

RITA Midterm Report Ridgewater 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 their grant 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 Ridgewater College. Eight staff and faculty were interviewed and eight students participated in a focus group.

Successes



Employment and Education Assistants (EEAs) developed approaches for engaging diverse populations. New outreach practices target community and cultural groups that traditionally have not been part of the college. Interviewees have seen an increase in enrollment numbers for People of Color and improving community perceptions of the college.



Work flow has been optimized to maximize potential student engagement and enrollment. EEAs created a new process for engaging with students who applied but were not accepted and have actively called and texted prospective students who expressed an interest in RITA programs.



RITA programs have sparked valuable collaboration. Interviewees highlight that RITA has fostered a more collaborative, trusting environment within Ridgewater College, as well as with other colleges. Inside Ridgewater, instructors (and students) benefit from the support EEAs provide students who are struggling with course content. In addition, RITA faculty see the value of collaborating with faculty from other consortium schools to deliver programs. A product of this collaboration is an improved curriculum and assistance in reaching target enrollment numbers.



Faculty were exposed to new experiences and ideas through professional development training – further developing Ridgewater College’s organizational capacity. Through professional development training and networking opportunities, RITA faculty have been able to keep abreast of trends in the field and hone their approaches to instruction. Interviewees were appreciative of these opportunities, identifying this as the first time they had such experiences in a community college environment. This exposure helped ensure the new curricula and technology, especially the Cybersecurity Technology curriculum and the virtualization technology, is relevant.

Sustainability

1. **RITA's technology infrastructure could help sustain grant benefits.** One outcome of RITA—the virtualization technology infrastructure—allows faculty to share curriculum across colleges. It also creates the opportunity for students enrolled at other colleges to take courses through Ridgewater. In order to sustain these benefits, Ridgewater College could explore funding sources to keep the virtualization hardware relevant and to create new financial models that enable faculty work across schools.
2. **Knowledge and skills gained through professional development will continue to benefit faculty and students.** Ridgewater could explore future funding opportunities to support ongoing professional development. Staying current on trends is important in any field, and particularly critical in fast-changing technology fields.
3. **Ridgewater College should consider continuing the innovative components of the RITA marketing model,** including: going into the community rather than waiting for students come to the school and having students represent Ridgewater College at education fairs. To increase sustainability, documentation should be bolstered to better respond to enrollment inquiries.

Challenges



Student enrollment at Ridgewater College is not what was hoped for. In Fall of 2014 there were 78 students enrolled fulltime, which increased to 102 students in the Fall of 2016. The RITA programs did show enrollment success compared to the college, with a 33 percent increase during this time span compared to a 6 percent decline in enrollment in the college overall. Given the relative strength of the economy, there are more jobs than students, and it is assumed that many potential Ridgewater students would prefer to be working than taking courses. Some interviewees voice concern that without higher numbers, the technology and equipment updates needed to keep pace with the technology field will not occur.



Some Ridgewater College staff continue to be resistant to change. Some staff's resistance to change continues to be an obstacle to fully implementing the RITA model. Interviewees underscore and improving its efficiency and quality. Interpersonal challenges arise when some staff use new and unfamiliar approaches as opposed to standard or traditional practices. There is also tension between RITA and non-RITA staff, as some non-RITA staff are frustrated with the disparity in resources. Lastly, The Improve Group also heard that not having more staff involved in the initial grant proposal process has contributed to buy-in challenges within the RITA team. There have been some successes in bridging this challenge through the IDI effort.



The sustainability of RITA efforts is unknown. RITA staff and faculty have responsibilities that were not previously held by college staff, such as recruiting students in community settings and developing new technology curriculum. They also have taken on some responsibilities previously held by other staff, such as helping out students who need extra support and teaching courses. Interviewees voice there is not a clear transition plan for sustaining RITA staff and faculty's contributions beyond the grant period. Building off of the sustainability ideas outlined above could serve as a helpful starting point for managing the changes that lie ahead.



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