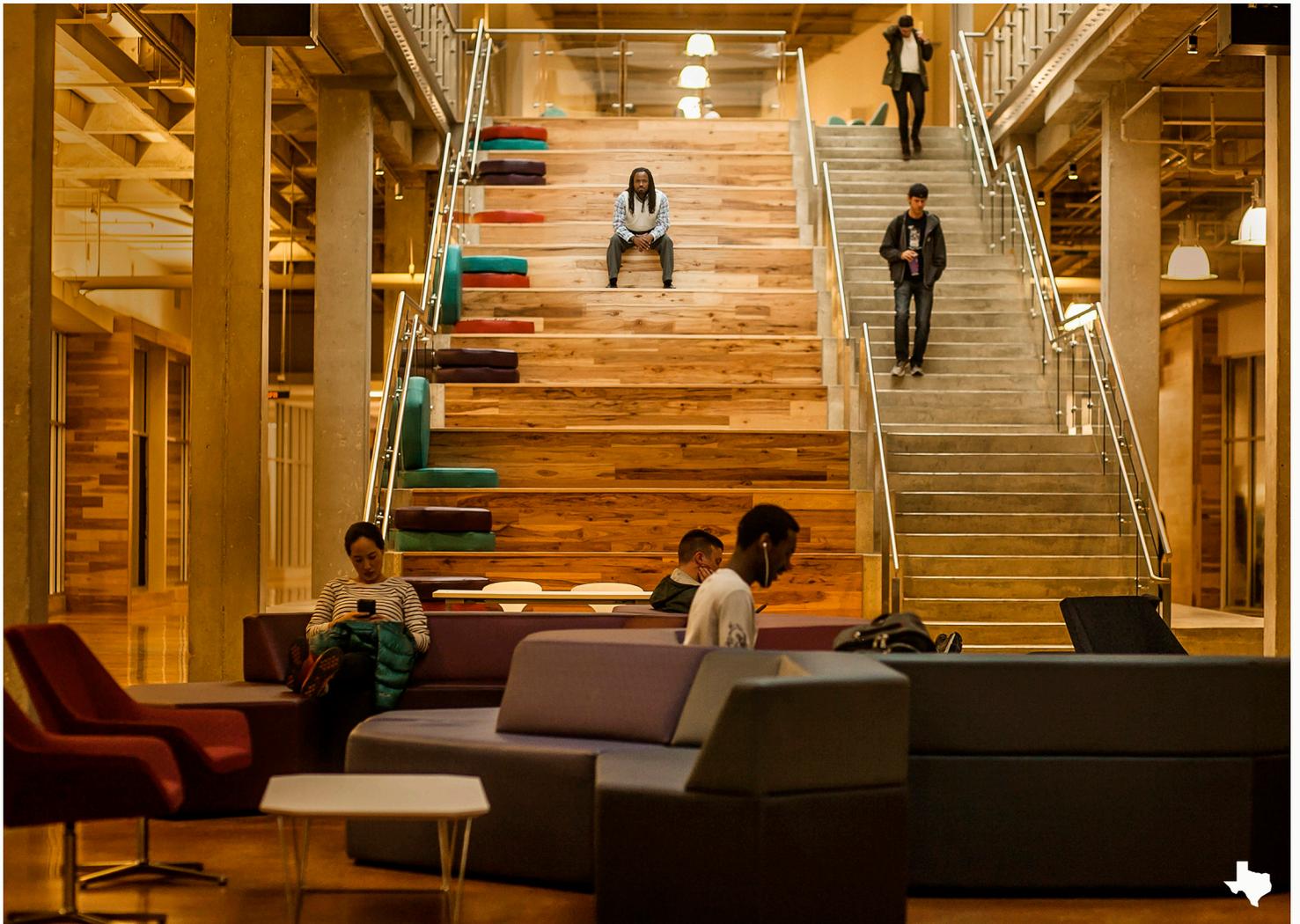


STUDENT  
SUCCESS IS  
ABOUT PEOPLE

FEATURING  
CIVITAS LEARNING  
PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

LEARNING

# BRIEF



Dorado Kinney *Dean of Student Services*

DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING A TRANSFORMED ADVISING MODEL

**AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

## By the Numbers

1973  
YEAR ESTABLISHED

100+  
FIELDS OF STUDY

SECOND LARGEST

*Higher Learning Institution in Central Texas*

43,000+  
CREDIT STUDENTS ENROLLED

7  
CENTERS

10  
CAMPUSES

15,000  
NON-CREDIT STUDENTS ANNUALLY

Austin Community College (ACC) has been engaged in a multi-year student success initiative focused on improving participation, persistence, graduation and transfers across all student categories. “We improved our persistence rates for fall-to-spring by 4% for all ethnic groups from 2007-2012 through innovative work in competency-based learning and accelerating developmental education in math. But there was still great potential for increasing completions,” said Virginia Fraire, Vice President of Student Services. “ACC saw fall-to-fall retention rates drop by 3% for Anglo and Hispanic students and 6% for African-American students from 2007-2012. We decided to focus some of our success work on the advising process, which for many students would



Nicky Haywood Senior Administrative Assistance to Student Services Dean

occur only once, at the point of entry.” In 2011, ACC transitioned from an all-paper advising process to an “e-advising” Education Plan in an effort to better track progress and conversations for its students. At ACC, approximately 25% of students enroll to pursue certificates, enrichment courses, or improve a skill. The other 75% is evenly

split in their intent to transfer to another institution (typically a university in Texas), or stay to earn an associate degree. “About a year and a half into the new e-advising Education Plan, we had an invitation to hear from Civitas Learning™ about how we might further enhance the advising process,” said Fraire.

*“We were intrigued with the concept of adopting an advising tool that would help us facilitate richer and more relevant conversations between advisors and students. At the time, we were also exploring ways to continue improving and scaling advising, and saw an opportunity to explore this in partnership with Civitas Learning.”*

PRESIDENT AND CEO

Richard Rhodes | Austin Community College

### SCOPING THE PROBLEM

## Ethnographic Study Identifies Opportunity for Innovation



Richard Rhodes President and CEO

Initial meetings involved multi-disciplinary teams from ACC, including President and CEO Richard Rhodes, Fraire, advisors, counselors, representatives from Admissions and IT, along with Civitas Learning data engineers, designers, and data scientists. An ethnographic study was implemented with Civitas Learning staff observing more than 200 hours of ACC student-advisor sessions. This enabled the team to best understand ways to enhance the mechanics of advising and gain greater efficiencies. “We were so hung up on the mechanics before that we couldn’t really integrate

advising into a conversation about the whole student,” Fraire said. Because many first-generation college students had no exposure to academic or careers options prior to joining ACC, the institution wanted to spend more time talking about their vocational and academic goals to find

better fits, and identify the stumbling blocks and challenges they may face along the way. One of the key challenges the team sought to address was making it easier for students to see where they were along their academic journey, and to help them plan beyond just one semester.



Tomi Welch Associate Registrar

## Making the Human Moments of Education More Precious

When ACC originally rolled out Degree Map™, it was available only to advisors and counselors, with adoption being optional. “We did not want to force this change,” said Fraire. “We began hosting training sessions and invited counselors and advisors to view a demo and provide us with input. Once they saw the intuitive nature of the interface, they were very interested.” Within 60 days of the campus-wide advising and counselor rollout, ACC had broad adoption by advisors and counselors.

ACC began to see a change in the advising experience.



Adam Saucedo | Recruiting and Advising Specialist

Students were not staring across the desk at their advisor any more. With Degree Map, they could engage and have more genuine, relevant,

and valuable conversations. Fraire recalls a student who came to ACC with a stated love of dance, but little idea of vocational choices in the

*“A student wanted to change his major to something related to computers. The minute I showed him where he was on his current degree plan – he was two classes from finishing – he could see the light at the end of the tunnel. I was able to work with him to complete the associate’s and then focus on computer classes.”*

STUDENT ADVISOR

Jason Brown | Austin Community College

event she wasn’t selected to join a major dance company. “She came to me and said she was going to drop out. She couldn’t see any point in continuing.” Fraire used the Degree Map matching option to see which degrees the student had the most credits toward and saw that she was more than 65% complete in teaching. The student went

from being discouraged to being very excited about the possibility of applying her love of dance to actually teaching it. “There are so many students like her who struggle when they lose commitment to the original major. Being able to see which ten degrees at ACC they are closest to completing with one click has been a huge asset to us and them,” Fraire said.

*“We appreciated how methodical the development process was, and how involved we were with the product design and implementation. This was definitely not something out of the box, one size fits all. The feedback from our early users was carefully integrated.”*

VICE PRESIDENT, STUDENT SERVICES

Virginia Fraire | Austin Community College



Angelica Diaz-Miranda de la Rosa | Advising and Student Services Specialist

A CULTURE OF ANALYTICS

## Process Changes Resulting From Implementation

“We have improved significantly in a very short period,” said Fraire. “For almost 40 years, students walked out of their first, and typically only, advising session with a stack of papers and an advising form they might never read and that sometimes lacked relevance to their individual dreams and desires, in large part because caseloads made it difficult to have meaningful conversations. These conversations can easily become repetitive and inconsistent at a time when it’s critical to convey early engagement.”

Today, ACC is no longer conducting individual advising sessions for the first advising visit. All incoming students are placed into small Group Planning Sessions (GPS) where they meet peers, interact with Degree Map and visit with an advisor. “Students are leaving the sessions with consistent information and are ready to register,” said Fraire. “One student shared that she enjoyed using Degree Map because it had gaming-like features – she could see at a glance where she was in her path and explained that it made exploring her choices fun, rather than a burden filled with catalogs and papers.”

From a resource allocation viewpoint – a huge concern for most community colleges – there are payoffs as well. “With some students, GPS is all they need. They get it – they are off and running,” said Fraire. “For those who need more advice, or an opportunity to better understand how their choices play out in the way of career options, we can identify that and help in a timely, effective manner. It has allowed us to more effectively serve the different needs of our students. For some of our students, that means having follow-up individual advising sessions to talk about day care and bus routes as much as career choices. It allows the conversations to be personally relevant.”

## Increasing the Likelihood of Completion

In April 2015, a thorough analysis was conducted of pilot and control groups created through prediction-based propensity score matching – one of the most rigorous standards to avoid selection bias in understanding the efficacy of a learning technology or intervention – to look at the impact of the use of Degree Map on student persistence at ACC. The study looked at more than 35,000 matched pairs

of students over the course of three terms – from Fall 2013 to Fall 2014. The results revealed that students who used Degree Map to track their degree progress, plan courses, and evaluate degree options, showed a 2.42 percentage point increase in persistence over similar students\* who did not use Degree Map.

“Seeing this kind of result after only three terms is thrilling for us,” said Fraire.

“It validates our decision to focus our institution’s student success work on transforming our advising process, and reinforces the importance of implementing engaging tools to help students map their journeys, drive the quality of advising conversations, and get students to graduation.”

The study further examined the impact of the frequency at which students used Degree Map (dosage effect) and if they

stayed true to the plans they developed using the app (fidelity-to-plan). It found that students who used Degree Map two or more times to plan their courses showed a 3.3 percentage point increase in persistence, increasing by up to 7.3 percentage points when used five or more times compared to similar students who did not use Degree map. Moreover, students who went through with taking the courses they planned using Degree Map added, on average, another 1.9 percentage points when compared to similar students who did not use Degree Map. These results were statistically significant, with p-values <0.01 and confidence levels greater than 99.9%.

*“Our Degree Map project shows that when students have more clarity and control of their degree path, they’re significantly more likely to make progress on their learning path and, best of all, cross the finish line and complete a certificate or degree. These are the kinds of outcomes all of our student success innovations are shooting for!”*

PRESIDENT AND CEO  
Richard Rhodes | *Austin Community College*



Richard Armenta  
Associate Vice President of Student Success

\* Students were paired based on similar propensity to persist as identified through a predictive model that leverages several hundred predictive factors including factors such as GPA, terms completed, credits earned, etc.

### WHAT'S NEXT

## The Road Ahead

The overall improvement in persistence since the launch of Degree Map is driving more excitement around the institution’s vision to provide students year-round, on-demand advising as their interests or needs change. “This can be transformational for us and our students because so many of our students can easily get off the path – with work, families, finances, they can face very real challenges. We now have the technology to provide them with consistent advising when they need it, and this can scale,” she said.

Down the road, ACC will also look at leading indicators including frequency of major changes, rate of progress, and course combinations to intervene at the appropriate time for students who might be at risk of not persisting. “If we consider only GPA or completion rates after the semester ends, we’re too late.”

Fraire looks forward to honing interventions by exploring the data collected and insights gleaned. “We’ve come to understand that advising is essential to a student’s success, and technology has helped us gain efficiencies. As we improve the mechanics of advising by using Degree Map, we are moving to advising that is more holistic and culturally relevant.”



Virginia Fraire | Vice President of Student Services

ACC’s long-term goal is to create an advising system so holistic that it not only tracks a student through the academic enrollment and matriculation process, but it also maps out career choices, the availability (and median salary) of potential jobs based

on a student’s degree choice, as well as the ability of a student’s credits to transfer to another institution. The system would also map to the student’s “financial portfolio” in order to bring together academic and career conversations. “Degree Map

gives the student their data – their progress, their projected costs and time to completion. They have a right to this information,” Fraire said. “Building this in partnership with Civitas Learning, we’re getting there.” ■



**Civitas Learning™ is building a community** of higher education institutions to bring leading-edge technology, design thinking, and data science together to help a million more students learn well and finish strong. Using predictive analytics platform and engaging applications, institutions can bring deep insights to decision makers and personalized recommendations to the front lines of learning to measurably improve student success.

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