SUNY Excels 2015 Performance Improvement Plan
Attachment 1: Narrative Template

CAMPUS INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus:</th>
<th>Erie Community College</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President:</td>
<td>Jack Quinn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Academic Officer:</td>
<td>Richard Washousky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Financial Officer:</td>
<td>William Reuter</td>
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Section 1: Campus Alignment with SUNY Excels (the framework for the Power of SUNY 2020) and SUNY’s overall focus on completion

The release of SUNY Excels after its statewide development in 2014-15 coincided with the beginning stages of Erie Community College’s own strategic review. The previous strategic plan had been adopted in 2012, and ECC had intended an 18-month-long review of its plan for some time. The concurrent release of SUNY Excels was fortunate for ECC, as it has allowed for optimal alignment in the following ways:

- ECC’s 2016-2021 Strategic Plan – currently under development – has been named ECC Excels.
- Four of SUNY’s five focus areas have been adopted: Access, Completion, Engagement, and Success.
- A fifth area – Operations – is focused on local needs and will incorporate elements unique to ECC.
- The 2016-2021 plan will be grounded in SUNY Excels targets. ECC’s reporting infrastructure is being geared to fit in with each of the targets. The SUNY Excels workbook will form the foundation for ECC’s central planning dashboards, also currently under development in a SharePoint environment.

ECC’s planning timeline demonstrates the collaborative process currently under way:

- Strategic Plan 2016-2021 development began in January of 2015 with the establishment of the Strategic Plan Working Group, a broadly representative group consisting of the full breadth of college stakeholders: administrators, community members, faculty, staff, and students;
A college-wide survey and an all-staff college meeting to review ECC’s compliance with the revised MSCHE standards of excellence informed ECC’s mission review and analytical self-assessment. These Spring 2015 assessments confirmed the need to focus broadly on the Completion Agenda and improving student outcomes via a revamped student support structure;

A comprehensive mission and vision review resulted in a refreshed mission statement and revised vision statement in mid-2015;

The decision to align ECC’s new strategic plan with SUNY Excels came soon after the release of the full Excels package in June of 2015. Shared governance review of the path forward on SUNY Excels metrics has been underway during these past three months and will continue for the rest of the calendar year;

Completion of ECC Excels dashboards (local versions of the 18 SUNY Excels tables along with local additions and modifications) is scheduled to be completed by the end of this calendar year; these dashboards will provide college-wide data as well as drive local information to academic programs and administrative units;

ECC Program Review – a five-year review process designed to assess academic and non-academic unit success – will be reorganized for SUNY Excels and MSCHE compliance in order to prioritize local implementation of Excels initiatives and Middle States compliance;

The full first draft of the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan will include the aforementioned five focus areas and specific initiatives to reach the targets; review of the first full draft will result in a second full draft being developed which will include more fine-grained implementation-level detail;

ECC Board of Trustees approval is expected in Spring of 2016;

Plan implementation is scheduled for July 2016 to June 2021;

ECC believes that it has made great strides in aligning SUNY Excels with its own strategic planning process. The next several months of planning will further cement and operationalize the broad goals outlined in the remainder of this document.
Section 2: Specific SUNY Excels Priority Areas and Metrics

This section is divided into the three SUNY Excels areas most relevant to ECC’s Strategic Plan and strategic focus over the life of the plan: Access, Completion, and Success. It should be noted that ECC’s governance process is ongoing and some of these elements will come into clearer focus throughout the remainder of the strategic plan development timeline.

Access

Open-access institutions must continue to promote education for all and fight to expand the reach of education to those who cannot easily acquire it. Access encompasses accessibility, the addressing of racial, gender, and economic disparities, and the establishment of clear linkages between program offerings and the needs of students who look to continue their education as well as enter the workforce after graduation.

This means that Erie remains committed to providing access to specific workforce programs. At the same time, it recognizes that job-focused education is not simply job training. We must offer our students opportunities for rewarding careers. That is what education does. Liberal arts education requires that students think critically, analyze information, write, speak, and argue effectively. An Erie education offers students an opportunity to understand the experience of others in the world with respect, dignity, and compassion while remaining focused on the skill achievement necessary to succeed in any single workplace.

Data Summary:

- ECC has experienced a loss of more than 2000 students in overall fall enrollment during the past five years;
- 12 academic programs have either been recently deployed or are in the SUNY proposal and announcement stages;
- Approximately 1/3 of ECC’s students are part-time;
- Incoming transfer cohorts are on the increase even while ECC’s overall headcount has decreased considerable;

The following initiatives are planned in the Access area:
Nominal Enrollment Growth over the Life of the Plan

The following chart illustrates ECC’s current enrollment situation as well as its Excels projection (from Table 1):

As shown, ECC proposes to grow nominally during the life of the plan. The decision to grow at a prudent rate of 1.4% was made in acknowledgement of the challenging demographic situation in Erie County. While population decreases appear to have stopped within the county, there is a considerably smaller high school pipeline from which the college can draw. Between 2010 and 2020 the County is expected to lose approximately 23,500 people in the 15-24 age range (Data from Cornell Project on Applied Demographics). High school graduation projections from ORIS (here) show a drop in the total graduate count from approximately 10,000 to approximately 8,500. While the completion efforts underway at Erie are expected to hold the line on the continuing, returning, and transferring cohorts it is important to note that the first-time full-time cohort makes up nearly 20% of Erie Community College’s total fall enrollment. The drop in high school completions is therefore expected to continue to put downward pressure on the FTFT cohort.

At the same time, expected improvements in the persistence, retention, and completion of all of Erie’s large cohorts (FTFT, continuing, and returning) should yield some enrollment growth over the life of the plan. Those improvements are discussed in the Completion section, below.

In addition, the following enrollment initiatives are under way at the college:

- **WNY Workforce Development Center:** Recognizing that Access is maximized by establishing a clear fit between regional workforce needs and program offerings, ECC is seeking to establish a significant presence at the NYS-funded center, offering degrees and certificates for in-demand programs in advanced manufacturing and technologies.
Curriculum Development: ECC has taken an aggressive approach to curriculum development. New Programs in Development or Recently Completed are as follows:

- **Completed and Enrolling Students:**
  - Nanotechnology (AAS)
  - Health and Wellness Promotion (AAS), with concentrations in Exercise Science and Health Education
  - Brewing Science and Service (Certificate)

- **Proposed:**
  - Advanced Manufacturing (AAS)
  - Alternative Energy Technology (AAS)
  - Fine Arts (AS)
  - Mechatronics (Certificate)
  - Quality Assurance Technician (Certificate)

- **Announced:**
  - Catering (Certificate)
  - Corrections Officer (Certificate)
  - Leadership and Creative Studies (AS)
  - Public Health (AAS).

Online Expansion: ECC plans to expand the number of online course sections by 3-5% annually. The high fill rate of online courses promotes access for our busy and highly mobile students while promoting enrollment at the college. The recent addition of six online courses to support online learning for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at 6 hub and 32 spoke airports across the country is an example of the type of development under way.

Complete Implementation of Recruiter Software: ECC is in the late implementation stages of Ellucian Recruiter. The goal of the software is to increase our recruitment and outreach via systematic and consistent messaging. Additionally, Recruiter provides valuable analytics that allow ECC to specifically target student populations to positively influence the yield of our applicants. It is anticipated that full and complete functionality will occur by January of 2016.

Complete Construction of New STEM-Focused Building: the $30 million project will add 57,000 square feet to ECC’s North Campus and host many of its STEM programs. On track to open in fall 2017, the building will have an instant impact on the college’s enrollment and completion efforts.
The challenge of open-access institutions is to address the Completion Agenda without limiting access. As all stakeholders become more attuned to basic as well as advanced completion analytics in higher education it will become imperative for institutions like Erie to advance the appropriate analysis of completion at an open access institution, but also to meet high expectations. While it is imperative for the community college sector to adopt and promote the appropriate measures of completion, these measures must be coupled with high expectations. Erie is committed to pursuing a dynamic completion agenda that focuses on seeking improvements in year-to-year retention and developing a true completion pipeline for our students. Such efforts are already underway at Erie.

Data Summary:

- ECC’s time-to-degree for first-time (native) students was 4.01 years, one quarter of a year higher than the sector;
- ECC’s most recent retention rate was 53.5% (2013 to 2014), 8.4 points below the sector average;
- ECC has graduated just shy of 2,500 students (counting certificates as well as degrees) in each of the last three years.

ECC will address the time-to-degree and retention deficiencies and improve overall completions through the following initiatives:

**Decrease Time to Degree**

The following charts capture the state of affairs in this area. After a steady period of increases, the college has leveled off and started a downward trajectory as measured in years as well as total credits:
The following factors are relevant to the recent downward trend:

- Developmental course enrollment has decreased significantly in the last several years; the decreased enrollment takes time to become visible in the final time-to-degree measure, but reforms enacted in the early part of this decade now appear to be paying dividends; and

- Erie aggressively and quickly implemented the SUNY Seamless Transfer initiative, resulting in an average decrease of 5.4% in required credits for 23 programs (from an average of 69.1 required credits to an average of 65.3).

The following chart shows the drop in Erie’s developmental education ratio from 2002 to 2013:
This significant decrease in developmental enrollments was made possible by changes to placement test administration and to the establishment of STEM and non-STEM pathways in the mathematics unit. The English unit, furthermore, led the way in eliminating a developmental layer from the English sequence. This led to a 1/3 reduction in the number of developmental English sections between 2010 and 2015 (from 161 sections per year to 107).

The college, however, can improve on the current efforts and reduce time-to-degree to the sector average of 3.75 years. The following measures are already underway and will continue throughout the life of the plan:

1. Improved self-service advisement via Degree Works and other online tools for students. These tools aim to reduce errors in academic planning by students and are expected to lead to reduced time to completion.

2. Improved in-person advisement via mandatory on-campus orientation. This effort has resulted in the widespread training of advisors who work during orientation sessions, thus resulting in fewer errors from student self-advising as well as reductions in staff and faculty advisement errors.

3. Implementation of approaches that incorporate developmental coursework into degree-credit-bearing courses in both English and mathematics:
   
   a. *Elementary Inferential Statistics* incorporates coursework previously designated as developmental into a single-semester degree-credit-bearing course. The 4-credit Statway-based course eliminates a course in the developmental pathway for students who wish to take a statistics pathway instead of an algebra sequence. The course will be piloted in the Spring of 2016 and could prove instrumental in reducing time to degree for a large number of students in a wide variety of programs.
b. Additional efforts are under way to reduce developmental credit loads in other areas by infusing additional developmental time into degree-credit-bearing courses.

**Increase Retention via Self-Service Tools and Improved Support Structures**

ECC’s retention rate of 53.5% is a major contributing factor to its relatively low graduation rate and therefore reduces total completions at the college. The following chart tells ECC’s retention story:

![Year-to-Year Retention Chart](chart.png)

ECC has not yet recovered from the significant drop in the college’s retention rate between 2009 and 2010. While the entire sector saw a retention reduction at the onset of the recession, it was not as pronounced or as long-lasting for the sector as it has been at Erie. There is clearly work to be done to achieve parity with the sector, but ECC has not been idle in addressing the issue. The following initiatives are already underway:

- **Implementation of Starfish:** The college is in the middle of a pilot program featuring 2,500 students and nearly 90% of its faculty. Students in select courses, academic programs, and specialized cohorts are being tracked with Starfish in anticipation of college-wide implementation in fall 2016. The current pilot represents roughly one fifth of the total student headcount and is leading to a re-imagining of student support workflows in various student affairs and academic affairs offices.

- **Predictive Success Scoring via Starfish/Hobson’s:** During its recent Starfish implementation the college became the first 2-year institution to work with Starfish/Hobson’s to develop predictive success scoring for its students. Now being finalized, the scoring program will give our advisors and student support staff a powerful tool to identify the key factors to predict student success.

- **Non-Cognitive Assessment of Incoming Students:** The college has purchased and begun to administer an ETS assessment of student non-cognitive skills and learning dispositions. Developed by ETS – Educational Testing Service – the tool, which is named *Success Navigator* assesses and then directs the student to relevant campus resources and
offices that are suited to the profile that emerges from the assessment. The college believes that when coupled with predictive success scoring this assessment will become a significant tool in our ability to predict success before the student begins their educational career. Plans are underway to implement the assessment into orientation and/or placement services during student intake. This would allow our admissions team to improve the assessment of students and improve the fit between student and academic program.

- Mandatory Orientation for all First-Time and Returning Students: Students who have been away for at least two semesters and who are new to the college are required to participate in an on-campus orientation. This initiative was implemented in Summer 2015 for the Fall 2015 entering class.

- Implementation of Degree Works: The college is in the end stages of Degree Works implementation and will be rolling it out college-wide in Spring of 2016. This is expected to have a significant impact in the Completion as well as the Success area as students develop a better understanding of their own degree progress – at Erie as well as other SUNY institutions.

- Centralization of Support Services: The college has completed a review of student satisfaction via a comprehensive external assessment. This review paved the way for a revamp of ECC’s support structures at our City Campus, where all student-facing services were centralized in a single office. This ease of access for the student aims to establish a one-stop experience and reduce time spent accessing those services. This translates into a reduction in the burden on students and frees up time for academic and other pursuits for our busy student body.

**Increase Completions via Reverse Transfer**

The college has embarked on an aggressive attempt to contact students who have previously left ECC without earning a credential. After internal data mining efforts identified several thousand possible candidates for reverse transfer, college staff began the task of contacting former students, simplifying the process of remitting transcripts from other institutions, and assessing students for possible degrees. While still in early stages, the process has already yielded several dozen new degree recipients. Future efforts will utilize reports from the National Student Clearinghouse in order to streamline the process and take advantage of this important national database. The college aims to reach 100 reverse transfer completions per year during the life of the plan.
Success

Our students succeed when they meet their own considered goals. As students begin to engage our institutions through more sophisticated goals, Erie will follow suit in its capacity to track student progress and success via technologies such as Early Alert systems and innovative sources of information. Understanding that students do not always have the information or understanding to define their own goals, the measure of success for the community college student must go beyond asking a simple question during an admissions application and asking students to select a major. It must consistently coach students to define success for themselves, feed information back to our student information system, and craft measures of success that are appropriate to the individual student.

Data Summary:

- ECC’s success score (SUNY Excels and SUNY BI, SUNY Educational Outcomes) has dipped to 49.2%, a decrease of 5.1% in just two years;
- ECC’s most recent six-year completion rate among students who attended exclusively full-time was reported at 53%, 4 points below the national average of 57% for two-year public institutions (Source: NSC Student Tracker Postsecondary Completions, Institutional Benchmark Report, Fall 2008 Entering Cohort);
- There is currently a lack of verifiable empirical data about student workforce success that can be connected back to the student’s academic program.

To address these deficiencies ECC is undertaking the following initiatives:

Intensify Student Tracking via NSC and DOL

To the extent that SUNY Excels measures Success via elements that extend beyond ECC, the college must improve its understanding of what happens to our students after they leave the institution. While the college has significantly improved its intake procedures by implementing Ellucian Recruiter in order to manage the admissions pipeline, it has only recently begun to focus on the success outcomes of both four-year transfer students and those students who seek a career through a certificate or two-year degree. The college is undertaking two major initiatives to address these external measures of success:

- The intensive, periodic, and actionable tracking of students who go on to other educational institutions after leaving ECC via National Student Clearinghouse reporting services. While ECC is and has been a participant in NSC’s Degree Verify program for two years, it has not fully begun to utilize the tracking services available to it via its StudentTracker service. As part of its new strategic plan the college will develop periodic reporting via NSC that is fed back to academic programs for possible curricular assessment and planning.
- The use of New York State Department of Labor’s Unemployment Insurance Data Sharing Program in order to begin measuring student success in the workplace in the medium and the long term. The periodic filing of report requests via this important new
resource will allow our academic programs to develop a better understanding of whether students are succeeding in the workforce. The data will be driven to academic program chairs, advisory committees, and to institutional assessment bodies for college-wide action.

Improve Financial Literacy and Hold the Line on Defaults

ECC aims to continue efforts to improve financial literacy via full implementation and rollout of SUNY Smart Track by aggressively publicizing the resource through student intake. In addition, it will continue to promote literacy efforts via coursework, such as in GS 111 – Student Success Skills. This course – taken by approximately 1,000 students each academic year – includes units on financial planning and financial aid and contributes to our financial literacy efforts. In addition, the mandatory student orientation program described above contains financial planning workshops and further illustrates to students the importance of careful planning.

Together, these initiatives and subsequent dissemination of the appropriate data streams will allow the college to improve its understanding of student success. While aggregate measures of success – such as the ones cited above – are available and helpful to institutional planners, it is only when such measures are disaggregated for local academic planning needs that they will have their greatest impact.
Section 3: Conclusion and Expected Impact

The Five-Year period envisioned by SUNY Excels and ECC Excels promises to be one of rapid change. Many institutions – and Erie is no different – are entering into a period driven by big data and an increased focus on data-driven institutional assessment. While these are necessary and helpful developments, the rise of such data-centric approaches must be coupled with an intensive focus on making data actionable. This requires institutions to make information locally relevant and to make it easy to use for local stakeholders.

To that end, ECC envisions the following outcomes from these varied and important initiatives:

- Students will become better educated in electronic systems of student support, namely Degree Works and Starfish. Their implementation will change the way students connect with the college’s support structure.
- As students become more educated in such systems, so must faculty and staff. ECC must plan for that need and stay ahead of this growing student sophistication.
- Students will still require support, but support structures will migrate increasingly into the online environment. Erie must adapt to these needs intelligently and compassionately in light of the full realization of the skill gap that affects so many of our students who leave high school or return to college without the necessary ability to navigate electronic resources;
- Faculty and staff will be under increased pressure themselves to become conversant in the new tools of student self-service. Such pressures will create institutional training gaps that must be addressed proactively. Training will need to be ongoing, appropriately redundant, and multi-modal in order to meet the needs of end users.
- Program chairs and heads will be under increasing pressure to focus on very specific metrics of program success, including traditional measures like persistence, retention, and graduation, but also to include default rates, transfer rates, and wage gains. An increased focus on cohort tracking will challenge our institutional reporters and researchers to educate themselves in new systems and to educate program leaders in the new data environment;
- In light of the previous item, we expect an increased reliance on SUNY Business Intelligence (BI) reporting and thus an increased need to ensure that local data coheres with SUNY BI.

In light of these findings and the aforementioned initiatives, ECC believes it can meet the following improvement targets over the life of the plan. We focus here on the key areas of Access, Completion, and Success. We place Table 12 – SEO under the Success category due to its focus on external measures and not merely internal completion targets:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Completion</th>
<th>Success</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excels Table and Measure</td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Excels Table and Measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table 1 – Headcount</strong></td>
<td>12,899 (Fall 2020)</td>
<td><strong>Table 8 – FTFT Retention</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table 2 – AAFTE</strong></td>
<td>11,481 (Fall 2020)</td>
<td><strong>Table 11 – Time to Degree</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Table 6 – URM Rate</strong></td>
<td>16.9% (Fall 2020)</td>
<td><strong>Table 13 – Awards Granted</strong></td>
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ECC acknowledges that the enrollment challenges facing the region are difficult to overcome, but it in spite of this proposes to stabilize and nominally grow its enrollment, decrease time to degree, improve retention by more than 8 percentage points, grow its completions by approximately 12%, improve its overall success rates with SUNY-based and NSC-based success metrics, and hold the line on default rates.

Taken together, this is an aggressive completion agenda that promises to have a significant impact on the percentage of college graduates in the region, on the economic health of Erie County and NY State residents, and on SUNY’s Completion Agenda.

Erie remains open to working with SUNY System in improving this plan through productive dialogues. The Excels process has been an instructive one to the college and many of us here in Buffalo, Orchard Park, and Amherst appreciate the exercise that we have undertaken. Hundreds of voices have contributed to this report, but it aims to speak univocally to the needs of the college, the city, the state, and SUNY.