

**Promising Practices:
WorkPlus+ Program
Montgomery College**

The Montgomery College WorkPlus+ program features entry-level English language courses that focus on the exploration of careers, the world of work, and core concepts in specific career sectors. As students enter the intermediate and advanced levels of English (per the U.S. Department of Education's National Reporting System for adult education), a co-taught approach is used to deliver high-demand occupational area content along with adult ESOL/basic skills instruction, so that students may earn an entry-level, labor market-recognized credential along a career pathway.

Students are supported with a suite of career and employment services with links to social services and options for transitioning to credit programming in some content areas. Currently, labor-market recognized credentials are supported in the following areas: Apartment Leasing Professional, Apartment Maintenance Technician, Child Development Associate, Comp TIA A+, Geriatric Nursing Assistant, and Electrocardiogram.

Name of Community College: Montgomery College
(<https://www.montgomerycollege.edu>)

Title of Program: WorkPlus+ (<https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/workforce-development-continuing-education/english-language-skills/workplus/index.html>)

Type of Program: Workforce training/career pathways.

Primary Division involved: The Adult ESOL & Basic Skills for College and Careers Programs, a unit under Workforce Development & Continuing Education (WDCE) division partners with other units in WDCE to provide this programming.

Key Partners: Partnerships depend on the occupational area and funding source. Typically, these include the other units in Workforce Development & Continuing Education (WDCE) that focus on the occupational area along with employer organizations and collaboratives, funders, and social and workforce development agencies.

Populations Served: English Language Learners, immigrants, refugee, and DACA/undocumented students.

Immigration status required: Must be work authorized.

1. Need for Program

A suburb of Washington, DC, Montgomery County, Maryland, is home to a large and diverse immigrant community. From 2010 to 2014, 39% (309,000) of the county's total population of 794,000 residents over the age of 16 were foreign-born. Of all the foreign-born residents over age 16, about 125,000 (40%) are limited English proficiency (LEP). Educational attainment in this group ranges widely. Of the LEP population ages 25 and older (117,000), 32% have less than a high school diploma and 25% have only a high school diploma or equivalent. This is a target

population for adult workforce training, given the un- and under-employment rates among this group.

Workforce education for this particular group has been in place in the County since the 1980s. The current programming model has been in place since 2010.

2. Program Description

The current model features entry-level English language courses that focus on the exploration of careers, the world of work, and core concepts in specific career sectors, for example, ESOL for healthcare jobs and ESOL for building trades. As students enter the intermediate and advanced levels of English (per the U.S. Department of Education's National Reporting System for adult education), a co-taught approach is used to deliver high-demand occupational area content along with adult ESOL/basic skills instruction, so that students may earn an entry-level, labor market-recognized credential along a career pathway. Students are supported with a suite of career and employment services with links to social services and options for transitioning to credit programming in some content areas. Currently, labor-market recognized credentials are supported in the following areas: Apartment Leasing Professional, Apartment Maintenance Technician, Child Development Associate, Comp TIA A+, Geriatric Nursing Assistant, and Electrocardiogram.

3. Specific Population Served

The programs serve adults with limited English/basic skills needs. Since, in some cases, funders require work authorization, immigrants without documentation are referred to other work-related in English programs.

4. Goals and Objectives

Students participating in WorkPlus+ programs will have the English language/basic skills knowledge; occupational competencies; and power/foundational/soft skills needed to enter a career sector and seek further education. Specific objectives are dependent on funder requirements. These typically include English language acquisition, credential attainment, finding a job, retaining a job, or entering another level of training/education.

5. Outcomes

As noted, objectives and outcomes are dependent on the additional capacity to place and track students, and overall sector employment opportunities. These have all varied significantly over time. The basic model, however, has been tested empirically as part of a 2012 U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Innovation Fund grant. Researchers found that Montgomery College's co-taught Nursing Assistant program saw a 93% completion rate with treatment group members earning an additional \$5,518 annually over the control group one year after the program.

6. Collaboration

Internal partners include other programs in the Workforce Development & Continuing Education unit and, in some cases, their credit-level counterparts. These partners have supported us with curricula, content instructors, and links to employers. External partnerships have varied over time, depending on the funding source. The programs have worked with ethnic community groups and refugee resettlement organizations to recruit; social service agencies to support students during instruction, and employment and career services agencies to link students to employment.

7. Success Factors /Lessons Learned

Over time, our programs have found several key factors that have helped us to move forward. These include:

- A robust student outreach and intake system that includes career awareness and counseling before students enter a program, so that they have a deeper understanding of their interests, commitment level, and resources as they make key life decisions.
- A comprehensive service delivery model that includes expanded dedicated staffing to provide high-quality instruction; college and career navigation; and job development along with a flexible schedule and service delivery approach.
- A focus on sustainability and success is woven throughout the program, including piloting courses to assess their suitability, collecting data, sharing stories, working with employers to advocate for students, and seeking a range of additional funding.

8. Challenges Faced

At Montgomery College, partnerships have been one of the biggest challenges. These have been made easier by:

- Identifying partners with agencies that share goals, mission, and values, so that everyone is on the same philosophical page.
- Clearly articulating priorities and needs, so that mismatches can be addressed before the project begins.
- Crafting shared accountability measures, so that everyone has measurable stakes in the project.
- Creating explicit written agreements, task assignments, and deadlines, so that work is completed in a timely fashion and does not duplicate efforts.

The shift to remote instruction due to COVID-19 has presented several challenges that are not unique to our programs including:

- Lack of technology – staff have tried to link students to resources such as our College Foundation, which has purchased several laptops for students
- Need for students to deal with family and employment circumstances – staff have adjusted schedules and identified additional supports (e.g. mental health) for students to persist
- Need to move clinical/hands-on portions of instruction online – instructors have developed videos, alternate equipment that can be found at home (e.g. bathrobes for medical gowns), workplace scenarios, and other resources to address clinical competencies

9. Funding and Sustainability

WorkPlus+ programs have been funded over time with a number of grants, federal, state, local, and private. We continue to evolve and seek alternative funding to keep programs tuition-free.

More information on the WorkPlus+ program is included in [Working Toward An Equitable and Prosperous Future For All: How Community Colleges and Immigrants Are Changing America](#) (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). Also available on [Amazon](#).

10. Contact Information

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