Scaffolding Student Learning Outcomes Through Pathways

West Texas proved the perfect choice: its regional education system is comprised of a community college, Odessa College, that offered excellent Bright Outlook Allied Health degree programs, its K-12 feeder system of schools that directed students to those programs, and a local four-year university that accepted its graduates into related baccalaureate degrees. Add to that IEBC’s long-standing and mutually respectful relationship with the leadership of Odessa College and the fact that this region had undergone economic changes brought on by the oil bust resulting in the need to support a workforce. IEBC invited the leaders of Odessa College, Ector County Independent School District, and Texas Tech University to work as partners with IEBC to create the CtCC SmartPathways model program.

The philosophy underlying this pilot initiative is that its goals and the critical educational needs of the nation require faculty as well as employers not only to recognize that each of their institutions can make unique and essential contributions to the alignment of academic curricular SLOs with occupation-required competencies but also to find language that bridges the academic and workplace communities. The overall goals of this work include development of transparent pathways that allow more efficient planning of courses and programs that can seamlessly lead to careers, more focused academic advising, and reduction of time to degree completion and, therefore, less college debt.

Following the initial preparation that IEBC’s staff and consultants conducted using O*NET to identify the occupations, there were several stages in the development of the Odessa Texas pilot project known as the Allied Health-Curriculum to Career Choices (AH-CtCC). This pilot program has subsequently evolved into the current model of CtCC SmartPathways.

1. Examining the need for, and commitment to, improving the alignment between Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and learning expectations, or competencies, identified by O*NET as critical for certain career paths, ranging from entry level requirements to highly specialized professions.
2. Preparation for the meetings with the faculty whose selection depended in part on the particular focus of the CtCC SmartPathways, which can be disciplinary, institution-specific, level- or program-specific, or occupation- or profession-determined. Common to all are the support of leadership, judicious choice of participants, appropriate meeting schedule and venue, and meaningful assessment.

3. Curricular alignment requires identifying academic SLOs and occupation-specific competencies in the three institutions’ curricula, as well as becoming aware of SLOs missing in the alignment with the competencies. This inquiry and recognition requires a gap analysis. For the West Texas pilot, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) Allied Health Competency Model provided the basis for the gap analysis. The IEBC team facilitated the work of the faculty on the gap analysis and plans for closing identified gaps, a process that progressed in three meetings.

4. Local implementation planning of CtCC SmartPathways builds on the basis of cooperative networks resulting from the initiative and its assessment. It provides opportunity for connections beyond the core group of engaged faculty with other colleagues at the home institution and others, and also with institutional and community leaders.