Section 1: Campus Alignment with SUNY Excels

NCCC’s current strategic plan (2012-2017) aligns perfectly with SUNY’s overall focus on completion. The overarching goal of NCCC’s strategic plan is: *Improve student success by increasing success in college courses, retention rates, and graduation rates*. The approach to reaching the goal is to design and test intervention strategies whose purpose is to have a positive impact on one or more of the student outcomes. Assessing the impact of initiatives is done by either comparing students engaged in an initiative with students not part of the initiative or with historical data for similar students prior to the intervention. Part of the goal of the strategic plan is to institutionalize those practices found to benefit student success. Key indicators used to assess the overall direction of student outcomes included course success rates (earning a grade of S (satisfactory), C, or better), fall to fall attrition rates (expected to decline), difference in attempted and earned hours (expected to shrink), and graduation rates (expected to increase). The trends in these measures were tracked for five years prior to the beginning of the strategic plan, with projections for another five years as targets to reach over time. One of the initiatives that has shown positive impact on course success and retention is a case management approach where specific groups of students receive one-on-one coaching/mentoring to assist them through a variety of challenges. For example, this approach has been used with developmental students and single mothers. Both of these groups have improved outcomes thus far. NCCC is now planning to broaden the application of this approach so that students have greater access to the benefits.

Section 2: Priority Areas and Metrics

For this section, each area will contain a description of the practices at NCCC that are in place and related to the area. At the end of each area, where appropriate, will be an explanation of the basis for future projections and plans for improvement.
Access

Part of NCCC’s mission is a commitment to accessibility, and the college’s policy of “open enrollment” reflects that commitment. Applicants are admitted to the college who have graduated from an accredited high school or have a high school equivalency diploma (HSE). Applicants who have not completed high school can meet with an admissions advisor to discuss completing the high school equivalency exam or taking credits to apply toward an HSE diploma from the New York State Education Department and a degree at NCCC.

Applicants, who cannot demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing, and math through achievement in related high school courses and Regents exam scores, through SAT or ACT scores, or through successful completion of college courses at another institution, are required to take placement tests to determine whether or not they need remediation in these areas. If an applicant fails to achieve the prescribed score, they are encouraged to “brush up” and consider retesting or they are expected to enroll in remedial courses in their first semester. Students taking remedial courses are encouraged to supplement their classroom instructional time with additional assistance in the college’s Learning Commons, where students can receive assistance with reading, writing, and math. The Learning Commons offers specialized software and academic coaches to help students who need assistance. The Learning Commons also offers tutoring services.

Consistent with the college’s mission, one of NCCC’s goals is to provide a broad range of courses leading to associate degrees in university parallel and career programs as well as certificate curricula. To ensure quality and appropriateness, all curricula are subject to periodic evaluations. There are 72 programs in total, which include 48 associate degree programs and 24 certificate programs. The intent of 26 of the degree offerings (AA and AS) is transfer into bachelor degree programs. The remaining 46 degree and certificate programs promote the opportunity for employment upon completion.

The degrees and certificates can be classified into 7 categories to represent a comprehensive range of offerings. There are 12 programs in Allied Health fields (17% of the total programs offered), 11 programs in the Arts (15%), 11 Business programs (15%), 14 Hospitality programs (19%), 5 Liberal Arts programs (7%), 9 programs related to Public Service (13%), and 10 programs related to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math fields (14%).

NCCC regularly assesses Academic programs to ensure they are current and properly resourced. In addition, NCCC annually benchmarks course success rates and other program outcomes (enrollment trends, attrition, and graduation rates).

In 2013, NCCC engaged with System Administration on SUNY Works to increase the opportunities for students to participate in internship and cooperative education experiences. This is explained more fully under the Success area.
NCCC is also part of the SUNY High Needs Program targeting some of the allied health programs. Special advisors work with prospective students on enrolling in the targeted programs. These same advisors also work with current students and faculty to help improve course success and retention.

NCCC also offers non-credit, vocational education through Workforce Development, which includes accelerated workforce training, in-demand skills certification programs, and customized training solutions for area employers. The type of courses offered fall under several broad categories including corporate training, short-term job training, and basic skills training. Classes to upgrade skills are frequently provided on-site in response to the needs of a particular employer.

The College Acceleration Program (CAP) is a program that allows high school students to take college classes in their high schools for both high school and college credit. CAP courses can be taught by teachers at the high school for dual high school and college credit.

NCCC has a Liberty Partnership grant that works with at-risk high school students to help them become better prepared for college. They gain experience with applying to college, learn what to expect from college attendance, and become more familiar with a college campus.

NCCC has been offering distance education courses for over 15 years. The number of online course registrations increased from 450 in fall 2000 (2.3% of total registrations) to 2,245 in fall 2014 (9.3% of total registrations) and have shown a nearly linear increase over that time period. NCCC is part of OPEN SUNY and spent the past year engaged in an extensive review of its online learning program as part of the SUNY Distance Learning Institutional Readiness Assessment. NCCC offers seven programs that are completely online.

NCCC has the lowest tuition rate in the Western New York area making a college education more affordable in the region.

As a community college, NCCC primarily serves the local county and some of the surrounding counties. Approximately 65% of our students are Niagara County residents with approximately 34% coming from neighboring counties. Thus, 99% of our students are from NYS. Given its mission, the college has focused on the needs of Niagara County. That said, in fall 2012, NCCC opened an additional location in the city of Niagara Falls, The Niagara Falls Culinary Institute, to offer a city experience to students seeking courses in culinary arts, hospitality, and tourism. This location is ideal for the tourism industry being located steps away from Niagara Falls, a well-known attraction for people outside of the area. As a result, this location has attracted students from outside of the area. Enrollments have grown since the opening and the goal is to continue to see growth as the location becomes better known.

Still, for many of our programs, we draw from the same pool as other SUNY and a host of private colleges. Our enrollment is impacted by a dwindling number of local high school graduates. The projected number of high school graduates between 2008 and 2019 is expected to drop by 20.9% in Niagara County and by 17.7% in Erie County. The Niagara County population has been dropping since 1960 (242,269 in 1960, estimated at 213,525 in 2014). These factors, along with the reality that our headcount has dropped by 11% in the last five years, make projecting growth a challenge. Our efforts
are always directed at increasing our enrollments, but the reality is the area the college serves has a relatively small and shrinking population, and we compete not only with other SUNY institutions for enrollment, but with many private colleges as well. In spite of these very real drawbacks, NCCC will enroll more students by implementing new practices to improve the success of enrolled students.

Efforts to increase enrollments:

One Stop advisement/registration events: In 2013 the college experimented with a planned event where students were able to complete the entire enrollment process from admissions to financial aid to advisement and registration in one day. Additional such days have since been added and have increased enrollments by as much as 200 students in one event. The college will continue to sponsor and refine this type of event.

To increase the number and improve yield rate of applicants: During the 2013-14 academic year, STAMATS and Simpson:Scarborough were hired to critique and recommend changes to recruitment/admission/registration procedures. The college continued to work with STAMATS during 2014-15 to clarify the college’s brand and messaging to improve communication with prospective students. The college is working to implement more individualized work with applicants to ensure they are matched to the appropriate academic program and understand the pathway to degree completion (use of Degree Works).

To grow the enrollment of transfer students: Transfer student enrollment has grown 29% over five years and suggests an increased interest on the part of students who have started out at another institution wanting to instead come to a community college. NCCC will recruit this group with better communication, targeted messages, and greater engagement efforts to continue to grow this population.

NCCC is in the process of preparing a SUNY Expanded Investment and Performance Fund proposal for the creation of an Education Opportunity Program (EOP). If funding is awarded, this NCCC EOP will start during the 2016/17 academic year and will attract a set of students NCCC has thus far not served.

To improve the retention of first time students: Many first time community college students are the first in their families to attend college. These students need more guidance early on to improve their chances for success. One initiative associated with this need is establishing a Liberal Arts Academy to engage the students who enroll in one of the college’s Liberal Arts Programs. These programs enroll a large number of students, so successful retention efforts would have an impact on enrollment. The Liberal Arts Academy tries to engage students by getting them involved in clubs, service learning, study abroad, study groups, as well as having a clear understanding of the role of Liberal Arts as a path to education beyond the level of Associates degree. There are plans to assign Liberal Arts students to faculty advisors who are actually teaching one of their courses. This is designed to provide a stronger connection between student and faculty.
NCCC implemented an early alert system in fall 2014 and is promoting more widespread use so that students who are experiencing academic difficulty can be identified early in the semester and be guided to appropriate support and subsequent better retention.

**Completion**

As stated in the prior section (Access), NCCC’s strategic plan focuses on student success with the ultimate goal of completion of degree requirements and career placement or transfer to a four-year institution. NCCC facilitates ease of transfer for selected programs within SUNY institutions by “Transfer Paths” that outline the core coursework recommended for students to complete during their first two years of study in a given discipline. The core coursework will meet degree requirements at all SUNY campuses offering majors in the transfer pathways disciplines. NCCC programs in these disciplines have been revised to include the core coursework required for seamless transfer to other SUNY institutions.

Transfer to four-year institutions is also facilitated by NCCC’s dual admissions program that includes agreements with a number of SUNY institutions and local private colleges or universities. Students can apply for dual admission to both NCCC and one of the participating colleges prior to the completion of 30 credits. Upon acceptance, students are guaranteed admission with junior status to the four-year institution upon graduation with an associate’s degree in the appropriate NCCC curriculum. All credits transfer as per the dual admission agreement.

To assist students in understanding and completing their educational path, NCCC implemented Degree Works. The academic planning tools in Degree Works help students and advisors see what courses and requirements students need to graduate. A degree audit gives students access to how the courses they have taken fit into degree requirements. It assists students and advisors in monitoring progress toward degree completion. It helps ensure that students have a clear picture of how many credits they have completed and what types of courses they will need in order to complete their academic program. Efforts are currently underway to implement SUNY Transfer Finder functionality within Degree Works. This is a cooperative effort by SUNY to allow students to select up to 3 transfer institutions, filter their completed coursework through an online degree evaluation, and find the shortest pathway to completion for a particular major. NCCC is serving as a pilot cohort with UB with a tentative go live date of spring 2016.

NCCC is committed to improving placement in remedial courses and the delivery of remedial instruction. Needing remediation has been shown to serve as a barrier to completion. NCCC has obtained SUNY GAP funding for various initiatives related to remediation. NCCC is also working with Columbia University Community College Research Center (CCRC) on improving the accuracy of placement testing. The college has worked closely with researchers from CCRC for the past year to plan the implementation of a study involving the comparison of an alternative placement to traditional methods over the next 3-5 years. NCCC has also tried different approaches to remedial instruction (accelerated Writing course) and has plans for additional options in the next year (math emporium).
In order to give students access to more options for completing their degrees in a timely fashion, NCCC is part of Open SUNY, as described above, to offer online instruction as a way to include courses that might not fit into a grounded schedule.

NCCC has been submitting the data required by the Student Achievement Measure (SAM) for the past two years, and will welcome another source for comparing our outcomes to other comparable institutions.

Various measures of student retention and graduation rates show that NCCC is above the comparison groups. This can be found on the SUNY Tables provided as a resource to SUNY Excels showing NCCC retention rates better than the community college sector rates, graduation rates better than community college sector rates, and time to degree shorter than the comparison. It is also reflected in the National Community College Benchmark (NCCBP) results, an initiative that NCCC has been part of since the inception of NCCBP in 2006. These favorable comparisons suggest that NCCC has already been committed to trying to maximize retention, minimize time to degree completion, and subsequently increase the number of graduates.

Our efforts, referred to in the Success and Access areas, related to our strategic plan goals will continue to be directly related to improving graduation rates.

Success

NCCC offers a robust set of student services through the Student Development office including: Advisement Services, Academic Counseling, Accessibility Services, Career Services, Cooperative Education, Curriculum Change, Transfer Services and Dual Admissions, Placement Testing, and Veterans Services. Student Development also supervises several grant-funded initiatives like the case management of Developmental students and coaching/career services for single mothers. By summer 2015, NCCC had renovated a location on campus for a Veterans Lounge and Transfer Services for students.

For academic support, NCCC recently centralized all learning centers by renovating the first floor of the library to create a Learning Commons where academic support services for students would be housed in the same location. The Learning Commons opened in the spring 2014 semester and provides support for math, writing, science, reading, economics, and accounting. Each of these disciplines has their own area with the technology specific for the skills and knowledge students need. The location is a bright, open environment where students can seek help in a very welcoming setting. Academic coaches are available to assist students who may be having difficulty. Plans have been made to redesign and expand this concept which will increase the services to students and their options for academic support.

NCCC participates with SUNY Works in order to increase the number of experiential learning opportunities for students. The academic programs at NCCC that have internship and cooperative education experiences as part of the requirements for the degree (or certificate) include: Animal
Management, Business Administration, Culinary Arts, Hospitality Management, Baking and Pastry Arts, Criminal Justice, Childhood Education, Audio Recording, Recreational Studies, Personal Training Certificate, Massage Therapy, and Medical Assistant. The allied health programs of Physical Therapist Assistant, Radiologic Technology, Surgical Technology and Nursing have clinical experience that is required in each program. In this way, students get hands-on work experience that compliments what is learned in the classroom. During the fall 2013 – spring 2014 academic year, 2,141 (duplicated headcount) students were registered in internship courses. In addition, Student Services offers a cooperative education experience to students who are looking for hands-on work experience related to their academic program, but whose programs do not require an internship.

Student Life actively promotes multiculturalism through scheduled activities and clubs on campus such as the Multicultural Student Leadership Forum (MSLF), African American Student Association, Latino Club, Native American Club, and Study Abroad Club. All of these student organizations were charged to support diversity on campus by providing cultural programming, promoting tolerance, and sharing experiences and insights. These clubs are sanctioned clubs with varied levels of participation depending on the level of interest in the student body any given year.

In 2013 the Student Senate took on leadership in promoting and supporting diversity on campus. Each month at least one activity is planned that celebrates a different culture. This gives the student body an opportunity to participate, learn, and explore differences throughout the year in a structured and meaningful way.

NCCC has partnered with SUNY on “Smart Track” to communicate with students more regularly especially in regard to the responsibilities associated with taking out student loans; the intent is to keep students engaged, improve financial literacy, and to subsequently improve retention and reduce loan default rates. Students are informed throughout the semester about important enrollment dates, and about academic and student services that are available. The Financial Aid office has a dedicated staff member to reach out to students who are behind in their payments. These efforts seem to be having some of the desired impacts. In 2012 NCCC’s default rate was 20.4%; in 2014 NCCC’s default rate was 15.6%, and in 2015 had dropped to 14.1%.

Our strategic plan calls for initiatives to improve student success, and while we have seen improvements in relatively small numbers of students who have participated in new initiatives (case management), these initiatives have not yet been made available to enough students to impact overall outcomes. So one of our plans is to expand the successful case management model to more students, and if even half as successful, should improve our retention and course success rates.

Another initiative associated with our strategic plan is to focus on improving course success rates. A recent publication in Community College Week described what faculty are doing at Wallace Community College (WCC), Alabama, to improve student success. The strategies they have implemented have resulted in very impressive results including dramatic increases in positive student course evaluations, increased attendance, increased number of students coming prepared for class, decreases in course withdrawals and increases in course success rates. Without success at the course level, students will not
be retained or reach graduation. Therefore, the focus for NCCC in the coming years will be on improving course success.

One of the hallmarks of the WCC program included a relentless effort to provide professional development for faculty focused on innovative classroom strategies. A key factor was the instructor-made video lectures that were made available to students 24/7, giving students the opportunity for online tutorials or preparation before class, making it possible to use classroom time for interactive learning. One of their changes in instruction included limiting lectures to no more than 20 minute segments so that instructors can engage students in other activities like a short quiz, in-class writing assignment, or group discussion.

Since the outcomes at WCC appeared to be directly impacted in a positive way following the implementation of a combination of professional development for faculty with the expectation that the focus would be on classroom strategies to improve student success, NCCC will try to model these same approaches. If the improvement in student outcomes moved in the same direction as WCC, enrollment would be positively impacted through retention.

Inquiry

Though Niagara County Community College is not a research facility, the College does actively seek to partner on various grant opportunities where access to research opportunities are the central theme. For example, over the past few years, NCCC has taken an active role in pursuing funding through the National Science Foundation (NSF). The College is currently completing its partnership in an NSF grant funded Advanced Technological Education (ATE) Program led by Missouri State. Through the grant, NCCC is the sole New York State representative, helping to create a National ATE Center that will be a nationally recognized resource for providing the science, mathematics and technology foundations that are critical to the development of an effective workforce, across a spectrum of skills, to support the rapidly expanding U.S. grape and wine production industry.

Additionally, the College has worked closely with Buffalo State College to submit collaborative NSF applications for the creation of programming designed to recruit and graduate students in the STEM fields of study, with a special emphasis of exposing students to undergraduate research opportunities and faculty/student research mentoring. Though these applications have been unsuccessful to date, the collaborative effort has provided NCCC with exposure to speakers from Buffalo State’s NOYCE Scholars series and McNair Scholars Program (initiatives designed to prepare participants for studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities).

Lastly, Niagara County Community College is participating in a US Department of Education grant led by Columbia University to study how colleges can improve upon current assessment practices to make sure students are placed in appropriate-level courses and the effects that alternate assessment and placement strategies on students’ overall academic performance, persistence, and progress toward college degrees.
Engagement

START-UP NY: Niagara County Community College currently has an approved START-UP NY plan. Through the planning process, the College has successfully formed a strong partnership with the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency and is currently seeking applications in the industry sectors of: Advanced Manufacturing; Agriculture/Agriscience; Health and Life Sciences; Professional Services; and Tourism.

Commercialization: The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) opened at NCCC in 1984 to help Niagara County residents start a new business or improve an existing business. Over the years, thousands of positions have been created or saved throughout the county. A second office opened at the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute (NFCI) in September 2012. Between opening in 2012 and June 16, 2014, the Niagara SBDC had worked with 126 new clients. This group of clients included both existing businesses and those thinking of becoming entrepreneurs. Of the 126 clients, 33 (26.19%) were minorities. In total, 900 counseling hours were provided. Businesses served through SBDC counseling included those from the retail, hospitality and tourism, and small manufacturing business sectors. To date, five clients have recorded an economic impact totaling $87,764 as a result of SBDC counseling. This includes eleven new jobs created and seven saved. Several SBDC clients have food products being sold at the NFCI.

Programs held at the NFCI included a five part business series, a program on the Affordable Care Act, and most recently, a workshop on Crowdfunding for businesses and not-for-profits. In total, 108 individuals attended these workshops. The largest event entitled, Meet the Best Resources for Your Business, was held in November of 2013 and co-sponsored by the NY State Senate. The event included 137 signed-in guests and over 25 vendor tables. Vendors in attendance included Empire State Development, the SBA, Niagara USA Chamber, Niagara County IDA, numerous business associations, and many other local resource providers. Feedback from both attendees and vendors at the event was very positive. Prior to the opening of the office at NFCI, the SBDC had difficulty meeting with Niagara Falls residents. Many were unable to drive to the SBDC office located in Lockport or on the Sanborn campus. The NFCI office has allowed the SBDC to fully serve all of Niagara County through counseling efforts and training programs.

Workforce Development: The College is specifically tailoring programs to meet the immediate critical needs of area employers. For example, NCCC has secured a 2nd year of a NYS Department of Labor long-term unemployed worker training grant. Currently through the grant the College is offering an intensive Customer Service and Hospitality training which provides students with nationally credentialed trainings such as: customer service; ServSafe, training in food safety practices for preparing and serving food; TIPs (Training for Intervention ProcedureS) training for the responsible service, sale, and consumption of alcohol; and restaurant server training.

Alumni Support: NCCC has an active alumni committee that is part of the NCCC Foundation. The Foundation uses social media (including Facebook) to communicate with alumni and sends out a semi-
annual *Connections Magazine* to alumni. The donor section of the Magazine solicits and receives donations. The Foundation also participates in Graduate Fairs, Open Houses, and Job Fairs (to name a few examples). At the past several commencement ceremonies alumni from the first graduating class of NCCC served as Alumni Marshalls. Several alumni are both Presidential Partners (contributing $1000.00 per year) and members of the Foundation Board. They are recognized by their graduation year in all publications. NCCC also holds an annual Alumni 5K Race/Walk. In August, 2015 NCCC held a 50th Reunion for the first graduating class of NCCC.

An alumni data project took place to ensure alumni data records from 1962-1985 are available in the Banner student information system. Approximately 12,800 records were identified, 9,000 of which were stored solely on microfilm and not in Banner. All of these records were put through a verification service to locate up-to-date contact information. The completion of this major project has provided valuable information to conduct further outreach to NCCC alumni.

**Civic Engagement:** Students are involved with community service through Student Life initiatives and student clubs. Some are fund raisers for charitable or medical research organizations, for example a Breast Cancer Awareness sporting event fundraiser each October, a flag sale for veterans in November, and a “penny wars” competition each December that supports St. Jude’s Research Hospital. All of the clubs and organizations are required to have at least two-thirds of their members complete 10 hours of community service per semester. During the 2015 spring break, students and advisors traveled to Memphis, TN to do community service at St. Jude’s Research Hospital, Mid-South food bank, and Habitat for Humanity of Memphis. Faculty are evaluated for promotion and tenure in part for their community service.

**Economic Impact:** The most recent results of an economic impact study done in 2011 by Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc. suggest that the Niagara Region economy receives a net of $46.8 million in added labor and non-labor income due to NCCC operations each year. The spending of NCCC’s non-local students generates approximately $6.1 million in added income each year. It is estimated that the accumulated contribution of NCCC instruction received by former students annually adds approximately $171.3 million in income to the Niagara Region. In total, NCCC’s annual economic impact was estimated to be $224.2 million.

**Section 3: Conclusion and Expected Impact on NCCC**

The goals of SUNY Excels are consistent with NCCC’s strategic plan to improve student success and should, therefore, reinforce to the campus community the importance of continued innovation in our strategies to improve student success. Such efforts should not only help meet our own stated goals, but also meet SUNY goals. Since NCCC is already above the average on many of the metrics related to student success, it suggests that NCCC’s ongoing policies and procedures are already working. Special emphasis moving forward on specific classroom strategies will be designed to help students stay more engaged in their own learning, improving attendance and course-based outcomes. Retention and graduation are preceded by course success and that is why NCCC will place special focus on how best to impact learning and success at the course level.