



Latino and Adult Student Success Academy 2022-2024

Diving Deeper on Institutional Change for Measurable Impact

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Executive Summary

The Latino and Adult Student Success (LASS) Academy is a multi-year initiative administered by CAEL (the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) focused on supporting Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) in their efforts to improve outcomes for adult and Latino adult learners. In its first phase, from 2018 through 2021, the LASS Academy supported fifteen postsecondary initiatives across the country. In the second phase, from 2022 through 2024, the LASS Academy continued its work with four Texas institutions: Austin Community College (ACC), South Texas College (STC), Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC), and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). The goals of the second LASS Academy aligned with the higher education priorities of Texas, which emphasize increasing postsecondary attainment for adult learners. For instance, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's (THECB) strategic plan highlights the need to equip adult learners with the skills demanded by the workforce. The second LASS Academy was supported by Greater Texas Foundation and Strada Education Foundation, and evaluated by Ithaka S+R.

THE LASS ACADEMY MODEL

The LASS Academy model facilitates institutional change through four key activities: identify key priorities and action steps; provide technical assistance; collect, analyze, and report data; and facilitate peer-to-peer learning. The institutions participating in the most recent LASS Academy received guidance from CAEL and three partner organizations (InsideTrack, CollegeAPP, and *Excelencia* in Education), insights into the needs of adult learners through the administration of CAEL's Adult Learner 360 (AL 360) surveys, and the opportunity to learn from their peers through virtual and in-person convenings.

The LASS Academy model facilitates institutional change through four key activities: identify key priorities and action steps; provide technical assistance; collect, analyze, and report data; and facilitate peer-to-peer learning.



PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS' FOCUS AREAS AND OUTCOMES

The four participating institutions identified strategic focus areas to work on during the grant period, depending on the specific needs identified through the examination of their own data. These focus areas were largely an extension of those that the institutions identified during the first LASS Academy. STC focused on **adult learner enrollment and recruitment**; TAMU-CC and UTRGV focused on **advising and personalized coaching for adult learners**; and TAMU-CC and ACC focused on **awarding credit for prior learning (CPL) to adult and Latino adult learners**.

- **Increasing Enrollment Through Targeted Marketing and Recruitment: South Texas College.** CollegeAPP assisted STC in conducting two targeted recruitment and marketing campaigns for adults. A new Office of Student Reengagement provided personalized support to adult learners with reenrollment and onboarding, and STC partnered with community organizations to assist students in addressing basic needs. *Outcomes: STC experienced increases in inquiries and enrollment numbers among adult and Latino adult learners, exceeding application and admissions targets by more than 100 percent.*
- **Improving Retention Through Advising and Personalized Coaching: Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.** InsideTrack provided a series of advisor and coaching training sessions to both institutions. The training employs a relational approach to coaching and advising that encourages staff to identify student needs and build trust with students so they feel comfortable sharing obstacles. *Outcomes: Both institutions substantially grew their adult student participation in advising and coaching, with UTRGV also increasing the number of Latino adult learners who participated in advising. Both are currently working to ensure sustainability of these approaches beyond the life of the initiative. UTRGV is conducting its own internal research to assess the impact of this new coaching approach; early data suggest that it could have a positive impact on adult students who have struggled academically in the past.*

South Texas College's Office of Student Re-Engagement provides personalized onboarding support to adult learners.

Both University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley and Texas A&M-Corpus Christi grew adult learner participation in advising and coaching -- with possible impact on adults who previously struggled academically.

- **Accelerating Degree Completion by Expanding and Improving Opportunities for Credit for Prior Learning: Austin Community College and Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.** CAEL provided CPL training for TAMU-CC staff, and both institutions participated in other activities to assess their CPL policies and build buy-in across the institution. Both TAMU-CC and ACC engaged in a process mapping activity with CAEL to identify inefficiencies or disconnects in their current CPL processes. In addition, ACC hired dedicated staff to expand internal capacity and launched CAEL's Credit Predictor Pro for better CPL advising and data tracking. *Outcomes: At ACC, adult learners' satisfaction with CPL increased over the grant period, and the average number of CPL credits awarded to students increased 32 percent among adult learners and 52 percent among Latino adult learners. TAMU-CC's program-building efforts, meanwhile, have positioned the institution to provide a more comprehensive approach to CPL moving forward.*

Austin Community College's adult learners increased participation with CPL -- and their satisfaction with the process improved.

LESSONS FROM THE INITIATIVE

Ithaka S+R, the project's independent evaluator, identified the following findings and insights:

- **Data helps build a business case for developing an intentional strategy for targeting and supporting adult learners.** Regular data collection also revealed to project staff existing trends in adult learner enrollment and completion, prompting commitments to evaluating adult learner data going forward.
- **Institutions value opportunities to learn from each other.** In fact, some participants expressed that even more of the initiative's convening time could have been dedicated to informal networking time with each other.
- **Raising program awareness is a critical step for supporting adult learners.** A key challenge facing the participating institutions is building greater awareness among students of the programming that is being offered.

- **Adult learners themselves provide important feedback on institutional improvements.** From just a small number of student interviews, the evaluators were able to capture some insights on the changes that institutions were making.
- **Adult learners are an important source of data on how to better support them.** One way is to help them feel like they belong and another is to provide flexibility in program design.
- **Making a real impact takes time.** Despite the progress made by all four institutions toward their goals, one common lament was that a longer grant would have been beneficial to account for the time spent in building leadership buy-in and developing the building blocks for more complex solutions like CPL.

CONCLUSION

The four participating institutions have put in place important services, processes, and policies that will allow them to become models for adult-serving HSIs. And, most importantly, adult learners who enroll at LASS Academy institutions will benefit from the impact of this work.

Adult learners are an important source of data on how to better support them.



Introduction

There has been tremendous growth in Latino student postsecondary enrollment that is reflected at more institutions nationally. In just the past decade, the number of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) has increased 62 percent, from 370 to 600 (*Excelencia in Education*, 2024). As a result, these institutions now represent 20 percent of all colleges and universities and enroll 63 percent of all Latino undergraduates. Nevertheless, only 29 percent of the Latino adult population has an associate degree or higher, compared to 46 percent overall postsecondary attainment (67 percent of Asian adults, 52 percent of White adults, and 36 percent of Black adults) (Lumina Foundation, 2024). These trends are significant because postsecondary attainment is positively associated with employment, career advancement, and economic mobility—though racial and gender inequality persists (Carnevale et al, 2024).

The good news is that Latino adults are finding their way back to postsecondary learning. According to *Excelencia in Education*, nearly one-third of Latino undergraduates are adult learners aged 25 years or older (Santiago et al., 2024, p. 9). This means that many HSIs are also—whether they realize it or not—*adult-serving institutions*.

Since 2018, CAEL (the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) has been working in partnership with *Excelencia* on the Latino and Adult Student Success (LASS) Academy, an initiative to support HSI efforts to serve enrolled and prospective adult and Latino adult learners. This report, prepared in partnership with the project's independent evaluators at Ithaka S+R, a not-for-profit research and advising organization, describes the details of the second phase of this initiative, in which four Texas institutions spent two years collaborating with CAEL, *Excelencia*, and each other to build on their earlier adult-focused efforts. Their additional recruitment activities, expanded advising/coaching services, and enhanced credit for prior learning (CPL) have expanded and strengthened their capacity as both adult-serving and Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

Latino adults are finding their way back to postsecondary learning.

* We use the term "Latino" throughout this report except for the federalized term of "Hispanic Serving Institutions." Note that according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Office of Management defines "Hispanic or Latino" as a "person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race."

Background

From 2018 to 2021, CAEL administered the inaugural LASS Academy, a three-year initiative which worked with 15 HSIs or emerging HSIs across the nation to develop and implement targeted strategies to support Latino adult learners, and adult learners generally, in their pursuit of postsecondary credentials. Despite the fact that the Academy experienced significant disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the participating institutions' consensus was that the Academy experience left them better positioned to foster important strategic discussions internally around the need to better serve adults and Latino adults. Moreover, as a result of the Academy's data-collection regimen, institutions found themselves better prepared to identify and measure key performance indicators about serving this population, and they were also positioned to use that data to inform multidisciplinary best practices, including enrollment, advising, career centers, and financial aid.

In October 2022, CAEL, with support from Greater Texas Foundation and Strada Education Foundation, launched a second LASS Academy to continue the impact of targeted strategies chosen by four of the Texas institutions from the first Academy: Austin Community College (ACC), South Texas College (STC), Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC), and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). In this second LASS Academy, CAEL aimed to support interventions that most effectively improve adult learner enrollment as well as outcomes for adult learners and institutions. Ithaka S+R conducted an independent, mixed methods evaluation of the second Academy. The evaluation highlights progress made at the participating institutions and key lessons learned over the course of the initiative.¹ The findings from this initiative are intended to inform and impact policies, programs, and practices that support adult-focused efforts of HSIs across the country.

The LASS 2.0 initiative supported interventions that most effectively improve adult learner enrollment as well as outcomes for adult learners and institutions.

¹ The primary goals of the evaluation were 1) to examine and document the impact of and lessons learned from the second LASS Academy to understand its effectiveness at driving institutional change and improving student outcomes; and 2) to use the findings to inform future development and implementation of the LASS model. Ithaka S+R conducted interviews with key stakeholders and analyzed project-level data through the fall 2023 term and institution-level data through the 2022-23 academic year. This monograph is based in part on three internal reports produced by Ithaka S+R and submitted to CAEL in its evaluation of the latest LASS Academy.

THE LATINO AND ADULT STUDENT SUCCESS (LASS) ACADEMY MODEL

In order to achieve the goals of the initiative, the LASS Academy model facilitates change through four different avenues:

1. Identify key priorities and action steps.
2. Provide technical assistance.
3. Collect, analyze, and report data.
4. Facilitate peer-to-peer learning.

These are described in greater detail below.

IDENTIFY KEY PRIORITIES AND ACTION STEPS

Building on the work of the first LASS Academy, the four Texas institutions worked with CAEL to identify key priorities and action steps to better support adult and Latino adult learners at their campuses. At the beginning of the second Academy, each institution set specific goals:

- **ACC** planned to enhance its credit for prior learning (CPL) program, with targets set for increasing the number of adult learners who earned CPL credits and increasing the number of CPL credits awarded.
- **STC** aimed to increase adult student enrollment through targeted marketing.
- **TAMU-CC** had two focus areas: improve retention of adult students through advising and personalized coaching and enhance the institution's approach to CPL as a way to accelerate degree completion.
- **UTRGV** intended to improve retention of its adult and Latino adult students through an existing advising program and a new personalized coaching approach.

CAEL then worked with each institution to map out specific action steps, technical assistance needed, and resources needed and already in place to reach these goals.

PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

To help institutions meet their goals, CAEL partnered with several organizations to provide technical assistance to the participating institutions.

- **InsideTrack** trained staff at TAMU-CC and UTRGV to help develop and refine more holistic academic advising and coaching strategies, with special consideration for the needs of adult learners. CAEL and InsideTrack are both part of Strada Collaborative.

- **CollegeAPP** worked with STC to create more effective strategies to target and recruit adult learners, as well as track the performance of these new recruitment efforts.
- **CAEL** provided specialized support to ACC and TAMU-CC on enhancements to their credit for prior learning programs, including policy review, process mapping, planning, implementation, and professional development. ACC also adopted CAEL's Credit Predictor Pro advising tool.
- **Excelencia in Education** continued their longtime support of LASS, providing subject matter expertise on Latino student success and workshops on using data and storytelling to drive efforts to serve students with intentionality.

COLLECT, ANALYZE, AND REPORT DATA

As part of the initiative, the participating institutions were required to collect and submit institutional data at regular intervals to help develop a better comfort level with using data to measure progress and inform decision-making. As noted by NASPA President Amelia Parnell, "Every higher education professional, regardless of their role, can find a use for data in their daily work" (2021, p. xii). Four times during the initiative, each participating institution collected institution-level data as well as data related to their specific focus areas. **Institution-level data** was the same across all four institutions: academic year enrollment, academic year credit completion, and matriculating cohort data on persistence and completion. All metrics were provided for all undergraduates, adult undergraduates, and Latino adult undergraduates. This data was designed to show project teams the extent to which they were already serving adult and Latino adult learners, as well as how those populations were faring in terms of academic success. **Project-level data** was customized to the specific focus of the institution for the LASS initiative. This included the number of students at each stage of the enrollment inquiry pipeline, the number of students earning CPL credit, and the number of students receiving advising or coaching services. Similar to the institution-level data, metrics were provided for all undergraduates, adult undergraduates, and Latino adult undergraduates. The project-level data was intended to focus teams on the progress they were making toward their overall goals and target metrics for the initiative. Where possible, CAEL pointed to but did not require action on opportunities to link the project-level data to the institution-level data to better understand the association between the sets of measures.

The participating institutions were required to collect and submit institutional data at regular intervals.

Additionally, the institutions administered CAEL's Adult Learner 360™ (AL 360) survey at least twice throughout both LASS Academies to gain a better sense of each institution's overall approach to serving adult learners. AL 360 is an integrated diagnostic tool and consulting solution used to identify areas for improved service to adult learners at postsecondary education institutions. The combination of a student survey and institutional survey yields results that help institutions take actionable steps in implementing plans to better support their adult learners.

The above approach to data collection, tracking, and analysis was intended to focus participating institutions on how data can be used for analyzing need (i.e., identifying service gaps), understanding the larger context at the institution, measuring progress toward target metrics, and, given additional time and resources, measuring impact on student performance or other larger impact goals.

FACILITATE PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING

An important part of the LASS initiative is the Academy component in which CAEL convenes all project participants as part of a community of practice. During the second LASS Academy, there were two in-person convenings, each held over two days, and three virtual convenings over the course of the two-year grant period. These convenings were designed so that the participating institutions could share their implementation experiences, best practices, and lessons learned from their work in the initiative. At each of the convenings, CAEL provided opportunities for the institutions to examine the collected data, share updates and challenges with the group, and network with each other in structured and informal settings.



ALIGNMENT WITH TEXAS STATE HIGHER EDUCATION PRIORITIES

Importantly, the goals of the LASS Academy and the priorities of the institutions involved in the initiative align with the higher education priorities of the state. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) is the governmental agency that oversees public institutions in Texas, primarily tasked with formulating a long-term vision for postsecondary education in the state, collecting and sharing postsecondary data, and providing financial resources to institutions and programs to accomplish state goals (THECB, n.d.). In 2022, the THECB unveiled its newest strategic plan, *Building a Talent Strong Texas*, which outlined its postsecondary goals for the state through 2030. Included in this plan is a commitment to improving the postsecondary outcomes for adult learners specifically.

The first goal of the plan is for 60 percent of working-age Texans (ages 25-64) to receive a degree, certificate, or other postsecondary credential of value by 2030, a clear modification from the prior strategic plan, which set a goal of 60 percent postsecondary degree attainment among Texans ages 25 to 34 only. Explaining this expanded scope, the THECB stated, “We can’t address the workforce needs of tomorrow by focusing solely on traditional student and early-career Texans. We must expand our focus to include mid-career employees who can advance in their jobs and meet the changing demands of Texas employers” (2022, p.8). The report clarifies that “This group includes a range of potential adult learners: from those who never attended college or programs after high school, to nearly 4 million Texans with some college credit but no credential. Reskilling and upskilling are within reach for many of them” (THECB, 2022, p.8).

The expanded scope underscores the growing realization, in Texas and across the country, that adult learners make up a significant and increasing share of students, and that for states to meet lofty completion targets, institutions must do a better job of enrolling and supporting these students. As such, the findings and lessons learned from the LASS Academy can play an important and potentially substantive role within and across the higher education community on the most effective ways to do this. In addition, the alignment between the goals of the THECB—which holds influence over institutional priorities and provides grant funding to institutions in the state—and the LASS Academy bodes well for the sustainability of institutional efforts in the coming years.

The LASS 2.0 initiative is aligned with the goals of *Building a Talent Strong Texas*, with its commitment to improving postsecondary outcomes for adult learners.

There is a growing realization in Texas and the country that institutions must do a better job enrolling and supporting adult learners.

Case Studies of the Institutional Approaches

INCREASING ENROLLMENT THROUGH TARGETED MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT

BACKGROUND

Higher education institutions across the country are facing enrollment challenges and looking for ways to buck national trends. STC is no exception. After suffering enrollment declines over each of the last five academic years, STC experienced a large jump in enrollment in the 2021-22 academic year after the institution used money from the federal Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) to award grants to students to cover their tuition for a semester. But after HEERF funds depleted and student tuition was no longer fully or mostly covered by the institution, enrollment in the 2022-23 academic year returned to pre-HEERF fund levels. STC learned through its first administration of CAEL's AL 360 survey that some of these challenges were driven by shortcomings in the institution's outreach, admission, and onboarding processes for adult learners. During the inaugural LASS Academy, with technical assistance from CAEL, STC engaged in process mapping to closely review its internal processes and programs for serving adult learners to pinpoint key challenges and inefficiencies.

THE APPROACH AND GOALS IN THE SECOND LASS ACADEMY

In this next stage of the LASS initiative, STC decided to build on previous work by focusing on increasing adult enrollment through targeted marketing and recruitment efforts. Integral to the institution's efforts to improve adult student recruitment was the newly formed Office of Student Reengagement, which was created during the previous LASS Academy by repurposing a department devoted to recruiting recent high school graduates. It focuses specifically on recruiting and onboarding adult learners with some college but no credential. Program staff noted that this innovative approach to engaging prospective adult learners meant that they did not have established best practices to lean on: "A lot of institutions have not a lot going on as far as adult learner enrollment strategies and a lot of institutions don't have departments like ours completely committed to adult learners, so we were kind of venturing off on our own with little guidance." The Office of Student Reengagement works closely with students to guide them through the entire enrollment and onboarding process. STC's personalized approach to case management was in response to student feedback and findings from STC's first AL 360 survey, which revealed that students found it confusing and frustrating when they were bounced from office to office to complete enrollment tasks.





ACTIVITIES

In order to effectively market and recruit learners with some college but no degree, STC received technical assistance from CollegeAPP during the second LASS Academy to facilitate a marketing campaign for adult learners. CollegeAPP combines commercial database data, state-wide survey data, and machine learning to generate predictive analytics to inform institutional marketing efforts. CollegeAPP began working with STC in December 2022 to launch an adult reengagement campaign in the summer of 2023. In this campaign, CollegeAPP identified individuals in Hidalgo and Starr Counties who were likely to be adults with a high school diploma or some college but no degree and have a high probability of “intent to enroll.” STC then leveraged the results for digital media, social media, and direct mail marketing campaigns. In the spring of 2024, STC launched a second campaign with CollegeAPP focused on social media marketing that would enable the institution to track prospective student engagement with the recruitment materials, calculate the return on investment of their campaign, and identify the most cost-effective way to recruit students.

Nurturing Inquiries Through a New Communications System. While CollegeAPP worked on identifying the right individuals to target, STC implemented a mobile messaging system and contracted with an external organization to create a call center to increase their outreach efforts with prospective students and give the Office of Reengagement’s small staff more capacity to tailor support for students interested in enrolling. In the first Academy, STC had initially prioritized on-campus events to draw prospective adult students to their campus but were forced to shift to virtual events during the COVID-19 pandemic. This prompted staff to reevaluate their communication strategies so they could better accommodate the busy lives of prospective adult learners: “We shifted away from events to offering virtual services for them, giving them an opportunity to text us ... and that actually has been working very well. They do prefer to text with our recruitment staff rather than coming in person.”

A multi-phased marketing campaign allowed STC to track prospective student engagement.



Student Story: Marisa, 42, South Texas College

Marisa credits the text messages she received from STC over the summer as the catalyst she needed to reenroll at the college. She had previously spent ten years pursuing her degree at a few community colleges, including STC and one outside of Texas, but as a single parent of two, she struggled to balance work and family responsibilities with school and ultimately left STC in 2019. In the spring of 2023, at the same time that Marisa's work hours became less consistent, she started to receive text messages from STC asking if she was interested in returning to the college. Marisa shared, "Going back to school is always something I wanted to do, it's always been in the back of my head, you know? ... something that motivated me though was that STC, they text you." She continued:

"They made it real personal— 'Hey Marisa, this is so-and-so from STC, we haven't heard from you, you've been away, are you interested in coming back to college?' So, I would read and was like, 'I am,' but I didn't get back to her. It wasn't until like the third text ... like I remembered it started during the summer ... and I kind of didn't, you know, pay attention. But then when I got that text when it was getting closer to fall, I was like ... you know, 'I'm going to do it. Work is slow, I'm going to do it, I have time for this.' So, it was because of that—it's what STC was doing, sending those messages out, that really motivated me to continue."

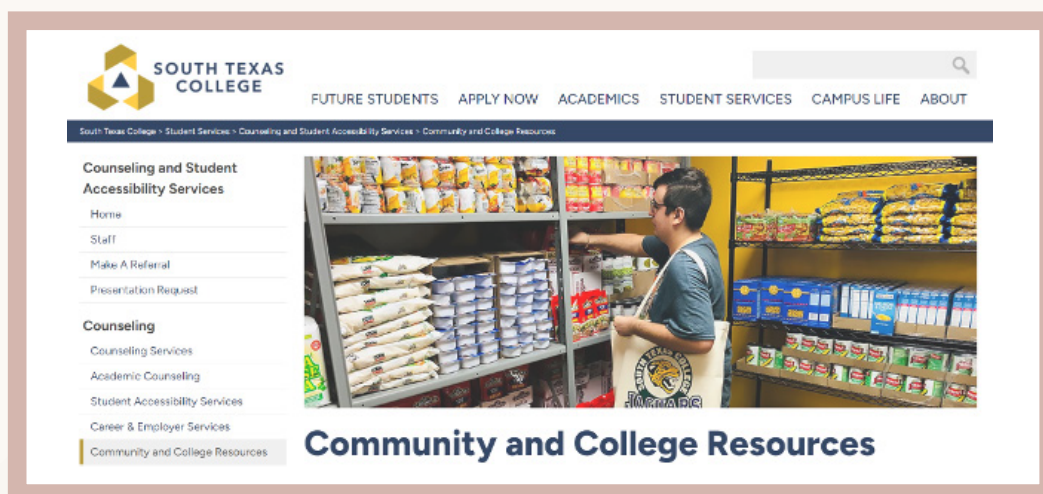
Marisa explained that the texts "were very inviting, very helpful" and she decided to reenroll because she thought, "They are sending so many messages here, they are kind of making it easy for you. Like, why not?"

Adding Wraparound Support Services to Improve Student Success. While focusing on bringing more adult learners to the institution and supporting them throughout the enrollment process, STC also recognized the need to provide more holistic support throughout a student's educational journey, which would require buy-in and assistance from staff across the institution. As a first step, STC established a Degree Reclamation Committee that brings together key institutional stakeholders on a regular basis to discuss how the institution is serving adult learners and how they can improve those services.

While the institution, with the help of this newly formed committee, was able to identify gaps in services, project staff shared that addressing those gaps was a significant challenge



because of limited resources. For example, many adult learners require child care and housing support to enroll and persist at the institution, which are beyond what the institution can provide on its own. To help meet students' needs, STC developed partnerships with local organizations, including nonprofits and state agencies, so students can be easily referred to external organizations to receive assistance. STC project staff emphasized the importance of these partnerships, sharing, "We don't have a lot [of] resources in the campus, but if we work together, we're gonna be able to get there." For example, STC brought county officials to campus to train staff on the eligibility criteria and application requirements for county social services. The institution also granted office space on campus to a local nonprofit that provides students with financial assistance to cover expenses like housing, child care, and textbooks. As a result, project staff explained, when "We're helping [students] re-enroll, and they're like, 'We need help with this,' we can just walk them over and [the nonprofit staff] help them with the application process." STC is currently working to create a page on the institution's website that details the full scope of services that are offered both by the institution and local community organizations for students to easily reference.



Source: <https://studentservices.southtexascollege.edu/counseling/community-resources/>

OUTCOMES

The institution's efforts over the course of the LASS Academy were highly successful. The total number of contacts with prospective students, including adult and Latino adult learners, significantly increased. As a result of its strong outreach, the institution admitted more than double its target metric for adult learners in the 2023 calendar year. This led to a large increase in the number of adult and Latino adult learners (reflecting the demographics of the region served by STC) who enrolled in the fall 2023 term. Looking ahead, STC is focused on improving how it tracks student recruitment, maintaining its high volume of student outreach while providing personalized case management support, and developing additional financial aid opportunities to increase adult learner persistence and completion.

IMPROVING RETENTION THROUGH ADVISING AND PERSONALIZED COACHING

BACKGROUND

Advising and coaching services at higher education institutions play vital support roles for students, especially those who are navigating and balancing other responsibilities outside of school. Two institutions, TAMU-CC and UTRGV, focused their efforts in the first LASS Academy on improving their advising services to better support adult and Latino adult learners. TAMU-CC aimed to improve the way the institution communicated and interacted with adult learners, and enhanced its academic services to students, including advising. By the end of the first Academy, the institution laid the foundation to better understand and meet the needs of adults and Latino adults on campus with the support of key stakeholders across the institution. UTRGV sought to strengthen its differentiated advising services to make advising more data driven, holistic, and tailored to student subpopulations who were struggling academically, which included adult learners. As part of the first LASS Academy, UTRGV had engaged in targeted outreach to adult students to encourage greater engagement with academic advising and created internal systems to help advisors monitor students' progress at the institution.

APPROACH AND GOALS IN THE SECOND LASS ACADEMY

Increasing student participation in advising and coaching services was a top priority for both TAMU-CC and UTRGV. At the end of the first Academy, project staff at TAMU-CC reported some gains in the number of adult learners who participated in academic advising appointments. The institution sought to capitalize on this progress by working in the second Academy on strengthening relationships among students, advisors, and coaches, and by increasing the number of adult learners who participated in advising and coaching. UTRGV, after experiencing declines in advising participation during the pandemic, hoped to increase the number of advising and coaching appointments of Latino adult learners and the number of credits completed per term by Latino adult advising participants to pre-pandemic levels by the end of the second LASS Academy. At the same time, UTRGV added a new area of focus: to develop an academic coaching program to supplement advising services and offer on-demand and ongoing support for students. UTRGV project staff explained that since academic advisors had large student caseloads and limited capacity, "Academic coaching could be something that would be instrumental in offering that ongoing, individualized, more accessible support to adult learners."

UTRGV sought to make advising more data driven, holistic, and tailored to adult learners who were struggling academically,

ACTIVITIES

Both TAMU-CC and UTRGV received technical assistance during the second LASS Academy from InsideTrack, which provides training on its evidence-based, holistic coaching model. Depending on their specific roles, UTRGV academic coaches and staff participated in one or more of four training series with InsideTrack: Foundational Coach, Quality Management, Coaching-Powered Leadership, or Coach Development. UTRGV's inclusion of graduate students in the training sessions was highly unique since InsideTrack typically works with professional staff members at its institutional partners. Three UTRGV staff members also earned InsideTrack's observer certification, which signifies their training in evaluating and providing feedback to other coaches. At TAMU-CC, academic advisors and coaches participated in three of the InsideTrack training series.

While both institutions received assistance from InsideTrack, their academic coaching programs differ in the following ways:

- **TAMU-CC Coaching Model.** At TAMU-CC, students are assigned an academic success coach if they are 1) conditionally admitted to TAMU-CC; 2) are currently on academic probation; or 3) are returning from or have been reinstated from academic suspension or dismissal. Only those students who meet these criteria are eligible to participate in the academic coaching program. Students meet with their academic success coach to develop an academic performance success plan and then meet periodically to check in on their progress.
- **UTRGV Coaching Model.** While all undergraduate students are welcome to participate in the UTRGV coaching program, the program works to engage specific student populations, including adult learners who are new to the institution or recently returned to the institution after stopping out. Unlike academic advisors, academic coaches are graduate students, not professional staff members, and are intended to serve as peer or near-peer mentors to students. While most academic coaches work with undergraduate students regardless of their degree program, coaches from the College of Engineering and Computer Science are paired specifically with undergraduate students in their college. Academic coaching is also required for students who have received academic suspension, and staff noted that many of the students in this population are adult learners. Academic coaches provide students with guidance and assistance on topics outside of degree planning and course registration by connecting them with resources on campus and mentoring them on topics such as: time management; setting goals and developing action plans to reach those goals; self-regulation of learning; managing stress and anxiety; and balancing competing priorities such as academic, work, and familial responsibilities (e.g., being a primary caretaker).



The InsideTrack Model. TAMU-CC staff explained that in the past, advising sessions were largely driven by advisors, who approached these meetings with a checklist of topics to cover with students. InsideTrack's relational approach to advising instead encourages advisors and coaches to identify what students are looking to gain by speaking with them and build trust with students so they feel comfortable sharing obstacles.

Adding Outreach. To increase adult student participation in coaching and advising, TAMU-CC and UTRGV conducted targeted outreach campaigns. TAMU-CC launched an advising campaign in the fall of 2023 targeted at adult students who had recently matriculated to the institution. They sent the students communications to encourage them to schedule appointments with their academic advisor and complete an intake survey about their life and goals so their advisor could better tailor their guidance during meetings. UTRGV's coaching program sent targeted weekly emails to specific student populations—including newly enrolled adult learners—to explain what academic coaching is and how students could benefit from participating in it. The coaching program also began working with the academic advising department to help recruit continuing adult learners, reasoning that "students tend to listen to advisors a little bit more" and therefore "respond a little bit more regularly to the advisors" than from an email sent from the coaching program.

Capturing Data. Both institutions recognized the importance of collecting qualitative data to continuously improve their advising and coaching services and developed procedures to collect and integrate data collection into their programs. After each UTRGV coaching session, academic coaches update the student's coaching casebook to detail what the session covered and describe challenges faced by the student. Looking across these casebooks for themes, project staff learned that adult learners can be reluctant to seek help and that academic coaches at times shy away from asking students about sensitive—but highly important—topics, like their finances and support systems. This led program staff to consider how the coaching program could take a more trauma-informed approach to working with students so students are more comfortable asking for help. UTRGV staff hope that the qualitative data captured in the coaching casebooks on the needs and challenges of adult and Latino adult learners will have a broader impact on the institution and inform institutional decision-making.

UTRGV academic advisors can also access notes on student sessions to better support conversations with students on their goals, action plans, and choice of major as well as discuss relevant career, internship, and employment opportunities. Program staff explained that "It gives the advisor an opportunity to read through it, get some context, and they also can outreach to students and say, 'Hey, why don't you come in and see me and also let's maybe touch base back with your coach.'" Since the academic coaching program was specifically created to supplement advising, UTRGV project staff hope that sharing information between the two departments will allow for a more comprehensive approach to providing support and guidance to the student subpopulations that most need it. Similarly, TAMU-CC incorporated

TAMU-CC launched an advising campaign in the fall of 2023 targeted at adult students who had recently matriculated to the institution.

new record-keeping technology so that advisors' notes on student interactions are housed in a central location and can be accessed by other institutional staff who are working to support the same student.

OUTCOMES

TAMU-CC substantially grew adult student participation in advising and coaching over the course of the grant, more than doubling its target metric year-to-year and from one fall term to the next. Moving forward, TAMU-CC plans to train more advising and academic coaches using the personalized coaching model shared by InsideTrack to further entrench these methods into their advising approach.

UTRGV's efforts were also highly successful. The institution met its target metric for the number of advising appointments per term, which contributed to an increase in the number of adult and Latino adult learners who participated in advising from one fall term to the next. To sustain and grow the work of the initiative, UTRGV will work with InsideTrack to create sustainable systems for training more staff in their holistic coaching model and expand the scope and outreach of the academic coaching program. In addition, UTRGV is conducting its own internal research to assess the impact of this new coaching approach; early data suggest that it could have a positive impact on adult students who have struggled academically in the past.



Student Story: Erick, 27, TAMU-CC

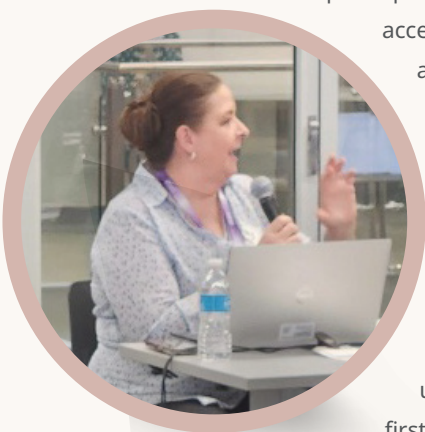
Erick returned to Corpus Christi after serving in the military for nearly a decade. He spoke highly of the assistance he received from his advisor and other staff on campus. Erick described how he once dropped in unexpectedly on his advisor to discuss some challenges he was facing in class and ask about accessing academic accommodations. Erick's advisor explained that academic accommodations fell under the purview of the institution's disability services office, but instead of just directing Erick to contact someone in that office, Erick recalled, "He walks me down the hall. He's like, 'This is the place, these are the people you need to talk to'... and as we walked, he was just explaining other programs the school offers." Erick really appreciated his advisor's help with this issue and shared that he's confident that his advisor will help him or put him in contact with others at the institution who can also assist him when needed. Reflecting on his decision to enroll at TAMU-CC, he shared, "I just wish I would have done this earlier."

ACCELERATING DEGREE COMPLETION BY EXPANDING AND IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

BACKGROUND

Today's postsecondary students participate in more learning experiences from a larger array of sources than ever before. Recognizing these experiences and awarding credit for them brings students closer to earning a degree. In addition to improving its academic advising and coaching services, TAMU-CC sought to evaluate and strengthen its CPL processes through its participation in the second LASS Academy. While TAMU-CC had long

accepted credits earned through examinations like the CLEP and Advanced Placement tests, it had much less experience awarding credits to students based on learning acquired through prior employment and military experience. This was a new area of focus for TAMU-CC, as they did not focus on CPL in the first LASS Academy.



Austin Community College (ACC) began working to improve its CPL program during the first LASS Academy to ultimately help students reduce their time to degree. In the first Academy, ACC assembled a Prior Learning Assessment Task

Force of relevant staff to review and improve ACC's CPL policies and procedures, and 20 faculty members participated in a portfolio review training led by CAEL. ACC also spent part of the first LASS Academy marketing CPL opportunities and conveying its benefits to students to drive up the number of CPL credits attempted and subsequently earned. By the completion of the first Academy, ACC reported improvements in adult and Latino adult students' time to degree and substantial growth in the number of students attempting CPL credits.

APPROACH AND GOALS IN THE SECOND LASS ACADEMY

While ACC made great progress in the first Academy, project staff recognized that they needed to continue to work on how they marketed CPL to students and expand CPL opportunities. Furthermore, during the second LASS Academy, of the initiative, the institution sought to streamline its CPL application and review process by implementing CAEL's CPL advising tool, Credit Predictor Pro. Over the course of the grant period, ACC aimed to increase the number of adult learners who earned CPL credits and the total number of CPL credits awarded to undergraduate students. TAMU-CC sought to use the second LASS Academy to review and improve its CPL policies to lay the foundation for increasing student CPL usage at the institution in the years ahead. TAMU-CC's focus was on building a roadmap toward CPL expansion, identifying opportunities for improvement and growth in its CPL efforts. This included putting in place some of the key building blocks for CPL, such as clear institutional policies, trained staff, and improvements in processes.

ACC recognized the need to improve the marketing of CPL to students.

ACTIVITIES

CAEL provided technical assistance to ACC and TAMU-CC, which included a variety of activities to assess their CPL policies and raise awareness and buy-in for CPL among faculty and staff. CAEL kicked off its efforts at TAMU-CC with a virtual training for administrators and faculty on the fundamentals of CPL and the benefits of awarding such credits for both adult learners and the institution. CAEL also provided a workshop to dive deeper into CPL methods and review TAMU-CC's current CPL policies to identify gaps or areas that needed clarity or greater consistency.

The Value of Process Mapping. Both TAMU-CC and ACC engaged in a process mapping activity with CAEL to identify inefficiencies or disconnects in their current CPL processes. TAMU-CC staff described the process mapping activity as eye-opening, helping them realize they needed to focus their attention on improving their current CPL offerings and policies before trying to offer new CPL opportunities to students. ACC explained that the disconnects identified in their institution's CPL procedures during the process mapping activity were generally a product of competing priorities across the institution, noting that numerous offices across the campus needed to be involved in the process.

Building Buy-in Across the Institution. Both TAMU-CC and ACC emphasized the importance of organizational alignment and support from stakeholders across their institutions. TAMU-CC project staff described how integrating a more expansive CPL program requires a great deal of faculty and staff buy-in, since faculty play a key role in determining how students' prior learning can translate to course credits. To generate buy-in, TAMU-CC assembled a committee of relevant staff, including the director of the Academic Testing Center. The committee began meeting in March 2024 to discuss improvements to their CPL processes, particularly regarding military credits and credit by examination, and how they can generate stronger support among faculty and staff. The institution also offered professional development opportunities for academic advisors to become more familiar with ways adult learners can earn CPL credits. Similarly, ACC project staff started working with administrators devoted to student affairs and academic affairs to serve as program ambassadors who would be responsible for articulating the importance and impact that CPL can have both on student outcomes and funding from the state. The institution also hired a part-time prior learning assessment coordinator in the spring of 2024 to build their internal capacity to further develop ACC's CPL program and coordinate with the various stakeholders involved with CPL across the institution.

Highlights of the CPL activities included process mapping, building buy-in across the institution, and leveraging the Credit Predictor Pro.

Leveraging Technology-Based Tools. With this foundational work in place, ACC is positioned to implement CAEL's **Credit Predictor Pro**, which they hope will allow the institution to bring CPL opportunities to more adult learners, provide a more seamless system for awarding CPL credits to students, and facilitate improved tracking of CPL usage at the institution. ACC began piloting Credit Predictor Pro in the spring of 2024 with a small group of academic advisors and students so they could test its functionality and give recommendations on how to improve it before offering it across the institution. The institution plans to fully implement Credit Predictor Pro in the 2024-25 academic year by building the tool into the student onboarding process so that all newly enrolled students have a sense of what courses they can bypass before meeting with their academic advisor to discuss course registration for the upcoming semester. Project staff noted that the messaging students will receive about Credit Predictor Pro will be motivational and highlight how students could save both time and money by engaging with the tool and seeking to earn CPL credits. ACC is currently working through additional administrative issues, such as how to involve faculty in the review process.



Student Story: Olivia, 36, TAMU-CC

Olivia, 36, enrolled in 2020 at TAMU-CC to earn a bachelor's degree after completing her associate degree at a local community college. She was on track to complete the bachelor's degree by December 2023, but realized early in the fall semester that she still needed to fulfill the foreign language course requirements for her degree. "If I added on those classes, it would have me graduating in 2024, so my advisor suggested that we try to CLEP out of Spanish since I'm fluent in Spanish. And so, she gave me that option and I was able to CLEP out and save me six credits really quick." As a result of earning those CPL credits, Olivia was able to stay on track to graduate in December. Speaking about her academic advisor's role, Olivia said, "She really saved me," noting that, "I didn't even know what CLEP was until she suggested it for me."

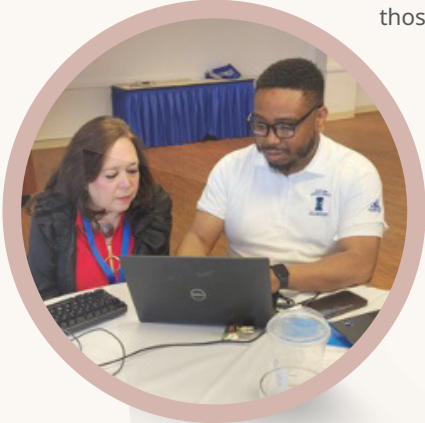


OUTCOMES

ACC took a thoughtful approach to expanding CPL opportunities across the institution, including conducting a detailed CPL policy review and process mapping activity and engaging key stakeholders from across the institution. Between the fall 2022 and fall 2023 terms, the institution experienced increases in the number of adult and Latino adult learners who earned CPL credits, the number of CPL credits awarded to adult and Latino adult learners, and the average number of CPL credits awarded per CPL recipient among adult learners. ACC expects these numbers to continue to increase once Credit Predictor Pro is fully implemented. Even without full implementation, results from the AL 360 surveys already show steady improvements in adult students' satisfaction with CPL since the beginning of the first Academy. These results indicate that ACC is on the right track to improving CPL policies and procedures. During the Credit Predictor Pro pilot phase, ACC plans to deepen faculty involvement with CPL policy, train more faculty to use Credit Predictor Pro, and evaluate students' CPL applications so they can incorporate the tool into the institution's student onboarding process.

TAMU-CC project staff lauded the initiative for the change management support they received as they navigated a new approach to CPL across the institution. Moving forward, TAMU-CC plans to continue addressing the institutional barriers to earning CPL credits that they identified in the process mapping activity. TAMU-CC also aims to raise students' awareness of available CPL opportunities so students can pursue them earlier in their educational journeys, employ professional development training for academic advisors and coaches so they can provide information and guidance about CPL to students earlier in their college careers, and put clear policies into practice so advisors can evaluate students' prior experiences, especially those from the military, more efficiently and fairly.

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TAMU-CC's early work to advance CPL focused on change management and removing institutional barriers.

Insights from the Initiative for Serving Adult and Latino Adult Learners

Through their evaluation, Ithaka S+R identified several key insights on serving adult and Latino adult learners, informed by interviews with project staff and students.

- **Data helps build a business case for developing an intentional strategy for targeting and supporting adult learners.** In interviews and at the convenings, project staff at the four institutions stressed that their participation in both LASS Academies gave them the data and insights they needed to build a robust case for why their institution should prioritize programming and policies aimed at adult learners specifically. Several project staff noted that their participation in LASS was the first time that they disaggregated and compared student outcome data by age, resulting in a process that was eye-opening. As one staff member noted, paying attention to the data revealed that adult learners were already among the students they serve: “I guess from an enrollment management standpoint, we are very traditional student-focused, so being a part of both [LASS Academies] has helped build some awareness and some campus understanding of the vast amount of adult learners that we have on our campus and why this is important, that I think we might not otherwise have paid attention to if we were not pulling these data and providing these reports that are, again, part of that structure that CAEL puts in place. So doing that has created even more of a business case to think about this type of work as well.”

Further supporting the business case is a new state funding formula for community colleges in Texas, which places more weight on enrolling and graduating adult learners. With the data collected through the LASS Academies, these institutions’ leaders now understand how the improvements they have been making in their adult-focused programs and services could lead to more funding. Staff shared that their work in the Academies demonstrated to their leadership that adult learners are a key population to consider in their institution’s strategic plans moving forward.

- **Institutions value opportunities to learn from each other.** Staff at the participating institutions expressed appreciation for the Academy model and the opportunity to connect with each other during the convenings. At the in-person convenings, content included short presentations from the four institutions on their progress and challenges, *Excelencia’s* evidence-based practices on supporting Latino students, overview of data collected, upcoming

Data helps build a business case for developing an intentional strategy for targeting and supporting adult learners.

evaluation activities, overviews of research on supporting adult learners, time for each institutional team to work together, and informal networking time with the larger group. The original design for the initiative included only the two in-person convenings, but in the course of the initiative, and at the request of the participating institutions, CAEL added three more virtual convenings so that the participating institutions could have more opportunities for peer networking and sharing updates on their progress. Even so, some participants expressed that even more of that convening time could have been dedicated to informal networking with each other. One noted, “I think those could be sort of touch points, not necessarily an official formal program, more like, ‘Let’s all get together and give updates on where we are,’ and ‘Where are there questions or things we can talk about collectively that would help each other?’”

- **Raising program awareness is a critical step for supporting adult learners.**

A key challenge facing the participating institutions is building greater awareness among students of the programming that is being offered. For example, UTRGV staff described how they recently recognized that adult learner involvement in the academic coaching program would not increase at the rate they hoped unless they improved how they market the program to students. ACC staff shared similar sentiments, noting that if students are not aware of what CPL is, or the numerous ways they can earn those credits, they will not be able to fully take advantage of it.

Communication to students is just one of the challenges—communication within the institution and across units and departments about how to support adult learners is yet another. At ACC and TAMU-CC, that means aligning the institution on a shared understanding of CPL. At STC, project staff have been diligently compiling a comprehensive resource of services for adult learners. Project staff at UTRGV assembled a working group of staff from departments across the institution to engage in continued conversations about adult learners at the institution and the challenges they are facing. Project staff hope that working group members can “be our champions and influence the leaders in their area” so the institution can take a more comprehensive approach to addressing students’ needs. Colleges and universities are massive organizations, and it therefore takes strategic and concerted efforts to ensure that staff, faculty, and students are informed about institutional services.

- **Adult learners themselves provide important feedback on institutional improvements.** From just a small number of student interviews, the evaluators were able to capture some insights on the changes that institutions were making. Marisa, for example, helped to show STC the value of taking an intentional,

A key challenge facing the participating institutions is building greater awareness among students of the adult-focused programming that is being offered.

persistent, and direct approach to nurturing inquiring students. Her story showed that sometimes the timing of outreach really matters—the text that arrives at just the right time, after all the other texts had been ignored, may be the precipitating factor in an adult learner deciding to enroll. Having multiple ways to communicate, and the right kind of message (that doesn't get you blocked!), may be an important adult learner recruitment strategy going forward. Olivia's experience with CPL at TAMU-CC is great feedback for the staff working to implement new policies and procedures. Conversations with more students about their experiences with CPL can also help to identify where there may be barriers or process glitches from the student's perspective.

- **Adult learners are an important source of data on how to better support them—one way is to help them feel like they belong and another is to provide flexibility in program design.** In the student interviews, the evaluators observed that many of the adult learners are hyper-aware of perceived age differences between themselves and other students at their institution. While most still felt that they belonged at their institution, some described struggling to feel like they fit in. Olivia shared that she sometimes felt “out of place with all the younger kids” at TAMU-CC as a 36-year-old woman, but because she sees other students that are a variety of ages on campus, she can reassure herself that there is still a place for her at the institution. Olivia explained, “I just have to get out my head and know that there's not an exact age that you have to go [to college], everybody's going at their own pace.” Two students at ACC shared similar sentiments, noting how seeing other adult learners on campus and in their courses helped them feel more at ease at ACC. These student examples suggest that adult learners may benefit from more opportunities to interact with each other and build community to increase their sense of belonging at their institution.

With respect to needed flexibility, it is important to note that most of the students interviewed were parents who worked full-time. To be able to complete their degrees, they needed flexible course options that could be incorporated into their busy schedules. Albert, an ACC student, loved that he could control the pace of his coursework by taking online courses. Albert is a father of six, and since enrolling at ACC in 2021, he has worked full-time and been a full-time student. He explained that a big factor in his decision to enroll at ACC was that it offered so many of the courses for his degree plan online, which would give him more flexibility with how he manages his time and balances his priorities.

Conversations with more students about their experiences with CPL can also help to identify where there may be barriers or process glitches from the student's perspective.

However, other students described some academic programs, such as nursing, as being less accommodating of students' work and family responsibilities due to their rigor and lack of flexible course options. Several students we interviewed either had or were currently pursuing a nursing degree and shared that the programs were like full-time jobs in and of themselves. Two students at STC switched their majors from nursing after trying unsuccessfully to balance the program with a full-time job. Elaine, a 32-year-old nursing student at ACC, has been able to pursue her associate degree but only because her partner works and can provide for their family of six. Elaine wants to eventually earn her bachelor's in nursing, but relying solely on her partner's salary has been difficult. She plans to go back to work for a time before starting her bachelor's so she can save money to help support her family while she is in school. In addition to demanding coursework, the students explained that nursing and other similar academic programs generally have inflexible, in-person components, such as clinical courses, that conflict with a typical nine to five work schedule.

While nursing was a common example given by students, Diana at UTRGV described similar struggles in her education program. Diana earned her associate degree by taking all of her classes online at a nearby community college, but her bachelor's degree program at UTRGV requires her to be on campus three days a week. She has loved her courses so far but wished that the department could offer them at night to better accommodate her work schedule.

- **Making a real impact takes time.** Despite the progress made by all four institutions toward their goals, one common lament was that a longer grant would have been beneficial. Implementing new programming and practices requires buy-in from institutional leadership and staff, which takes time to cultivate, especially at large institutions like the ones that participated in the second LASS Academy. One participant at ACC explained that it can be time-consuming to work through the various layers of their institution's "leadership bureaucracy," noting that "It's not so much a challenge, it's a timing issue." Institutions often cannot make decisions quickly due to the number of stakeholders who need to be involved or the timing of an activity or discussion during the academic calendar. With only a two-year grant period for the second LASS Academy, some of the institutions only had enough time during the grant period to lay the groundwork for what they hope will translate to improvements in student outcomes in the future. This was particularly the case for the institutions focused on CPL, whose efforts during the grant period were largely spent developing the critical building blocks for a CPL program rather than marketing and implementing new CPL offerings to students. UTRGV also dedicated much of the grant period to developing its coaching program, and therefore is looking forward to capturing the impacts of its coaching redesign now that the pillars of the program have been fully implemented.

Some academic programs may be less accommodating of students' work and family responsibilities.

Conclusion

During the second LASS Academy, each of the four participating institutions made progress toward their goals, buttressed by change management support from CAEL and collaboration with other technical assistance partners. Throughout this work, the institutions gained important insights into ways they can improve their services for adult and Latino adult learners. Staff at STC shared how they learned that they need to move away from in-person events and find ways for students to communicate with institutional staff more easily, ultimately implementing new software to facilitate texting between students and staff. Project staff at STC also emphasized how important it is to have a centralized space to house information for adult learners and to be proactive about building relationships with local organizations to ensure adult students' basic needs are met. At UTRGV, through the academic coaching program, staff learned that adult students can be hesitant to seek help. In response, the institution is trying to normalize seeking help and utilizing support services across the institution, including coaching.

During the second LASS Academy, each of the four participating institutions made progress toward their goals, buttressed by change management support from CAEL and collaboration with other technical assistance partners.

All the institutions grappled with how to garner buy-in from key stakeholders. At ACC, project staff are still working to create a shared understanding of CPL with staff and faculty and ensure they, along with students, are aware of the importance and benefits of CPL for the institution. UTRGV also emphasized the importance of improving the marketing of the academic coaching program moving forward, so more students can take advantage of the program's services.

In addition to these lessons, the evaluators have noted that future academies would benefit from additional progress metrics aligned with each site's specific goals, a longer grant timeline to allow for more implementation progress, additional evaluation of program impact through quantitative examination of comparison groups, and additional opportunities for peer learning. CAEL is absorbing all of these lessons and using them to inform its future work with institutions and peer learning academies.

The four participating institutions have put in place important services, processes, and policies that will allow them to become models for adult-serving HSIs. And, most importantly, adult learners who enroll at these LASS Academy institutions will benefit from the impact of this work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CAEL

CAEL is grateful to the four institutions who participated in the second LASS Academy: Austin Community College (ACC), South Texas College (STC), Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC), and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). We were inspired by your passionate support for your adult learners and learned so much from your leadership in this work. We loved being your partner in the Academy!

The second LASS Academy benefited greatly from our national partners: *Excelencia* in Education, InsideTrack, and CollegeApp. Their expertise was invaluable for helping the participating institutions refine their programs and approaches.

CAEL is also grateful to Greater Texas Foundation and Strada Education Foundation for their financial support and their dedication to adult learners—and to Ithaka S+R for asking the tough questions and synthesizing the data that informs this initiative now and in the future.

Our collective hats are tipped to the adult learners who every day are juggling responsibilities, finding ways to squeeze learning into busy days, and showing us all what real commitment means.

Ithaka S+R

Ithaka S+R thanks the project staff at the participating institutions for generously sharing their time and feedback with our team. We are impressed and inspired by the work you and your institutions do every day to serve students. We also thank the technical assistance partners—CollegeAPP, InsideTrack, and *Excelencia* in Education—for speaking with our team and sharing more about their incredible efforts to improve postsecondary access and success. Thank you to CAEL for your terrific partnership over the course of the Academy, and Greater Texas Foundation and Strada Education Foundation for your generous support of the initiative and evaluation. Lastly, we thank the students who gave our team a brief window into their lives and postsecondary experiences. Your stories illustrate why this work is so crucial, and we wish you all the best in your educational journey and beyond.

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ABOUT CAEL

Recognizing that adult learners are the backbone of the U.S. economy, CAEL helps forge a clear, viable connection between education and career success, providing solutions that promote sustainable and equitable economic growth. CAEL opens doors to opportunity in collaboration with workforce and economic developers; postsecondary educators; employers and industry groups; foundations and other mission-aligned organizations. By engaging with these stakeholders, we foster a culture of innovative, lifelong learning that helps individuals and their communities thrive. A national membership organization established in 1974, CAEL is a part of Strada Collaborative, a mission-driven nonprofit. Learn more at cael.org and stradacollaborative.org.

ABOUT ITHAKA S+R

Ithaka S+R (sr.ithaka.org) provides research and strategic guidance to help the academic and cultural communities serve the public good and navigate economic, demographic, and technological change.

Ithaka S+R is part of ITHAKA, a nonprofit with a mission to improve access to knowledge and education for people around the world. We believe education is key to the wellbeing of individuals and society, and we work to make it more effective and affordable.