

**SECTION 6: LINKING
WORKERS TO**

COLLEGE

MY FAMILY IS BEHIND IT. MY FAMILY SUPPORTS ME IN EVERYTHING I DO...I HAVE COLLEGE-AGED KIDS, SO I'M SHOWING THEM TO CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION AND KEEP GOING, TOO

- Diana Millay, Work-based Course student at OCTC and Mechanical Repairman at Aleris Corp.

Beyond the educational and career value that they provide on their own, work-based courses can serve as a gateway for workers to engage or reengage in community college. Students who take other courses and ultimately obtain a certificate or a degree increase their

educational, economic, and career benefits. At the same time, because the students are recruited at work and much of the instruction happens through job responsibilities, the link to college completion may not be clear to work-based course students.



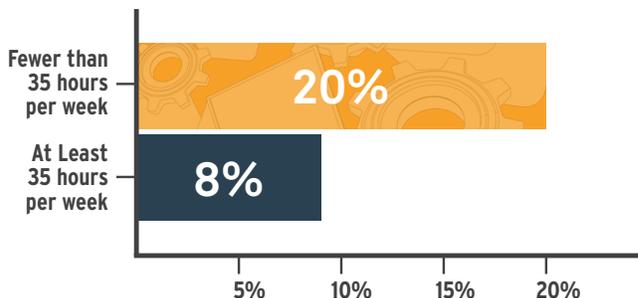
By developing internal partnerships between academic departments and college departments such as admissions and student services, colleges can build a bridge to help students continue their learning and earning potential.

One strategy to consider is supplementing work-based courses with college and career navigation services as well as other wraparound services that can help students overcome nonacademic barriers ranging from time management to transportation or housing. While not directly part of the work-based course design, these services are critical to the success of the students targeted by work-based courses. Engineering and technology students have the highest attrition rates of all STEM majors,¹ and attrition from community college is particularly pronounced among working adults. Only 8 percent of students working at least 35 hours per week obtain an associate's degree, compared with 20 percent of those working fewer hours. Similarly, part-time students graduate at a rate of 12 percent, as compared with 20 percent for full-time students. Finally, students entering directly from high school also outpace delayed-entry students in associate degree attainment, at rates of 19 percent versus 13 percent.² In addition, evaluations of a number of community college reform initiatives have shown that adult students succeed better when the college provides strong mentoring, tutoring, support services, and linkages to employment.³ By design, work-based courses engage adult, working students most likely to face these additional challenges in balancing academic, work, and personal demands.

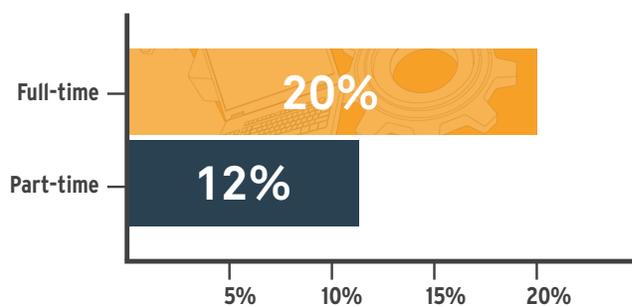
The connection between work-based courses and other programs offered by the community college will be stronger if work-based course administrators begin to consider relevant wraparound supports as part of the institutional self-assessment when preparing to introduce work-based courses to the college. At the beginning of implementation, consider how to connect participating students with the broader resources at the college and facilitate the transition to longer-term programs of study. While a number of academic and other supports will help work-based students just as they help students in traditional courses, several strategies could be particularly helpful in addressing the needs of these working students. This section highlights a few types of assistance that can help work-based students navigate both the educational landscape and their own workplace.

ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE ATTAINMENT BY:

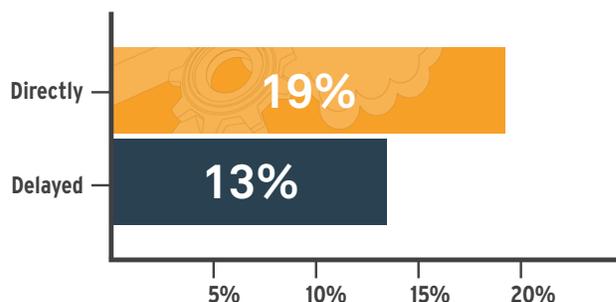
Hours Worked per Week



College Enrollment Status



Timing Entered after High School



1. Koff R., Molter L., Renninger, K.A., (2009) "Why Students Leave STEM Fields: Development of a Common Data Template and Survey Tool." Report to Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.
2. Hoachlander G., Sikora, A.C., & Horn, L. (2003). "Community College Students: Goals, Academic Preparation, and Outcomes." U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
3. Bragg, Debra, Kathleen Marie Oertle, Sujung Kim, Catherine Kirby, Jason Taylor, Tim Harmon, & Lorelea Liss, 2011. "Illinois Adult Education Bridges: Promising Practices. Office of Community College Research and Leadership." *Transition Highlights*. Issue 4.

IDENTIFYING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND TRAINING NEEDS

Internal Career Advancement Exploration. Work-based course students are enrolled in courses that not only further their education but also help advance their careers. Students will be better positioned for career success if they are comfortable advocating for themselves within their companies. Work-based course instructors, college and career navigators, or other college staff can collaborate with the employer to encourage and prepare these students to reach out internally in their company to explore career advancement options and pathways. Networking and self-advocacy are important skills to practice both in the workplace and in a college setting.

Informational interviews are one common strategy for students to learn how to advance within an industry or company. A variety of tools, such as the Informational Interview Guide and Log in the [SkillWorks Toolkit](#), can help students make the most of these interviews. College staff should customize this guidance for work-based course students to conduct interviews at their current place of work. For example, work-based students can speak with their direct manager about their role and ask about reaching out to others internally for informational interviews. Work-based course students also can contact their human resources department to discuss the skills required for more advanced positions, as well as how to enroll in additional training opportunities.

As work-based course instructors, college and career navigators, or other college staff work with students to define their career goals, they can help students identify what educational opportunities at the college can help them achieve those goals. College staff should align the career goals to the information on advancement that the work-based course student has learned from the company as well as similar labor market information about the skills and credentials relevant to similar employers throughout the region. Based on this, staff can help the student identify the specific courses, academic programs, and credentials that would be most valuable to meeting the student's goals.

Basic Skills Remediation. Work-based course students may learn about and enter the program through a variety of avenues. At OCTC, some students currently apply for admission to the college's work-based program at the same time they apply to work with the employer. Others are incumbent workers selected by employers. While the former already undergo a college admissions process that parallels that of traditional students, the employer-selected students come to the college through employer-defined processes unlikely to be closely tied to academic preparation. These work-based course students are likely to be reliable workers, often with many years of experience, who have shown the capacity to advance. At the same time, they also may not have been in school for many years. While some have already taken community college courses, others may have basic skills deficiencies in math and English that could curtail their success in the work-based course itself, or when they continue with traditional courses at the college.

Work-based course programs that integrate a skills assessment at the beginning of the program will be better positioned to help each student succeed. The college should determine whether work-based course students must meet the same admission requirements as other students. If not, including key elements of the admission process, such as the college's standard assessment (i.e., Accuplacer) in the course startup, can provide detailed information about the areas in which students need support. For example, one student may need extra help with fractions, while another requires a semester-long developmental education math course. Reviewing developmental options to onboard these students should be part of a work-based program strategy.



When students' skill needs are determined, the college can identify the best resources to prepare them for college-level work. Many community colleges offer basic skills remediation, including intensive, short-term boot camps, online courses, and one-on-one or group tutoring. Contextualized developmental education can be particularly appealing to incumbent workers, who would be comfortable with the industry perspective in the content. Examples of contextualized developmental education include a variety of [advanced manufacturing literacy and math modules](#) developed by the Massachusetts Community Colleges and Workforce Development Transformation Agenda. [Skills Commons](#), developed through the U.S. Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCT) program, also includes contextualized math and literacy curricula. While it is beyond the scope of this toolkit to provide tools to develop strategies for the basic skills remediation of work-based course students, we encourage those designing and implementing work-based courses to leverage institutional assets to meet these needs.

ADDRESSING NONACADEMIC BARRIERS

College and Career Navigator. College and career navigators coordinate the resources of the college and community, providing one easy place for students to locate help. Navigators help students create a long-term career plan and identify the right courses and programs for those long-term career goals. They improve college outcomes by addressing systematic and psychosocial barriers students may face in addition to academic ones. As navigators build relationships with students, they also identify resources that students might not otherwise know how to find. This can be particularly helpful to work-based course students, who spend less time on campus and are likely to be less familiar with the resources available to them.

Navigators are becoming increasingly prevalent at community colleges, funded in part through federal or philanthropic grants to pilot navigator positions. The value of navigators has been clear to OCTC. The college initially funded a navigator in 2005 through a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation as part of the Breaking Through initiative of Jobs for the Future and the National Council for Workforce Education. They have since made this a permanent self-sustaining position that is funded by the college rather than grants. Cindy Fiorella, the Vice President of Workforce Solutions division of OCTC, describes how the role has become integrated in the division:

“A navigator, referred to as a success coach, ...works with adult students, dislocated workers, and incumbent workers seeking further training. This full-time staff person provides academic and life coaching assistance, helps students with navigating college functions, mentors students, tracks their program progression, and intervenes when crises emerge.”

Even when it is not financially possible to create a new navigator position, colleges can look at the roles of a navigator to determine whether existing staff positions may be able to provide these services to work-based course students.

The [College and Career Navigator Training Manual](#), developed for JFF's Accelerating Opportunity Initiative, provides in-depth guidance on training staff for this role, along with links to additional resources. Navigators or other staff can use tools with work-based students from [Coaching for College and Career: A SkillWorks Toolkit](#), a compilation of resources that career coaches have successfully used and adapted for their work with clients. Other helpful resources for learning how to integrate best practices of college and career navigators with program design include the [Colorado Community College System SUN Navigator Manual](#) and [TAACCT Career Coaches: Findings and Observations](#) from the Education & Employment Research Center at Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations.

Nonacademic Student Needs and Referrals. Work-based course students balance the competing demands of classroom and work responsibilities and their nonacademic family and financial obligations. College and career navigators, work-based course faculty, or other college staff are not expected to take on a full case management role. But it helps to be aware of questions to ask students and to be able to refer them to appropriate resources in the public workforce system, community-based organizations, and elsewhere. Often, this leads to identifying benefits and nonacademic supports that students may not be aware of.

EMPath’s [Bridge to Self-Sufficiency](#) provides a holistic theory of change that can help you contextualize education and employment among other key elements of self-sufficiency: family stability, health and well-being, and financial management. The continua that define each area can provide a starting point for proactive planning to prevent or resolve barriers to success in work-based courses. Students may also be referred to a variety of national and local resources that provide critical supports. The National Resource List included as A-7 of the [College and Career Navigator Training Manual](#) provides a good starting point that compiles strong national resources for support services. Colleges can also create their own maps of parallel resources available in the community, at the college, and the work-based course student’s place of work. Ideally, these services are co-located on a college campus, or someone at the college will periodically check in with their contacts in organizations that accept student referrals.

Time Management. Managing their time is a big challenge for working students.⁴ While work-based courses help ease this burden by integrating some of the academic learning into the job itself, work-based course students still have to juggle and prioritize work schedules and responsibilities, time requirements of the work-based courses and homework, and family or other personal demands. Work-based course instructors can help through flexible course scheduling or opportunities to make up missed class time. In addition, orientations to work-based courses can recognize this problem and offer guidance to help students manage their time. Simple tools such as [My Weekly Schedule: Time Management Exercise](#), developed by Study Guides and Strategies as part of their time management series, can support this discussion. In addition, work-based course faculty and supervisors, college and career navigators, or other college staff can serve as resources throughout the course to address challenges with time management as they emerge. Often, the workplace offers tips to help with managing time as well.

This section provides a brief introduction to some critical ways to help support work-based course students as they balance work-based courses, community college, and a career. When administrators and program developers understand the academic and nonacademic student supports available at the college, these connections can be effectively integrated and flagged for students. For example, an orientation to each work-based course can require students to visit the college and a career navigator as an early homework assignment. Or students can receive a short worksheet that details some of the campus resources most likely to help them. Developing and leveraging the support assets of the college is not a direct element of work-based courses and goes beyond the scope of this toolkit. However, we hope you will consider using these strategies as a way to improve student and program outcomes and success.

4. Lotkowski, Veronica A., Robbins, Steven B., Noeth, Richard J. (2004). “The Role of Academic and Non-academic Factors in Improving College Retention.” ACT Policy Report.

WORK-BASED COURSES: BRINGING COLLEGE TO THE PRODUCTION LINE

This document is part of a toolkit that provides guidance to community college administrators and faculty who are interested in bringing a work-based course model to their college. Tools and resources walk through the major stages of program design and implementation. To access the complete toolkit, go to: <http://www.jff.org/workbasedcourses>

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