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Financial Coaching: Community College Of Baltimore County CCBC Cares



City, State	Baltimore, MD
City population estimate 2013	622,104 ¹
Campus setting	Suburb: Large
Fall 2013 student enrollment	23,981
Part-time	67%
Female	60%
White	45%
Latino or Hispanic	4%
Black or African American	38%
Other	13%
Age (25 and older)	42%
Pell grants received by full-time beginning undergraduate students	59%
Federal student loans received by full-time beginning undergraduate students	22%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2013–14, <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>.

The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) is located in Baltimore, Maryland. Of the 16 public two-year institutions in the state, CCBC is the second largest, with a fall 2013 enrollment of 23,981.²

Summary

The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) began a program to increase financial awareness and empowerment of students after it realized the direct relationship between race, socio-economic status, and academic achievement and witnessed an increase in impoverished students enrolling in the college. Efforts started with a simple strategy of handing out piggy banks to first-year students in an orientation course. This light touch program had broad reach, resulted in actual savings of more than \$70,000 from spring 2011 to fall 2013, and highlighted the potential for building financial capabilities among the CCBC student body. But administrators acknowledged the need to offer financial coaching to students who were experiencing an acute financial crisis. The aim would be to move students beyond their current crisis into a position to better manage their personal finances moving forward. With this in mind, a more intense, but narrowly focused program, was implemented in 2013, named CCBC Cares (Community and Academic Resources for Educational Success).²

Area of Need

The majority of students enrolled in courses at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) live at or below the poverty line. These students face social and economic challenges of budget shortfalls, housing insecurity, and food insecurity. Many of these challenges affect students' educational experiences at CCBC and interfere with their ability to focus on the demands of school. Historically, CCBC made efforts to address acute financial challenges but the institution was concerned about the lack of tools available to help students become competent in navigating financial systems and routinely making healthy financial decisions.

Program Description

CCBC Cares is a financial coaching program modeled after the coaching piece of the Annie E. Casey Foundation Center for Working Families Community College Learning Network initiative (now referred to as the Working Families Success Network). CCBC Cares offers financial coaching tailored to the level of student need in achieving an articulated financial goal. (In this *Handbook*, see the case studies of how this approach has been implemented in the Central New Mexico Community College CNM Connect program and the SparkPoint Center at Skyline College in northern California.)

CCBC Cares is designed to help students work toward financial goals by using a three-tiered approach based on the level of service needed. The first tier is resource-focused and might include connecting students to needed resources such as scholarships. The second tier involves light touch financial counseling. The third tier offers more time-intensive structural support, referred to as scaffolding. Students who receive scaffolding coaching might spend an hour or more with the coach during each visit, whereas students seeking guidance on scholarship options spend much less time with a coach. Some students may come in seeking guidance on resources but find they need to leverage more intensive tiers of service. A student who would qualify for scaffolding coaching might have many inter-related financial goals, such as developing a personal budget, devising a savings plan, and charting a path to home ownership.

The coaches take each student's financial circumstances into consideration when thinking about the steps required for a student to reach his or her financial goals. Helping the students break their goals into specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (S.M.A.R.T.) steps is integral to the approach.³

Exploration and Adoption Phase

CCBC had experimented with efforts to improve the financial knowledge and skills of its students before implementing CCBC Cares. Concerned about the prevalence of student need for emergency assistance to deal with unforeseen expenses, in 2011, CCBC's initial response was to pilot a program called "Money Matters @ CCBC," which consisted of a series of financial literacy-focused lesson plans that were embedded into the first-year orientation course. The goal was to engage students in discussions of the financial dimensions and consequences of their decision making. It also sought to reinforce the importance of savings and to encourage savings behavior by providing each student with an actual piggy bank. While the program was light touch, it grew to reach more than 17,000 students and provided a means for students to accumulate emergency savings. To help students facing financial crises, CCBC also offered emergency assistance funds with CCBC Foundation dollars.

Students are able to apply for emergency assistance, which, if approved, is disbursed directly to creditors, such as utility companies. On the part of the student, the program entails very little contact with the creditor, since payments are delivered electronically to third parties. As important as the program is in addressing financial crises, it's not designed to help students make good financial decisions moving forward. To help fill this gap, college administrators sought to provide students with the tools that could reduce their vulnerability to such financial crises and, more importantly for the long term, help them achieve their financial goals. This marked a shift from a student-deficit approach (intervening on behalf of the student to deal with a financial crisis) to an asset-based approach.

When administrators learned about the Annie E. Casey Foundation Center for Working Families model, they believed they found a useful tool. While they never intended to implement the full CWF model at CCBC, components of it and types of expertise applied to previous implementations in community college settings seemed relevant and promising. CCBC was most interested in the financial coaching piece of the CWF model and explored the possibilities of bringing that piece to the institution.

Characterized as a holistic model that bundles services across three pillars of support — education and employment, work and income, and financial and asset-building — the full-fledged CWF model was not perceived by administrators as fitting well with CCBC's structure because it crossed both student services and instructional departments. Unanswerable questions were where to house a complete CWF model in CCBC's institutional structure and how to generate the universal buy-in required for such a holistic approach. In the end, administrators decided to focus on ways in which CCBC could intensively deliver the financial coaching piece of the CWF approach. CCBC applied for grant funding to offer financial coaching to at-risk students, who were identified as students requesting emergency assistance.

Implementation Phase

Grant funding pursued by CCBC required that staff members hired to work as financial coaches attend financial coaching training. CCBC elected to use training offered through

Central New Mexico Community College's CNM Connect program, not realizing the challenge of getting future coaches to participate in the five-day training. To address this challenge, the coordinator of developmental education, who serves as the Money Matters @ CCBC program manager and leads the effort at CCBC, provided a modified version of the training she received through Central New Mexico Connect that was customized to CCBC's needs. This included a special focus on the philosophy that students should be perceived as resourceful rather than broken. The coordinator worked with the funding partner, MDC, to both ensure that the competency-based financial coaching training complied with its guidelines and to provide MDC with an opportunity to weigh in on suggested revisions to the training model.

CCBC Cares' financial coaches are required to have a college education as well as an empathetic philosophy toward people with limited resources. The educational requirements are in place to screen for staff who possess strong soft skills and are capable of being articulate and empathetic toward students in need of coaching. Good communications skills are critical for dealing with people in difficult situations and for demonstrating cultural sensitivity since the meaning of money can vary by group. For instance, the coordinator led a session with the coaches-in-training on the topic of conspicuous consumption and why a student might have an iPhone but no textbooks. The goal is to encourage coaching from a realistic standpoint, free of judgment, rather than from the angle of what people should or should not do.

The initial plan for staffing CCBC Cares was to have three trained coaches, two paid and one volunteer, to cover each campus. While two of the coaches who received the training were deemed good fits, even after the training, a volunteer from Americorps did not have the educational background, expertise, and job experience to work with participants in the way CCBC Cares required. Instead she was put to use promoting CCBC Cares across the three campuses and generating traffic to the CCBC Cares locations within the college's Student Success Centers. In retrospect, this modification filled an unanticipated need for marketing.

CCBC Cares planned to target those students who had requested emergency assistance with opportunities for financial coaching. The targeting strategy proposed in the grant application described the intention to move emergency funds from the control of the CCBC Foundation, which had no contact with students, to the financial aid department. This would also enable CCBC Cares to monitor student requests for emergency assistance and ensure follow up to try to connect students to financial coaching. While this strategy made sense as a way to act on a teachable moment, students requesting emergency assistance were often nonresponsive to outreach by CCBC Cares' financial coaches. As such, the need for active promotion of CCBC Cares emerged and was, in part, addressed through the modified role of the Americorps volunteer who had been redirected into promotional efforts.

CCBC Cares operates primarily from the Student Success Centers (CCBC's tutoring centers), where the program manager is located, although there is not a designated physical space used solely for the purpose of financial coaching. Finding an established home for the program has been challenging, because the institution continues to grapple with where the program organizationally belongs. Some staff consider the program to be a student services function. However, others interpret the disruptive nature of students' financial challenges as impacting the classroom first, which suggests that financial coaching is an instruction-based intervention. Yet others believe that an integrative model operating across

different departments might be a more ideal setup. Since its inception, CCBC Cares has resided under the auspices of the instructional area, but where the program will remain is an ongoing discussion.

A combination of efforts by the Americorps volunteer and other staff members of CCBC Cares were used to drive traffic into the program. Outreach efforts have included the following:

- flyers distributed across campuses,
- student surveys conducted to assess interest and experience with applying for scholarship money, and
- events organized by the Office of Student Life, such as “Get Involved Fairs” that offer students the opportunity to win raffle prizes if they compel their peers to work on financial goals with CCBC Cares financial coaches.

CCBC Cares employs an intake process for all students who meet with a financial coach for any one of the three tiers of service. Data collected include student name, ID number, tier(s) of service, establishment of S.M.A.R.T. goals, appointment date(s), and frequency of visits.

Utilization and Effectiveness

Capacity limitations are always a concern with regard to the scaling up of a program. At this point, CCBC Cares has reported serving 185 students to date. This has included a mix of students who received different tiers of service. With more staffing, it is conceivable that the program could serve additional students and be able to demonstrate higher retention and completion outcomes, as Central New Mexico Community College’s CNM Connect has reported.⁴

CCBC Cares has responded to implementation challenges by modifying the program, as needed. For example, the challenge of getting part-time coaches to participate in a five-day out-of-state training was addressed by modifying the training and delivering it themselves. The challenge of utilizing a volunteer who did not have the requisite skills to do coaching was addressed by using her in a different but needed function, marketing. In short, CCBC responded to the challenges by modifying roles and changing the delivery method and philosophical approach to the training.

Success, Challenges, and Funding

For CCBC Cares to continue growing, it will need to be institutionalized. The combined grant funding that helped launch CCBC Cares requires a lot of staff time to manage and is not a sustainable funding strategy. The coordinator leading CCBC Cares believes that data collection and the ability to demonstrate program effectiveness are critical to generating widespread buy-in for an institutionalized plan. As her role is currently structured, she fulfills an institutional role in developmental education and leads CCBC Cares, a dual role that results in her capacity being limited.

Another challenge related to planning an institutionalization strategy is determining where to house CCBC Cares permanently. Coaching sometimes crosses into social service delivery mechanisms. For example, a financial coach might need to help a food-insecure student access the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps) as a form of income support to overcome the economic barrier of being unable to afford food.

CCBC is unsure at this time whether the program will grow to include the full Center for Working Families model. Faced with fiscal constraints, the institution would be challenged to dedicate physical and human resources necessary for a large, comprehensive program on multiple campuses. On the other hand, CCBC sees the value in that strategy in order to retain its current, financially at-risk population. Without having a specific plan for expansion, CCBC anticipates that the “next steps” vision will be dedicated to finding ways to make financial coaching more scalable so that more students can take advantage of the program.

Endnotes

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau, State & County QuickFacts. Data was derived from population estimates, the American Community Survey, the Census of Population and Housing, County Business Patterns, the Economic Census, the Survey of Business Owners, the Building Permits Survey, and the Census of Governments.
- ² Details for this case study were gathered during an informal phone interview with Sonya Caesar, coordinator of developmental education and *Money Matters @ CCBC* program manager, on February 10, 2014. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2011–12, <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>.
- ³ Edwin A. Locke, “Toward a Theory of Task Motivation and Incentives,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 2, no. 3 (1968): 157-189.
- ⁴ Determining how outcomes differ among students leveraging CNM Connect is not based upon comparable treatment and control groups. But, to date, student outcomes are progressing in the right direction to justify the use of more rigorous evaluation techniques to attribute the impacts of the program with confidence.