

# The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

## Des Moines Area Community College

Project Details			
<b>Title</b>	University College Transfer Program	<b>Status</b>	REVIEWED
<b>Category</b>	1 - Helping Students Learn	<b>Updated</b>	09-30-2015
<b>Timeline</b>		<b>Reviewed</b>	10-08-2015
	<b>Planned Project Kickoff</b> 08-15-2014	<b>Created</b>	11-10-2014
	<b>Target Completion</b> 09-30-2015	<b>Version</b>	1

### 1: PROJECT SUMMARY

**A:** Focusing on transfer potential and completion rates, Des Moines Area Community College has initiated a University College Transfer program (UCT) to encourage participation in activities and co-curricular opportunities in order to build student engagement with the institution. The expectation is that students will experience an improved quality of student life and build a strong foundation of directed support through academic advisors, counselors, financial aid specialists, Academic Achievement Center resources, social engagement activities, etc.

### 2: PROJECT RATIONALE

**A:** In 2006, DMAACC set course retention, persistence, and completion as a component of its FIRSTS Goals initiative. A Completion Task Force was established and continues to meet regularly. All metrics regarding student retention, persistence and success (4R2 in the 2014 Systems Portfolio) are monitored regularly. The data studied has been the impetus for the creation of the University College Transfer program (UCT). The focus is to increase enrollment and build student engagement with the institution. The UCT is being developed to enhance the experience for students who intend to transfer following degree completion at DMAACC. The program also provides support for focused direction and encouraged participation in activities and co-curricular opportunities. At this stage this specific Action Project is based on building and launching the initiative. It is anticipated that participation data provided over four terms will be useful in directing additional UCT growth initiatives in following years.

### 3: PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

**A:** Marketing for the UCT program will be conducted through the website, admissions applications, information sessions, class visits, one-one advising sessions and orientation. Much of this action project will be to establish benchmarking data. Both interest and actual applications by campus and the transfer programs will be tracked for Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Summer 2015, Fall 2015.

As part of their participation in UCT students will be required to sign contracts and stay in touch with their advisors. Advisor contacts and signed contracts will be tracked and monitored on a term basis. In addition, student credit retention and persistence Fall/Spring and Fall/Fall persistence data will be tracked.

Students must commit to participating in three-five directed events/activities per semester. The need to identify a way to centralize and track events and participation has been identified. The UCT task force will be working on establishing a readily available events calendar, focused events and enhancing the website for the district. A baseline of available Events in the focused categories will be established for Fall 2014 and Spring 2015. Growth in options available for Fall 2015 will be tracked. The goal will be establish a uniform and manageable system to track participation.

Currently some of the benefits of participation include early registration of courses, free transfer planning course or career exploration credit, and assigned academic advisor, and career planning assistance. A process will be established by the end of Spring 2015 to track and monitor student participation.

### 4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

**A:** The UCT program is based in Student Services. Leadership is provided by the Assistant Director of Student Development. Advisors

and counselors will play a significant role in the monitoring, advising and transfer planning support. The District-wide Completion Task force membership headed by the CAO of the College with representation from each campus, the Executive Dean of Student Services, Academic Achievement Center Program Director, TRIO Program Director, and the Institutional Effectiveness Executive Director will monitor activities and data. A UCT task force representing advisors, financial aid counselors, the Assistant Registrar and Student Activities Coordinator has been assembled to provide expertise in planning events to provide intentional activities for student participation within the categories of academics, leadership, diversity, business connections, service learning, financial awareness and social engagement. Faculty members will be requested to take on roles providing mentorship to students based on program of study. The Academic Achievement Center Director and Coordinator for Business & Student Connectivity are developing a viable resource for Service Learning opportunities for UCT students.

## 5: PROJECT CONTROL

A: The following areas will be monitored on a semester basis for the first year of this Action Project:

### 1. Recruiting:

- Resources-Number used and effectiveness. This will be anecdotal through surveys
- Student Indicated Interest-Baseline data will be established and student interest by campus/full-time status will be tracked for each term of the Action Project.
- Student Enrollments- Data will be collected by campus/full-time status will be tracked for each term of the Action Project.

### 2. Participation:

- Student Enrollments-Data on actual enrollments and withdrawals will be tracked
- Student Retention and Persistence data will be tracked.
- Activity Participation-A website calendar will be established. Baseline number of available activities will be identified. A process for tracking/monitoring will be established.

## 6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

A: As this is a start-up Action Project it is always a concern that some protocols may be detoured. The basis for this project has been researched extensively, it is district-wide, and is sound; however, it is the initial year and roll out components of it are somewhat exploratory. As such, semester based monitoring will be conducted on all phases and the findings will be used to support any needed modifications if necessary. It is anticipated that additional action projects will be able to be developed that will focus on the institutionalization.

## 7: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A: Research shows that students who are engaged are more participatory and inclined to persist. By nature of being a community college, engagement of students is a priority as our students are diverse and not residential. This program provides a resource to support engagement in a non-traditional environment.

## Project Update

### 1: CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

A: General Project Status:  Completed  In-progress  Suspended  Reopened

Original Project Start Date: 08/01/2014

Originally Projected End Date: 09/30/2015

The University College Transfer (UCT) Program is being restructured due to lack of resources in regards to technology and staffing, as well as a low student participation rate. UCT is currently being restructured to increase transfer programming and opportunities for students to connect with four-year institutions in order to increase their transfer potential and DMACC's completion rates. A challenge of UCT@DMACC was having students sign a contract where they were responsible for many items in order to be part of the program. In order to address this obstacle, DMACC is forgoing the contract and tracking of specific student progress and instead offering

monthly transfer programs and workshops. Attendance will be tracked at these events to track participation. This Action Project as written is being retired. While it provided great insight for DMAACC in its initial goals, it has proven that there is much more work to be done in communicating, implementation, and testing to find effective practices that enhance student engagement, retention, persistence and completion. Going forward, DMAACC is focusing on retreading and restructuring the program. As documented in the 2014 System Portfolio Institutional Overview in response to President Obama's call to increase the number of America's college graduates by 2020, and in alignment with DMAACC's Strategic Plan of 'First in Quality', the UTC Action Project was initiated by the Completion Task Force. The Completion Task Force was established in 2006 and is led by DMAACC's Chief Academic Officer. The 'First in Quality' goal indicators that are aligned with this Action Project are:

- Within term credit retention,
- Fall-Spring and Fall-Fall credit student persistence,
- And graduation rates.

All metrics regarding student retention, persistence, and success (4R2 in the 2014 Systems Portfolio) are monitored regularly. The data studied has been the impetus for the creation of the University College Transfer Action Project.

## 2: ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

### A: Marketing Conducted:

Marketing for UCT was conducted through a new website, information on the admissions application, information sessions to recruit students to sign contracts, district-wide emails, SDV 108 outreach, orientation, and one-on-one advising sessions. Participation rates were low across the district. Assessment of first year participation and retention rates to the UCT program are below.

#### **Fall 2014/15 – Ankeny/Boone/Newton Campuses**

Student Interest Forms:	631
Initial Contracts:	98 (16%)
Additional Contracts Signed:	51 (8%)
Student Contract Cumulative Total:	149 (24%)
Advisor Meetings Fall & Spring:	110 (74%)
Completion of 3 Events:	67 (45%)
Student Contract Completion:	57 (38%)
Participation in Early Enrollment	79 (53%)
Persistence Fall 2014 – Spring	113 (76%)
Persistence Fall 2014 – Fall	24 (16%)
Participated in Free Course	9 (6%)

\*Initially contract listed students were to be eliminated from the program if they did not meet the contract requirements. Due to low numbers, UCT allowed students to stay in the program for the Spring 2015 semester.

\*Persistence data includes all UTC Cohort students Fall 2014 and Spring 2015. Data reflects persistence from Fall 2014.

The UTC Task Force was unsuccessful in implementing a readily available events calendar in the time line of the Action Project. As a result, students were allowed to participate in any activities. Participation in events was self-reported by students. The lack of technology to efficiently communicate events and track students' participation was apparent in the low numbers of participation with events across campus. With such limited participation/activity there was no way to track the effectiveness of the participation interventions.

The academic standing of students participating in UCT was tracked. At the end of the spring 2015 semester, 20 of 149 students were at risk, academically (13%). See numbers below.

#### **Academic Standing**

Students on Academic Warning:	11 (7%)
Students on Conditional Enrollment:	7 (5%)
Students Academically Disqualified:	2 (1%)

## 3: ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

### A: The overarching goals of the program to increase student completion and transfer rates continue to be the center of the UCT program.

The contracts and numerous responsibilities for students to complete to reap benefits of the program proved to be an obstacle. The limited effort students put into the program did not justify the early registration and the free one-credit course. Students are savvy consumers and quickly decided that the end benefit was not worth fulfilling the contract.

Going forward the UTC program is shifting to provide increased transfer programming and resources that are marketed to ALL students, rather than a small number of students who sign a contract. The contract will no longer be part of the program, nor will the expectations of assigned advisors and completion of events.

The marketing of the program will continue and will be inclusive to all students. The UCT website will include a Transfer Events Calendar, featuring monthly events that include visit days and programs from four-year institutions, tabling, partnership programs, articulation agreements, financial aid and scholarships, and transfer workshops. In addition, the monthly newsletter and the uct@dmacc email address that was implemented this past year will continue to be utilized for increased communication and information regarding transfer.

#### **4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT**

**A:** The Assistant Director of Student Development has monitored the activities and progress of students participating in UCT. Advisors and counselors across the district were assigned to meet with students each semester and assist with transfer planning. Marketing representatives assisted with the creation of the UCT website and brochure to increase awareness and recruit student participation. Financial Aid hosted a workshop to meet financial literacy objectives. Communication with faculty members on identifying components of business connections or service learning in their classes has been expanded and faculty were encouraged to track participation.

#### **5: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES**

**A:** The institution is acutely aware of the need to support students who are on the transfer track. As a result of this Action Project, much was learned through testing a small cohort of students and as a result focused attention is being devoted to ALL students who would like to transfer. Conversations and UTC workgroups are continuing to meet and redesign the transfer pathway for students, from the recruitment and application to academic advising and student life. The experience of the initial Action Project has provided clarity for the focus to be strategic and intentional when developing programming for transfer students. Efforts have expanded to include diverse individuals in the discussion to improve transfer services.

#### **6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS**

**A:** The challenges for UCT are in the resources and staffing available to meet the needs of the UCT student participants as written in the student contract. These challenges have been addressed as UCT shifts from removing a contract to scaling up transfer programming college-wide in order to create awareness of the resources available to students on the transfer pathway. The next year UCT will focus on designing, staffing, hosting, and assessing programs and workshops.

#### **7: PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIMELINE**

**A:** May – August 2015  
Increase transfer partnerships with four-year institutions.

May – September 2015  
Update website to reflect changes in UCT.  
Create and implement a transfer calendar.  
Collaborate with Marketing for materials (handouts, brochures, etc.).

Sept 2015 – May 2016  
Host events, tables, and transfer workshops. Track participation.  
Develop & Survey students who participate with events to assess student interest and engagement.  
Provide electronic monthly newsletters to increase student awareness regarding transfer opportunities and milestones to keep them in good standing with the institution.  
Provide campus and program-specific emails/messages to students to create awareness of academic opportunities for students.

## 8: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS

A: DMACC has learned much from creating the initial UTC Action Project. DMACC is a large six campus community college with a diverse commuter student population. A little over 25% of the Liberal Arts (AA) population of 6,949 for Fall 2014 indicated that their intent was to transfer to another college. The initial development a pilot UTC Action Project served as a great benchmark from which to identify limitations and refine/test new interventions and initiatives to engage students. The effort is being continued and will be refined as opportunities are identified. The Action Project as written is being retired.

## Update Review

### 1: CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

A: In the original description of this action project, Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) recognized that there would be some challenges with regards to the protocols for establishing student participation in activities. This action project update acknowledges that the institution has had to respond flexibly as it has evaluated the results of this action project. The be specific, the goal of having students sign a contract and adhere to other program requirements was not achievable. Thus, DMACC has had to rethink the original action project will work on restructuring the University College Transfer Program in the coming year.

The goal of increasing student transfer to 4-year institutions demonstrates DMACC's commitment to AQIP Category 1 Helping Students Learn and HLC Criterion 3 Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support. In its next Systems Appraisal report, the institution can discuss this action project as evidence that it is addressing these areas.

### 2: ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

A: DMACC acknowledges in this update that some of the original goals were not met and student participation in the program was low. The UTC Taskforce responsible for this action project was not able to adhere to the timeline set out in the action project. A schedule of UTC activities was not published; therefore, student participation in any activity was counted. The data presented in this update on student participation are based on students' own reporting of attendance. DMACC recognizes that data based on self-reporting are not always accurate.

It doesn't appear from the update that DMACC is satisfied with the data collected on retention and student success, hence the institution's desire to restructure the UTC program.

### 3: ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

A: Because of the obstacles related to the onerous requirements of participation in the UTC Program, DMACC decided to market this program to all students rather than to a limited numbers who were willing to sign the contract. That said, the main accomplishment over the past year cannot be understated. That the original project was not successful does not mean that the action project was not successful. DMACC tried something new and learned from the experience and is now willing to make adjustments.

That DMACC has not given up on its original goal of helping students transfer to a 4-year institution speaks to the institution's commitment to student success and completion. It is willing to rethink the goals and deliverables of this action project in order to achieve the original goal. As such, it now has a plan to market to all students. DMACC might consider establishing a timeline along with persons responsible for each part of the new plan to ensure that it is accomplished.

**Even though the original goals and timeline were not met, DMACC has made satisfactory progress on this action project for reasons explained above.**

### 4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

**A:** DMACC included several different stakeholders in working on this action project. The list in the update, however, is shorter than in the original action project plan. DMACC might consider including a broader group of stakeholders to ensure that the new direction will gain momentum and a strong foothold in the institution's culture. For example, it might be useful to identify the programs that might benefit or embrace service learning and then target faculty from those programs.

## **5: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES**

**A:** The institution's response to this section -- Effective Practices -- is important. DMACC recognizes that part of what is missing from the original action plan is an intentional design of transfer pathways for students. The original plan focused heavily on student engagement, and while this is important, the research (Tinto, Completing College, 2012) suggests that engagement is only one piece of what makes students successful. That DMACC has identified the need to track students from recruitment through their academic experience demonstrates a greater understanding now of the various pieces that must be addressed in order to assist more students in transferring to universities.

DMACC might consider perusing the AQIP Action Directory ([http://www.hlcommission.org/component/com\\_apdsearch/Itemid,126/](http://www.hlcommission.org/component/com_apdsearch/Itemid,126/)) for ideas on how to find and support students who wish to transfer.

## **6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS**

**A:** DMACC acknowledges in their response to anticipated challenges that indeed involving more stakeholders is needed, but not easy to achieve. The focus on the program in the coming year clearly addresses this challenge. To ensure that the original goal is not lost in the day-to-day tasks of a busy community college, the institution might consider developing a detailed plan for designing, staffing, hosting, and assessing the program and the workshops it offers to students. This plan could include a timeline, goals, persons or office responsible for various tasks, etc.

## **7: PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIME LINE**

**A:** While this list of activities proposed for the coming year is admirable, DMACC might consider rethinking this timeline through the lens of the principles of continuous quality improvement. In other words, might there be a process that would help institutionalize the activities listed? The process would likely include a way to manage and evaluate/assess successes and failures such that momentum is continuous and improvements can be made at various stages throughout the year. The prompts in AQIP Category 4 Planning and Leading provide a kind of heuristic for planning that might help the institution move forward with more agility and consistency.

## **8: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS**

**A:** As mentioned above, DMACC should be commended on the positive way it has responded to the results of this action project. It is also noteworthy that the institution is not giving up on the original goal of helping students transfer. Certainly new opportunities will present themselves and DMACC appears to have developed a culture that is willing to take risks, evaluate results honestly, and then rethink directions as necessary. DMACC exemplifies an institution that **plans proactively** and has **integrity in word and deed** -- two characteristics of high performing organizations.