



Foreword

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Abstract

Connect2Complete (C2C) is a program for community college students, which encourages academic development, social integration, personal development, and civic consciousness—all key factors for student success. Through two distinct strategies—course-based peer-to-peer advocacy and peer-assisted service-learning—C2C supports vulnerable students in achieving academic success and credential completion while they actively engage with their peers, their college, and their broader community. To implement ambitious C2C pilot projects, Campus Compact, through the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, funded nine community colleges in Florida, Ohio, and Washington, along with the Compact’s related state affiliates. Between January 2012 and June 2014, these programs engaged more than 6,500 low-income, underprepared students. Fall 2012 to Spring 2013 retention rates were 3 to 16 percent higher for C2C students than for the comparison groups of similar students not benefitting from the C2C program.

The Completion Agenda and Connect2Complete

Underprepared, low-income students in community colleges face significant barriers that can make earning a college degree a struggle. While 70 percent of community college students test into at least one or more developmental education courses (courses designed to prepare students for college-level coursework), only 25 percent of these students graduate within eight years (Clayton & Rodriguez 2012; Bailey 2009). Low-income students are especially likely to require developmental education courses: 63 percent of students in the lowest socioeconomic-status quintile enroll in developmental education courses, compared to just 25 percent in the highest quintile (Russell 2008). Despite the intentions behind developmental education courses, economically disadvantaged students persist

and graduate at lower rates than their more affluent counterparts (Bailey, Jeong & Chong 2009).

The C2C Pilot Projects 2012–2014

Florida

Broward College

Miami Dade College

Tallahassee Community College

Florida Campus Compact

Ohio

Cuyahoga Community College

Lorain County Community College

Owens Community College

Ohio Campus Compact

Washington

Big Bend Community College

Edmonds Community College

Green River Community College

Washington Campus Compact

In response to these figures, President Obama set a goal to increase the degree-attainment rate in US colleges from 40 to 60 percent. To reach this target, Obama has called for 5 million more community college graduates by the year 2020, and a coalition of community college organizations led by the American Association of Community Colleges has pledged to support this effort through its 21st-Century Initiative. In addition, several powerful, private foundations have stepped forward to support this movement, which is known as the “completion agenda.”

While it is certainly important to help students achieve the goal of earning a degree, many higher education professionals have pointed out that, with its singular focus on “time to degree,” the completion agenda may emphasize efficiency to the detriment of high-quality learning (Humphreys 2012). Aware of this critique and cognizant that strategies for achieving completion goals have been questioned and criticized, community colleges are seeking innovative ways to increase graduation rates while improving the quality of student learning and holding true to their open-access missions.

Connect2Complete Overview

The Connect2Complete (C2C) program—developed by Campus Compact, a national coalition of 1,200 college presidents committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education—is a unique and promising model that encourages academic development, social integration, personal development, and civic consciousness—all key factors for student success. The program grew out of Campus Compact’s 2010 white paper, “A Promising Connection: Increasing College Access and Success through Civic Engagement.” Authored by leading researchers in the field of community engagement in higher education, the paper highlighted local and national studies that demonstrate positive connections between college success and civic engagement.

Through two distinct strategies—course-based peer-to-peer advocacy and peer-assisted service-learning—C2C supports vulnerable students in achieving academic success and credential completion while they actively engage with their peers, their college, and their broader community. While service-learning has been identified as one of ten high-impact educational practices effective in increasing student retention and engagement (Kuh 2008), this pedagogy is rarely integrated into developmental education courses. Connect2Complete offers a model for combining and integrating proven interventions with a population ripe for such engagement.

To implement ambitious C2C pilot programs, Campus Compact leveraged support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to fund nine community colleges in Florida, Ohio, and Washington, along with the Compact’s related state affiliates. Over the course of the pilots, these colleges engaged more than 4,500 low-income, underprepared students.

For C2C’s service-learning component, faculty integrate service-learning pedagogy into their college preparation courses. To select courses and faculty for C2C, campuses examine institutional data and identify either of two categories of courses:

- developmental education courses with historically low pass rates or
- college-success courses required for students who test into two or more developmental education courses.

Colleges then identify developmental education and college-success faculty teaching these courses who are interested in incorporating service-learning into their courses and working with student peer advocates. For the C2C model, faculty participants are expected to adhere to criteria for high-quality service-learning:

- Faculty require student participation in service-learning activities.
- Critical reflection occurs before, during, and after service activities.
- Service activities are connected to coursework and course objectives.
- Coursework incorporates civic-learning outcomes.
- Learning is documented through writing, video, photography, or other artifacts.

Students who serve as peer advocates are the core of the peer advocacy component of the model and serve as mentors and leaders

Service-Learning

Service-learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs. Students then reflect on the service activity to gain a further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

Peer Advocates

Peer advocates are enrolled college students who, in addition to serving as leaders of service-learning, are mentors, advocates, and advisors to their peers in developmental education courses.

of service-learning for the C2C students by attending the developmental education or college success courses with which they are matched. The peer advocate's regular presence in the classroom creates a familiar, regular, and accessible point of contact for the C2C students. In addition, peer advocates connect with C2C students through service-learning activities, social media and online platforms, office hours, and campus events. All campuses offer incentives to peer advocates in the form of Federal Work-Study funds, free credit-bearing leadership development training, AmeriCorps Educational Awards, scholarship funds, stipends, or some combination of the aforementioned incentives.

As mentors, peer advocates assist C2C students in building relationships with peers, faculty, and advisors; connecting with campus and community resources; and becoming comfortable with the unwritten rules of college (Crisp 2010). As leaders of service-learning, peer advocates receive training, and they work closely with developmental education faculty and college staff to support C2C student participation in service-learning activities. Peer advocates introduce C2C students to service-learning pedagogy, develop and maintain relationships with community or campus partners, and facilitate reflection. The model permits flexibility. At some of the pilot campuses, the program coordinator works with peer advocates and faculty to design a standard set of peer-advocate-led workshops and resources on service-learning and success skills. At other campuses, the faculty and peer advocate pairs—supported by a “tool belt” of resources, activities, and materials—customize the peer advocate's role in the classroom.

Lessons Learned

The C2C pilot programs provided each implementing college with the opportunity to test peer-to-peer models that were adapted to unique campus and state cultures. In the article series *Lessons from the Field: Weaving Service-Learning and Peer Advocacy into Developmental Education Courses*, the authors discuss lessons learned throughout these pilot implementations. Learning in four areas stands out: implementation models, systems for supporting and elevating the role of developmental education faculty, ways of re-imagining service-learning to define the campus as community, and institutional readiness for service-learning and student-leadership programming.

Implementation Models

Initially, four of the nine colleges experimented with co-curricular models of service-learning, while the other five designed course-based models. Together Campus Compact and the colleges saw clear evidence that course-based models have distinct advantages over co-curricular models. Now, all campuses have adopted course-based models for a variety of reasons.

- First, developmental education students—not unlike all community college students—often have heavy work and family responsibilities that preclude extracurricular activities. C2C's course-based model reaches these students where they are: in the classroom.
- Second, service-learning pedagogy can make classroom learning more relevant to students' lives—a key connection for students who may doubt the usefulness of a college education.
- Third, by recruiting students through course enrollment, the program can reach those who might not otherwise seek the support that C2C offers, and who, therefore, are the ones who need it most.
- Fourth, course-based models offer opportunities for C2C students to develop strong connections with faculty—which are key to creating a college-staying culture.
- Finally, by dedicating funds to faculty training rather than to external support services, the program reaches a large number of students in a cost-effective manner.

Role of Developmental Education Faculty

Developmental education faculty are critical to C2C's success, and many of them are adjuncts. The pilot programs revealed a lack of service-learning-related professional development and community building opportunities for these individuals. In response, Campus Compact created a C2C Faculty Fellows Community of Practice, comprising two developmental education faculty from each of the nine pilot campuses. Through facilitated phone calls, an online forum, face-to-face meetings, and a national institute, C2C faculty fellows shared successes and challenges and created practical tools for peer-assisted service-learning and peer advocacy. Several colleges developed their own campus-based fellowship programs to support and incentivize developmental education faculty as they integrated peer-assisted service-learning and peer advocacy into their courses. Because faculty are more likely to pursue curricular innovations that are promoted by their colleagues, many of the national fellows played strong leadership roles in promoting service-learning and peer advocacy among other developmental education faculty on their campuses. In addition, paid release time and stipends enabled faculty to take on such leadership roles.

Defining the Campus as Community

C2C has highlighted the fact that there are rich opportunities for student engagement on the community college campus. As Zlotkowski and colleagues write, "The community college can itself be viewed as a community-based organization: It is of, not simply in, a particular place." (2004, 79) To find vulnerable populations and to see systemic inequality, one need only look around campus, where cuts to Pell grants coincide with the emergence of food banks to meet student needs. C2C does not suggest that campuses abandon traditional community partnerships, but, instead, it supports an expansive understanding of the college itself as the community at hand. The campus community, with both assets and needs, can prove to be a productive hub for service-learning activities.

Institutional Readiness

Connect2Complete is a complex program. Before launching a C2C program, campuses will want to assess their institutional readiness to support faculty around integrating quality service-learning into their developmental education courses and to train peer advocates as service-learning and student-success leaders. Where student leadership is strong and staff are in place to support service-learning and peer advocacy, colleges can move quickly to launch C2C. Without a culture of student leadership or in the absence of service-learning support staff, more time and planning will be needed.

Results

Together with the pilot sites and partner evaluators at Brandeis University, Campus Compact collected data to evaluate the success of C2C and to identify promising practices and essential elements of a C2C model. Evaluation methods included collection of student-record data, administration of C2C student and peer-advocate surveys, and interviews and focus groups with all C2C participants—students, peer advocates, faculty, C2C coordinators, and administrators. At this time of writing, the evaluation is ongoing and data are available only from Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 cohorts. Data from the Washington campuses, which operate on a quarter system, are also not yet available. Fall 2012 to Spring 2013 retention rates for all Florida and Ohio colleges were 3 to 16 percent higher for C2C students than for the comparison groups of similar students who did not benefit from the C2C program. Success rates (credits earned vs. credits attempted) were also higher for C2C students than comparable students not benefiting from C2C at these six colleges.

According to C2C student surveys, students who had peer advocates and who participated in course-based service-learning were two times more likely than comparable students not receiving C2C services to report that they would achieve their academic and career goals. They were also two times more likely than comparable students not receiving C2C services to report that they would pass their developmental

education courses in reading and writing. In part, these results can be attributed to an increased sense of confidence among C2C participants. In the words of one student,

With C2C, I intellectually felt confident. Before, I didn't feel confident to have a voice. At C2C, we were learning and teaching others, and it developed a sense of confidence for everyone involved. Without C2C, I wouldn't be aware of my potential voice in the community.

C2C students were nearly two-and-a-half times more likely than comparable students not receiving the benefits of the C2C program to experience faculty as friendly, supportive, and inclusive—which makes sense given that course-based service-learning increases student interactions with faculty and that support from peer advocates enhances those interactions (Keup 2005-2006; Astin & Sax 1998). On bus rides to community sites, through peer-advocate-led reflections that encourage collaboration, and in the midst of service projects where students are pushed beyond their comfort zones, peer-assisted service-learning facilitates connections among students with their peers and with faculty in ways that are unlikely to happen in a classroom setting. As one C2C student notes,

When you get a classroom together and you all go on a trip, you really interact with your classmates. Sitting in a classroom all quarter, you don't get to know people behind you or across the class. [With service-learning] you learn to communicate. It creates a bond. You develop skills within yourself. There are more learning experiences when you take the class somewhere else.

Although the piloting colleges used a variety of approaches for incorporating service-learning and peer advocacy into their developmental education courses, the combination was effective in increasing success for developmental education students. Community colleges interested in adopting the C2C model will need to follow effective practices for incorporating service-learning and peer advocacy into courses, but they can create their own approaches for aligning the C2C model with the unique needs of their particular community college setting.

Conclusion

In Connect2Complete, Campus Compact has proposed a bold and cutting-edge program to support low-income community college students in achieving their goals. Through C2C, nine community colleges have translated the needs and interests of students, faculty, and local community members in innovative ways and transformed the meaning and value of community for each college campus.

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Connect2Complete

As institutions of higher education serve large populations of underprepared and vulnerable students and simultaneously experience decreased budgets, they seek innovative and cost-effective ways to increase graduation rates while ensuring the quality of student learning. Connect2Complete (C2C), developed by Campus Compact with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is a new model for true student success. Through the C2C strategy of peer advocacy and peer-assisted service-learning, C2C supports vulnerable students in achieving academic success and credential completion while they actively engage with their peers, their college, and their broader community. These strategies encourage academic development, social integration, personal development, and civic consciousness—all key factors for student persistence.

In August 2011, Campus Compact selected nine community colleges in Florida, Ohio, and Washington, along with the Compact's related state affiliates, to operate ambitious C2C pilot programs between January 2012 and June 2014. These programs engaged more than 6,500 low-income, underprepared students who enrolled in developmental education courses designed to get them ready for college-level coursework. Beyond the pilot phase, the C2C model has garnered interest from and is being implemented by four-year colleges and universities.

Campus Compact

Campus Compact is a national coalition of more than 1,100 college and university presidents who are committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education. As the only national higher education association dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement, Campus Compact promotes public and community service that develops students' citizenship skills, helps campuses forge effective community partnerships, and provides resources and training for faculty seeking to integrate civic and community-based learning into the curriculum.