

# Planning at Tri-County Technical College

## *Introduction*

Tri-County Technical College recently completed a year-long 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. As we plan for the future, we are building on a tradition of delivering quality, affordable educational programs that facilitate the achievement of our citizens' aspirations for a better life.

The reason Tri-County Technical College exists is defined by its mission to be an open admissions, public, two-year community college dedicated to serving as a catalyst for the economic and lifelong development of the citizens of Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens counties through outstanding programs and unparalleled service. How we intend to achieve our mission is robustly described in our carefully crafted ten-year vision which established a strategic framework to define the work necessary to realize our vision. We believe our vision document, "Transforming Lives, Shaping the Community", embodies the outcomes the College seeks to achieve. Our 2014-2016 Strategic Plan establishes the path forward for the next three years to realize this long-term vision.

A major emphasis in our planning for the next three years is student success. The first and, perhaps, most important step is to understand what "student success" means. TCTC defines student success as students achieving their educational and career goals. In order to succeed, students must be positioned and equipped for success, be engaged in their learning, and be supported in their academic development. Our strategies to improve student success reflect the complexities of student achievement and address the sources that hinder achievement.

While having a common definition of student success and a unified desire to help students succeed is necessary to realize our long-term vision, we also must have a strategic planning process integrated into the day-to-day operations of the College because:

- Education transforms our students' lives. Strategic planning organizes our efforts to deliver a transformational experience for our students. Our work also directly impacts the communities we serve, thereby promoting economic development in our service area.. The extent to which we provide a transformative educational experience determines our effectiveness in serving our students, our coworkers, and our community.
- We must allocate our limited resources (fiscal, personnel, and infrastructure) to make the biggest impact on student success and economic development.
- We must continually make data-informed decisions to improve programs, processes, and experiences, and coordinate our efforts to insure these changes result in improved learning and goal attainment for as many students as possible.
- We must proactively plan, staying abreast of external factors so we may adapt and continue to deliver high quality programs and unparalleled service to our community.

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## Planning as a Process

The President, Executive Staff, President’s Advisory Committee, and the Tri-County Technical College Commission utilized a collaborative process in developing, reviewing, and approving the 2014-2016 Strategic Plan.

### *Step 1: Review of the Ten-Year Vision and College Mission*

#### **MISSION**

Tri-County Technical College is a public, two-year community college dedicated to serving as a catalyst for the economic and lifelong development of the citizens of Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens counties through outstanding programs and unparalleled service. An open admissions institution with primary focus on teaching and learning, the College serves approximately 6,000 to 7,000 students through both on-campus and distance learning courses. The College grants certificates, diplomas, and associate degrees in technical, career, and transfer programs. The College also offers certificates in continuing education programs.

#### **VISION**

Tri-County Technical College will be the role model for community college education through dedication to high standards, a nurturing environment, community alliances, and innovative leadership.

#### **VALUES**

At Tri-County Technical College, we value

*INTEGRITY*-respect for the dignity, equality, and potential of self and others in personal and professional interactions.

*RESPONSIBILITY*-accountability in personal, professional, community, and fiscal affairs.

*ACCESSIBILITY*-equal opportunity to advance professionally and personally in a clean, safe, stimulating, and aesthetically pleasing environment.

*COLLABORATION*-partnerships among students, faculty, staff, and community to promote open and effective communication, decision-making, and implementation of ideas and processes.

*LEARNING*-facilitation of intellectual and technical growth through commitment to continuous improvement and innovation.

The planning process began with a review of the College’s mission, vision, and values. Throughout the planning process, we referred to these statements to guide decisions and develop work products within the context of these statements.

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## *Step 2: Review of our Environmental Scan*

An environmental scan informed the strategic planning process, helping us recognize and more effectively respond to changes in external influences that affect the institution. We used a best practice process, a PEST (political, economic, social, technological) analysis, to perform the scan. The analysis was modified to reflect the factors affecting an educational institution. Political factors include law, policy, and other influences employed by State and Federal governments that affect our College. Economic factors include economic growth, unemployment rate, and labor market skills data. Social factors encompass population growth rates, high school enrollment, college-going rates, and the value placed on higher education. Technological factors include advances and changes in technology, as well as internet bandwidth availability.

The environmental scan presented numerous challenges and opportunities for Tri-County.

- **South Carolina’s recovery from “The Great Recession” is slow.**

What experts term “The Great Recession” is aptly named because this recession deeply affected many economic sectors. Not only has the recovery been slow from an employment perspective, but housing growth (which is a driver for economic growth) is slow, and State and Federal funds are diminishing. The past decade was the first decade in US history (including the Great Depression era) where the US experienced negative job growth. Projections are for flat and continued decreases in State funding and more regulations placed on Federal funding. In the past, recovery led to a replenishment of lost funding; however, that concept is in direct contrast to this recession. Additionally, the counties we serve are faced with persistent budget challenges, so the funding we receive from them is an economic factor that will play a role in the College’s planning for years to come.

- **The high school population is not projected to grow.**

High school enrollment projections show a relatively flat high school population for the foreseeable future. Approximately 23% of our service area high school seniors matriculate to TCTC in the fall following their high school graduation. This population comprises a substantial portion of our first-time TCTC student body. We will be competing for this population with other post-secondary institutions, both public and private. Additionally, we will reach maximum capacity for the Bridge to Clemson Program (one-year transfer program for students accepted by invitation only) in the near future.

- **The demand for skilled workers presents itself in the form of a skills gap.**

Many currently available and future jobs require a post-secondary credential; however, these jobs don’t require a bachelor’s degree. Many of these jobs require technical skills in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, yet many students come to Tri-County with deficiencies in the

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basic knowledge and skills required. Advanced manufacturing jobs, in particular, require a special skill set for which our citizens are not fully equipped. One example of a federal response to the skills gap is the United States President's Completion Agenda, which calls for a large increase in community college graduates in the over decade.

- **Federal financial aid regulations are affecting our funding and will continue to do so.**

One effect on tightening federal funds manifests itself in rapidly-changing financial aid regulations. About 80% of TCTC students receive some form of federal aid, illustrating the College's reliance on financial aid as an important revenue stream. Federal regulations have and will continue to change, requiring the College to quickly adapt. More stringent reporting and academic progress requirements will continue to challenge the way we operate.

- **Accountability requirements continue to increase.**

Even as State and federal funding has decreased, growing accountability measures are being placed on colleges nationwide. A laser focus has been placed on graduation rates, loan default rates, job placement, and other accountability metrics. We will be held more accountable for our institutional performance than ever before. Additionally, our communities are asking about the return on investment for higher education. Consumers are paying close attention to the relationship between the cost of attendance, job placement, and earned wages.

- **An increasing number of jobs will require a certificate or associate's degree.**

The upstate region is experiencing a resurgence in manufacturing. Many manufacturing jobs require technical competencies and 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce skills such as problem solving/critical thinking, communicating effectively, ethical behavior, and collaboration. A high school education is a starting point; however, certificates and associates degrees will position citizens to obtain required skills to obtain these jobs.

- **There is a focus in business/industry on advanced manufacturing.**

Labor statistics and economic development indicators clearly show the job market is changing in upstate South Carolina. An emphasis on recruiting manufacturing companies to the upstate, particularly advanced manufacturing, has led to resurgence in industrial activity in the upstate. As this job sector grows, there will be an increase in the demand for skilled workers.

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- **There is a greater reliance on technology as a tool to deliver instruction and services.**

Online learning has grown exponentially as a mechanism to deliver instruction. Development of online resources, MOOCs, and other electronic learning resources will continue to change the landscape of the traditional learning experience. This places pressure on our IT infrastructure as well as curriculum development as we adjust to the rapid increase in the use of technology both in and out of the classroom.

In addition to external factors, the College used a variety of institutional performance data to inform the planning discussion. Key data include graduation, student success, persistence and retention, employment, CCSSE benchmarks, Noel-Levitz national comparison reports, the Baldrige Accountability Report, and credit course grade information.

### *Step 3: Development of a practical vision that moves us towards realizing our Ten-Year Vision*

Because the environment in which we operate changes so quickly, it is more effective to plan in three-year increments. The President and Executive Staff used a focus question to guide development of the practical vision: What do we want to see in place in three years as a result of our actions? The President and Executive Staff defined elements of the practical vision which more clearly articulated what we wanted to see in three years as a result of our work. The elements include:

- A LEAN organizational structure
- Vibrant campuses
- Sustainable programs that deliver value
- Engaged and empowered employees creating value
- Students equipped for success
- Students engaged in their learning
- Students accomplishing their goals
- Valued business and industry partnerships

### *Step 4: Identification of root causes of problems*

In order to realize the practical vision, it was important to identify and analyze obstacles and root causes that could obstruct success. The President and Executive Staff engaged in a root cause analysis exercise in which obstacles and problems were identified and then grouped, revealing key areas of concern. Identified root cause problems are:

- Inflexible, ineffective systems that inhibit student success
- Entrenched and obsolete leadership
- Non-adaptive and non-innovative culture

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- Excessive focus on teaching rather than learning
- Obsolete approach to business and industry relationships
- Constrained and limited resources
- Poor alignment of actions to vision and goals

### *Step 5: Development of strategic directions*

Using the environmental scan, a review of our current institutional performance, the practical vision, and root cause analysis as context, the President and Executive Staff discussed substantial actions that, if taken, would address the root causes that could prevent the College from achieving its vision. Strategic directions serve as a framework, helping steer efforts to achieve our vision and condensing the ideas and opportunities into practical actions. A variety of practical actions were named, then grouped based on relationships to one another. Each group was given a descriptive title; then, relationships among groups were made. The product resulted in four streams that formed our four strategic directions. Each direction provides the framework or context by which initiatives can be devised to move the College forward.

#### *Driving Organizational Success through our People*

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If we are to move forward in realizing improved performance and student success, we must invest in the resources that deliver value, our people. We therefore, decided to adopt a “Talent Management” approach to structuring our HR practices. Talent management embraces various elements of competency modeling to drive recruiting, professional development, and performance management. It also emphasizes succession planning and more intentional and fit-for purpose organizational design, including process-centric organizational structures rather than traditional hierarchical organizational constructs.

Moreover, Talent Management emphasizes empowerment of an organization’s people. Management systems are more oriented to equipping employees so that decisions can be made as close as possible to the action. Empowerment begins with clearly communicating the College’s vision and the strategies and plans designed to achieve the vision, so employees can have a proper context for making decisions and to allow them to engage directly in helping the organization execute its plans. Measurable organizational goals are also defined to help our people understand the degree of improvement the College needs to make to achieve these goals. Being goal oriented also means we must hold ourselves appropriately accountable for achieving these goals.

We also know that leadership styles must change and the College must invest in leadership development. We must encourage and reward transformational leadership. We also know that in order to deliver a transformational experience to students, we must lead transformationally. The skills, attitudes, and behaviors for this type of leadership must be established and nurtured.

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### *Reinventing our Offerings to Adapt to Changing Realities*

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Our programs are our life-blood and comprise the products we offer to our community. Programs that are aligned to business, industry, and community needs attract students and provide value in terms of high job placement rates. Assessing our current programs and making data-informed changes, including the incorporation of labor market information, is crucial to the sustainability of our programs. As labor markets change, we must proactively adapt our offerings to meet evolving needs. This calls for changing some programs and planning for when, where, and how they will be delivered. This type of value-driven programming demonstrates how investments in the College are worthwhile because we consistently deliver graduates who will contribute to our community. Doing so ensures our financial sustainability.

### *Positioning and Equipping Students for Success*

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To facilitate students reaching their educational goals, we must create learning environments that position students for success and equip them with the necessary tools to be successful. Because we serve a diverse student body, differentiated processes must be in place to position students for success. Positioning students involves helping students make informed program choices, assessing readiness in a more holistic fashion, and preparing students so they are ready to learn the first day of class. Advising is second only to classroom instruction in its impact on student learning and success. In order to promote a student's academic development, advising must be more than prescriptive course selection. Intrusive advising, developmental advising, and academic coaching must be employed to improve student success.

### *Embracing Personal Accountability for Student Learning*

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A culture where faculty and staff relentlessly pursue improving student learning leads to innovation and improved student success. Developing systems and strategies that promote deep, intentional learning leads to improved completion. Having a shared culture focused on improving student learning inspires true collaboration between programs and student development, leading to improvements in learning both in and out of the classroom. Embracing our personal accountability to improve student learning will lead to increases in completion rates.

## Step 6: Developing Key Strategic Objectives and Key Performance Indicators

While the strategic directions provide the framework for the work that needs to be done, key strategic objectives represent critical accomplishments that we must achieve within the allotted timeframe.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) measure institutional performance in areas where success is critical for the College to be competitive. They reflect high priority College operations, linked to the strategic plan and

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priorities, and are meaningful to internal and external stakeholders. The KPIs are linked to strategic objectives and express a current state and desired goal to achieve in three years. Numerous KPIs are benchmarks that compare institutional performance to national data.

### The 2014-2016 Key Strategic Objectives and associated KPIs are:

Strategic Objective	KPI(s)	Target
Cultivate leadership and accountability	Leadership and Accountability benchmark Target:	Achieve 50% (median) by 2016
Improve campus culture	Noel-Levitz employee satisfaction survey campus culture rating	4.0 by 2016
Develop a process, a plan, and implementation strategy to adapt the educational programs we will offer in the future to meet the needs of our stakeholders, including how, where, and when they will be delivered	Program enrollment target achievement	Enrollment targets set yearly by enrollment management
	Cost to educate a successful student	Reduce the cost to educate a successful student to \$8433
Build integrated support for learners	CCSSE Support for Learners benchmark	Achieve 70th decile by 2016
	CCSSE Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark	Achieve 50th decile by 2016
Improve the transition to college	Persistence: The number of credential-seeking students present in a given fall cohort that have either graduated or remain enrolled in the following spring term.	85% by 2016 Retention
	The number of credential-seeking students present in a given fall cohort that graduated, transferred, or remained enrolled as of the following fall term.	Improve retention by 10% by 2016
Improve the value created for students	Goal attainment	To be set from analyzing goal data being collected 2012-2013
	Job placement	80% by 2016
	Student Success Rate	75% by 2016

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## Step 7: Development of initiatives to support moving towards strategic directions and achieving strategic objectives

The President’s Advisory Committee used the strategic directions and key strategic objectives (success criteria) to develop significant initiatives required to realize success. The collaborative process produced specific, measurable initiatives in which we will engage in this year in order to make substantial progress in achieving our long-term goals. Corollary implementation plans were developed using the College’s project management system to define each initiative’s purpose, deliverables, work scope, budget, evaluation metrics, and team members.

## Step 8: Alignment to budget

Some initiatives required funding to be accomplished. Therefore, all initiatives requiring funding were submitted as part of the College’s budgeting process. Initiative budgets were incorporated into budget requests, ensuring appropriate funding to accomplish the initiatives.

## Step 9: Plan for continuous improvement and assessment

A plan is just that, a plan. As we move forward and evaluate the effectiveness of our initiatives, we will use qualitative and quantitative data and feedback to adjust our activities as necessary. Quarterly progress report-outs using the President’s Advisory Committee as the venue will provide a measure of accountability and assessment of progress. Doing so supports collective learning and a culture of evidence and collaboration. Our work will honor the following learning-centered principles.

➤ *Actively seeking root causes of problems*

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We must objectively seek out root cause problems in order to improve. Doing so requires us to pursue the truth, be self-critical, and reflect on how we can improve.

➤ *Creating integrated solutions*

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As we consider solutions, we must be ever mindful of the institutional impact our decisions have on multiple functional areas of the college. Solutions should be integrated into strategies, leading to synergies instead of undermining other processes. Collectively sharing responsibility for improving the College operationalizes accountability in delivering results the right way throughout the organization.

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### ➤ *Being intentionally collaborative*

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The best results come from the collective wisdom of a diverse group of thinkers. The planning process will employ collaborative processes so communication lines are open and more people are included when critical decisions are made.

### ➤ *Being deliberately data-informed*

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Meaningful information must be used in an effort to be transparent about our performance and to make informed decisions on how to improve. We should be predisposed to asking these questions to guide our decision-making.

- How do we know? (Is this process working? Are students learning?)
- So what? (Are the outcomes worthwhile? Are we doing the right things?)
  
- Now what? (How can we use what we've learned to improve?)

The plan is a living document which requires systematic review to ensure optimal effectiveness. Each year, we will use KPIs and other institutional data to measure our progress and to formulate new activities that will help us continue to improve and achieve our goals. New activities will be developed in the same collaborative process to ensure the collective wisdom of our leadership is leveraged to achieve the best possible outcomes.

### *Conclusion*

The 2014-2016 Strategic Plan is grounded in the College's experience and leverages institutional strengths while providing direction on where we must improve to be a thriving organization that generates student success and economic development in our community. Our value comes from providing an accessible, affordable, transformative experience where students achieve their educational and career goals. To continue to thrive and deliver value to our community, we must adapt to our environment and improve student success. This type of deep change requires us to redesign our programs, remodel the student educational experience, and reformulate the way we lead. The four strategic directions and related initiatives provide the impetus and directional focus for the change needed. As Tri-County continues on our journey to improve student learning and success, all of our resources will be leveraged to achieve our goals. By embracing change and making improvements, we are certain to see more students achieve their educational and career goals and realize our vision to transform lives and shape the community we serve.