

Student Academic Success

The Center for Academic Success (CAS) is the home of the TRiO Student Support Services (SSS) grant which funds approximately 50% of the total CAS budget. This is currently \$302,000 per year. TRIO programs, first created in the 1960s and now awarded in all 50 states, are to promote college access and completion for low income and first generation students. In other words- to level the playing field for students at risk of failing. Our SSS grant also serve students with disabilities as they, too, are at-risk of not succeeding. VTC currently has approximately 12% of the student body that has some type of disability.

At any one time, Vermont Tech has 65-75% students that fall into one (or more) of the three qualifying categories. Many VTC students are low income, first generation *and* experience a disability. By each staff person being paid partly by TRIO and partly by the college, all students at VTC are able to access services. However, we practice what in the research is called 'intrusive advising'- meaning we go search out those students enrolled in TRIO vs. waiting for them to come to us- or worse yet, fail. In the past these services have been mostly academic (e.g. tutoring) but more and more we are finding that in order to be successful, students may first need assistance with 'softer' academic skills (time management, study skills, study skills, etc.) before they will benefit fully from the more pure academic approach of tutoring.

Like most of the nation, we are seeing more and more students with serious emotional and mental health issues. The increase in anxiety, as well as students who have experienced trauma, has easily more than doubled in number and severity over just the past few years. Thus, the program has increased services for early intervention meaning for first year students but mainly in their first semester- or even first month. The earlier the more successful. This has included such things as reaching out over the summer, orientation involvement and a peer-mentoring program first semester.

The statistics during the last grant competition for three requirements (graduation rate, being in good academic standing and persistence year to year) showed that:

1. Students who received TRiO services were statistically more successful in all three categories than TRiO eligible students who did not sign up for TRiO.
2. In several cases, the statistics for TRiO students were higher than even non-TRiO eligible students (students not low income and students with parents who have 4 year degree)

Given these impressive statistics, expanding this type of program to more (if not all) VTC students would seem prudent both in terms of student success and finances: *Retaining students who will stay for 2-4 years is a much easier task than replacing the students that drop leave after 1-2 semesters.*

TRiO has a long history of successfully working with our type of students so that they attend and graduate from college. The biggest take away for that success is relationships and students feeling that they belong. While we have faculty that mentor and advise students, many do not feel connected to their advisor. Many advisors do not feel comfortable speaking with students about financial or personal issues much less helping them problem solve. And that is not their job. But students need that personal connection. That is what we refer to as wrap-around services. TRiO students meet regularly with various staff at the CAS for a variety of individual reasons, referrals, problems solving, etc.

Every student should have a similar experience, but it will take funds:

1. New Student Advocate

Consider one FTE position at CAS that cycles from January to January and interacts with new students as soon as they are admitted via text, phone or meetings with both students and parents. They participate at admitted student day and orientations. They stay involved all summer- answering questions, checking in to see if they are prepared, making connections with faculty or financial aid as appropriate, getting appropriate student enrolled in TRIO and getting them paired with a peer mentor before they even arrive. This same person continues to work with them throughout the fall semester, again making referrals as is appropriate- academic, financial, social, etc.. By the end of the semester, those students still considered at-risk will be discussed, a plan made and their follow up handed off to the CAS staff. The cycle begins again the next January.

Financial implication: By retaining 3-4 students the first year, the position pays for itself.

2. Disability Services

Work with library to develop a guide for students with disabilities. [Years 1-2]

Identify strategies to increase the level of support available to students with disabilities at the Brattleboro campus in particular, as required by the Vermont Department of Education review, so that the level of services and supports available are more functionally equivalent to those provided on the Randolph and Williston campuses. (Year 1)

3. Upward Bound grant at VTC

An Upward Bound grant could be written for during the next grant competition (writing 2021 to start 2022). UB is a competitive program that VTC had 15 years ago but lost in a round of funding. It would be housed at VTC and work with local high schools to identify and recruit low income and first generation students. UB then works with them throughout their 4 years of high school to prepare them for college socially, academically and fiscally. Although counselors work full time and throughout the year, there is a residential summer program so that students become familiar and comfortable with our campus. Nationally, 40% of UB students attend the college they were at for UB. If even half of that national average, 20%, of the required 120 UB students/year enrolled, that would mean 24 college-ready students each year. UB houses programs and employs the staff.

Financial implication: After the grant is written, ALL costs are covered by the grant. VTC provides only office space, phones, etc.

4. A second SSS grant

VTC's SSS grant is what is referred to as a 'Classic' SSS grant. Each college can only have one. However, we could write for a second SS grant: a 'STEM' SSS grant. It would need to enroll 120 students and they would need to be additional after the 190 we must currently enroll. With the

support of faculty we could recruit an additional 120 that are just STEM (including Allied Health). The grant competition for SSS will be due early winter 2019 to start Sept 1 2019. Writing and researching data should start this summer or early fall.

Financial implication: It would add approximately \$200,000/year for more staffing and more student served.