of student dropout. Financial challenges are

often due to students not making enough money to cover their everyday living

expenses or not spending their money responsibly (Britt et al., 2013). Zhang (2013)

found that when students cannot pay for their everyday living expenses, such as

childcare, they are not able to attend classes, which causes them to drop out. Haiyang

and Volpe (2002) found that financial literacy for students is important because many

college students lack financial management skills, and students often take out

additional student loans for pleasure activities such as vacations. Students who have

nonacademic financial barriers often display irresponsible financial behaviors (Britt et

al., 2013, p. 178). Research indicates that student loan debt affects the lifestyle

choices and academic success of students. Student loan debt affects their lifestyle

choices because it creates a barrier to financial resources, and people with student

loans face challenges in obtaining financing for home and car loans (Zhang, 2013).

Students' academics suffer because they worry about paying their loans back. College

administrators recognize finances as a stress factor in students' lives. They believe

retention programs for financial barriers would benefit students (Sages, Britt, &

Cumbie, 2013).

   Student retention historical background. To fully understand the impact

retention has on student success, identifying the most profound retention strategies

used historically is important. Studies have identified the student integration model

and the student attrition model as the most impactful strategies to increase student

success (Cabrera & Castaneda, 1992). According to Forsman et al. (2014), the work

of Spady (1970) addressed integration from a social standpoint and suggested that

students should experience social connections. Social connections are considered a

form of social support, which includes interactions with peers, faculty, staff, and the

campus community (Sullivan & Pagano, 2012). The attrition model, developed by

Bean (1980), addressed nonacademic barriers that interfere with students' success.

Nonacademic barriers include childcare issues, finances, housing, and other factors

not associated with school. Research to identify whether external factors or

institutional factors affect student retention has indicated that many student retention

issues are due to external factors (Bonet & Walters, 2016; Tinto, 1997).

　　　Existing student retention programs. According to Katrevich and Aruguete

(2017), some institutions have recognized that schools need more retention programs.

The researchers noted that external factors are significant elements that need to be

addressed in retention programs. A review of programs will identify retention

program strategies that were used to improve student retention in higher education. In

addition, the retention strategies used in these different programs address the reasons

why students drop out of school. When reviewing programs that have been

implemented in the past, what has already been done to address students' barriers is

important to note.

　　　Sullivan and Pagano (2012) created a case study based on Alaska Pacific

University's student retention program called the Rural Alaska Native Adult Distance

Education Program (RANA). The program helped rural Alaska Native students build

social connections. The program required students to attend short in-person meetings

to increase peer-to-peer relationships (Sullivan & Pagano, 2012). Building

connections at school is an essential component of student life. Students who build

social connections with their peers increase their support system (Jamelske, 2009).

Fontaine (2014) reported that socialization for students helped them gain a sense of

belonging on their college campuses and helped them feel supported. According to

Heublein (2014), students need social connections to their college campuses,

including to faculty, staff, and peers. This type of support increases students'

academic success, despite the challenges they may face, and increases students'

abilities to get guidance, since they have opportunities to build relationships with

trusting groups of friends, professors, staff, and administrators who understand their

struggles (Masika & Jones, 2016).

Online communication has been another strategy to help RANA students build

social connections. Students were required to participate in online engagement

activities weekly to help them build peer-to-peer relationshippeers, and faculty-to-

student relationships. Engagement was encouraged by using a discussion board

format (Sullivan & Pagano, 2012). This approach has been shown to increase student

retention (Jamelske, 2009). Students need to receive ongoing online communication

from peers; staff, and professors to keep them engaged with the campus community

(De Freitas et al., 2015). In order to be successful, the online engagement component

must provide students with strategic online teaching, learning, and support tools.

According to Travers (2016), professors, staff, and administrators need to have

prompt responses to students' questions and provide prompt feedback to improve

retention. Lack of prompt responses results in students not getting the direction they need to be successful. In addition, helping students learn effective time management skills is an essential strategy that helps with retention. Students who have good time management have a sense of empowerment and feel they have control over their lives.

In addition to social connections, Alaska Pacific University adjusted its programs to fit students' schedules by offering flexible class scheduling. Students were aware of course offerings two years in advance. Sullivan and Pagano (2012) reported that the university offering flexible course schedules resulted in better student attendance. This adjustment allowed students to overcome their nonacademic barriers by planning in advance. For example, students were able to make necessary arrangements for childcare. Programs that help students to address their nonacademic barriers show that the institutions care about their students' success (Mitchell & King, 2018). Implementing flexible scheduling and helping students connect with their peers increased the university's student retention rates. The student retention rates increased because the institution was willing to assist their students in balancing school and their personal lives (Ferrell & DeCrane, 2016).

According to Caffarella and Daffron (2013), marketing campaigns are a key component to advertising. Campaigns should be conducted for all programs. Program developers have to determine the form of marketing that works best for their targeted population. Different forms of marketing include social media, printed materials, and word-of-mouth communications. Emphasis on marketing is even more important for

programs that are voluntary and do not require students to participate. Nontraditional

students often report that finding additional time to participate in programs is hard

(Lee & Matusovich, 2016). They typically do not volunteer unless programs

accommodate their nontraditional needs. Programs must promote their services

proactively to grasp students' attention (Rosario et al., 2014). For successful student

recruitment, understanding the target audience and identifying where they are likely

to see marketing materials are essential (Caffarella, 2002).

   Sullivan and Pagano (2012) noted that recruitment for the RANA program

was difficult. Program developers commonly struggle with recruiting students for

their programs. Program developers often lack knowledge of successful strategies to

get students to participate in student retention programs (Sasso & DeVitis, 2015). The

RANA program started with only 15 participants. They decided to include program

recruitment as part of the university's admissions department initiative. Moreover,

"recruitment efforts expanded to involve more RANA promotion at events and

forums within a fifty-mile radius of Anchorage, advertising placements on radio

stations and markets located on the highway" (Sullivan & Pagano, 2012, p. 26).

   Sullivan and Pagano's (2012) RANA study assisted students with retention

services and support. Researchers have found that implementing an online component

to retention programs assists students in feeling connected to the campus community

(Torres-Díaz, Duart, Gómez-Alvaro, & Marin-Gutiérrez, 2016). According to

Sullivan and Pagano (2012), online engagement such as a discussion board and

ongoing communications with peers, campus staff, and professors made the program

successful, and providing students with a two-year course schedule was beneficial for nontraditional students. Still, the research had some weaknesses. The researchers failed to discuss how the program's success was measured, and they did not outline the steps they took to collect data. The program also faced some enrollment challenges. However, the program staff was able to identify recruitment errors and implemented an additional student recruitment plan (Sullivan & Pagan, 2012).

Jacobs (2016) investigated a pre-semester student retention program for students in the nursing program at a community college. The purpose of this study was to assess whether students benefited from receiving information about their school prior to classes starting. This included information regarding support services, student life, college expectations, and college success. Pre-semester workshops provided students with a grounded foundation to succeed in college. Students who were more aware of support services, academic expectations, study skills, and other student success tips tended to be more successful (Thomas, 2011). Students' first year in college is one of the most significant periods in their education, and engaging students before school starts helps them prepare for college life. Making the transition from not attending to attending college is a noteworthy step that needs attention. Jacobs (2016) indicated that students who have been out of school for a while are likely to have nonacademic barriers that need attention as soon as possible to prevent them from dropping out. The sooner nonacademic barriers are addressed the higher students' chances are to be successful in school.

Therefore, assisting students with minimizing their nonacademic barriers helps them have a smooth transition into college and increases student retention rates (Wilson et al., 2016). Similar to Sullivan and Pagano (2012), Jacobs (2016) focused on students building relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. According to Collings, Swanson, and Watkins (2014), retention programs need to include peer-to-peer interactions to keep students engaged. The support of faculty and staff improves the quality of students' academic experience. Peer mentors help students by boosting their self-esteem and confidence, and students increase their social connections when they have high confidence. Jacobs (2016) assessed whether the confidence levels of students had an impact on their academic success. The findings indicated that students confident in their abilities have higher academic success rates. Another study noted that high levels of self-efficacy enables students to overcome negative feelings because self-efficacy gives students a high tolerance for difficulties (Marghitan, Gavrila, & Tulbure, 2017).

Research has shown that nontraditional students benefit from campus engagement within the first few weeks after classes start. Capturing students within the first few weeks of school has increased students' ability to graduate (Wilson et al., 2016). Therefore, students are more likely to be successful the sooner they are able to gain exposure to their institution, learn about the campus community and make connections, meet the faculty, and understand the resources available to them. Orientations and pre-semester workshops should include interactive activities to

familiarize students with academic expectations and the curriculum (Shankar, Karki, Thapa, & Singh, 2012).

Bonet and Walters (2016) implemented a student retention and engagement program at a community college. They created the program to better serve students enrolled in developmental courses. Developmental courses are for students whose academic work does not meet college-level work standards. Often students who have been out of school for a while lack the ability to perform college-level work and need to take basic writing, English, and math courses to prepare them for college-level work. One component of the support the program offered to students included learning communities.

Learning communities involve putting students in small groups with peers who have common academic and personal needs. Learning communities increased students' abilities to establish profound connections with their peers, and giving students time to become acquainted helped establish a learning environment. Building friendships encouraged students to engage with each other, and they were able to motivate each other to attend classes. Learning communities help students develop their interpersonal skills by building friendships (Fontaine, 2014, p. 95). According to Bonet and Walters (2016), learning communities better prepare students, which is evident in students' engagement in their courses. They are more eager to attend classes due to their peer relationships, and they are able to build better relationships with faculty. Moreover, the retention rate each semester is higher, and students are more likely to graduate on time.

Bonet and Walters' (2016) retention and engagement program also provided support services to address students' financial and personal challenges. The researchers relied on prior research studies to identify the barriers students face. Based on the findings, students were given free bus tokens for public transportation as the increase in fuel prices affected students' ability to travel to campus to attend classes. Transportation barriers cause students stress and worry about their abilities to complete their academic requirements, and eliminating these barriers gives students better opportunities to attend classes (Sages et al., 2013). Bonet and Walters (2016) also gave students free books for their courses to help them better prepare for course requirements. However, difficulties in paying for their books appeared to be a nonacademic concern and not an academic concern. Students in this study were considered low-income and did not have the financial means to pay for their books.

Bonet and Walters' (2016) study consisted of 247 students. They found that students in learning communities are more likely to stay in school. Students also have higher grades due to the wraparound support they receive from peers, faculty, and staff. The researchers reported the program was successful due to the different approaches implemented, such as financial support, counseling services, and social connections and because the college retained students in the cohorts. Although the study was successful, there were some limitations. Researchers attempted to collect surveys from students and faculty, but they were not always successful in collecting surveys from participants. The researchers fell short in collecting data from all participants due to a lack of student participation. They were not able to collect

additional data in a follow-up survey because students submitted their surveys too late

and the researchers were not able to incorporate participants' feedback into the study.

In addition, the researchers provided students with resources for public transportation

and books, but they did not conduct an in-depth assessment to identify more

important barriers, such as housing needs and food insecurity.

   Program similarities and differences. All three programs addressed the

nonacademic barriers that hinder adult learners. Research has shown that students

lacking support is listed as one of the reasons retention rates suffer. Helping students

build connections to their campus communities was a common element of all three

programs (Fontaine, 2014). Sullivan and Pagano (2012) helped students build a

connection to their campus by implementing online communication. Faculty, staff,

and peers were able to engage in activities and learning experiences together. The

researchers also used in-person meetings to build peer relationships. Jacobs (2016)

concluded that students should build connections to their campus community prior to

school starting. His strategy of creating pre-semester workshops gave students an

opportunity to learn about campus life and services offered and to get to know the

people around them. Bonet and Walters (2016) used learning communities to help

students build peer relationships and connections to their campus communities.

   Another commonality is that researchers implemented two of the programs at

community colleges. Bonet and Walters (2016) noted that community college

students face more nonacademic barriers compared to four-year university students.

Jacobs (2016) found that community college students' first semesters are the most

vital. His program helped students to gain more information about their school and to

understand campus life. Similar to Bonet and Walters (2016), Jacobs (2016) indicated

community college students need additional interventions to help them succeed. Both

of these programs were successful in implementing nonacademic interventions at the

colleges.

Each program addressed different elements to resolve student retention issues.

Sullivan and Pagano's (2012) program addressed retention barriers by including

flexible course scheduling. The study indicated that adult learners have a difficult

time balancing their academic and personal lives. The RANA program's flexible

scheduling allowed students to attend classes, go to work, and take care of their home

life. Student retention rates increased due to the school's implementation of a two-

year advance course schedule. All of the retention programs included ways to

improve students' connections to their campus. However, the RANA program is the

only one that offered online communication. The online communication gave

students, faculty, and staff an opportunity to engage with each other off campus. They

were able to build a support network by incorporating online activities and the ability

to learn from each other remotely.

Bonet and Walters (2016) included a component in their program that the

other studies did not: financial support for students. They provided tokens to students

for public transportation and free books for their classes. The researchers failed to

conduct additional research to determine what other financial barriers their students

faced. Research shows that college students often do not have positive money

management skills and do not make enough money to sustain their everyday living expenses (Sages et al., 2013). However, this study did not address these matters.

Jacobs (2016) used a different approach by providing students with program information prior to attending classes or at the beginning of students' first semesters. The pre-semester orientation helped increase student retention by helping students become familiar with their institution. The orientation included information sessions to enhance students' connection with the campus community. Students had the opportunity to learn about campus life, study skills, and the college's expectations. In addition, the study examined students' confidence levels and the impact confidence had on students' success.

Summary. Based on the programs reviewed, retention programs are currently in place for flexible scheduling, to help students build connections to their campus communities, and for minimum financial support. However, student financial challenges are a leading cause of student dropout. Research shows that students stress over money, and financial barriers negatively affect their academic success. Students often do not have the funds to pay for daily expenses such as childcare, housing, and, transportation. Moreover, students often exhibit poor money management skills, which keeps them from paying their bills. Sages et al. (2013) indicated that college students would benefit from financial therapy.

Financial therapy should address students' money management and saving skills and provide in-depth resources for areas where they lack financial stability. A review of the literature indicates a lack of retention programs that address students'

individual financial challenges and provide resources to help educate and support

students around financial issues. Moreover, there is a lack of guidance for student

development staff about how to develop and provide these resources. Due to these

gaps in services, higher education institutions need student retention programs to

support students by providing them with financial literacy resources and other

financial resources and a guide to help staff implement these programs to increase

student retention.

Who is the Capstone Meant to Impact?

Project Elevation was designed to help students attending Gateway

Community and Technical College. The population targeted was financially

challenged students who had dependents in their home. The term *financially*

challenged refers to students who could not afford their everyday living expenses,

such as housing needs, transportation, childcare, utility bills, and food. Many of these

students faced issues like evictions and utility shutoffs. This population was the target

group due to the high level of financial barriers. The term *dependent* refers to at least

one additional person living in the household with a student. Dependents include

parents who are expecting a child, significant others, children, elderly family

members, adult children in college, disabled adult children, and roommates.

Project Elevation was marketed to students in Gateway Community and

Technical College's Ready to Work program. Ready to Work is grant funded and

strives to help low-income parents. According to Person, Pavetti, and Max (2008), the

program consists of several different elements. First, the program coordinates with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program.

TANF is a government-funded program to help students register for government benefits such as food stamps and health insurance. For food benefits, students are given a certain amount in food stamps per month. Often, the food stamps do not last students the entire month. These students frequently visited the on-campus food pantry for additional food assistance. Second, the program assists students with finding employment. Students can only work 20 hours a week. The limited hours students can work means they are not earning enough to cover expenses such as car repairs, gas, and diapers.

A researcher found that students' median yearly income was $16,686 (Porter, 2018). Third, participants must have custody of at least one child who lives in the home. This prerequisite corresponded with the Project Elevation's requirement that participants must have a dependent in the home. Fourth, Ready to Work is obligated to provide students with additional resources, such as financial support and low-income housing, to fill the gaps in government assistance (Person et al., 2008).

Project Elevation was implemented at a community Gateway Community and Technical College, where students did not live on campus. The targeted student population were all residents at a local subsidized housing program. Students were referred for the subsidized housing through Ready to Work. The housing program was established by a public housing agency called Neighborhood Foundation and a non-profit organization called Brighton Center. The housing program was developed

to offer financial support to students pursuing degrees from higher education institutions. Students were assigned to two- and three-bedroom apartments at no cost. The only requirement was that they to stay in school and pay their utility bills (Porter, 2018).

The capstone project was designed to help guide student development services staff. Student development staff members are responsible for offering effective retention services to students. Students feel comfortable approaching staff members due to their role in the college setting (Reynolds, 2011). Historically, the role of staff member has been focused on the well-being of students. However, researchers have noted that all staff do not possess the skills needed to offer the most beneficial retention services, and staff would benefit from training and program development guidance (Hevel, 2016).

The need for program development guidance is due to lack of direction and support from administrators. In addition, staff spend a significant amount of time defending the importance of and advocating for the need for their services. Unfortunately, student development services are not a priority in higher education, although the services and staff are key to student retention (Mitchell & King, 2018).

Context of the capstone. Project Elevation was implemented at Gateway Community and Technical College. Northern Kentucky is located near Cincinnati, Ohio, and is often considered part of the Cincinnati metropolitan area. Due to Gateway Community and Technical College's location, adults from surrounding counties attend the institution, including Boone, Campbell, Grant, Kenton, and

Pendleton counties. Each of these counties makes up a significant part of the region's

population (Porter, 2018). Gateway Community and Technical College has three

different campus. One campus is in Boone county. Another campus is in Edgewood,

Kentucky, which is in Kenton County.

The newest campus is in Covington, Kentucky, which is in Kenton County.

Academic programs are divided and housed at different campuses. For example, the

nursing program is located at the Edgewood campus and the business program is

located at the Boone campus. Students only attend the campus where their program is

housed for their core classes. For electives and prerequisite courses, students can

attend any of the three campuses.

Project Elevation was available to students at each campus. Project Elevation

offered services in different settings, such as classrooms, meeting rooms, group

rooms, training rooms, and conference rooms. These locations provided comfortable

and appropriate spaces needed to facilitate the program for note taking and group

activities. Each room setting included chairs, desk and tables, at least one computer

for presenters, and a projector.

How Was the Capstone Project Implemented?

I started the implementation process by conducting a needs assessment. I

conducted the needs assessment by distributing a nonacademic barrier survey to all

current students and all incoming students, which they completed at orientation. The

survey results revealed that the majority of the students were struggling financially.

Students reported they needed assistance with childcare, housing, transportation, and

food. To gain a clearer understanding for next steps, I developed an outline to identify

how the program registration process should be conducted and who would need to be

a part of the registration process. The outline started with the student application

process, when students complete the online applications. The outline included the

following:

Accepted students (after the applications are completed):

- The administrator (counseling staff) assigns each qualified student to a case

  manager.

- The case manager (peer mentor) contacts the student.

- The case manager informs the student that the student's application for the

  program was accepted.

- The case manager introduces themselves and informs the student about the

  role of the case manager.

- The case manager informs the student about the required student orientation

  (date, time, and location).

- The case manager follows up with the student via email and provides

  orientation information (date, time, and location).

Not accepted students (after the applications are completed):

- The administrator (counseling staff) assigns the student to a case manager.

- The case manager contacts the student who did not qualify for the program.

- The case manager informs the student that the student's application was not accepted.

- The case manager provides the student with some information about why the student's application was not accepted.

- The case manager provides the student with financial resources that the student can still access.

- The case manager provides the student with the online resource directory information for additional resources.

Critical thinking played a significant role in implementing the program. The program application was online and identified what resources students needed and who qualified for the program. The questions ensured the application captured the correct information. The questions on the application included the following:

1. What is your (the student's) name?

2. Do you have a dependent in your home?

3. Can you commit to this program for two years and meet once a month?

4. At which campus do you prefer to meet?

5. What are your financial goals?

6. What other resources do you need?

To ensure I successfully implemented the program, I invited key people to be part of a program committee. I selected individuals based on their key role in students' success (Fogler & LeBlanc, 2014). Counseling staff and the student success

coach who oversees the student resource program were the initial committee members. At the first team meeting, I informed members about the purpose of the program and how the program would benefit students and impact the college (Fogler & LeBlanc, 2014). The committee meetings took place biweekly for four months and once a month for four months.

I created a meeting agenda to keep the team on task for every meeting. The agendas included topics for discussion, meeting objectives, and next steps. Counseling staff and the student success coach identified additional stakeholders to include in future meetings. The stakeholders included representatives from the Ready to Work Program, the foundation department, the marketing department, career services, and Project Aspire (TRIO); academic deans; the vice president of student development; peer mentors; and the program funder. The program funder was a community agency that was financially supported by United Way and fundraising.

The committee members identified key factors that needed to be incorporated in the program such as case management, resource referrals, financial literacy workshops, and related issues, including how much money students would receive. I provided committee members with information and materials that I created in advance. I gave the program structure outline, the student application, and information about the funder's program requirements to the team.

The funder's requirements were that the student must have a dependent in the home, commit to the program for two years, attend a monthly group meeting with peers and a quarterly individual case management meeting with a financial case

manager, and track financial progress using an online journal. The committee

determined that the quarterly financial case management meetings would be

facilitated by the funder's financial case management staff. During these meetings,

case managers reviewed students' online journal entries, gave feedback on progress,

offered suggestions on budgeting, and provided guidance to help students reach their

financial goals. The financial case managers facilitated the monthly group meetings.

The meetings were an opportunity for group members to offer each other suggestions,

discuss their current goals, and build a support system. Upon successful completion

of these requirements, students received $1,250 at the end of the year, for two years.

Although students received their funding at the end of each year, they were able to

access the funds for everyday living expenses. However, students needed approval

from the financial case managers to access funds and to determine how much money

they could access.

Even though the funder had program requirements, I included additional

program requirements that were applicable to the institution setting. These

requirements were that students must attend at least two workshops each semester and

complete a mid-semester and end-semester needs assessments. The student

workshops covered topics related to financial management, building credit, first-time

homeownership guidance and resources, and loan default education. The counseling

staff and I scheduled presentations by community partners specializing in various

financial literacy topics. We implemented the mid-semester and end-semester needs

assessments so that we could provide case management services and give students

referrals to other resources. Resource referrals are community support services that can assist students with childcare vouchers, housing support, food assistance, transportation assistance, and employment-related support.

The committee members decided to offer the required monthly meeting and workshops on Fridays. They made this decision because Gateway Community and Technical College does not offer classes on Fridays. The Ready to Work staff also communicated with students' employers. The employers agreed to give students permission to attend the meetings and workshops. Due to these accommodations, students' schedules were open, and they were able to participate in the program.

Next, the committee worked with the marketing department. The marketing department created a program flyer, a promotional email, and television advertisements to run on televisions at each campus. Ready to Work staff informed all of their students during meetings and by email about the program. I sent the Ready to Work students an additional email inviting them to an information session.

I conducted the information session. The session was created to provide students with details about the program, the benefits of the program, and program requirements. During the information session, I gave students a tour of the counseling department's website. I showed students the program's online application link located on the counseling department's website, and I encouraged students to complete the online application and apply to the program.

After students submitted the applications, the team followed the program registration process. Thirty students were accepted into the program. Students were

contacted by their assigned case managers. The case managers scheduled students for a required program orientation and followed up with students via email with orientation information and their contact information.

The funder and I presented at the orientation. We gave students a program overview refresher. The refresher presentation reviewed the program requirements and the program structure. I provided students with a program folder, which included a flyer with a list of and information about the upcoming workshops. The folder also had a program handout that included the program goals, purpose, and requirements and staff contact information. We informed students about who they should report to for the different program requirements. For example, questions regarding funds, monthly financial meetings, and journals would be directed to the financial case manager.

Questions regarding workshops and needed resources would be directed to the peer mentor case managers. Students introduced themselves to the group, and we introduced students to the peer mentor case managers and led an ice breaker activity. The ice breaker used was called Person BINGO, and it assisted students in finding peers who had common interests. Students were able to engage in group discussions to further get acquainted. After students formed their groups, they came up with set dates and times for their group monthly meetings. Students were able to start the program the following month.

Capstone Implementation

The capstone was implemented in October 2018 (fall semester). This was because the committee wanted to give students enough time to adjust to the new semester. Starting the program in October also gave committee members additional time to coordinate the information sessions and orientation. In addition, the October start date gave the marketing department plenty of time to promote the program. Marketing for the program started in August 2018, which gave students a two-month time frame to apply. The implementation guide was created between August 2019 and March 2020.

Study Limitations

There were three limitations to the program. First, the program has not been completed. Therefore, a thorough program evaluation cannot be conducted to provide a conclusion. Second, funding for the program was provided by an outside source. External funding limited Gateway Community and Technical College's ability to have full decision making such as program qualifications and what the funds can assist students with. Third, the program was only open to students with dependents living in their home. Students without dependents living in their home could not access funds or support, although many of them expressed interest and reported non-academic financial barriers.

In addition, the implementation guide presents some limitations. Colleges and universities will have to specifically reflect on their student population. The guide was created in an open format for institutions to have flexibility in their program

structure. This is considered a limitation because some institutions may experience barriers that are different from the barriers Gateway experienced. With this limitation in mind, institutions may need additional time to identify student's needs and the best program structure for their student population.

Reflections

From creating the capstone, I have learned many processes involved with developing and implementing a program. Focusing on the overall structure of the program and determining the best procedures for an at-risk population was challenging. The most perplexing component was the fact that a program like Project Elevation has never existed in higher education before. Therefore, every portion of the program was modified organically for Gateway Community and Technical College students. I learned the importance of including individuals from all areas of the college and external partners. The amount of feedback that was provided impacted the program significantly. The luncheon that was held for internal and external partners was a great way to obtain feedback all at once.

The students who participated in the program were able to receive assistance with paying their bills and other barriers. It is rewarding to hear students express how they feel stable and have more control over the barriers they once faced. Not only were students able to gain financial stability, but they also gained financial literacy. The financial literacy components seemed to provide students with a skill they would be able to use for a lifetime. Another aspect of the program I enjoyed was finding resources to bring on campus that would help students save money, build a savings

account, plan to buy a home, and plan for financial emergencies. Students appeared to

feel more confident in themselves and more motivated academically.

While creating the implementation guide, I often reflected on my experience

in implementing the Project Elevation program. Creating the program first helped me

identify the steps for each module in the implementation guide. I created handouts

and diagrams for the implementation guide to help other institutions with

organization, brainstorming, and structure.

If I had to do the guide over, I would include different versions of each

handout. I think having different versions of each handout would make the guide

more user friendly.

Why Were This Capstone and Related Strategies Selected?

During the program implementation process, the committee members and I

lacked guidance when developing and implementing Project Elevation. A financial

support student retention program like Project Elevation had not previously existed in

higher education. Without a guide or a similar program to review, the committee

found it hard to get the program up and running. Due to this lack of guidance, I

wanted to create a guide for other student development staff members to use, and this

is the core of the capstone project. Therefore, I proposed a capstone project to create a

guide for implementing a student retention financial support program.

To implement the program, we used different strategies to ensure the program

was organized and structured. I included these same strategies in the program

implementation guide. Related strategies to implement the program were based on the

literature review findings and Caffarella and Daffron's (2013) book, *Planning*

Programs for Adult Learners: A Practical Guide, heavily influenced these strategies.

The first strategy selected was a needs assessment. To understand what a

needs assessment is, the term *needs* must be clarified. Needs refers to student barriers

students and the lack of services colleges offer to resolve or minimize these barriers.

A needs assessment is a tool used to identify the needs and prioritize them in the

order of their severity (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2008). The needs assessment helped in

the creation of a program tailored to reduce students' most prevalent barriers. Another

assessment tool I used was the application. I developed the application to help

identify interested students and each applicant's individualized financial barriers.

Identifying students' individual barriers provided insight into which referrals and

services could address students' issues.

Working with a team of stakeholders was another strategy. I wanted to ensure

that the program had a support system of individuals who played a significant part in

students' success. According to Caffarella and Daffron (2013), "when implementing

programs at colleges, it is important to gain support from various departments,

organizations and community groups (such as specific business and industries), and

other potential participants themselves" (p. 107). Based on this recommendation,

students who were also peer mentors were a part of the implementation process to

give their perspectives from students' point of view.

Individuals from various programs and departments at the college were also

participants in committee meetings. This helped the team members gain different

perspectives, which Caffarella and Daffron (2013) recommended. Furthermore, community partners played a significant role by offering workshops on various financial topics. Community partners facilitated the workshops due to their expertise in financial management skills. According to Fogler and LeBlanc (2014), collaborating with stakeholders who have the knowledge and skills to better serve the targeted population is the best approach.

A structured foundation for the program was a key component. I strategically set up several essential elements to offer the best learning environment for students, including organizing monthly financial workshops, putting students in small cohorts, and offering the program on Fridays. I wanted students to participate in monthly financial workshops, so they could receive additional financial literacy. According to Caffarella and Daffron (2013), workshops are "intensive group activities that emphasize the development of skills and competencies in a defined content area.

An emphasis is placed on participants being able to use what they learned and apply them in real life situations" (p. 263). The workshops were focused on topics that would help students make good financial decisions and stop poor financial behaviors. Britt et al. (2013) indicated that students need guidance about changing their poor financial behaviors.

Bonet and Walters (2016) reported that a review of the literature shows that students learn best when they learn from and support each other. Students in small cohorts was a way to help them build relationships with their peers. Peer mentors assisted students in building their cohorts by facilitating an ice breaker. According to

Eitington (2002), ice breakers help participants feel comfortable communicating with others and ease them into the program. Due to students' ability to build relationships with each other, they were able to offer each other budgeting tips and encourage each other to keep working toward their financial goals.

Last, offering the program on Fridays was the best day for the targeted student population to meet. Caffarella and Daffron (2013) noted that, "in finalizing the dates for the program, developers take care that the dates and times chosen fit into the participants personal or job schedules, and they understand the consequences for expecting participants to take off work" (p. 267). The committee members took this recommendation into consideration by picking a day that classes were not offered and by working with students' employers to have their hours arranged to allow attendance at workshops and meetings.

Marketing is a key component in getting targeted populations interested in programs. The marketing department team was intentional in the marketing delivery. The team marketed the program in several different ways. Email notifications, printed materials, and television advertisements were posted on television displays at each campus. Caffarella and Daffron (2013) suggested that all marketing materials include the same information and look the same. Although the marketing team used different platforms to promote the program, each message had the same information and theme.

Following this format made the message consistent and easy to understand. Although social media was not a platform the team used to market Project Elevation,

the implementation guide will include it as a recommended strategy. The committee

members decided not to advertise on social media because the program already had

direct contact with the targeted population since the students were Ready to Work

participants. The implementation committee included the Ready to Work staff, and

this ensured the students would receive the marketing materials at the Ready to Work

meetings. However, social media is a popular method to advertise to students

attending higher education institutions. According to Caffarella and Daffron (2013),

program developers should focus on the social media outlets that their student

population is more likely to use.

   I invited participants to an information session, and the program required

participants to attend an orientation session. Both sessions were structured based on

the Jacobs (2016) program. This study focused on offering students information about

their school and programs prior to classes starting, which increased Gateway

Community and Technical College's student retention rates. Similarly, I offered the

information session and orientation prior to the program starting. The information

session provided students with information regarding program eligibility for the

program, reviewed next steps to apply for the program, and detailed the program

requirements. I offered the orientation to give students more in-depth information

about topics such as who they would work with and report to and the workshop

offerings.

   Due to my experience implementing the Project Elevation program, I applied

the strategies used from the program to create the implementation guide. For

example, the program included individuals from different departments at Gateway to

be a part of the program's committee. In the guide, I suggested for at least one person

from significant departments within institutions to participate in their committee. As

mentioned previously, having different people with different professional

backgrounds provide different perspectives. Having different perspectives increases

the success of a program (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).

   Breaking down the guide into modules is a component I thought would help

make the process easier. I wanted to prevent program committees from becoming

overwhelmed due to the different aspects of the guide. Breaking each step down into

modules give committees time to reflect on how they want their program structured.

In addition, committees need adequate time to implement appropriate processes and

procedures for their student population (Fogler & LeBlanc, 2014). The modules

provide an overview and ideas on how an institution's program can function.

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PROJECT ELEVATION: A STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

Project Elevation is a student financial support program. The program was implemented at Gateway Community and Technical College. This guide is created to help other higher education institutions implement Project Elevation. The guide is based on experiences from Gateway's program implementation journey and discovered research on program implementation strategies. This step-by-step guide consists of eight modules. Each module includes suggested methods and considerations to implement Project Elevation. Figure 1 illustrates the module topics and their order.
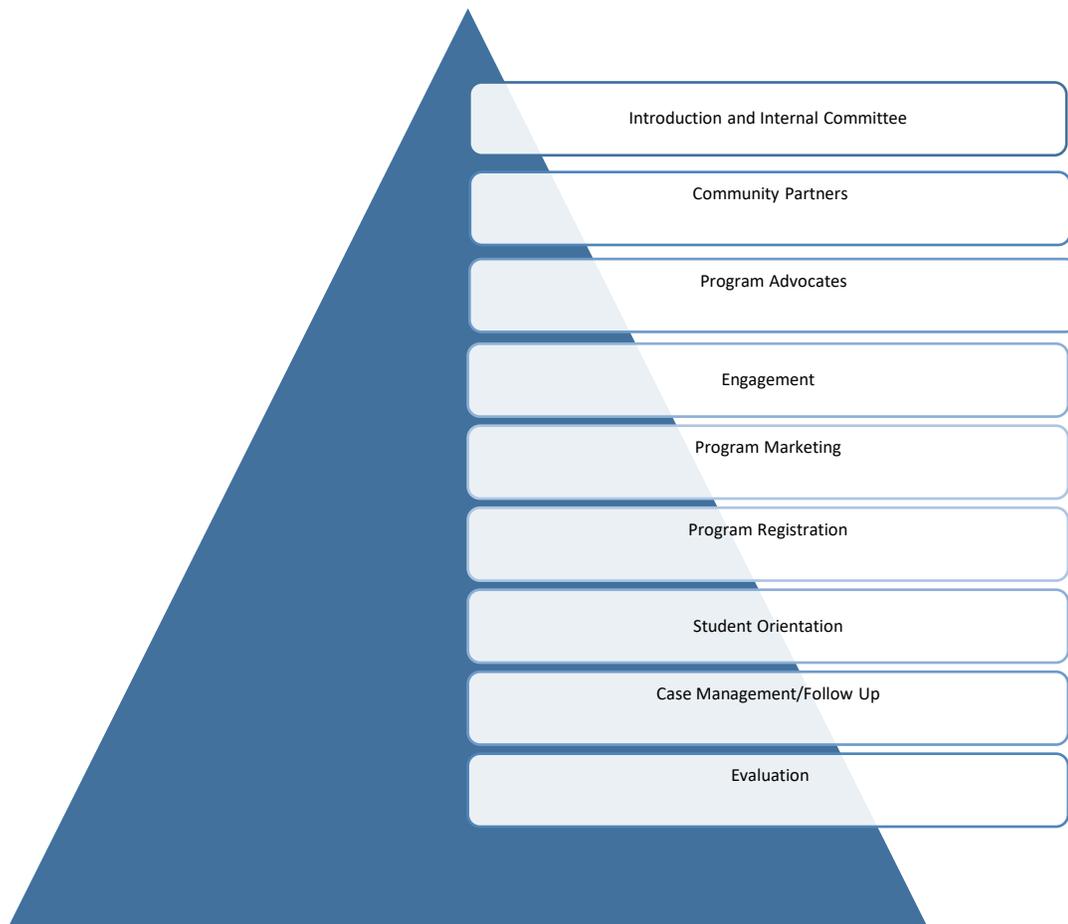
Figure 1. The different modules that describe the Project Elevation implementation process and their recommended order.

The rest of this section consists of a review of each module in turn. The modules contain detailed descriptions of the modules and include handouts, information, and outline meeting agendas that explain what the committee meetings should cover to coordinate the program.

Module 1 relates to establishment of committee members and reviews the entire program. This module will provide the committee chair with guidance on

properly running the first committee meeting, during which invited faculty and staff members will be oriented to the purpose of the program and how the program will help students.

Module 2 suggests that Meeting 2 begin with committee members receiving a summary of what was covered at the last meeting. This will ensure that new members and existing members have the same understanding of the program. Module 2 focuses strictly on building community partnerships. Building community partnerships helps to establish on-campus financial resources and funding to support the program. All committee members will need to vote to identify the best resources for the student population served.

Module 3 relates to establishing an advocate group on campus. An advocate group consists of key individuals who can assist with promoting the program and informing students about the services. The advocate group should include members from student organizations, peer mentors, student ambassadors, resident assistants, at least one faculty member from each academic program, and one staff member from each department. This module provides guidance on how to engage identified group members, establish their role, and set dates for them to recruit students for the program. In addition, this module explains how to give committee members an opportunity to provide feedback on the status of community partnerships.

Module 4 provides insight into how to engage faculty, staff, and community partners. The committee chair and members need to establish meeting times to present the program to identified groups. This module is a guide for coordinating a

luncheon for community partners and employees. The luncheon is an opportunity to welcome community partners to the college or university. In addition, community partners and employees receive information about the program, how the program will benefit students, and why their help is needed.

Module 5 focuses on marketing the program to students. In Meeting 5, committee members identify best practices to promote the program to students. In addition, committee members identify the members' responsibilities with respect to marketing the program.

Module 6 assists with organization of the student registration process. Committee members need to review the predeveloped Project Elevation Survey/Application. This tool contains all the questions needed to determine whether students are good candidates for the program. In addition, the tool assists with tracking how many students are interested in the program and how many students are actually enrolled. Meeting 6 will help committee members gain consistent understanding of the tool, which will allow committee members to guide students in the use of the tool.

Module 7 relates to student orientation. Meeting 7 helps members become familiar with the orientation process and assign roles and responsibilities to key players. Program advocates and committee members should rotate presenting the orientation using PowerPoint. This encourages organization-wide participation.

Module 8 focuses on case management and student follow-up. This module addresses provision of one-on-one support to students regarding referrals, individual

services for career readiness, and other elements of financial support. This module
directs committee members to identify who is responsible for case management and
follow-up services.

Module 9 focuses on program evaluation. Evaluation involves review of
students' midsemester survey results, students' semester-end survey results, and
tracking results of case management. This module helps committee members to
evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

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MODULE 1: INTRODUCTION TO PROGRAM AND ESTABLISHMENT OF

INTERNAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

What is Project Elevation?

Project Elevation is a student-financial-barrier support program. This program

assists students with their everyday living expenses. The program provides a

nonrepayment financial support fund as an on-campus service for students and

incorporates financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, job-

readiness opportunities, career fairs, referrals to resources related to financial barriers,

and case management for student retention. The program emphasizes the importance

of building partnerships with community agencies and local businesses. The program

is structured to allow community partners to conduct workshops and provide job-

readiness opportunities. The ultimate goal of the program is to increase student

engagement, retention, and self-sufficiency by incorporating these initiatives.

Program Location and Atmosphere

Project Elevation is a program for providing financial education, awareness,

and support. The education and awareness components require monthly meetings and

workshops to take place in a classroom environment. The classroom needs chairs,

several desk for students at least one computer, and a computer monitor or projector.

Some facilitators may require a computer lab for group work and to allow students to

work on online worksheets. The program administrator needs to confirm room and

setting requirements with each community partner or facilitator. The program

administrator's role is to manage program functioning. The administrator should

make sure documents are complete, collected, and filed in an organized order. The

program administrator is responsible for scheduling rooms for meetings, activities,

workshops, and complete all clerical tasks.

Food

If possible, provide food (snacks) for student participants during monthly

meetings. A particular program's ability to do this depends on available funding.

Who Can Participate?

Any student who enrolled in at least 1 credit hour at the college or university

can participate. Each participating student should have a dependent in his or her

home.

What Is a Dependent?

For this program, a dependent is any person who relies on a student or lives in

the student's household. The term *dependent* is used loosely for this program.

Examples of dependents of a student include the following;

- elderly parent,

- a child who is in college,

- a roommate,

- a spouse,

- any person who receives financial support from the student, and

- expecting parents.

The entity responsible for disbursing student funds is responsible for collecting

dependent information.

Note: Institutions may adjust, edit, change, or modify these recommendations to

accommodate their student population and institution.

Program Primary Goals

The program's primary goals are the following;

- increase student retention and engagement,

- reduce student financial barriers,

- increase on-campus and off-campus resources available for students to utilize,

- provide students with financial literacy and financial management skills, and

- increase self-sufficiency of students.

Before Implementing the Program

Before implementing the program, college and university administrators

should follow the steps identified in the guide. This ensures that all components of the

program are well organized, a committee is developed, advocates are engaged for the

program, and partnerships and funding are obtained for the program. Each module

includes an outline meeting agenda to follow. These agendas help with coordinating

every aspect of the program.

In addition, before beginning, meet with the principal officer and other senior

administrators of the college or university to get their suggestions, feedback, and

approval to implement the program. It is best to present a PowerPoint describing the

program to these individuals to help them understand the concept and mission of the program.

Who Should Implement the Program?

Project Elevation should be incorporated in college and university departments that already provide similar student support services, such as those responsible for counseling services, student engagement, financial aid, and student resources. Implementation of the program requires at least one person who takes the lead by coordinating meetings and establishing a committee. This leader is considered the committee chair. The committee chair should be an individual who has experience overseeing projects, implementing programs, and offering support services to students.

Recommended Training for Staff

If possible, all employees and program advocates should receive training in working with at-risk college students, case management, working with low-income students, and diversity. Individuals within the college or university who specialize in the training content can conduct the recommended training, or partners in the community can provide it. Team members or program advocates can serve as case managers; however, they should complete the case management training and at least one of the other three suggested types of training.

How Long Is the Program?

Implementation takes 2–12 months depending on the institution. The implementation time frame depends on whether the college or university already has

established partnerships or it needs to build new partnerships. The exact form of the

program depends on funding available in the college or university. Students enrolled

in the program should stay in it for at least 2 years.

Program Funding

Funding for the program can come from multiple sources, including

department budgets, internal programs, grants, donations, and so on. Colleges and

universities may consider using funds from department budgets for items such as

giveaways, gift cards, and food. Overall funding of the program typically requires

more money than most department budgets can bear. When establishing funding

partnerships, it is essential to clarify which party is responsible for disbursing funds to

students (the community partner or a certain department within the college or

university).

Suggested Giveaways

Implementers can use giveaways as incentives for students, community

partners, and program advocates. Suggested giveaways include the following;

- Project Elevation T-shirts,

- gift cards,

- gift baskets,

- headphones,

- cell phone covers,

- cell phone chargers or portable chargers,

- fitness trackers,

- pens,

- water bottles,

- book bags, and

- umbrellas.

Note: Institutions may adjust, edit, change, or modify these recommendations to accommodate their student population and institution.

Operating Budget

The number of students able to enroll in the program depends on the college or university's budget. It is suggested for each student in the program to receive at least a total of $2,700 over the course of 2 years: $1,200 each year plus $300 to purchase a computer or laptop and Internet service. However, every institution is different and should modify the operating budget to accommodate their student population and institution.

Other items to consider in the budget include gift cards for individuals who advocate for the program, supplies, and training for staff members and program advocates. The college or university should be responsible for operation of the program. However, a partner community agency can provide financial literacy and oversee the operation of the budget for student funds. Parties responsible for disbursing funds to students should ensure students complete all requirements before they receive funds.

Program Structure

After students enroll in the program, each has the opportunity to receive financial support up to the dollar amount identified by their institution. The suggested amount for financial support is $2,700. It is recommended for students to be in groups of 6–12 people. Small group sizes allow students to build rapport with each other easier (Masika & Jones, 2016). Ideally, students should form their own groups at orientation. However, staff members can provide avenues for peer relationship building and group building to enhance students' abilities to build their groups. Students should attend one financial literacy meeting a month.

At these meetings, students discuss their budgeting goals, financial goals, and steps needed to reach their goals. A community partner facilitator conducts each meeting. The facilitator provides students with skills in financial literacy, money management, goal setting, and determining steps needed to reach goals. Students should journal their budgeting and progress toward reaching their goals in an electronic cloud-based system. In addition, students should attend at least two financial workshops or events or a job-readiness service during each semester. Students are paid based on their ability to complete the program requirements.

It is recommended for each student to receive $300 to put toward buying a laptop or other computer and Internet service. However, students can receive additional or less funding depending on their institution. Students receive laptop or computer and internet service funding after attending the first three monthly meetings. Students can put the money toward anything they choose if they already

have a computer and Internet access. Students should attend quarterly check-in meetings to assess progress toward financial goals.

It is suggested after students are in the program for 6 months, students should receive a $600 stipend. Students can use this $600 toward everyday living expenses, especially those that help meet the financial goals students set for themselves. After the last 6 months of the year, students receive another $600 stipend, which can be used for the same things as the first stipend. Although the $600 stipend is a recommendation, institutions should set the stipend amount to match their institution's operation budget.

The financial literacy component of the program should be 1 hour long. Each workshop should be at least 30 minutes long. The workshops can be offered on several different dates and times and at several different locations to accommodate students' schedules. Implementers should ideally offer some workshops immediately after the monthly financial literacy meetings: students may be more likely to attend these because they are already on campus. Each networking opportunity or event should be at least 30 minutes long.

Approved Workshops and Events

Students should attend at least two workshops, services, or events each semester. Approved topics for workshops and events include the following;

- resume building,
- mock interview,

- career fairs,

- career planning,

- budgeting,

- establishing and maintaining credit,

- first time homeownership,

- saving for a crisis,

- paying back student loans,

- saving and investing,

- understanding and managing income taxes,

- housing, and

- insurance

Note: Committee members can add to the list of approved topics or make other adjustments to suit their institution. Implementers should track students' attendance at workshops and events. Attendance slips for students to get signed by workshop and event facilitators or hosts are provided in Appendix A.

Approved Student Spending

Students are permitted to spend their funds on approved financial goals and everyday living expenses:

- childcare,

- housing repairs or utilities,

- car repairs,

- transportation,

- food,

- buying a car,

- home down payment,

- children's sports,

- gym memberships,

- starting a new business,

- paying off debt,

- school,

- books,

- clothing, and

- rent or mortgage.

Note: Committee members can add to the list of approved topics or make other

adjustments to suit their institution.

Organizing Committee

The program should have one person responsible for coordinating meetings

and establishing the committee. This person is considered the committee chair.

Project Elevation is a college- or university-wide initiative: The committee itself

should include at least two faculty members in addition to at least one person from

each of the following departments:

- career services,

- resource program,

- student engagement,

- financial aid,

- advising,

- Project Aspire (TRIO),

- Ready to Work,

- foundation/fundraising/grants,

- vice president of academic affairs, and

- vice president of student development.

The Role of the Committee

Committee members are responsible for the following;

- attending committee meetings

- voting on community resources and partnerships and reaching out to potential

  partners,

- providing documentation for any program worksheets,

- assisting in program orientation,

- assisting in follow-up and case management,

- promoting the program,

- participating in program decision-making, and

- assisting the committee chair with program tasks.

How Long Should Committee Meetings Last?

In the beginning, committee meetings should take place biweekly. This assists with consistent progress of program implementation. After the program is up and running, committee meetings can take place biweekly, monthly, or as needed. Each meeting should last at least 1 hour. However, some meetings may require additional or less time, depending on the institution.

Module 1 Outline Meeting Agenda

An outline meeting agenda for Module 1 is in Appendix B. The meeting agenda helps committee members coordinate the program. Follow the agenda to cover all aspects of program implementation.

MODULE 2: IDENTIFICATION OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND THEIR

ROLES

Community Resources and Partnerships

Community resources and partnerships are essential aspects of the program.

Colleges and universities need to build partnerships with local businesses and

community agencies to provide financial literacy and offer workshops to students in

the program. First, committee members need to identify available local resources. The

committee chair is then responsible for researching community partnerships. The

committee chair can also delegate this duty to other committee members. When

identifying community resources and potential partnerships, use the Financial

Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet, which appears in Appendix C. All

committee members should vote to identify the best resources for the student

population served.

Online Financial Resource Directory

Committee members should create an online financial resource directory, if

possible. This tool helps to refer students to needed resources and is extremely helpful

during case management and follow-up. The directory should include any financial

resources that committee members believe will educate and benefit students. The

directory should be located on the same website as the Project Elevation

Survey/Application, which is in Appendix I.

Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet

The Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet is designed to help committee members determine the best resources to utilize, what each community partner's role should be, and track partnership agreement. The worksheet appears in Appendix C.

Luncheon to Establish Community Partnerships

Community members need to vote on a date to host a luncheon for community partners. A luncheon provides guests with both food and new information and is sometimes called a *lunch and learn*. To prepare for the luncheon, committee members should do the following;

- assign committee members to create a PowerPoint presentation describing the program, student population, ways that partners can help, and the benefits of the program;

- assign a committee member to order food;

- assign committee members to create a program flyer and other promotional items that will be used to promote the program; and

- assign committee members to reach out to identified community partners and invite them to luncheon.

Module 2 Outline Meeting Agenda

An outline meeting agenda for Module 2 is in Appendix D. The meeting agenda helps committee members coordinate the program. Follow the agenda to cover all aspects of program implementation

MODULE 3: PROGRAM ADVOCATES

Program advocates are individuals who help to promote the program. Advocates are people with whom students come into contact daily, whom others may look up to (leaders), and who have an interest in the overall mission of the program. Because Project Elevation is a college- or university-wide initiative, everyone within the organization plays a part in implementing the program.

What Are the Benefits of Being a Program Advocate?

Being a program advocate consists of helping at-risk students receive additional financial support, networking opportunities, and job-readiness skills. Benefits include the following;

- being part of a team and working together with others from different departments and programs;
- gaining familiarity with on-campus and off-campus resources;
- contributing to increasing student retention and engagement; and
- receiving incentives such as gift cards, free professional development training, giveaways, program T-shirts, and so on.

Who Are Program Advocates?

Program advocates are drawn from among the following;

- student organizations and groups,
- athletes,
- peer mentors,

- resident assistants,

- student ambassadors,

- faculty,

- staff members (including maintenance and operations),

- administrators,

- interns, and

- service-learning students.

The Role of a Program Advocate

The role of a program advocate is the following;

- promote the program to students,

- recruit students,

- recruit new program advocates,

- assist in program orientation,

- assist with case management and follow-up,

- attend committee meetings as needed, and

- reserve rooms for student monthly meetings.

Module 3 Outline Meeting Agenda

An outline meeting agenda for Module 3 is in Appendix E. The meeting agenda helps committee members coordinate the program. Follow the agenda to cover all aspects of program implementation.

MODULE 4: ENGAGEMENT

Luncheon

The luncheon (or lunch and learn) is a time to engage community partners and internal employees. The goal of committee members should be to inform partners about the mission of the program, how the program is structured, and how they can assist. Members should communicate this with a PowerPoint presentation, which the committee chair and committee members should develop together. The luncheon is also an opportunity for community partners to ask questions and provide the committee with feedback. At the end of the presentation, give partners and employees giveaways for attending the event.

What Needs to Be Covered in the PowerPoint Presentation

The PowerPoint presentation should include the following;

- a welcome slide,

- the purpose of the program,

- the mission of the program,

- the structure of the program,

- why partners should get involved,

- who can be involved,

- how partners can get involved (hand out a memorandum of understanding and encourage partners to sign),

- the role of partners,

- benefits of the program,

- the potential program start date, and

- an opportunity to receive questions, feedback, and suggestions.

Module 4 Outline Meeting Agenda

An outline meeting agenda for Module 4 is in Appendix F. The meeting

agenda helps committee members coordinate the program. Follow the agenda to

cover all aspects of program implementation.

MODULE 5: MARKETING

Marketing the program captures the attention of students. Students should see value in the program. Use marketing tools to capture their attention. From a committee standpoint, some leg work is necessary, which requires a team effort to ensure everything is done correctly. First, the committee chair should develop a sign-up genius by going to http://www.signupgenius.com. The committee chair should also review the Possible Ways to Market the Program Checklist, which is in Appendix G. Add all items from the checklist to the sign-up genius registration list and set due dates.

This allows committee members to easily sign up for a task and see who is responsible for what. This is a simple way to keep track of task responsibilities. The committee chair needs to review and explain the marketing sign-up genius registration list during the meeting. Second, give committee members an opportunity to identify the responsibilities they want to sign up for. The committee chair types committee members' names next to the tasks they request to sign up for. Third, the committee chair sends out the electronic sign-up genius link to committee members. This allows committee members to review and change tasks as needed.

Marketing Hashtag

A hashtag is a marketing slogan for social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and so on). The hashtag slogan for Project Elevation follows the template #schoolnameelevation. The committee chair ensures that all committee members have the hashtag for marketing materials.

Module 5 Outline Meeting Agenda

An outline meeting agenda for Module 5 is in Appendix H. The meeting agenda helps committee members coordinate the program. Follow the agenda to cover all aspects of program implementation.

MODULE 6: PROGRAM REGISTRATION

For the registration process, students complete the Project Elevation Survey/Application, which appears in Appendix I. The questions on the application help determine whether an applicant qualifies for the program. If possible, create an online version of the application. This provides students with more flexibility to complete the form in their own time. In addition, following this format helps with simple data collection. To properly implement the application, implementers should work with their marketing departments. A link to the application should appear on the website of the department responsible for the program.

Committee members need to coordinate when and how applications are processed. In addition, committee members need to establish dates for student orientation. This helps with a smooth transition. The next section outlines a suggested registration process.

Registration Process Outline

For accepted students, an administrator assigns each qualified student to a case manager, who does the following;

- contacts the student and provides a brief introduction to the program;

- introduces him- or herself and informs the student about his or her role;

- informs the student that the student's applications for the program has been accepted;

- informs the student about the required student orientation and its date, time, and location; and

- follows up with the student with an e-mail that includes the date, time, and location of the orientation.

For students who are not accepted:

- Identified team members or program advocates review applications and contact students who do not qualify for the program.

- An administrator, case manager, committee member, or program advocate informs students whose applications were not accepted.

- Students should receive some information about why their application was not accepted.

- Students should receive financial resources that they can access. Refer to the created online resource directory for referral information.

Module 6 Outline Meeting Agenda

An outline meeting agenda for Module 6 is in Appendix J. The meeting agenda helps committee members coordinate the program. Follow the agenda to cover all aspects of program implementation.

MODULE 7: STUDENT ORIENTATION

The student orientation is a 1-hour session used to provide students with information about the program. Students need to know about every detail of the program. Refer to the outline of the PowerPoint presentation later in this module for more details of what to include. The committee chair, committee members, and program advocates all need to participate in orientation. Orientation gives students an opportunity to learn about the program, understand participation expectations, meet their peers, meet staff members, meet community partners, form peer groups, and ask questions.

Program Folders

Committee members need to create program folders to give to students when they check in at orientation. Each folder should include any information students need to know about the program. This can be created in the form of a packet. Each folder should include the following:

- program flyer,

- program description,

- individualized case manager contact information for the student (see below),

- outline of the program structure,

- list of program requirements,

- schedule of Project Elevation meetings,

- schedule of approved events and workshops,

- list of approved services with location and contact information, and

- list of community partners and services they provide.

Each student should receive an individualized case manager flyer. Include the case manager's name, contact information, and picture along with a brief introduction statement from the case manager.

Orientation Staffing

Orientation roles and responsibilities can rotate, so everyone needs to have a clear understanding of what takes place during orientation. The subsections below describe the necessary orientation staffing roles. The committee chair needs to develop a sign-up genius by going to http://www.signupgenius.com, reviewing the orientation staffing roles, and adding corresponding items into the sign-up genius. This allows committee members to easily sign up for a task and see who is responsible for what. This is a simple way to keep track of task responsibilities.

Administration Role

Staff members in the administration role are responsible for reserving all rooms for orientation. Ensure that all materials, such as giveaways, are ordered and available at orientation. In addition, coordinate workshops, schedule community partners, and send out invites and reminders to community partners, staff members, and students. Track attendance using submitted sign-in sheets. Review midterm and term-end check-in forms obtained from floaters. Assign cases to case managers and follow up with committee members and program advocates.

Welcome/Sign-In Role

Staff members in the welcome/sign-in role need a list of students who registered for the program. One side of the list has students' names printed. The other side has a space for students to sign their names when they check in. Staff members are responsible for providing students with the Project Elevation folder. Submit sign-in sheets to the administrator.

Floater Role

Staff members in the floater role greet students and walk or direct them to the appropriate room for orientation. Collect midterm or term-end check-in forms and convey these to the administrator.

Orientation Presenter Role

Presenters should be responsible for orienting students to the program. They present the orientation PowerPoint, facilitate student ice breakers, and introduce community partners.

Case Manager Role

Case managers who attend orientation should introduce themselves. Case managers form a support system and should answer any questions students have. Orientation gives case managers and students an opportunity to meet each other face-to-face.

What Should Be Included in the Orientation PowerPoint Presentation?

Introduction

The introduction should include the following slides:

- a title slide that includes the title "Project Elevation" and the presenting staff

  member's name,

- the purpose of the program,

- a student ice breaker, and

- a slide that includes pictures and introduction for each case manager.

Some case managers may be able to attend the event. If not, that is fine. Each student

will also receive a case manager flyer in the program folder that includes the same

information from the PowerPoint slide.

Student Ice Breaker

Assist students to become acquainted with each other by facilitating an ice

breaker. Find an ice breaker that will give students opportunities to find similarities

and differences.

Community Partnerships

Discuss the role of the college or university.

Explain which department Project Elevation is housed in.

Have a panel of community partners present. Introduce each community

partner and allow the partner to inform students about the services the partner

provides.

Structure of the Program

Cover each of these points:

Meetings take place once a month, and each last 1 hour.

Students are expected to attend at least two workshops per semester.

Explain clearly

- what workshops and events are offered,

- how long each workshop is,

- how much money students receive, and

- when students receive the money.

Benefits of the Program

Explain clearly the benefits of the program:

- case management services,

- incentives and funding,

- financial education, and

- networking opportunities.

Questions

Allow students to ask questions about the program.

<div align="center">

Module 7 Outline Meeting Agenda

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An outline meeting agenda for Module 7 is in Appendix K. The meeting

agenda helps committee members coordinate the program. Follow the agenda to

cover all aspects of program implementation.

MODULE 8: CASE MANAGEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

Case Management

Case management is a process undertaken by a professional to ensure students receive the support and services needed to be successful. Case management takes many different forms, such as advocacy, assessing students' needs, coordinating services for care, providing resources, and processing referrals. For this program, case managers start to follow up with students as they are assigned to them. Each student is assigned to a case manager after submitting an application and being approved for the program. Case managers should call and e-mail the students assigned to them at least three times a semester. However, if students need additional support, additional outreach may be necessary. If possible, use a cloud-based case management system for case management note-taking and tracking.

Follow-Up and Check-Ins

First Check-In

Case managers should check in with students when they are accepted into the program and initially assigned a case manager. Follow the registration outline process for this task.

Second and Third Check-Ins

At the middle of the semester, and again at the end of the semester, each student should complete a check-in survey, which is submitted to the administrator and distributed to the correct case manager. (See the Project Elevation Mid/End Term Check-In form in Appendix L.) Case managers contact students who indicate on their

surveys that they need resources. Case managers ask students for their appointment preference (in-person, face-to-face, video chat, or e-mail). Case managers refer to the online financial resource directory and provide students with needed resources.

Check-In Surveys

Students can receive the check-in surveys either on paper or electronically. An electronic version may aid collection of data and assignment to case managers. To create an electronic survey, work the information technology department of the college or university. Identify key committee members to compile the midsemester and semester-end survey results into summaries and report the results to the committee.

<div align="center">

Suggested Case Tracking Information

</div>

Suggested additional data items to track for each student for case management purposes include the following;

- why the student's case was closed,

- whether the student completed workshops,

- whether the student withdrew from school,

- whether the student completed orientation,

- whether the student is registered for the next semester, and

- the student's semester-end GPA.

Tracking this information assists with data collection.

Module 8 Outline Meeting Agenda

An outline meeting agenda for Module 8 is in Appendix M. The meeting

agenda helps committee members coordinate the program. Follow the agenda to

cover all aspects of program implementation.

MODULE 9: EVALUATION

At the time of writing, the initial implementation of the program was underway, and so Gateway Community and Technical College had not yet completed an extensive evaluation of the program. During the initial implementation of Project Elevation, the first midsemester survey results indicated that 33% of students indicated housing needs, 17% indicated food insecurity, 31% indicated childcare needs, 24% indicated transportation needs, and 5% needed assistance with their career paths. Comprehensive evaluation was scheduled to take place at the end of the second year of the program. The rest of this module includes discussion of existing research relating to evaluation and the recommended steps for evaluation of the program.

Research Relating to Evaluation

Researchers have found that the evaluation process is essential to program management (Derrick & Nickson, 2014). To improve research related to student development program outcomes, colleges and universities should allow research administrators to lead research planning and strategically oversee necessary research steps. To properly evaluate a program, researchers should take practical steps to decrease bias. They can decrease bias by starting off small and conducting trials of the program. A trial gives research administrators the ability to test their evaluation processes, conclusion-summarizing skills, and decision-making. These steps make up a formal method of conducing evaluations (Derrick & Nickson, 2014).

However, successfully evaluating student development programs takes more than formal measures. Although formal measures are important, intuitive guidance plays a significant role in program evaluation (Cooper, 2009). Intuitive guidance is a set of principles that guide strategic evaluation practices. The first intuitive guidance task is to identify educational values. Educational values are standards that faculty members, staff members, and administrators develop for programs to ensure that the procedures during the evaluation process are effective and fair. These standards require research administrators to establish clear goals prior to evaluation. External and internal stakeholders should be a part of this process. By including external and internal stakeholders, issues within the college or university can be examined at an advanced level due to the different perspectives involved. By following these steps, research administrators can obtain data necessary to enhance research outcomes and ensure maintenance of program expectations (J. Cooper, 2009).

Provisionally Recommended Steps for Evaluation

Evaluation of the program relies on the midsemester surveys, the semester-end surveys, and the case management tracking data discussed module 6. As mentioned in module 6, case managers are responsible for meeting with students and conducting interviews based on students' survey answers. The interview process allows case managers to ask students follow-up questions, offer guidance, and provide needed resources (Duke-Benfield & Saunders, 2016). One of the committee members is a representative from the college or university's knowledge management

team and is responsible for compiling the data. The knowledge management team

consists of the college or university's research administrators.

Module 9 Outline Meeting Agenda

An outline meeting agenda for Module 9 is in Appendix N. The meeting

agenda helps committee members coordinate the program. Follow the agenda to

cover all aspects of program implementation.

APPENDIX A

Module 1: Workshop and Event Attendance Slips

Students, please utilize these workshop and event attendance slips. This is the only way your attendance can be counted. Please submit your attendance slip at the welcome table when you sign in each month. Every student should attend at least two approved events or workshops each semester.

Student Engagement Slip

Student's Name:
Date:
Workshop Attended:
Workshop Presenter:
Presenter's Signature: _____

Student Engagement Slip

Student's Name:
Date:
Workshop Attended:
Workshop Presenter:
Presenter's Signature: _____

APPENDIX B

Module 1: Meeting Agenda

Module 1: Introduction to Program and Establishment of Internal Committee Members
Meeting 1: To prepare for this meeting, the committee chair will invite at least one individual from each of the programs and departments identified in the Members Invited section.
Meeting Time: This meeting lasts 1 hour and is one of a series of biweekly meetings.
Program Overview: Project Elevation is a student-financial-support program. This program assists students with their everyday living expenses. The program provides a nonrepayment financial support fund as an on-campus service for students and incorporates financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, job-readiness opportunities, referrals to resources related to financial barriers, and case management for student retention. The ultimate goal of the program is to increase student engagement and retention by incorporating these initiatives.
Members Invited: Counseling services Career services Resource program Student engagement Financial aid Project Aspire (TRIO) Ready to Work Advising Foundation department/fundraiser/grants department At least two faculty members Vice president of academic affairs Vice president of student development Knowledge management team
Program Goals: • Build community partnerships to support student financial barriers. • Provide financial nonrepayment support to students. • Provide financial education, awareness, and management to students. • Offer structured case management and financial referral services. • Increase student retention by eliminating student financial barriers.

Meeting Agenda:
- Present program overview.
- Discuss why each department was invited and how they can help the program.
- Identify suggested committee members.
    - Allow committee members to suggest additional members for the committee.
- Review the purpose and goals of the program.
- Establish 1-hour biweekly meetings.
- Solicit thoughts, questions, and feedback.

Materials:
- Module 1 description section.

APPENDIX C

Module 2: Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet

Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet			
Company Name	What service will they provide? (Budgeting, financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, and job readiness opportunities, funding)	Contact Information	MOU (Yes or No)

APPENDIX D

Module 2: Meeting Agenda

Module 2: Identification of Community Partners and Their Roles
Meeting 2: To prepare for this meeting, the committee chair needs a list of financial resources for possible partnerships. As a team, complete the Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet and determine which resources best fit the program mission. Invite suggested members to attend the meeting.
Meeting Time: This meeting lasts 1 hour and is one of a series of biweekly meetings.
Program Overview: Project Elevation is a student-financial-support program. This program assists students with their everyday living expenses. The program provides a nonrepayment financial support fund as an on-campus service for students and incorporates financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, job-readiness opportunities, referrals to resources related to financial barriers, and case management for student retention. The ultimate goal of the program is to increase student engagement and retention by incorporating these initiatives.
Members Invited: Counseling services Career services Resource program Student engagement Financial aid Project Aspire (TRIO) Ready to Work Advising Foundation department/fundraiser/grants department At least two faculty members Vice president of academic affairs Vice president of student development Knowledge management team

Meeting Guided Direction:

For this program, community resources on campus are needed. Financial community resources and partners will draw on their predeveloped curricula on budgeting, financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, and job-readiness opportunities. Committee members will be responsible only for coordinating services on campus and not providing these services themselves. One exception is that college and university career services programs typically have predeveloped curricula for career readiness. Career services can be treated as a partner for the career readiness component of the program. In addition, it is necessary to identify funders to support the program. Committee members should work together to create an online financial resource directory. The resource directory can guide referrals for students. Work with the college or university's foundation department to establish these partnerships.

Meeting Agenda:

- Welcome new members.
- Review program overview, goals, and the last meeting.
- Complete the Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet and discuss.
- Vote on community resources to build partnerships with.
- Establish a date for a community partner luncheon.
- Assign committee members to reach out to identified community partners and invite them to luncheon.
- Assign a committee member to order food for the luncheon.
- Assign committee members to create a PowerPoint presentation for the luncheon.
- Assign committee members to create flyers or promotional items with which to attract potential community partners.
- Assign committee members to create an online financial resource directory.

Materials:

- Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet

APPENDIX E

Module 3: Meeting Agenda

Module 3: Program Advocates
Meeting 3: To prepare for this meeting, the committee chair needs an updated list of community partners. Invite suggested advocate groups to attend the meeting. Have an established list of identified incentives for advocate groups.
Meeting Time: This meeting lasts 1 hour and is one of a series of biweekly meetings.
Program Overview: Project Elevation is a student-financial-support program. This program assists students with their everyday living expenses. The program provides a nonrepayment financial support fund as an on-campus service for students and incorporates financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, job-readiness opportunities, referrals to resources related to financial barriers, and case management for student retention. The ultimate goal of the program is to increase student engagement and retention by incorporating these initiatives.
Members Invited: Counseling services Career services Resource program Student engagement Financial aid Project Aspire (TRIO) Ready to Work Advising Foundation department/fundraiser/grants department At least two faculty members Vice president of academic affairs Vice president of student development Knowledge management team

Advocate Groups Invited:
Student organizations
Athletes
Peer mentors
Resident assistants
Student ambassadors
At least one faculty member from each academic program
At least one staff member from each department
Meeting Guided Direction:
For this program, advocate groups play a major role in the success of student recruitment. It is important to have at least one advocate from every department and academic program within the college or university. Recruitment and overall support for this program should be an organization-wide initiative. Advocates should receive the program flyer and information about the program to help them to recruit students. Faculty and staff advocates need to inform their peers about the program. Their role is to encourage their peers to also promote the program to students. Advocates need to assist with the orientation process. Another meeting will review the orientation process. By participating in this program, advocates have the opportunity to win incentives.
Meeting Agenda:
- Welcome advocate groups to the meeting.   - Review the program overview, goals, and the last meeting.   - Review the Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet and discuss progress.   - Go over the purpose of advocate groups and their role.   - Review incentives and opportunities for advocate groups.   - Establish a program start date and when recruitment will begin.
Materials:
Module 3 description section.

APPENDIX F

Module 4: Meeting Agenda

Module 4:
Engagement
Meeting 4:
To prepare for this meeting, create a community partner and employee engagement PowerPoint presentation. Prepare to present this to faculty members, staff members, and community partners.
Invite key players, such as faculty members, staff members, community partners, and committee members.
Meeting Time:
This meeting lasts 1 hour and is one of a series of biweekly meetings.
Program Overview:
Project Elevation is a student-financial-support program. This program assists students with their everyday living expenses. The program provides a nonrepayment financial support fund as an on-campus service for students and incorporates financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, job-readiness opportunities, referrals to resources related to financial barriers, and case management for student retention. The ultimate goal of the program is to increase student engagement and retention by incorporating these initiatives.
Members Invited:
Counseling services
Career services
Resource program
Student engagement
Financial aid
Project Aspire (TRIO)
Ready to Work
Advising
Foundation department/fundraiser/grants department
At least two faculty members
Vice president of academic affairs
Vice president of student development
Knowledge management team
Guests Invited:
Faculty members
Staff members
Senior administrators
Community partners

| **Meeting Guided Direction:** |
| For this meeting, capturing the attention of community partners and college or university employees is essential. The purpose of the luncheon is to present information about the program and capture the audience's attention. Help them understand how they would make a tremendous impact on student retention and support. |
| **Meeting Agenda:** Welcome community partners and college or university employees. Hand out program flyer. Allow 10–15 minutes for guests to get food and drinks and network. Present the community partner and employee engagement PowerPoint. Accept and respond to questions and feedback. |
| **Materials Needed:** Community partner and employee engagement PowerPoint presentation Sign-in sheet Program flyer Giveaways Food and drink Partnership agreement forms (memorandums of understanding) |

APPENDIX G

Module 5: Possible Ways to Market the Program Checklist

Committee members are free to add items, delete items, or modify the list.

☐ Attend resource fairs/other school events and hand out flyers
☐ Flyers, posters, banners
☐ Marketing emails to students, faculty members, and staff members
☐ Post on TV screens
☐ Classroom presentations
☐ School event calendar
☐ Social media
☐ Advocate groups

APPENDIX H

Module 5: Meeting Agenda

Module 5:   Program Marketing
Meeting 5:   To prepare for this meeting, update the Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet to reflect current partnership statuses.   Create a marketing responsibility sign-up sheet by using sign-up genius. Refer to the Possible Ways to Market the Program Checklist and use the sign-up sheet to determine responsibilities.   Have the custom hashtag (#schoolnameelevation) ready to present to the committee.
Meeting Time: This meeting lasts 1 hour and is one of a series of biweekly meetings.
Program Overview: Project Elevation is a student-financial-support program. This program assists students with their everyday living expenses. The program provides a nonrepayment financial support fund as an on-campus service for students and incorporates financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, job-readiness opportunities, referrals to resources related to financial barriers, and case management for student retention. The ultimate goal of the program is to increase student engagement and retention by incorporating these initiatives.
Members Invited: Counseling services   Career services   Resource program   Student engagement   Financial aid   Project Aspire (TRIO)   Ready to Work   Advising   Foundation department/fundraiser/grants department   At least two faculty members   Vice president of academic affairs   Vice president of student development   Knowledge management team

Meeting Guided Direction:
For this meeting, review the Possible Ways to Market the Program Checklist. Marketing of the program determines how many students will register. Strong presence of the marketing materials will increase the interest of students. During this meeting, committee members need to review the Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet. This ensures that committee members are aware of each partnership being established. Establish who will order giveaways, if needed.

Meeting Agenda:
- Review the last meeting.
- Discuss marketing strategies.
- Review Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet.
- Discuss draft for a memorandum of understanding.
- Assign the task of ordering giveaways.

Materials Needed:
- Possible Ways to Market the Program Checklist
- The Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet
- Custom hashtag slogan

APPENDIX I

Module 6: Project Elevation Survey/Application

Project Elevation Survey/Application (FII)
Student Name:
Student ID #
Phone Number #
Personal Email:
School Email:
Is this your first semester?　　☐ Y　　　☐ N
If no, how long have you been at this school?
Circle one:　　Spring　　Summer　　Fall　　＿＿＿＿＿＿ (year)
How many *dependents* do you have in your home? (Dependents are any person who relies on you: i.e. children, roommate, elderly parents, etc.) **# of household members (drop down-1-10)**
Relationship to you: **(please list each one)**
Are you comfortable navigating the internet and using a computer?　　☐Y　　☐N (If no, we can help!)

Please list 2 goals you would like to achieve over the next 2 years through FII:

   1.

   2.

Each group meets once a month for a commitment of 2 years. Are you comfortable committing to a monthly meeting for 2 years? ☐ Y   ☐   N

Which location is most convenient, fill in all that apply?

_____ _____ _____

Are you free to meet once a month?

☐ *Yes*   ☐ *No*

If yes, please select the availability that fits your schedule.

☐ Mornings   ☐ Evenings   ☐ Afternoons

If no, please indicate your schedule below.

☐ Mondays   ☐ Mornings   ☐ Evenings   ☐ Afternoons

☐ Tuesdays   ☐ Mornings   ☐ Evenings   ☐ Afternoons

☐ Wednesdays   ☐ Mornings   ☐ Evenings   ☐ Afternoons

☐ Thursdays   ☐ Mornings   ☐ Evenings   ☐ Afternoons

☐ Fridays   ☐ Mornings   ☐ Evenings   ☐ Afternoons

APPENDIX J

Module 6: Meeting Agenda

Module 6: Program Registration
Meeting 6: To prepare for this meeting, make copies of the Project Elevation Survey/Application to provide to committee members. Create an online version of the Project Elevation Survey/Application. Implementers should work with their marketing departments on this task. The application should be linked to from the website of the department responsible for the program.
Meeting Time: This meeting lasts 1 hour and is one of a series of biweekly meetings.
Program Overview: Project Elevation is a student-financial-support program. This program assists students with their everyday living expenses. The program provides a nonrepayment financial support fund as an on-campus service for students and incorporates financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, job-readiness opportunities, referrals to resources related to financial barriers, and case management for student retention. The ultimate goal of the program is to increase student engagement and retention by incorporating these initiatives.
Members Invited: Counseling services Career services Resource program Student engagement Financial aid Project Aspire (TRIO) Ready to Work Advising Foundation department/fundraiser/grants department At least two faculty members Vice president of academic affairs Vice president of student development Knowledge management team

Meeting Guided Direction:

For this meeting, committee members need to become familiar with the registration process. This will prepare committee members to assist students who are completing the application and answer their questions. For this meeting, committee members need to finalize the start and end dates for registration. Review the description of Module 6 to ensure everyone is in accord. Review the Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet and any updates to the memorandums of understanding. In addition, discuss progress on the presentation for community partners and employee engagement. Determine if anything needs to be adjusted and discuss feedback provided.

Meeting Agenda:
- Review the registration process.
- Discuss and review the Project Elevation Survey/Application.
- Review the Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet and memorandum of understanding.
- Discuss the orientation presentation and assign the presentation as a task.

Materials Needed:
- Module 6 registration description
- Copies of the Project Elevation Survey/Application
- Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet
- Notes from the luncheon for community partners and employees

APPENDIX K

Module 7: Meeting Agenda

Module 7:   Student Orientation
Meeting 7:   To prepare for this meeting, the committee chair and committee members need to create a student orientation PowerPoint presentation.   To prepare for this meeting, make copies of the Module 7 description and the PowerPoint presentation.
Meeting Time: This meeting lasts 1 hour and is one of a series of biweekly meetings.
Program Overview: Project Elevation is a student-financial-support program. This program assists students with their everyday living expenses. The program provides a nonrepayment financial support fund as an on-campus service for students and incorporates financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, job-readiness opportunities, referrals to resources related to financial barriers, and case management for student retention. The ultimate goal of the program is to increase student engagement and retention by incorporating these initiatives.
Members Invited: Counseling services   Career services   Resource program   Student engagement   Financial aid   Project Aspire (TRIO)   Ready to Work   Advising   Foundation department/fundraiser/grants department   At least two faculty members   Vice president of academic affairs   Vice president of student development   Knowledge management team

Advocate Groups Invited: Student organizations Athletes Peer mentors Resident assistants Student ambassadors At least one faculty member from each academic program At least one staff member from each department
Meeting Guided Direction: For this meeting, committee members need to become familiar with the orientation process. Review Module 7 first. Go over the predeveloped Project Elevation Survey/Application as a team. Make adjustments to the application as needed. In addition, review any loose ends from previous meetings.
Meeting Agenda • Review the Module 7 and discuss the process. • Make adjustments to the Project Elevation Survey/Application as needed. • Review updates to the Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet and updates memorandums of understanding. • Review the orientation responsibilities sign-up genius list. • Review progress on the presentation for community partners and employee engagement.
Materials Needed: • Module 7 orientation description section • Copies of the Project Elevation Survey/Application • Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet • Responsibilities sign-up genius list

APPENDIX L

Module 8: Project Elevation Check-In

Project Elevation Check-In
☐ **Mid** ☐ **End**
Term Form
Date:
Student Name:
Student ID #
Phone Number #
Personal Email:

Resource Questionnaire

I currently need assistance with housing

☐ *Yes*   ☐ *No*

I need money to buy food

☐ *Yes*   ☐ *Sometimes*   ☐ *No*

I cannot afford childcare for my children.

☐ *Yes*   ☐ *Sometimes*   ☐ *No*   ☐ *Does not apply to me*

I struggle with attending classes due to lack of transportation.

☐ *Yes*   ☐ *Sometimes*   ☐ *No*

I need assistance to better my career path.

☐ *Does not apply to me*   ☐ *Resume Help*   ☐ *Job Search*   ☐ *Practice Interview*

Currently, I am (check which best applies to you):

☐ *Employed full-time*   ☐ *Employed part-time*   ☐ *Unemployed*

☐ *Seeking Employment*   ☐ *Displaced Worker*

End Semester Questions Only

Has this program helped you stay in school?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Has this program given you financial stability?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Have you learned better money management skills from being in this program?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Do you believe the skills learned and the support offered from this program will better prepare you for your future?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

APPENDIX M

Module 8: Meeting Agenda

Module 8: Case Management and Follow Up
Meeting 8: To prepare for this meeting, make copies of the Module 8 description and the orientation PowerPoint presentation.
Meeting Time: This meeting lasts 1 hour and is one of a series of biweekly meetings.
Program Overview: Project Elevation is a student-financial-support program. This program assists students with their everyday living expenses. The program provides a nonrepayment financial support fund as an on-campus service for students and incorporates financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, job-readiness opportunities, referrals to resources related to financial barriers, and case management for student retention. The ultimate goal of the program is to increase student engagement and retention by incorporating these initiatives.
Members Invited: Counseling services Career services Resource program Student engagement Financial aid Project Aspire (TRIO) Ready to Work Advising Foundation department/fundraiser/grants department At least two faculty members Vice president of academic affairs Vice president of student development Knowledge management team
Meeting Guided Direction: For this meeting, committee members identify what is included in case management services and follow-up. Committee members should involve key people from the different departments indicated in the Members Invited section.

Meeting Agenda
- Review Module 8 and discuss the process.   - Assign key people to take on the case management role.   - Review the Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet and memorandums of understanding and wrap these up.   - Review the responsibilities sign-up genius list.
Materials Needed:
- Module 8 case management and follow-up description section.   - Financial Resource Potential Partnerships Worksheet   - Memorandums of understanding   - Responsibilities sign-up genius list

APPENDIX N

Module 9: Meeting Agenda

Module 9: Evaluation
Meeting 9: To prepare for this meeting, make copies of the Module 9 description and compile the midsemester survey and semester-end survey results.
Meeting Time: This meeting lasts 1 hour and is one of a series of biweekly meetings.
Program Overview: Project Elevation is a student-financial-support program. This program assists students with their everyday living expenses. The program provides a nonrepayment financial support fund as an on-campus service for students and incorporates financial management groups, financial literacy workshops, job-readiness opportunities, referrals to resources related to financial barriers, and case management for student retention. The ultimate goal of the program is to increase student engagement and retention by incorporating these initiatives.
Members Invited: Counseling services Career services Resource program Student engagement Financial aid Project Aspire (TRIO) Ready to Work Advising Foundation department/fundraiser/grants department At least two faculty members Vice president of academic affairs Vice president of student development Knowledge management team
Meeting Guided Direction: For this meeting, committee members identify best practices to evaluate the program. Committee members pick a preferred method of evaluation that will best fit their college or university. This meeting also serves as a wrap-up. Address any loose ends from past meetings. Review the list of roles and responsibilities to ensure all duties are accounted for.

Meeting Agenda
- Review Module 8 and discuss strengths and weaknesses. The committee should make adjustments as needed.
- Assign key people to research the best evaluation structure to fit the college or university and its students.
- Review the results of the midsemester survey, semester-end survey, and case management tracking.

Materials Needed:
- Module 9 description section.
- Results of midsemester survey, semester-end survey, and case management tracking.

VITA

TIFFANY S. MINARD

EDUCATION

June, 2009	Bachelor of Social Work University of Cincinnati Cincinnati, Ohio	
August, 2014	Master of Education Western Kentucky University Bowling Green, Kentucky	
May, 2017	Master of Science Western Kentucky University Bowling Green, Kentucky	
Pending	Doctor of Education Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky	

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

July, 2015– Present	Director of Counseling, Career and Intervention Services Gateway Community and Technical College Edgewood, Kentucky
August, 2014– Present	Training Developer and Instructional Designer Gateway Community and Technical College Edgewood, Kentucky
January, 2012– January, 2017	Adjunct Instructor/First Year Experience Gateway Community and Technical College Edgewood, Kentucky
July, 2012– July, 2015	Coordinator of Counseling, Career and Intervention Services Gateway Community and Technical College Edgewood, Kentucky

August, 2011–   Intervention Specialist
July, 2012   Gateway Community and Technical College
                       Edgewood, Kentucky

June, 2011–   Mental Health Specialist
February, 2012   Lighthouse Youth Services
                       Cincinnati, Ohio

April, 2010–   Therapeutic Support Counselor/Provider
August, 2011   Child Focus
                       Cincinnati, Ohio