

RITA Midterm Report Central Lakes College

November 2016



EVALUATION QUESTIONS






1. To what degree is RITA reaching its enrollment goal?
2. What capacity is being built to sustain the RITA model beyond the grant period?
3. Is the program being implemented according to the original plan?
4. With what level of quality is the program being implemented?

RITA Model Components

- Communications
- New or enhanced curriculum
- New technology infrastructure
- Student support
- Student employment
- Industry partner engagement

For Year 3 of the TAACCCT grant, the RITA consortium underwent a midterm evaluation to document their progress in implementing the funded programs. Each school in the consortium participated in the evaluation. The Improve Group captured information from staff and faculty interviews and a student focus group to determine successes and challenges at Central Lakes College. Eight staff and faculty were interviewed and 4 students participated in a focus group.


Successes


-  **Outreach and recruiting has been taken to the next level.** RITA staff marketing and recruitment efforts have been noticed across the campus as high quality print materials and process improvements were developed for grant purposes. Some of these processes are being rolled out for other programs on campus. Outreach activities like the Hack-a-thon and coding camps have served a pipeline from the community into the school.
-  **Community engagement has increased with RITA staff and faculty involvement.** IT business and partner relationships in the community have improved; staff believe the growing enrollment numbers are products of this success. RITA staff prioritized these relationships and, as a result, have been able to create new opportunities for strategic engagement with regional school districts and local employers. Employers now seek recognize the value of CLC students and have sought interns from the college.
-  **Advising services have supported students.** Several interviewees noticed the benefits of having EEAs work with students. One remarked that this advising model gets students to remain in the program when they may not otherwise be motivated to continue.
-  **The Mobile App Development program has generated interest and engagement.** Students have been excited by this opportunity, enrolling in the program and taking classes as soon as it was launched. This program has brought a new IT skillset to the region and served to highlight other enhancements to the IT curriculums. In addition, the Mobile App program is credited with having catalyzed higher participation in Computer Club and other extracurricular activities.
-  **Instructional design support has led to improved faculty culture and new curriculum delivery methods.** More courses have been developed as hybrid or online. The curriculum has further been enriched to better match the delivery mechanism.


Sustainability


1. **Community relationships** will continue beyond the grant cycle. The work of RITA staff to encourage IT careers and skill-building through CLC programs has built a pipeline that may yield benefits in the long term. This may be particularly apparent from high school relationships.
2. The new **technology software and hardware** will be valuable and used in the curriculum in the next few years.
3. Much of the **new and enhanced curriculum** that was developed through the grant will be maintained, although some may be cut in favor of higher enrollment programs. Staff believe the Mobile Apps degree will continue due to student enrollment and interest.
4. **CLC faculty expanded their network with other instructors** in the consortium, and developed strong relationships that can be maintained despite a funding lapse. This network will potentially allow training and teaching materials to grow.
5. Some **improved campus business practices**—taken from RITA piloting—will be sustained after the grant is complete. RITA staff engagement with committees and activities across campus helped to model new practices and provide lessons learned to other program areas.


Challenges

 The school is facing a shortfall with less prospective students available to enroll. With high school graduation numbers declining and low unemployment, recruiting new students is difficult for all programs. In addition, as new IT credentials were delayed for review and approval, several semesters passed when students may have deferred enrollment until they could be in the program they desired.

 RITA staff positions and influx of IT program offerings are built on grant funds and not necessarily incorporated into the college's budget. Many interviewees remarked that ultimately the school will make decisions about the future of RITA components based on student enrollment. Most stated that given the school's size, having a large number of programs is difficult to sustain; some suggested that several IT programs will likely be cut after the grant funding ceases.

 Funding for a specific program creates tension between departments. Both staff and students are impacted by the large influx of money and resources available to the IT programs. As RITA interviewees reported, staff outside this department feel that the program gets special treatment and the students are being taught to expect this level of service.

 Professional development is a high risk investment in a department that struggles to retain qualified instructors. Although professional development yields long-term benefits for both the employee and students, it requires a substantial investment in one faculty member. In an environment where there are only a few qualified professionals willing to teach the material, the school is at high risk of losing its professional development investment if an instructor leaves for another opportunity. Moreover, many of the cutting-edge professional development opportunities in IT are highly expensive, heightening the loss if it occurs.

 The grant proposal forced a focus on programs and technology that were not necessarily responsive to CLC's region or market. For example, the Cisco partnership has led to a focus on one type of networking equipment rather than a broader array of options that could make students more marketable to employers with varying equipment at their site.



For additional details about this study, contact:

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