#### CASE STUDY

# Guided Pathways at OCC help revolutionize student success

Using Guided Pathways and innovative coaching, Onondaga Community College strives to get more students across the finish line.



### Who is OCC?

Onondaga Community College is a 2-year, public SUNY institution located in Syracuse, NY Like many community schools across the country, Onondaga Community College needed to improve student retention. Facing a myriad of challenges and realizing that the school needed to make changes to help students through the lifecycle, the staff developed a bold and comprehensive plan. This process began in 2013 and included a detailed proposal to gain grant funding, a revamping of curriculum to make it easier for students to make choices, and a careful approach to coaching students through the college process, utilizing texting with Cadence.

# What are the unique challenges?

- > Decrease in the number of applicants
- Enrollment declined 23% from 13,018 in 2012 to 9,834 in 2018
- > A large amount of low-income students focused on family and jobs
- All applicants are accepted, including under-prepared students

# Putting community first

After an in-depth evaluation, OCC realized it could better help students by better serving the needs of the Central New York community. OCC focused on adding new curriculum and services that met the demands of local businesses and industries. OCC connected with Achieving the Dream, a network of support institutions that share best practices. The school did a deep dive into their curriculum and processes. This research helped set the stage for the Title III proposal.

The school's Grants Office constantly mines grants, but the search for funding is based on a specific mission and a strategic plan. The office explores grant opportunities that support the mission of the college. This community-minded mission aims toward serving local students; offering degrees and credentials that will meet the needs of local employers.

Onondaga Community College was awarded a 5-year, \$3 million grant in October of 2018, Title III Capacity Building, with a goal of helping under-represented students.

### What are Guided Pathways?

Students enrolling at Onondaga Community College face a number of different processes.

- > Financial Aid Federal and State
- > Immunization Records
- > Certificate of Residence
- > Advisement

### Guided Pathways is not just about curriculum. It's multi-dimensional.

First-generation and post-traditional students are often unprepared to handle the long list of registration requirements, including immunization papers, state and federal financial aid forms, and credit transfer information.

Based on feedback from students about the complexity of their process in applying and registering for the semester, the OCC team developed an intense 1-on-1 model to better prepare new students to be successful. **By removing obstacles and friction points, students can better focus on academics.** 

## Multifaceted texting approach

There are a number of ways in which OCC can reach out to students through texting, calls, and emails, as well as different channels for students to seek help from the staff.

#### ROBERT

Robert is the name OCC designated for the staffmaintained texting line that sends out important, periodic updates to students about deadlines and events. Students can also text questions to Robert, and many have embraced the text line as a campus personality.

# ₹.

#### **ONE TEAM**

A collection of 60+ OCC staff members who have been assigned 50-to-100 students. In addition to their duties in other departments on campus, One Team members provide 1-on-1 assistance and encouragement to students, giving them a better chance to graduate.

### COACHING

A new communication strategy at OCC, developed in conjunction with Inside Track, consisting of "coaches" who help students navigate through non-cognitive barriers.

# What is One Team?

One Team is a collection of 60+ OCC staff members who guide and support students through the collegiate lifecycle.

Each One Team member is assigned 50 to 100 students with whom they communicate and monitor.

While students receive informational texts to help them meet deadlines and complete tasks, the 1-on-1 approach to coaching goes beyond that. Coaches connect with students to steer them through everyday obstacles and friction points.

### The coaching aspect of Guided Pathways

"When I'm meeting with students, I'm not just focusing on academics. I'm focused on things like their home life and transportation. How are they getting to school? All of those things that may present themselves where a student will say, 'I don't have the money to get to class so therefore, I'm failing."

- Jenna Alexander Coach and Director of Advising at OCC

### Coaching is different than advising.

It goes beyond course scheduling and financial aid. Coaching focuses on community. A student might feel like they're falling off course. Through coaching, OCC gives that student incentive and personal support to keep going.

Grant funding goes specifically towards employee development using a "train the trainer" model. OCC has partnered with consultants who help train employees on the methodology of coaching. These employees can then train other employees to help spread the approach throughout the college.

### A NEW WAY OF DOING THINGS Journey mapping

"Students get to college and they don't know what the heck anyone is talking about."

- Wendy Tarby Associate Vice President Institutional Planning, Assessment and Research OCC realized that the old ways of admissions and retention needed to be strengthened to meet the changing complexity of student lives. Journey mapping involves approaching a process to see how navigating that process affects a student, not an employee. The faculty and staff go through tasks themselves to get a first-hand experience. For example, they look for the kinds of obstacles students face as they go through the registration process. The staff highlighted those friction points and re-organized to make it easier for first generation and at-risk students to succeed.

As Wendy states, **"We look for any little thing we can do** to support the students' ability to succeed."

# The role of RISE

Research Institute for Studies in Education

RISE is OCC's evaluation partner, tasked with studying the effectiveness of the Guided Pathways program, specifically the coaching aspect. RISE has chosen over 300 students to participate in an experimental design, tracking success through multiple measures and comparing those results to a control group of students who are not receiving coaching.

### BUILDING A WORKFORCE Forward-focused

Part of OCC's job is to project and envision where future employment opportunities may develop.

The staff talks to professionals in the local workforce to see what positions might be in need in the future, so when those needs hit, the institution will have trained graduates ready to fill the available roles. Many members of the OCC faculty still work in and have contact with various industries, i.e. healthcare, technology, and other vocations.

# How does texting help?

"When students leave for Thanksgiving break, they may not come back. School may be too much, they get overwhelmed by expectations and commitments. The coach – student relationship and support system become critical to their persistence and success."

- Wendy Tarby Associate Vice President Institutional Planning, Assessment and Research Texting in Cadence has proven to be a powerful tool for coaching students. OCC used phone calls and email prior to implementing Cadence and experienced poor response rates.

By "checking in" with texts, they reach at-risk students at strategic touchpoints, helping them stay in school.

## The value of texting

"Students respond to texting. I'm getting students, even weeks later, responding and asking questions. As long as they know they have someone right there to ask a question to, that's what we're looking for."

> - Jenna Alexander Director, Advising Center

While the school is still very early in the process, OCC's new approach through Guided Pathways and the Title III grant has produced results and shows promise for significant change in the future.

**2.3%** increase in conversion for the 2019 fall semester

"That uptick in conversion over a short period of time was impressive and a strong indicator that this new approach is working."

- Scott Titus, Director of Marketing & New Media

### Financial Aid Outreach Program

2018		40 attendees	
2019	(with Cadence)		150 attendees

## One Team results

The goal of 'One Team' texts is to engage with students and create conversations, making the reply rate an important statistic.

## 29.1%

combined reply rate for the 60+ One Team members within the first month of texting with Cadence this semester. Mongoose publishes content including industry insights, webinars, case studies, and best practices focused on one goal: helping organizations continuously improve the ways they communicate.

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