

SPC St. Petersburg College

www.spcollege.edu/collegeexperience

INTRODUCTION

America's colleges are finding themselves testing a myriad of student success strategies and tools to help advance the completion agenda. While some strategies are showing signs of improvement for select student groups, very few have resulted in moving the needle of student success at scale. As colleges continue to face low graduation rates, particularly among students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education, one underlined conclusion can be derived: student support strategies alone are not enough to make rapid improvements in student success.

St. Petersburg College (SPC) took on this challenge beginning in 2011 after taking an honest look at the experience of its students and realizing that as an institution, it was not student-centered at all. At this time, it could be said that SPC loved its rules and procedures more than its students. Only 1 out of 10 full-time First Time in College students were graduating in five years and only 65% of students overall were successfully completing their courses.

To right the situation, SPC set on a journey to make student success its only mission, with a goal of giving students the support they need to earn the degree or certificate that will change their lives. SPC recognized that it needed to completely revamp its institutional culture and organizational structure if any solution it was going to implement was going to work. After all, "culture eats strategy for breakfast" as famed management consultant Peter Drucker expressively puts it. With over 45,000 degree-seeking students, including 29,000 online students, at nine different learning sites, attempting any strategy at scale would be a daunting task.

Four years of tactical decision-making and college-wide dedication to what the institution has coined 'The College Experience' resulted in dramatic results, namely 22% gains in completions overall between Fall 2010 and Fall 2014, highlighting a 69% increase among Hispanic Males and a 54% increase among African-American Males, two of the most atrisk student populations.

SIX KEY STEPS LEADING TO CHANGE:

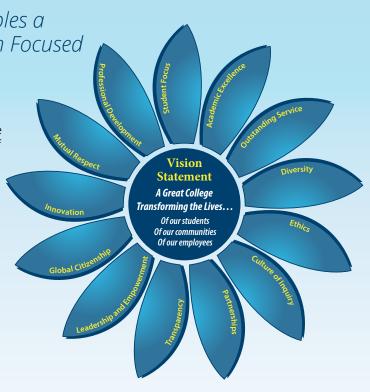
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Start with Strategic Guiding Principles a Values-Based Culture that is Mission Focused

The trigger for SPC's reformation was to get back to the foundational values of the institution by asking, "what does the student have the right to expect when they come to the College?" The expectation should be universal across all of the campuses, without having to be identical, as each campus has a different history, range of experiences, resources and student population. Yet, the values should remain consistent.

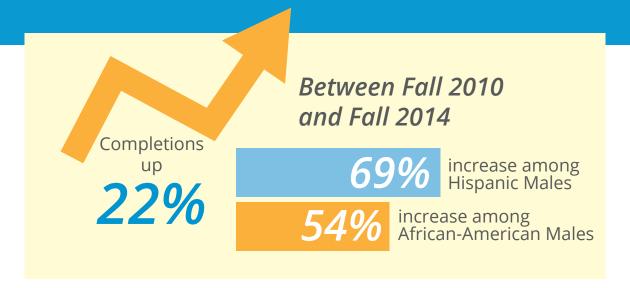
Using a broad group of administrators, faculty, staff and students, SPC defined a set of values driven by a revitalized mission to promote student success and enrich its communities through education, career development and self-discovery. All conversations and decisions are led by three guiding principles.

- The definition of student success is 'students finish what they start'.
- If you don't teach, your job is to help students get to class in the best condition for learning.
- Access changes self-perception, degrees and certificates change lives.



Mission Statement

Promote student success and enrich our communities through education, career development and self-discovery



These remarkable outcomes have drawn national attention, with colleges and educational experts from across the U.S. wanting to understand just how SPC was able make it happen and what they can do to see similar results at their institutions.

While the strategies themselves are not new, the reason The College Experience has had such a positive impact on student success can be attributed to SPC's intense focus on institutional culture and organizational structure using **six key steps leading to change.**

2 Commit to Transparency and Creating a Culture of Inquiry

SPC has committed to **transparency** and a **culture of inquiry**, two of its most practiced values, to create a data-driven environment that allows for open, honest dialogue about who the institution is, what it does, and how it continues to improve student success. This change has resulted in an evolution in the way the College conducts business and drives institutional improvement, by focusing on the widespread use and access to data.

To make this possible, SPC developed a very unique institutional data system known as **Pulse Business Intelligence (Pulse BI)** in order to provide timely, relevant and valid information in a user-friendly way. The system allows administrators, faculty and staff



to track multiple student groups, including First Time in College students, using disaggregated data combining economic, demographic, and academic factors more commonly impacting student achievement. Longitudinal cohort analysis is a key tool that allows SPC to better understand student performance over time – analyzing which students are performing and why; which students are falling behind and at which points, to focus efforts where large-scale gains can be attained.

A priority for the Pulse BI design was that it was easy to use. The College did not want to get ahead of its end users. They wanted to build a system that made sense so that it was easy to interact with and created for the entire institution to use, not just the Institutional Research department. With **over 700 users**, the case can be made that the design works. The best example of system use is SPC's The College Experience **weekly webinars**, where more than 150 people, from provosts and associate provosts to frontline advising staff, join online to look at outcome data for key initiatives from week to week and by term end to analyze how the numbers changed.

SPC has learned that data has no power when everybody sees it. For those working at the College, data is the beginning of the conversation, not the end. To them, it's not about pointing out a failure; it's about a true, honest reflection of the data.

3

Empower Staff through Shared Ownership

The onset of the values based conversation led SPC to completely overhaul its organizational leadership structure and overall roles and responsibilities of front-line staff at the institution.

• **Create** One College through Decentralized Leadership

At the very peak of the transformation was to address the fact that someone needed to own the student success problem. It was important that the institution take a deep look at its infrastructure - the people, technology and processes - to come up with a better plan of helping students complete what they start. Equally important was determining how SPC programs, services, and experiences could be delivered to students with minimum bureaucracy and a clear commitment to becoming more proactive, efficient and effective in getting helpful tools and resources to students. Local ownership in the delivery of the services would be critical to the continued improvement of all services.

SPC began this reorganization by shifting to a 'One College' structure through a one voice, one vision and one experience model. District administrators were decentralized and campus officers were empowered to work collaboratively for the good of all students. Instead of operating as independent campuses, Campus Provosts now operate under the guise of the Council of Campus Provosts **(CCP)**, charged with improving student success college-wide. Critical to the renewed focus on student success, the Campus Provosts reporting structure changed from academic affairs to student affairs, where the chief student services officer reports to the College President. This position has oversight over the CCP as an independent and impartial entity focusing on ensuring that the group remains mission driven. In collaboration with deans and academic leadership, this approach strengthened SPC's ability to function as a cohesive organization, ensuring consistency and unity across the College, while providing Campus Provosts the authority to oversee site-based day-to-day operations, still giving them the flexibility to respond to the needs of students that are

unique to their campus and community.

The One College approach was perhaps the biggest challenge SPC needed to overcome in its reformation because it involved a culture shift of people and personal change. To be successful in its effort, College administration brought in an independent leadership advisor and studied and practiced two critical pieces of literature: *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (Lencioni, 2002) and *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* (McChesney, Covey and Huling, 2012).

• Learn How to Change

How to get people to change is the foundation of the prescribed leadership mentality shared by Lencioni in *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, and the basis for SPC's leadership transformation. Lencioni, who specializes in executive team development and organizational health, teaches groups how to work together in the 'sandbox'. If SPC was to be successful, its leadership needed to be able to work together and align practices. Lencioni outlines a powerful model and actionable steps that can be used to overcome common hurdles to build a cohesive, effective team, including how to overcome a lack of trust among team members; ways to help a team engage in constructive conflict; how to use dysfunctions to improve teams; and what to do to achieve the real power of teamwork.



After putting the steps into action, the SVP of Student Services and Provosts found they were able to have healthy, frank conversations, holding one another accountable for performance. Going through this process helped them to work as a team, to depend on one another and collaborate more to resolve issues and share successes. They were able to accept and respect that an issue that comes up is everyone's issue, not that of any one single person; where the common focus is on the institution, not on an individual campus. The revised organizational structure refocused energy around true values – spearheading improved communication and resulting in earned trust.

• **Learn** How to Keep Moving & Analyze Efforts

Once the team started working together as one, the next step was to figure out how to keep plans alive and moving while analyzing strategies and making improvements along the way. In *The 4 Disciplines of Execution (4DX)*, Covey, et. al., demonstrate how to execute plans in the midst of a *whirlwind* of distractions. 4DX is a tested set of practices that represent a new way of thinking and working day-to-day among endless distractions, priorities, limited resources and time. Leadership was asked, "If every other area of your operation remained at its current level of performance, what is the one area in which change would have the greatest impact?" Their answer was The College Experience. At that point, the goal then was to make The College Experience a natural part of the team's operation.

4DX adoption started with the SVP and Provosts but ended up creating a snowball effect where Deans, Associate Provosts and eventually all levels of staff used these practices in day-to-day performance assessment and implementation, emphasizing the belief that every individual at the College is responsible for student success. The practice of 4DX is most visible through globally broadcasted weekly webinars where now over 150 key administrators, frontline staff, faculty and other personnel from across SPC gather to analyze data supplied by the College's Pulse BI system so that employees can see what strategies are working and what are not, making adjustments along the way, within the semester and before it's too late to impact students.

• **Professionalize** the Role of the Advisor

The One College structure gave the SVP and Provosts the accountability and leadership responsibility needed to make change across all levels of the College, starting with those working closest to students.



To effectively support students on their educational journey, SPC had to acknowledge that the College's advisor structure, as it was, did not provide students with the level of guidance they so desperately needed to be successful, nor did it equip the staff in these positions with the skills, knowledge, authority or resources to properly assist students. The effectiveness of SPC's traditional advisory model was further inhibited by career and academic services structured as separate departments, where academic advisors focused on course scheduling without tying career planning to a student's educational plan. Recognizing that SPC is responsible for both the education and ultimate employment of students, the College restructured these positions into a single function of Career and Academic Advising. This new configuration has been realized, in part, by over 5,700 hours of advisor specific training since 2012.

Implementing The College Experience required a significant change in the routine and attitude for many staff members, particularly for SPC's long-serving advisors who were mired in the status quo. This presented a challenge for leadership as these changes would inevitably impact staff morale, performance and job satisfaction if not handled with honest conversations, proper support and transitional planning. Traditionally, advisors at SPC were behind

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the scenes, focusing on student schedules and performance issues. As the College increased the visibility and responsibility of the advisors, it was not surprising that those currently in these positions felt the immediate effects of the shifting expectations. Committed to employee satisfaction and advancement, SPC leadership realigned the role of the advisor by elevating the position to a higher employee classification, redesigning the job description and increasing the accompanying compensation, a significant financial investment by the College.

With this adjusted and elevated role, advisor visibility not only increased with students but across the College as advisors were tasked with leading the college-wide weekly webinars, an opportunity for them to present on lead and lag measures related to each component of The College Experience. This highly intentional change strengthened the overall fabric of SPC, further reinforcing the College's belief that advisors are critical to student success and should be recognized as leaders.

4

Create a Unified Student Experience

At the core of SPC's mission, vision and values is the pledge to eliminate achievement gaps while improving outcomes for all students. Understanding that SPC needed to do more than just pilot best practices in targeted problem areas for a small group of students, it was important for the institution to target underrepresented and at-risk populations, while retaining the capacity to scale interventions for all students. SPC set out on an unwavering and ambitious journey to create and implement The College Experience as a unified student experience offering a safety net of customized services to ensure the right support is provided at the right time – with strategies targeting all stages of the student lifecycle from entry to exit, providing students with frequent communication and encouragement along the way.

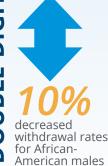
COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

- New Student Orientation
- Integrate Career and Academic Advising
- Individualized Learning Plans
- System for Early Alerts and Student Coaching
- Increase Use of Out-of-Class Support

As a result of this holistic effort, for six consecutive semesters between Fall 2011 and Spring 2014, students made significant academic improvements and returned from one semester to the next to complete their degree. The advances were astounding – low-income and minority students demonstrated double-digit gains where withdrawal rates for African American males decreased by 10% and retention rates for Hispanic males increased by over 14%.

UBLE-DIGIT GAINS

14% increased retention rates for Hispanic males



Shaping the students' full experience from start to finish has been critical to improving student success. SPC began its initiative by studying its own student satisfaction ratings and existing practices, compared to best practices among colleges nationwide, and honed in on five key interventions that it felt were most impactful on student success at SPC:

• Redesign New Student Orientation

At SPC, the student experience begins with New Student Orientation (NSO), an event that acclimates students to the institution, equipping them with the necessary information and tools to be successful while creating a sense of excitement for the journey ahead.

While SPC traditionally used NSO to engage students at enrollment, its influence on student success was questioned over the years. In Fall 2011, data revealed that only 821 students attended the NSO and, of these students, only 64% demonstrated course success. Reflecting on this information, SPC developed a more guided orientation for those students whose placement test scores required they take one or more remedial courses. Through the weekly webinars, SPC proceeded to regularly monitor the progress of this cohort and found that students attending NSO were more engaged in The College Experience, had higher course success rates, and greater retention. Overall, First Time in College (FTIC) students attending a face-to-face NSO experienced a 9% point increase in course success rates between Fall 2011 and Fall 2014, at an overall success rate of 73%. Even more remarkable was the impact on target populations, where Hispanic students experienced a 15% increase between the same period, reaching an 80% course success rate, while Pell recipients experienced a 9% increase, from 63% to 72%.

FTIC STUDENTS
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80%
course success rate for
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9% gain for Pell recipients
between 2011 and 2014

Acknowledging the impact NSO has on student outcomes, SPC deepened its investment by launching **Smart Start** in Fall 2015 – a free, non-credit 4-week course led by advisors, covering topics such as library resources, academic standing and career services. It is a mandatory course for all First Time at SPC students. By leading the NSO, advisors develop relationships with students during their first engaging campus experience, a truly effective practice to increase student success. SPC's intentional inclusion of advisors in the development and delivery of NSO was a further declaration of the vital role advisors play at the College.



• Integrate Career & Academic Advising

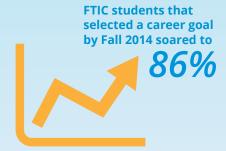
After the process of self-assessment, one of the major areas for improvement that stood out was the level of student use of career services. What SPC learned pretty quickly was that not only were career services under supported, they were invisible, a common problem found by colleges across the national landscape.

To become a more workforce-centric institution, SPC started by integrating the role of Career and Academic Advisor. Having these services aligned employs a holistic and unified process to guide students through the identification, clarification and realization of their future employment goals. This model facilitates student interaction with advisors from end-to-end – an area of support that students interact with from the time they start SPC, until the time they leave and beyond. Merging these operations links students' academic decisions with their ultimate career goals to increase retention. The conversation now begins with

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the question, "who are you and where are you going?" There is an awareness that if a student doesn't know where he or she is going, it will be very hard for an institution to help the student get there.

With this in mind, SPC began the implementation of a "green-yellow-red" career decision scale that starts the career and academic advising discussion. Data shows SPC FTIC students are 10% more successful in their classes when they have identified a career goal. Those who have identified a career goal also withdraw from classes less often and return for the next term at a higher rate. The implication of this on student outcomes was considerable when only 24% of FTIC students in Fall 2011 identified a career goal. Since the integration of these services, the number of FTIC students that selected a career goal by Fall 2014 soared to 86%.



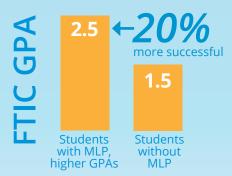
SPC took the invisibility problem a step further by not only physically transforming its facilities to place career centers at the entrance of student service areas so that they were unavoidable in space, but also making sure that services were **programmatically unavoidable** by embedding career services into Smart Start orientation curriculum. Smart Start (NSO), which serves roughly 12,000 students each year (First Time at SPC), includes a focus on career counseling and labor market information ensuring **all incoming students** are engaged in career exploration and designation.

Like advising, students no longer visit career services just at the beginning and or just at the end of their time at the college. They go to see career services throughout their journey. To support the career conversation, all advisors now have access to and are trained to use online workforce database tools during sessions with students to link their planning with real-time labor market data.

• Create Individualized Learning Plans

Further building on the tools available to students to improve the alignment of academics to careers, SPC chose to implement **Individualized Learning Plans**,

called My Learning Plans, to serve as a student's roadmap to graduation – helping guide students through their degree path to know what classes to take, and when, so that at any point in time they know where they stand in meeting graduation requirements.



Upon implementation of this tool, SPC found that FTIC students with a learning plan had higher GPAs (2.5 vs. 1.5) and were over 20% more successful than their peers without plans. Further evidence has shown that students with learning plans are less likely to drop out of college, spend less money on tuition and books by taking only required classes, are more likely to meet federal guidelines in order to keep their financial aid, and spend less time trying to figure out what classes to take. This is great news for the more than 20,000 students that had My Learning Plans as of Fall 2015.

• **Establish** a System for Early Alerts and Student Coaching

SPC determined early on that by the midpoint of the semester, it is often too late to help struggling students recover. College leaders wanted to be sure that they can quickly get to a student who needs help getting back on track. As a critical feature of the student coaching success triangle involving student, advisor and faculty member, Early Alerts helped SPC reach the next level in advising by being more intrusive. SPC needed a tool that helped identify students early so they stayed enrolled in their courses, on track with assignments and fully engaged.

Through SPC's Early Alert system, faculty members are able to alert an advisor when a student starts to struggle in class. These students are then referred to a student coach, mentor, or faculty member of a specific out-of-class support

to help get them back on track. SPC has found that students who receive early alerts are most successful when they also take advantage of other

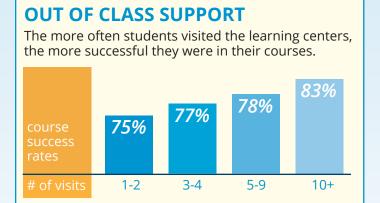


resources, like out-of-class supports and learning plans. The combined effort has **reduced D, F and Withdrawal grades**, as much as 12% between Spring 2014 and Spring 2015, and **increased A, B and C grades** by 6% between the same period.

• Increase Use of Out-of-Class Support

A key component of The College Experience is increased use of out-of-class supports such as tutoring, library services and workshops. At the core of this is engaging faculty in the development and delivery of support services, including having faculty dedicate office hours to the Learning Support Centers (LSC).

Currently, services provided through the LSCs are primarily focused on credit seeking students. In Fall 2014, over 18,000 unduplicated students (55%) used the LSC's for a total of 130,674 visits. During this time, **students** who visited the LSCs 10 times or more were successful in 83% of their courses, compared to students with 1 to 2 visits who were successful in 75% of their courses. A particular emphasis was placed on those identified as high-risk, a population which instantaneously exhibited increased outcomes as a of result of these strategies. Data confirmed that minority students showed considerable gains with African American male success rates rising by 17% when they visited 10 or more times, and Hispanic male success rates rising by 12%.



Validating that this is a highly effective intervention for at-risk students, SPC was compelled to ensure these resources were further scaled, increasing staff and resources to the LSCs and further involving faculty. In 2014-2015, SPC saw more than 200 full-time faculty members log 5,500 hours at the LSCs. More recently, SPC committed to hiring seven new instructional support specialists and expand tutoring services, a direct response to the 29% increase in student visits to the LSCs in the Spring 2014 term.



Grow the Team, Both Personally and Professionally

To foster the buy-in and engagement of staff and faculty, SPC instituted professional development opportunities for every employee, whether full-time or part-time, on the front line or in the back office, to help them grow in their role at the College and personally as a provider. By establishing **The College Experience Institute**, under the leadership of campus Provosts and in collaboration with the Human Resources Office of Professional Development, SPC was able to reach its workforce in a way that was interactive and engaging, where staff and faculty set a roadmap for their own professional development. Here, the SPC team is encouraged to share data and learn from what that data tells them, creating an inquisitive culture where people are not afraid to ask questions and have the freedom to explore and analyze practices for improvement in both personal and professional practices.

Prior to The College Experience Institute, training opportunities at SPC didn't exist, or were very limited. Since 2012, nearly **51,000 hours of training have been delivered, with nearly 21,000 of those hours happening in 2015 alone**.

Through the Institute, SPC was able to hone training in on subject matter that would help staff and faculty improve daily interaction with students, emphasizing how to better understand individual students' needs and how to communicate in tough situations, covering courses like Student Coaching Meetings & Building Rapport; Asking Tough Questions; and Active Listening & Building Actions Plans. Training was also targeted to all staff to help them better understand the big picture and all that is being implemented at the College and why it's important, by covering such topics as an Overview of The College Experience and Employees' Role in the Success of Each Student. These training sessions ultimately helped to improve acceptance and engagement of the College workforce as a whole in its rich amount of change-driven initiatives.

Much of the hike in training hours in 2015 stemmed from the transformation of the role of the advisor. To help ease this transition, SPC provided advisors a comprehensive and structured timeline to assist them in meeting new training and educational expectations. Advisors were afforded the resources necessary to learn, practice and master the new skills and tools they are expected to utilize and implement. To help professionalize the role, SPC is now providing advisors with the National Career Development Association's Career Development Facilitator training, allowing each individual to gain a national certification.

6

Align Your Money with Your Mission

Valuing The College Experience and student success as its core mission, SPC's leadership embarked on a long-term and strategic journey that dedicated all resources to achieving the goals of the initiative, while scaling each component to all students. With this massive college-wide undertaking, leadership recognized that it would require significant resources. This was a particularly daunting challenge considering the struggling state and national financial climate. However, tough budgetary measures were enacted, and in the last five years, SPC shifted personnel, financial resources and energy towards its guiding principles.

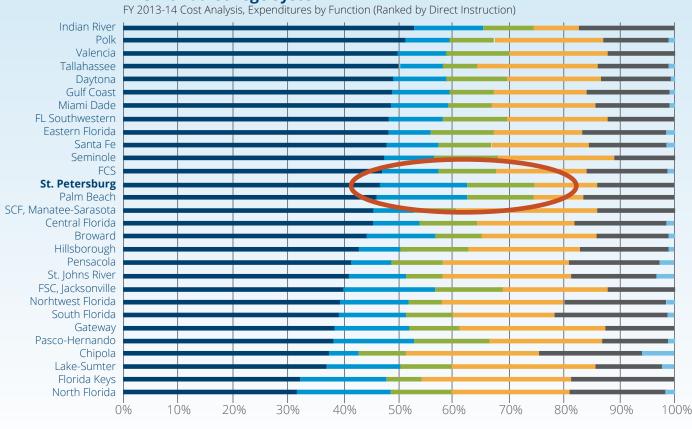
Keeping tuition rates flat, SPC consistently increased spending for student and academic support by 10-20% each year, while decreasing administrative support significantly by 12-20% each year. SPC rose to the top in the state for financial readjustments that concentrated on student services, clearly demonstrating leadership's

pledge to student success and access to affordable quality education.

One key example of this targeted reallocation of resources has been the increase in the number of staff dedicated to the needs of students. In 2015, SPC provisioned \$585,000 to create 18 new Student Support and Career Services positions including Cyber Advisors, a Veterans Services Coordinator, Disabilities Resources Specialists and dedicated Job Specialists.

Student success initiatives also continue to drive SPC's strategic planning and budgeting processes. This process begins during annual public budget hearings where requests are brought before the Board of Trustees, President and the general public for consideration. Each submission is required to align with the College's strategic goals, notably student success, as well as present specific data to support the budgetary request, including current benchmark status, need and anticipated metric outcomes.





■ Direct Instruction ■ Academic Support ■ Student Services ■ Institutional Support ■ Plant Operations & Maintenance ■ Unallocated Costs Excluding Transfers

NEXT STEPS

With its new decentralized organizational structure and improving institutional culture, SPC has become a nimble establishment, which has allowed the College to respond quickly to challenges that arise, such as Florida's developmental education reform, as well as implement next steps initiatives to move the needle of student success even further. By using real-time data, the College has the ability to analyze and determine when something is or is not working and can make intentional shifts in advance to reset the course of action.

SPC has recognized that a unified student experience not only represents the out-of-class experience, but the learning experience as well. While the College focused The College Experience around student support services initially, SPC has also become more intentional in the way academic services are provided, by emphasizing the student learning experience and comprehensive programs of study, enabling students to be career and content ready for their own path.

In a 10-week timeframe during the summer of 2015, SPC focused on creating Academic Pathways for each academic program that embedded short and long-term certificates and began the process of embedding Industry Certification on and offramps. In one summer, 184 pathways within 95 programs were created. The goal was to identify at least one appropriate industry certification to be embedded within each Associate Degree program, map the competencies from the industry certification exam to existing course outcomes and identify those competencies that are not addressed to design additional industry certification preparation courses for students to get ready to sit for their exam.

In Fall 2015, SPC focused its attention on integrating The College Experience and Academic Pathways to establish a **'guided pathway'** for students to offer clear, structured, industry-driven programs of study for students to follow through to graduation and into the workforce, providing wraparound support services along the way.

SPC is further investing in improving the quality of its online programming, recognizing that more than 65% of its students take at least one online course during their time at the College, and success rates in these courses remain lower than instructor-led courses. Using Quality Matters (QM), a nationally recognized peer-based approach to improving online education through advances in student learning, faculty are improving their online expertise through focused training in online teaching strategies, developing online courses, and reviewing peers' courses. By December

2015, nearly 900 faculty members completed training using the QM process, representing over 17,500 hours, a clear commitment to online revitalization at SPC.

While SPC has successfully embraced several highly effective initiatives, producing

900
faculty members/
representing over
17,500
hours of
training

significant results, the institution recognizes that foundational adjustments and process improvements need to be addressed in order to extend the impact and scale of The College Experience. Student achievement at SPC is the responsibility of all, not just the advisors or leadership, making strategic, ongoing and elevated engagement and training of all employees key to success. An analysis of its service structure, processes, technology alignment, and communication patterns is a pivotal next step for the institution to become more effective and efficient, to stay on the cutting edge and help to maintain a positive institutional culture for faculty and staff.

It is SPC's institutional culture that has allowed the College to implement such high impact initiatives so quickly. It's not just how the College uses and processes data and communicates, it's about how it reacts to information. At the very core of that are the guiding values that drive the institution; the ultimate value being student success and helping students improve and finish what they start.

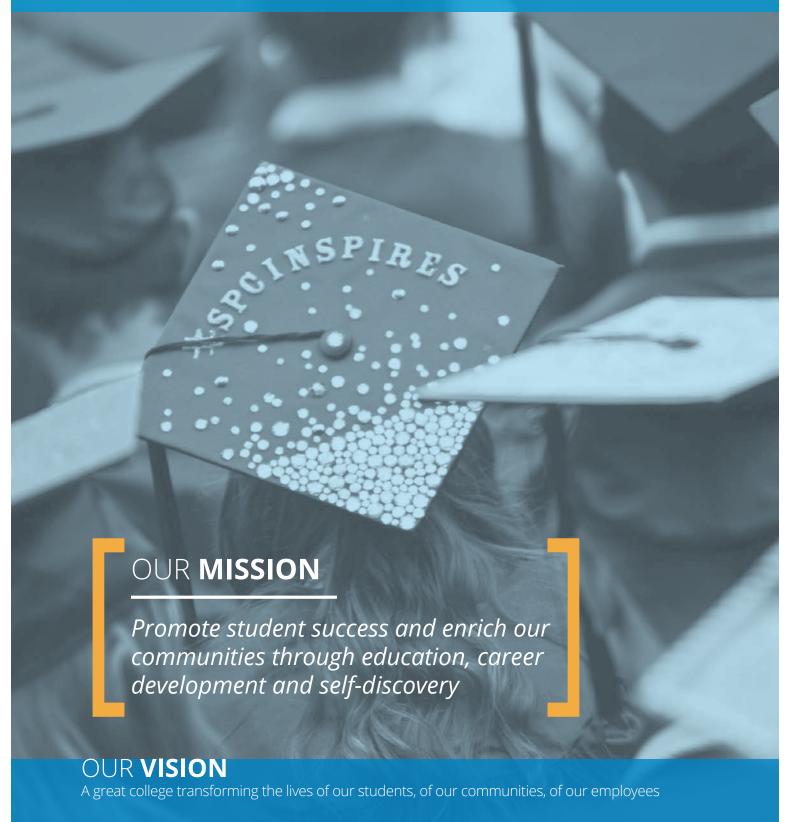
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