

Accounting Assistant Career Pathway Certificate

ESL student success with Accounting Assistant Career Pathway Certificate using innovative I-BEST model

Background & Organizational Context

Mt. Hood Community College was one of the first community colleges in Oregon to adopt the Career Pathways model. The Accounting Assistant Career Pathway certificate was the first to be developed in the Business department. In addition, this certificate was chosen to pilot the I-BEST instructional model at our college.

Critical Innovations

The Accounting Assistant Career Pathway certificate was planned with the intention that it would be offered both as an open-entry program and also in a cohort-based schedule using the I-BEST model. The I-BEST model (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training), originated in Washington State and is being replicated across the nation with great success.

I-BEST quickly boosts students' literacy and work skills so that students can earn credentials, get living wage jobs, and put their talents to work for employers. I-BEST pairs two instructors in the classroom – one to teach professional/technical content and the other to teach basic skills in reading, math, writing or English language – so students can move through school and into jobs faster. As students progress through the program, they learn basic skills in real-world scenarios offered by the college and career part of the curriculum. I-BEST challenges the traditional notion that students must complete all basic education before they can even start on a college or career pathway. I-BEST students start earning college credits immediately. (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges,

http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_integratedbasiceducationandskillstraining.aspx)

Mt. Hood Community College is the first community college in Oregon to implement this innovation, integrating I-BEST with Career Pathways. At present, the third cohort of Accounting Assistant students is in the program, and there are also I-BEST cohorts taking classes toward the Office Clerk Career Pathway certificate and the Assistant Teacher Career Pathway certificate. Two videos highlight this instructional advance:

[I-BEST Accounting Assistant at MHCC](#)

[I-BEST at Mt. Hood CC](#)

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Critical Partners

Critical partners for the Accounting Assistant Career Pathways Certificate have been the Career Pathways coordinator, the business faculty and dean, the ABS dean and staff, and WorkSource management and staff. The Career Pathways coordinator facilitated the development of the certificate by the business faculty with the leadership of the Dean of Business and the Dean of Workforce Development. For the I-BEST cohorts, WorkSource staff under the leadership of the Director of Workforce Development recruit, screen, and select students. The ABS student resource specialist assisted in recruitment. Then these same staff members act as career coaches, supporting the students during their three terms of classwork. The employer partnership coordinator and the faculty internship supervisor facilitate internships for the students.

Strategies and Services

When an Accounting Assistant Career Pathway certificate I-BEST cohort is scheduled, career coaches reach out to community agencies, WorkSource Oregon centers, and intracollege partners such as ABS instructors and academic advisors. The career coaches hold information-sessions for interested persons. They assist the applicants in completing application and admission forms, arrange for proficiency testing, and interview the applicants for motivation, willingness to comply with requirements, and understanding of and fit for the program.

For each accepted student, the career coach creates a funding stream through coordination of financial aid benefits (FAFSA), TUI, Trade Act, WIA funding, and college scholarships for ABS students. After sending out acceptance and welcome letters, an orientation session is held for the new students where they preview program content and structure and set clear expectations for attendance and homework completion.

Once classes begin, career coaches stay in touch with the students and any other case managers whom the students may be working with at human services agencies, public housing agencies, and WorkSource centers. They maintain contact with phone calls and office and classroom visits to remove barriers such as transportation problems and child care issues. They follow up with students who are struggling to help them problem solve so they can stay in class and not drop out. They communicate with the instructors about the students' progress. During the first term, the career coaches organize weekly workshops on topics like résumé development, interviewing skills, interpersonal communication, and college success skills.

In the second term of classes, job search skills and interview practice are the focus, along with internship preparation and preparing to take the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). Also, during the second term, the employer partnership coordinator sets up an employer panel. Four employers who hire completers from this program and talk about their requirements for entry-level positions in the field, visit the

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classroom. In addition, the employer partnership coordinator and the faculty internship supervisor discuss internship opportunities with the students to explore the type of internship each student wants. The coordinators talk about what makes a successful internship. They go over the Internship Training Agreement which outlines what the responsibilities are for the student, for the employer, and for the internship coordinators. Students are encouraged to seek their own internship site as this parallels the job search process. Students feel more engaged when they are actively researching sites. When a student has found a site, the employer partnership coordinator connects with the employer to review the process, obtain agreement, and get the document signature. For the remaining students who have not been able to secure their own internship placement, the career coach and the employer partnership coordinator meet with each student and work with them intensively to be sure a place is found.

During the third term, the emphasis is on making sure the student is ready for work including referrals for interview clothing to Dress for Success for women or Best Foot Forward for men, supporting a successful internship, and beginning the job search process. When the students begin the internship during the third quarter, the learning objectives are written cooperatively by the student and the employer with input from the employer partnership coordinator. Since the students are receiving college credit for these internships, the employer partnership coordinator shares duties with the faculty internship supervisor. The students meet weekly as a group to discuss successes and challenges at their site. Once the internship is complete, the employer completes an evaluation. Most evaluations are quite positive, and there have been several hires from the internships. After the third term ends, the career coaches stay in touch with the students to help them trouble shoot problems and remain engaged in the WorkSource system where a whole team assists the students as they continue their job search.

Financing and Funding

Initial funding to create the Accounting Assistant Career Pathway certificate involved the CCWD Career Pathways Grant (Career Pathways coordinator) and leveraged funding from the college (faculty and administrator time). Funding for the I-BEST cohorts has utilized CASE grant funds, and additional Career Pathways grant funds, WIA funds from WSI, and leveraged resources from the college.

Challenges

Challenge in scheduling: Scheduling ABS classes in tandem with content-area classes

Strategy: Enhanced communication and coordination among college partners

Challenge with recruitment: Difficulty of getting the word out quickly enough to a large potential audience to generate an extensive applicant pool with sufficient time to complete the application process.

Strategy: Need to plan recruitment further in advance and outreach more extensively.

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Challenge for internship locations: Finding enough internship sites willing to show financial records to an intern. Employers' lack of space and time to supervise interns. Employers not seeing the value of interns.
Strategy: Increased outreach to locate new internship sites.

Challenge for students: Personal life issues, child care, transportation, and lack of study habits can be challenges for completion. Even with pre-program assessment, some accepted students struggle with the reading and homework required. Students may change their goal regarding employment or expect staff to get them a job rather than expecting to do their own job search.
Strategy: Improved screening and enhanced communication and securing clarity of commitment from the beginning.

By The Numbers / Outcomes

1st I-BEST Accounting Assistant cohort 4/1/13 – 3/21/14: 19 students started, 15 completed on time, with the other 4 continuing to other college courses at MHCC. 11 of the 15 employed at average wage of \$13.29/hour.

2nd I-BEST Accounting Assistant cohort 1/6/14 – 8/29/14: 16 started, 13 completed on time, with 2 others planning to complete. 12 of the 13 employed at average wage of \$12.98/hour.

3rd I-BEST Accounting Assistant cohort 9/22/14 – 6/19/15: 17 started, all 17 continued to term 2.

These are strong results for any program, particularly for a program reaching out to underprepared students and including employment as an outcome measure. In addition, seven other students who were not in the cohorts have earned the Accounting Assistant Career Pathway certificate.

Sustainability

To sustain offering the Accounting Assistant Career Pathway certificate I-BEST cohort model, as well as our other I-BEST and VESL cohorts, the departments are willing to commit district funds for instruction. However, with the ending of the CASE grant in June, 2015, Career Pathways grant funds are crucial to being able to sustain the level of recruiting, screening, supporting, and coordinating needed for success. The students' high levels of educational achievement and job attainment are dependent on this extensive and intensive model of support. Without resources for this vital aspect of the program, a serious funding gap would exist.

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Impacts

One significant impact has been the increase in the number of ABS students transitioning to credit-bearing courses and completing a college certificate. Due to this comprehensive system of team teaching and wrap-around support services, we have noted that persistence, retention, and completion rates are higher for these cohorts than for students in open-entry classes. Furthermore, in addition to the educational and professional support that the students receive, it is remarkable how much the students in a cohort support one another by tutoring each other, sharing child care, giving rides to class, and in at least one case providing car repair!

Another impact has been a transformation in instructor attitudes about what students who have been labeled ABS are able to achieve with coordinated team teaching and wrap-around support services. Finally, both our Career Pathways initiative and our I-BEST model can be credited with boosting the number of certificates awarded by our college. Number of certificates awarded is a core component of the completions agenda for Oregon community colleges. Moreover, a recent report by CAPSEE, the Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment, matching college transcripts to employment data, concluded that certificates lead to increased probability of employment and have positive impacts on earnings. (Di Xu and Madeline Joy Trimble, [*What About Certificates? Evidence on the Labor Market Returns to Non-Degree Community College Awards in Two States*](#))

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