Suffolk County Community College  
Title III Evaluation Report  
First Year Interim Assessment

Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) began its Title III Strengthening Institutions project – *Student Engagement through Informed Support (SEIS)* – in October of 2010. As described in the abstract, the overall purpose of the project is to “dramatically improve the success of students as they transition from their first contact with the College, through the series of heavily subscribed gateway courses, to become accomplished learners.” With one major Activity, the project tackles the need to engage and support students by intensifying and expanding their access to resources and services technologically. To that end, the College will electronically enable enrollment and admissions, reorganize faculty academic advising, institute an early warning and intervention system, develop learning objects to enhance learning support for gateway courses, and unify student support resources through a Virtual Learning Commons. With the focus squarely on student success, the project will increase successful course completion and student persistence, retention and satisfaction. Now at the midpoint of the first year, SCCC will complete development over the next five years to fully implement and institutionalize SEIS by September 2015.

During the inaugural year of the Title III project, the College contracted with Development Institute, a Boston consulting firm, with Dr. Katherine German, Vice President, serving as the external evaluator. Dr. German has been involved with the design and implementation of similar programs since 1980 and held a variety of leadership roles within higher education over the past thirty years. She is currently working with numerous institutions in the development and evaluation of Title III projects as well as other change efforts within higher education.
Prior to the campus visit of May 24, 2011, Dr. German reviewed the College’s overall five-year project plan as well as other related documents and outlined the evaluation criteria specified in the project for the first year of implementation. These criteria, defined by the project objectives and anticipated results, have been incorporated into the evaluation report for use as benchmarks against which to measure the progress of the project to date.

While on campus for the initial interim assessment Dr. German conducted a series of structured interviews to ascertain the progress that has occurred within the elements of the overall activity under development. During these discussions, she met with Dr. Marlene DuBois, the newly appointed Title III Coordinator, Dr. Jian Zhang, the Title III Activity Director, Dr. William Tucker, the Grants Officer, and Muriel Lanier, the Title III Administrative Assistant regarding overall project organization, management and development. Thereafter, she met with key faculty and staff involved in project development and implementation, as well as members of the Title III Task Force. Individuals participating in evaluative discussions during the campus visit included:

C. Brady          Math Gateway Course Support Enhancement Team Leader
C. Connolly       Enrollment and Admissions Team Leader
K. Dovell         Virtual Learning Commons Team Leader
R. Hill            Virtual Learning Commons Team Leader
C. Holfester      Faculty Mentoring & Student Engagement Team Leader
L. Johnston       Enrollment and Admissions Team Leader
B. Laudicina      Enrollment and Admissions Team Leader
S. Lieberthal     Virtual Learning Commons Team Leader
P. Munsch         Faculty Mentoring & Student Engagement Team Leader
M. Ratna          Faculty Mentoring & Student Engagement Team Leader
L. Sprague        Enrollment and Admissions Team Leader
M. Weinstein-Zeolla College Seminar Gateway Course Support Enhancement Team Leader

Overall discussion focused on the achievement of the first six months, issues that have arisen, and plans for the future. Throughout the evaluation, the participants enthusiastically described their involvement, accomplishments, and expectations for the project. As part of the review, Dr. German
shared her perceptions of project implementation with the Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Dr. Mary Lou Araneo, as well as the Title III Project Coordinator.

**Needs Assessment**

In advance of proposal submittal, Suffolk County Community College faculty and staff engaged in an extensive, highly participatory analysis of the strengths, weaknesses and major problems inhibiting institutional growth and self-sufficiency. The analysis drew from multiple sources including the SCCC Strategic Plan, the Middle States Review, Gardner’s Foundations of Excellence Self-Report, and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement results as well as related internal reports and studies produced by the Institutional Research office.

Building on the institution’s academic, managerial, and fiscal strengths, the project addresses eight critical weaknesses in the same areas:

- Academic weaknesses include a disjointed enrollment and intervention system, insular instructional delivery, and inaccessible onsite academic support system.
- Managerial weaknesses include incomplete enterprise system implementation and integration, inconsistent and underpowered web presence, and technical limitations.
- Fiscal weaknesses include an inadequate budget for institutional development and an insufficient institutional endowment.

Taken together, these weaknesses significantly impact the College’s ability to sustain student progress to graduation, producing a single overarching problem to be addressed by the project:

Entering student academic achievement, persistence, retention and satisfaction are devastated by legacy enrollment, advising and academic support systems that fail to connect with one another or the students they purport to serve.

By enabling enrollment, advising and intervention systems, enhancing gateway courses, and enriching teaching and learning with a virtual learning commons the project seeks to significantly increase student success and satisfaction.
Scope of the Project

A single activity, Student Engagement through Informed Support (SEIS) presents a holistic, comprehensive approach to student success by reconstructing the SCCC educational experience, linking instruction with enhanced support systems. Three interrelated components designed to help students become accomplished learners will improve their success as they transition from their first contact with the College through a series of heavily subscribed ‘gateway’ courses, continuing their studies to graduation. The first component enables student success through the development of an electronic enrollment, advising and intervention system to streamline records management and coordinate admissions with continuous active monitoring thereafter, enabling timely intervention and mobilizing a refined faculty advising network. Thereafter, the second component enhances student success through the implementation of on-line learning objects developed by teaching faculty and integrated with the curriculum to enhance academic support for 20 gateway courses. And finally, the third component enriches teaching and learning through the implementation of a college-wide Virtual Learning Commons which provides a unified delivery system for all of the available resources – on-line and on-site - through a one-stop portal linking all learning resources - libraries, writing, math, and academic skills centers as well as gateway course learning objects - with an early alert and intervention system. As a result, processes for enrollment, advising, learning, and engaging with the College will be transformed across the institution and student success will increase: both student satisfaction with the college experience and gateway course completion will improve by 20 percent, persistence will improve by 15 percent, and retention
will improve by 10 percent. By 2015, the Activity will be fully institutionalized to ensure the continuing vitality of the institution and the success of its students.

**Year One Interim Activity Assessment**

To initialize the project Dr. Charity Welch, Executive Assistant to the President, was appointed as Title III Coordinator; Dr. Jian Zhang, College Associate Dean for Student Success, was appointed to the role of Activity Director; and the faculty and staff of the Title III Task Force were appointed. Shortly thereafter, Muriel Lanier was appointed to the position of Principal Clerk; four Design Teams composed of faculty and staff volunteers were formed and Dr. Marlene DuBois, Assistant Professor of English, was appointed to the position of Faculty Coordinator, a new role established by the President with institutional support to ensure the success of the faculty-driven initiative, and a website was established to sustain interest and involvement. Meanwhile, searches for the Instructional Media Technologist/ Webmaster and the Research Specialist are continuing, and Dr. Charity Welch, who left the College, has been replaced by Dr. DuBois as the Title III Coordinator.

With key personnel in place and announcements about the project made via the *College Brief* (Number 11, October 4, 2010), plans were developed to host a college-wide Professional Development Day focused on student success, the initiatives included in the project, and the best practices of their colleagues within and beyond the institution. Entitled *Preparing Faculty for Student Success in the 21st Century*, on March 22, 2011 over 500 faculty and staff participated in concurrent panel discussion on enrollment and admissions, gateway course support, virtual learning commons, and faculty mentoring followed by nineteen breakout sessions and four design team meetings involving all who wished to engage. A comprehensive
program provided a plethora of information about the project and the events of the day, providing a tremendous platform from which to launch Activity development.

Three major objectives focus the work of the Activity for the inaugural year:

1. Increase from 0 to 20% the accessibility of enrollment and advising by 9/30/2011;
2. Increase from 0 to 5 supported gateway courses by 9/30/11; and
3. Increase from 0 to 22% the accessibility of the Virtual Learning Commons by 9/30/11.

As a result of the first year’s work, e-transcripting software, assessment delivery scripts, and web-enabled applications are to be installed and debugged with 4550 first-time, full-time students enrolling using the web. Additionally, 5 gateway course teams are to select key concepts for support and design or adopt learning objects so that they are ready to pilot during the second year. And finally, site and process maps for the Virtual Learning Commons are to be completed with hardware and software ready for student use in the fall, including access to the learning objects developed or adopted for the five gateway courses to be piloted in year two.

The Enrollment and Admissions (E&A) Team is the first of four tri-campus volunteer teams of faculty and staff working on various components of the Activity. This particular Team has undertaken the task of improving electronic workflow, streamlining transcripting and assessment, and improving web-enabled application capability. Professional Day speakers from Hudson Valley Community College, the College at Oneonta, and Texas Wesleyan University discussed their unique enrollment and assessment systems and two vendors presented software systems designed to support the enrollment process, all geared to assist the college community in re-envisioning the enrollment and assessment system. Meanwhile, the E&A team has been busy working through the various steps of the enrollment process to streamline and enable the system across all sites. Components of the streamlined system include an
improved central and campus instant admissions process, strategies to enable electronic transcript acceptance, on-line scheduling and scripting of assessment, and e-mail access. Once established, the system will also support electronic distribution of orientation resources and, ultimately, the provision of an extended on-line orientation. Every effort is being made to capitalize on the capabilities of Banner, the College’s enterprise system, the use of the web portal, and the statewide effort to implement e-transcripting. By fall semester it is anticipated that the functionality and accessibility of web applications will be significantly improved across the institution, meeting the performance measures associated with the related objective.

The second team of faculty and staff known as the Gateway Course Support Enhancement (GCSE) team consists of two discipline-based teams to identify key concepts for support with on-line learning objects to increase student learning and achievement. Again, Professional Development Day presentations played a key role in expanding awareness of the potential that lies in the use of learning objects to augment ‘classroom’ learning. Faculty and staff from Rutgers University, the State University of New York at Empire State College, and Stony Brook University, as well as SCCC colleagues discussed the development and use of learning objects, sharing their best practices with the college community. During the course of the spring, eight groups of learning objects were developed and/or collected for five gateway courses, two college seminars and three developmental math courses: Freshman Seminar, Personal Growth and College Life, Developmental Math Skills, Pre-Algebra, and Algebra I. Faculty working on the courses are enthusiastic about the materials they are creating with tools such as Powerpoint, Flash, and Camtasia as well as the open-source materials they provide with links for the students. Course-specific learning objects include explanations, multimedia
demonstrations, quizzes, worksheets, and lexicons derived from the web and/or created by the faculty, all of which are linked with the curriculum and embedded into the instructional process. With pilots anticipated in the fall, participating faculty are considering strategies to encourage colleagues teaching the targeted courses to incorporate the learning objects in their sections. Again, each of the performance measure associated with the related objective should be addressed by the end of the year.

A third team, the Virtual Learning Commons Team (VLCT), like its counterparts, has begun work on the Commons with a demonstration of the Live-Brary, a highly interactive website developed for the Suffolk Country Cooperative Libraries, and the development of an inventory of on-site college services to be linked with the Commons, initial steps which ultimately led to the development of preliminary site and process maps to support the VLC. Conceived as both a comprehensive library of learning objects and a service delivery site, the concept of the VLC was featured in the Professional Development Day by presenters from Tufts University, Stony Brook University, Hostos Community College, the University of Hartford and SCCC. Four subgroups addressed the development of specific components of the VLC: web-mapping, Library, Writing and Academic Skills. Additionally, a student event entitled Virtual Learning Commons at SCCC – What’s in it for Me? demonstrated the concept and, asking students to move ‘Beyond Facebook’, garnered excellent feedback from students which included enthusiasm for the videos incorporated into the system, a recommendation that the site be accessible using mobile devices, and a concern that their work – especially quizzes designed to test their learning – remain apart from course grades. To ensure the accessibility of the Commons to students engaged in the pilots of the five gateway courses in the fall the Team
will invest in an on-site effort to improve the usability and aesthetics of the production site and work to capture essential analytics, allowing the Team to monitor student usage and assess impact, both tasks that will be assumed by the Instructional Technologist once hired.

And finally, the fourth team, Faculty Mentoring and Student Engagement (FM&SE) worked on redefining the concept of ‘faculty advising’ and ‘faculty mentoring’. Given a traditional model of advising in which the process is defined largely as course registration and scheduling, the FM&SE team began its work by examining the best practices of other institutions and considering the feasibility of using a system such as Degreeworks, a product that is under consideration by the SUNY system. Professional Development Day presentations by representatives of the College of Oneonata, Hudson Valley Community College, Texas Wesleyan University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and ACT provided the college community with an expanded view of the possibilities and their impact. These presentations, accompanied by a survey designed to assess faculty attitudes, experience, and needs relative to mentoring and academic advising, engendered considerable conversation across the college. As a result, two potential models of faculty mentoring and student engagement are under consideration. Model One describes students with two or more developmental placements moving through the Counseling Center while their peers with higher placements move directly into the faculty advising and mentoring system, and Model Two describes all students moving into the Counseling Center for initial advisement before making the transition to the faculty advising and mentoring system in the middle of their first semester. In both models, faculty provide advice and mentoring through an on-going Center, requiring additional staffing and released time for faculty. With the faculty mentoring/advising certification training scheduled
for the next year, the team has the opportunity to reflect on the students’ needs and, with the assistance of an organization such as NACADA, the National Advising and Counseling Administrators Association, completely reform the process.

Much has been accomplished in the first six months of the inaugural year of the project, with faculty clearly engaged in the development and implementation process; to date, SCCC has done a terrific job of creating and capitalizing on the opportunity the project presents.

Project Management

SCCC’s Title III project is integrated within the institutional structure with the President of the College, Dr. Shaun McKay, assuming overall leadership responsibility, with the Title III Team fully incorporated into the management of the organization, and with faculty and staff fully involved in the implementation of the Activity. The Title III Coordinator, Marlene DuBois, reports directly to the President and works closely and effectively with the Activity Director, Jian Zhang. While the Activity Director is responsible for and fully engaged in the day-to-day implementation of the project, the Coordinator is responsible for the provision of overall guidance for and supervision of project operations; compliance with all relevant requirements at the local, state and federal levels; the establishment of effective communication networks; the approval of expenditures and management of budgets; the maintenance of records and documentation; and the coordination of evaluation procedures culminating in the preparation and submission of required reports as the liaison with the Department of Education and the assigned Program Officer, Pearson Owens.

The components of the Activity are under the purview of project personnel and fully incorporated into the organizational structure under the supervision of appropriate College administrators. A comprehensive Title III Policies and Procedures Handbook has been developed to guide project implementation and provide direction for all major initiatives to be undertaken. All staff
hired for Title III positions are selected in accordance with established hiring procedures at the College with appropriate position descriptions and time-and-effort forms filed for all project personnel. All project records are maintained by Muriel Lanier, the Administrative Assistant, electronically and in hard copy. Additionally, all project expenditures are initiated by the Team Leaders in concert with the Activity Director, Title III Coordinator and reviewed by the appropriate College officer(s) prior to submission to the Business Office. Both the Title III Coordinator and the Business Manager approve all project expenditures to ensure compliance with the approved budget and all federal and state regulations. Program records are maintained in the Business Office under proper standards of accounting with statements available to the Title III Activity Director, the Coordinator, and the President.

With the hiring of the Research Specialist, a baseline database will be developed to include the storage of all relevant data required to provide appropriate benchmarks for use throughout the implementation of – and upon conclusion of – the project. Meetings of the Steering Committee, composed of the President’s Executive Staff including Governance Leaders, and the Task Force, composed of key stakeholders across the institution, provide opportunities for collaboration and communication as well as planning and problem-solving to ensure the success of the Activity and produce the intended impact of the project. Reports addressing Title III accomplishments are prepared and shared broadly during regular meetings of the Task Force, the Steering Committee, and other appropriate venues. Additionally, at key events in the calendar of the college, such as the Professional Development Day held in March, the President, the Title III Coordinator and the Activity Director, along with faculty and staff involved in the effort, provide briefings and updates for colleagues throughout the College community. Additionally, a robust website houses all major documents associated with the project, providing ubiquitous access to current information regarding the progress of the four major teams working on project initiatives.
The negotiated budget for the first year of implementation was submitted to the Department of Education to accommodate an award of $399,470. During the first six months expenditures were low, only $21,685.92, due primarily to delays in hiring and purchasing, leaving a balance of $377,748.08 to be spent during the remainder of the year. Meanwhile, College expenditures were $155,349.80 and included the full-time salaries of the Title III Coordinator, the Activity Director and the Administrative Assistant. With two new positions about to be filled – the Instructional Media Technologist and the Research Specialist – and the Teams working diligently to identify the tools required for successful implementation, it is anticipated that the expenditure of federal funds will increase significantly during the balance of the year, leaving a reasonable amount to be carried over into the second year of project implementation. No formal budget amendments are anticipated at this point, with internal reallocations managed in accordance with the guidelines of the Department of Education to ensure the disbursement of funds in accordance with established Title III requirements.

Conclusions, Commendations, and Recommendations

As a new project, Student Engagement through Informed Support (SEIS) is clearly well organized and extremely well managed. The President, a strong advocate for the Project, is highly invested in the success of the venture; the Executive Staff and Governance Leaders are keenly interested in the progress of the effort; and the faculty and staff of the College are intricately involved in the implementation of each component of the project. The project leaders are clearly focused, highly organized, and genuinely enthusiastic about the project; their creativity and initiative is proving invaluable to the task of transforming the learning environment. And the faculty and staff involved in leading, designing and implementing each component of the Activity are fully steeped in the development process.
Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the first six months of implementation, not surprisingly given the legions of faculty and staff who participated in the design process, is the effort to engage faculty, staff and students with the project. Upon award notification the President hosted a meeting of all members of the College Community to announce the project which was followed with meetings on all three campuses to promote the project, its goals and objectives, and engage the members of the College Community in the implementation process. This inaugural campaign was subsequently supported by the March Professional Development Day entitled *Preparing Faculty for Student success in the 21st Century*, a wildly successful effort to pique faculty interest with related innovations and best practices within and beyond the institution. As a result, each of the Teams working on the various components of the Activity are packed with faculty and staff invested in project implementation and each of the Teams has made significant progress on the development of specific initiatives:

- E$A team will be ready to pilot a streamlined enrollment and assessment process supported by e-transcripting, improved assessment scripts, and an enhanced web-enabled application with 4550 students;
- GCSE team will be ready to pilot five gateway courses with key concepts supported by learning objects embedded into the instructional process by teaching faculty;
- VLC team will be ready to provide access to the initial iteration of the Virtual Learning Commons with site/process maps constructed and the infrastructure developed to support the pilot gateway courses with access to learning objects; and
- FM&SE team will be ready to embark on the development of the faculty mentoring and advising curriculum, providing essential training and local support in accordance with their new mentoring/advising model.

Underlying the success of these ventures is the technological infrastructure – the backbone of the project. Consulting funds allocated to the development of essential improvements in the system are available, and every effort should be made to determine how
and when those funds will be used to ensure that the system is ready for the pilots to occur in the next few months. Likewise, the positions of Instructional Media Technologist and the Research Specialist identified in the project need to be filled appropriately and expeditiously. And finally, software products and systems under consideration for use in instruction and student support need to be purchased as soon as clear choices emerge to ensure the success of the upcoming pilots.

You’ve come a long way in your first six months, and you’ve got everything that it takes to succeed. Now let’s see just how far you can go! Congratulations on a terrific start to your new project!