Suffolk County Community College
Title III Evaluation Report
Second 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 second 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 Title III programs since 1980, several with SCCC, and held a variety of leadership roles within higher education over the past thirty years. She is currently working
with numerous institutions on the development and evaluation of Title III projects as well as other grant initiatives and change efforts within higher education.

Prior to the campus visit of May 18, 2012, 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 Title III Coordinator, Christine Crowe, the newly appointed 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. Specific individuals participating in evaluative discussions during the campus visit included:

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<td>A. Belanich</td>
<td>Title III Tech Support</td>
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<td>C. Brady</td>
<td>Math Gateway Course Support Enhancement Team Leader</td>
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<td>C. Connolly</td>
<td>Enrollment and Admissions Team Leader</td>
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<td>S. Lieberthal</td>
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Overall discussion focused on the achievement of the last 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 new Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, Dr. Carla Mazarelli, and, subsequently, the President, Dr. Shaun McKay, as well as the Title III Project Coordinator and Activity Director.

**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 Two Interim Activity Assessment**

With a successful inaugural year in tow, the Title III Leadership Team worked to sustain the energy generated through the collaborative spirit established and focus on efforts to address the development of the technological infrastructure. At the start of the second year of implementation, Dr. Jian Zhang left the College and Christine Crowe assumed the role of Title III Activity Director. Christine brings a keen organizational eye, an indomitable spirit, and an impressive base of experience to her new role, the impact of which has already become apparent to her colleagues on the Title III Leadership Team. Additionally, Alexandra Belanich joined the team as Tech Support, adding experience and expertise to the effort to develop and manage the technological and investigatory components of the project.

Four major objectives focus the work of the Activity for the second year of implementation:

1. Increase from 20 to 50% the accessibility of enrollment and advising by 9/30/2012;
2. Increase from 5 to 10 supported gateway courses by 9/30/12;
3. Increase from 22 to 48% the accessibility of the Virtual Learning Commons by 9/30/12; and
4. Increase from 64 to 76% FT/FT student success in 5 gateway courses with enhanced support by 9/30/12.

As a result of the second year’s work, a Faculty Mentoring/Advising model workshop curriculum is to be designed with 100 faculty trained and 3 centers equipped to advise 800 First-time/Full-time students. Additionally, 5 gateway course teams are to select the key concepts to support,
design or adopt learning objects, and be ready to pilot, while the Virtual Learning Center provides access to the 5 information literacy and critical thinking learning objects previously developed for students in 395 sections, ultimately hosting 10 course object sets by the end of the second year. And finally, 20 sections will be piloting on-line learning objects with 9 faculty and 1125 students, resulting in a 20% increase in the number of First-time/Full-time students finishing COM101, COL101, MAT001, 006 and 007 with a ‘C’ or better.

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. Last year this particular Team improved electronic workflow, streamlining transcripting and assessment, and improving web-enabled application capability. This year the Team has two major initiatives, the first improving the functionality of the web application, and the second creating and integrating the advising and testing database into Banner. By the mid-point of the year, the web app summary for students was implemented, so that student can view and receive an email summary of the admissions application before submission, while the staff can automatically place holds on the students’ accounts for advising and testing, immunization, meningitis, and felony, all conditions that can affect their admission. Next the students’ applications will be converted to pdfs so that they can be ‘pushed’ into Banner, automatically loaded into X-tender, and ready for viewing by the counselors. With a summary page sent to the Central Admissions printer to facilitate the processing of the application with all of the necessary information on a single sheet, avoiding the need to jump from screen to screen in Banner. Meanwhile, after analyzing three different software products, the Team is recommending the purchase and installation of SARS, a system known for ease of use and capacity, including the availability of an
early alert component. Tremendous progress has been made in the streamlining of Admissions and Enrollment systems, and all of their work is being developed collaboratively and implemented college-wide, a very difficult task. It appears that, like the previous year, work is on target to meet the objectives for the second year. The members of the Team are commended for their foresight and tenacity! Well done!

The second team of faculty and staff known as the Gateway Course Support Enhancement (GCSE) team consists of four discipline-based teams to identify key concepts for support with on-line learning objects to increase student learning and achievement. Last year, 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. This year work is progressing well on the development/identification of learning objects for five additional courses: COL 105, PSY101, RDG098 and 099, and BIO101. For example, the BIO101 Team has identified six units mapped to course objectives for learning objects along with a quiz for each unit. Objects will initially be created in PowerPoint and subsequently converted to Camtasia video for uploading to the VLC. The faculty are authoring the text, figures and animations, using commercial assets only when necessary with two publishers providing permission for asset use to date: McGraw-Hill and Pearson. Interactive unit quizzes will be developed in Flash as separate learning objects. Working together, the faculty have outlined each unit as a team, with a single team member thereafter assuming authorship. All six units have been draft with refinements occurring in preparation for deployment in the fall. Faculty working on the courses remain 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. So far, 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. Wisely, the objects developed for each course are reviewed by the Department and approved before they are hosted by the VLC, thereby encouraging all faculty in the department to become involved in their development and usage. Some faculty are requiring students to use the objects, while others are noting their availability in the syllabus with little further encouragement of their use. Most are promoting awareness of the learning objects to one extent or another; few faculty are completely disengaged from the initiative – a very decent track record. As the year concludes in the fall, every effort will need to be made to encourage faculty to inform students of the availability of the learning objects, if not use them in their courses, a task best undertaken by the faculty themselves with their departmental colleagues. Again, the objective should be met handsomely by the end of the year. Kudos to the gateway course teams!

A third team, the Virtual Learning Commons Team (VLCT), like its counterparts, has been working on the Commons. During the first year they created an inventory of on-site college services to be linked with the Commons, initial steps which led to the design of preliminary site and process maps to support the VLC, while four subgroups addressed the development of web-mapping, the Library, Writing and Academic Skills. By the end of the year plans were underway to support the pilot by improving the usability and aesthetics of the production site and working to capture essential analytics such as student usage and impact. Now at the midpoint of the second year, the collaboration continues: the site is up and running for six key
disciplines and an initial core of student users are indicating their preferences as they put the site to the test. A research study testing student usage in College Seminar and Math paired with a control group provided two critical pieces of information: first, students are more likely to use the site if it is part of the class, and second, use of the site increases student performance. These results are absolutely critical to the continued promotion and development of the site, encouraging both faculty and students to take advantage of the new learning opportunity the VLC provides. As a result, the push is on to publicize the VLC using posters, flat screen TVs, and screensavers in the fall, not to mention the introduction of the site at the students’ initial advising session, in the College Seminar course, and through the Student Activities Day on each campus. Additionally, the Library, which has its own learning objects on the site, is promoting the VLC in the 700 classes it teaches as well. Clearly the fall will really be the test, with increasing numbers of faculty and students using the site for more and more courses. Moreover, the College is moving to Luminis 5, which will ultimately provide increased opportunity for the development of the VLC. As the year continues, the public relations campaign will need to be fully developed, the site will need to be stabilized to ensure the capacity to handle increased usage, learning objects will need to be fully developed and accessible, and the site will need to be made ADA compliant, and research on the utility of the site will need to continue. The Team can already see that the site will need to be reconfigured to accommodate increasing numbers of courses in the near future, perhaps by discipline; can mobile apps be far behind? The VLC is where the action is - great job by the VLC Team!

And finally, the fourth team, Faculty Mentoring and Student Engagement (FM&SE) built on its examination of best practices during the first year with two workshops, one conducted by
Dr. Jayne Drake of NACADA addressing Advising as teaching, and the second conducted by counseling and teaching faculty at the College addressing advising strategies and the availability of Advising Tools, such as the Advising Handbook. During the course of the year, the concepts of ‘advising’ and ‘mentoring’ were refined in concert with the faculty to develop a new model for Mentoring and Engagement in which all incoming students will receive initial advisement through the Counseling Center, making the transition to the faculty advising and mentoring system in the middle of their first semester. Each campus will make the connection between students and faculty during this transition in a slightly different way: at the Ammerman Campus, students will go from the Center to faculty offices; at the Grant Campus, faculty volunteers will staff the Center; and on the East Campus faculty will provide arena advising during critical periods. With the model defined, the Team made tremendous headway, institutionalizing the Advising Handbook which was reviewed by the Faculty Association (Union) while the Team was initiating faculty training. During the fall, training sessions will address FERPA, best practices, transfer, learning disabilities, and special topics such as finding purpose and developing relationships. As the members say, “We’re moving beyond the blue form!” Clearly much progress has been made in rethinking the advising process – congratulations! During the balance of the year, the Team will recruit faculty for participation and training for the fall while work continues on the design of the curriculum for the virtual orientation and the identification of the assessment tool for student readiness, e.g., ACT, Noel-Levitz, SmartThinking, etc.

Much was accomplished during the first year of work to develop the foundation of the project; so far, during the second year the structure is beginning to take shape! Faculty remain
fully engaged in all four Teams within which collaborative development is the norm, a modus operandi that bodes well for the future of the project and the success of the students! Now as the second year continues, it will become increasingly important to make sure that each of the four initiatives is sufficiently developed and integrated with the learning process to begin to deliver the intended impact. The initial users – students and colleagues – will be the arbiters.

**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, Christine Crowe. 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 guides project
implementation and provides 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.

Through the work of the Research Specialist, Min Su, a baseline database was 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 Task Force, composed of key stakeholders across the institution, the President’s Executive Staff, and Governance Leaders, 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, 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 second year of implementation was submitted to the Department of Education to accommodate an award of $400,000; with carryover funds from the first year in the amount of 235,602, the funds available to support the project total $635,602. 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

*Student Engagement through Informed Support (SEIS)* is clearly well organized and extremely well managed, with faculty and staff fully engaged and working collaboratively on each of the four components to ensure project success. The President, a strong advocate for the Project, is highly invested in the success of the venture; the Executive Staff and Governance Leaders are clearly involved in the effort; and the key components of the organization are fully supportive of the successful implementation of each component. The project leaders themselves 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 remain enthusiastic and fully steeped in the development process.

While the first year built on the legions of faculty and staff who participated in the design process by engaging them in the implementation process, the second year seems to be
capitalizing on that involvement with the development of substantive initiatives which have the potential to transform student success at the College. As a result, each of the Teams working on the various components of the Activity are highly collaborative, engaging all components of the organization, and each of the Teams has made significant progress on the development of its specific initiatives:

- E&A team piloted a streamlined enrollment and assessment process supported by e-transcripting, improved assessment scripts, and an enhanced web-enabled application with 4550 students during the first year and continued to improve the functionality of the web application with student and staff summaries, increasing effectiveness and efficiency to the satisfaction of all;

- GCSE team conducted the initial pilots of the five gateway courses with embedded learning objects developed during the first year, assessing their usage and impact, and began to address five additional gateway courses for which learning objects are under development this year, increasing the overall sophistication of the products with new tools and techniques while preparing to promote usage in the fall;

- VLC team provided access to the initial iteration of the Virtual Learning Commons to support the pilot gateway courses with access to learning objects developed during the first year while continuing to expand the site and the tool set in preparation for the move to Luminis 5 and significantly increased accessibility; and

- FM&SE team completed its review of best practices during the inaugural year, identifying and developing the new advising/mentoring model during the second year, complete with a revised Handbook and training program for faculty and staff to support delivery as the model is implemented on three campuses in the fall.

Underlying the success of these ventures is the technological infrastructure – the backbone of the project. During the first year, it was uncertain where the Virtual Learning Commons would reside; during the course of the year that has become clear as the College moves to Luminis 5. Likewise, while the project provided consulting funds for the development of essential technological improvements during the first year, the second year actually provided
a clear picture of the need resulting in the acquisition of additional tech support which has made a significant difference in the progress of project development, ensuring that the system is ready to support the pilots as they occur.

All components are on course to successfully complete the four objectives guiding implementation for the second year, a tremendous accomplishment. Now, of course, attention begins to shift to impact, always the more challenging aspect of project implementation. Therefore, as the Title III Team continues through the second year of implementation, it might prove helpful to consider a few suggestions designed to bring the efforts of each and all of the components together to increase the synergy of their collective efforts:

- The GCSE and VLC Teams should consider joining forces to collaborate on the promotion of the concept of learning objects and their usage in the teaching-learning process, engaging faculty and staff in the display of their products, perhaps in a showcase or festival, while also expanding professional development opportunities, perhaps with mini-grants for interested faculty not originally identified as participants.

- The GCSE and VLC Teams may also want to join forces with the Research Specialist to continue with efforts to intensify the impact of the effort on student success, perhaps engaging faculty in action research projects related to their courses or disciplines.

- The GCSE, VLC and FM&SE Teams may want to collaborate on the promotion of the use of learning objects and the VLC through the orientation, advising, and registration process, embedding learning objects within the training of faculty and staff working with students during the intake process while also using learning objects to emulate the potential impact.

- The FM&SE Team may want to support the project by including the VLC in the Advising Handbook along with the curriculum code list and other items that may be identified, and consider placing the Handbook on the web to facilitate faculty and staff usage.

As always, there can never be too much communication across the college and its constituencies when dealing with a project of such magnitude. Presentations within and
beyond the institution are always helpful, as are articles such as those which appeared in the March 2012 issue of the *Compass News*: “Virtual Learning Commons Goes Online at SCCC”. Now as satisfaction increases with the enrollment process, more courses develop and promote learning objects, the Commons expands to promote both learning objects and academic support services, and the new advising/mentoring model emerges it is increasingly important to keep all parties aboard and engaged: administrators, faculty, staff and students. In this effort, creativity is your ally, so have a ball!

You’ve done a fantastic job so far, and you’ve got everything that it takes to succeed. From the small sample that initial research has provided it is clear that you are headed in the right direction and have only to continue, garnering support, expanding initiatives and creating capacity to increase impact. We can see the potential; now let’s see just how far you can go!

Congratulations on your continuing success!