

**Promising Practices:
Integrated Career Pathways (ICP)**
South Texas College

The South Texas College's Integrated Career Pathways (ICP) program is designed to allow certain immigrant students without a high school diploma or high school equivalency (HSE) certificate to transition from contextualized English as a second language (ESL) into credit-bearing postsecondary occupational programs while acquiring an HSE certificate and basic literacy skills. The ICP program offers career pathways in such fields as Emergency Medical Technology, Medical Assistant Technology, Electronic Health Records, Pharmacy Technology, Nursing, Welding, Accounting, and Computer Technology.

Name of Community College: South Texas College
(<https://www.southtexascollege.edu>)

Title of Program: Integrated Career Pathways (ICP)
<https://www.southtexascollege.edu/cpwe/services/career-pathways.html>

Type of Program: Workforce Training/Career Pathways

Primary Division(s) involved: Continuing Education, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs

Key Partners: Local Workforce Development Board, school districts, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and other community agencies.

Populations Served: Immigrants, ESL/ELL.

Immigration status required: Lawful immigration status.

1. Need for Program

In Hidalgo and Starr, the two counties that South Texas College serves, there are approximately 205,000 individuals over the age of 18 who do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent, and 58% of them (118,900) are of working age. Of the 205,000, approximately 116,000 have less than a high-grade education. A considerable number of these individuals (30% in Hidalgo County, 33.2% in Starr County) live below the poverty level, are either unemployed or underemployed and are not able to enter college and pursue a certificate or degree. Without the high school equivalency (HSE) certificate they do not meet admission requirements to enroll in college-level courses, and they are ineligible to apply for federal financial aid. Most of them find that they also do not meet minimum job requirements for minimum-wage jobs. STC's ICP program, which was piloted in 2009, was designed to allow underprepared immigrant students (low-skill, low-literacy) without a high school diploma or HSE to transition from contextualized ESL into credit-bearing postsecondary occupational programs while acquiring an HSE certificate and basic literacy skills.

The Rio Grande Valley region is a bicultural and binational region given the close proximity to Mexico. Many students are first-, second-, or third-generation as they may have immigrated to the U.S. themselves or have parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents who were

immigrants. The majority of ESL learners are served through the college's noncredit continuing education programs. For intermediate-level ESL immigrant students who have low literacy skills in their native languages, the college offers noncredit programs, such as ICP, that integrate ESL and HSE instruction with contextualized industry credentials and marketable skills.

2. Brief Description of Program

Two Integrated Career Pathways (ICP) tracks have been developed to assist the target population. Track 1 serves students functioning at the eighth-grade level in reading, writing, and math, and at the exit level in ESL, which is the most advanced noncredit ESL level. Students are co-enrolled in contextualized HSE instruction and the credit-bearing Occupational Skills Award (OSA) program, while integrating college success and employability skills, such as note-taking, test-taking, and study skills, as well as resume writing, interviewing skills, and work ethics. Student outcomes include HSE attainment, college credit hours, enrollment in a college certificate program, and/or employment.

Track 2 consists of two phases. Phase 1 serves students functioning at the sixth-grade level in reading, writing, and math, and at the intermediate-ESL level through contextualized ESL, pre-HSE, and bilingual occupational terminology instruction. Students exit this phase functioning at the eighth-grade level in reading, writing, and math, and at the advanced exit-level ESL. Phase 2 co-enrolls students in contextualized HSE instruction and the credit-bearing OSA program (i.e., Track 1) while integrating college success and employability skills. Student outcomes include HSE attainment, college credit hours, enrollment in a college certificate program, and/or employment.

While Track 1 takes approximately between four and six months, Track 2 normally ranges from six to eight months depending on the OSA program selected.

The OSA program is the first component of the career pathway and is offered through continuing education. The OSA program is essentially a subset of the certificate program and consists of one- to three-credit courses packaged into a marketable skills credential contextualized to a specific career pathway and leading to employment. Because the OSA is taught by credit faculty and consists of credit courses, the continuing education units (CEU) earned by students are converted to semester credit hours (SCH) once students attain their HSE and complete a certificate program.

The ICP program offers career pathways in such fields as Emergency Medical Technology, Medical Assistant Technology, Electronic Health Records, Pharmacy Technology, Nursing, Welding, Accounting, and Computer Technology. An example of a successful career pathway is STC's Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) pathway. There is high demand in the field, and it offers excellent potential for career advancement and a living wage. The EMT pathway allows lower-skill students to start targeted technical skills training in an entry-level, credit-bearing "first responder" course, which includes college and career success skills instruction, as well as employability skills.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we are currently adjusting our program by converting it to a hybrid format, that is, converting lecture instruction to online and reducing the number of students during hands-on skills-based instruction while following CDC guidelines.

3. Specific Population Served

Approximately 57% of these students are first-generation immigrant students looking for ways to break the poverty cycle and become productive members of their communities. Since the majority of grantors supporting the ICP program require participants to have lawful immigration status, South Texas College refers those ineligible to participate to local training providers equipped to serve them with ESL and literacy instruction; this allows them to improve their literacy while working on their immigration status, thereby preparing to enter ICP.

4. Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of ICP is to allow individuals with no high school diploma or its equivalent to enter college by co-enrolling them in an HSE and OSA program. The objectives for program participants are to (1) earn in an average of six months an HSE certificate, an OSA, and any applicable industry-recognized certifications; and (2) enroll in the rest of the certificate program and/or enter employment. These objectives are measured by the attainment of HSE and OSA certificates, attainment of certifications, college matriculation, and job placement.

5. Outcomes

Approximately 300 students have participated in ICP training at STC since 2011. Documented performance is as follows:

- 98% completed the program
- 75% earned college hours
- 70% attained their HSE
- 77% enrolled in a college certificate program or entered employment.

6. Collaboration

Without this highly integrated program that helps students accelerate their time to completion, these low-skill, low-literacy students would have had to take the traditional linear route: first ESL, then Adult Basic Education, followed by HSE, and finally a college certificate program. STC's Integrated Career Pathways program is the only one of its kind in Hidalgo and Starr counties. What makes this program effective, successful, and special is attributed to these collaborations:

- Working closely with Academic Affairs deans and program chairs to design continuing education certificates that feed into credit-bearing certificates and to establish the process for converting CEUs to semester credit hours, thereby allowing students to move through the career pathway without having to repeat any courses.
- Working with Academic Affairs program advisory committees to validate and approve new continuing education certificates that feed into credit-bearing certificates, thereby creating stackable credentials, which create a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to enable individuals to move along an educational pathway or up a career ladder.
- Collaborating with Centers for Learning Excellence to provide tutoring and student success workshops to continuing education students.

- Collaborating with Student Affairs to provide services to continuing education students in the areas of advising, counseling, financial aid, registration, career exploration, and job placement.
- Working with Student Affairs to organize employer advisory committees to review career pathways, deliver instruction, provide clinical/practicum sites, motivate students, and interview students for job opportunities.
- Collaborating with Workforce Solutions (the local workforce development board), school districts, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and other community agencies to provide comprehensive supportive services to participants, such as childcare, transportation, materials, and supplies.

7. Success Factors

A key success factor is to provide intensive and intrusive case management which includes the following:

- Monitor daily class attendance: locate those absent, ascertain reasons for absence, determine corrective actions (childcare, transportation, etc.), and identify preventive measures.
- Monitor daily academic progress: identify those failing or at risk of failing, ascertain reasons thereof, determine corrective actions (tutoring, supplemental instruction, etc.), and identify preventive measures.
- Monitor daily life issues: identify those with imminent problems, ascertain causes, determine corrective actions, and identify preventive measures.

One of the key lessons learned was to establish a sustainability plan early on in order to continue serving this population after grant funding ended. Other lessons learned that have helped improve and enhance the program include the need for a strong daily case management system to help participants successfully navigate college, work, and life in general; and the need for a robust support system within the college built on commitments from all divisions and departments.

8. Challenges Faced

As STC continues its own journey and as other colleges embark on similar initiatives, it is necessary to point out that the biggest challenges the College faced serving this population were to find funding to assist them and to find institutional resources to sustain the program after external funding ran out. To overcome these challenges, the College committed to continuously apply for grants to help this population and established an ongoing sustainability plan to assist at least a portion of the population with tuition-free opportunities. To combat the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, STC is currently adjusting the program by converting it to a hybrid format, that is, converting lecture instruction to online and reducing the number of students for hands-on skills-based instruction while following CDC guidelines.

9. Funding and Sustainability

The average cost per student participating in ICP training is \$3,500. To date, the vast majority of the costs have been incurred by grants from Jobs for the Future, Texas Higher Education

Coordinating Board, Lower Rio Workforce Development Board, and Texas Workforce Commission. Students have had to pay only a minimal amount, primarily in testing fees. Knowing that grant funds are finite and are meant only to assist colleges to start up and implement new initiatives, STC has developed a sustainability plan using the Texas Public Educational Grant to continue serving low-skill, low-literacy students in the ICP program after the grants ended. The college is very proud to have launched its first sustainable career pathways track in May 2014. Twelve students were selected for a phlebotomy/HSE program. STC used Texas Public Educational Grant funds to pay for both phlebotomy and HSE training, while students paid for their tests. Upon successful completion, students attained their HSE, received two credit hours toward the medical assistant technology certificate, passed the national phlebotomy certification exam, and enrolled in the certificate program. Since then, the college has served more than 100 students through its sustainable model.

More information on the Integrated Careers Pathway 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](#).

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