
Competency Models In Action:

Health Professions Academy Prepares Students for Allied Health Occupations

November 2014

- Using the Allied Health Competency Model to develop curricula
- Assessing science and math competencies as a training prerequisite
- Collaborating with area healthcare systems to develop work-based learning modules

Introduction

Austin Community College (ACC) has developed the Health Professions Academy to deliver individualized, computer-based education to improve the prerequisite completion rate for students pursuing a healthcare career. The programs of study, complemented by curricula at partnering area hospitals, align with national healthcare occupational standards and the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration's (ETA's) Allied Health Competency Model.

ACC is one of seven members of the Northern Virginia Community College Consortium Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCT) grant. The Consortium's focus is on developing new, employer-driven career pathways with stackable credentials in science-technology-engineering-math (STEM) occupations.

The Workforce Need

Careers in the fields of healthcare are growing at a significant rate. An analysis of 24 health sciences job titles indicate that job demand in the Austin area is expected to grow at 1,400 jobs per year from 2012 through 2020.¹

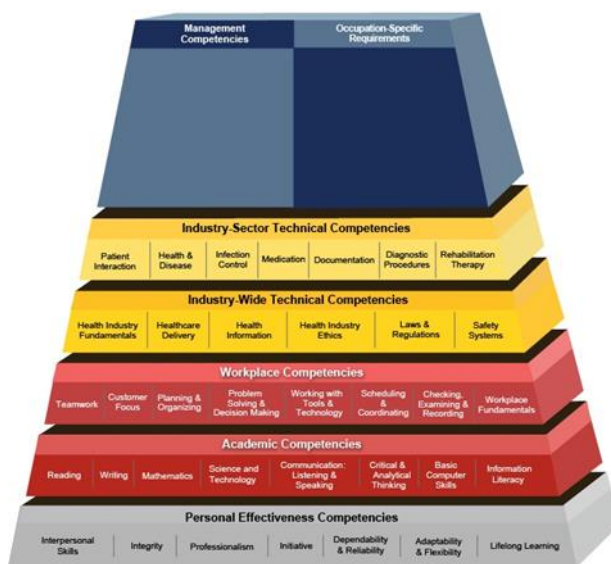
The Aspen Institute's Workforce Strategies Initiative study identified the elements of the ACC program that needed improvement. In 2011, only 33.5% of students who attempted the prerequisite courses for the Healthcare Training pathway completed them successfully. Students struggle, especially in mathematics and biology prerequisites, since these courses require higher-level knowledge and study skills.

Approach

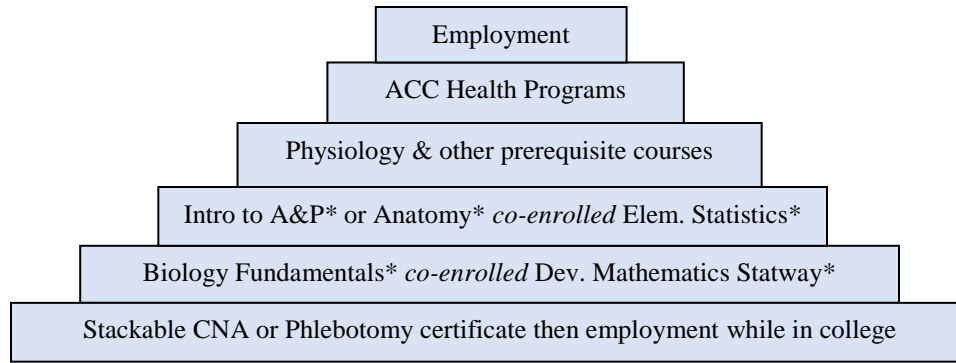
Academy students must successfully complete STEM coursework at ACC prior to entering the work-based learning program at major Austin area healthcare systems: the Seton Family of Hospitals and Saint David's Healthcare, clinics such as Austin Diagnostic Clinic and Texas Oncology, as well as numerous laboratory facilities. The college collaborates with clinical staff in developing the curriculum for the work-based learning component of the project.

¹ Austin Chamber/ACC 2013 Progress Towards Excellence Report, www.austincc.edu/publications/chamberreport

The five prerequisite math and science college courses required for entry into the project directly correlate to several of the academic competencies identified in the Allied Health Competency Model. These include knowledge of measurement and estimation, biology, anatomy and physiology. Students must achieve at least a 3.0 grade average in the five courses to continue in the program. “The mastery of these competencies is essential for the twenty rigorous clinical health sciences occupations--such as Nursing, Emergency Medical Technicians, Medical Laboratory Scientists, and Occupational Therapists--we are preparing our students for,” says Dr. Alice Sessions, Interdepartmental Assistant Dean, ACC. “We really like the ETA Allied Health Competency Model,” says Dr. Sessions. “We’ve been adapting it to our circumstances. It resonates with adult learners—people who don’t have much time at their disposal. They want the skill set to succeed in a career, and they need to know the academic, personal and workplace competencies that are necessary to achieve that. The model provides an easy-to-understand graphic depiction of what they need to succeed.”



“We’ve moved away from a lecture format,” says Dr. Sessions. “The college incorporates the competencies into its curriculum. We have visually satisfying modules for every subject. Two-thirds of the curriculum involves interactive group activities. We try to approach the same idea from a number of angles: modules, notes, readings, hands-on activities, quizzes and online instruction. Our career pathway mirrors the Building Blocks of the Allied Health Competency Model. It provides visualization for our students of the trajectory from achievement of academic competencies to gainful employment.”



* Innovative redesigned courses

The college also partners with a non-profit organization, Capital IDEA, to provide wrap-around supportive services for students in need who are accepted into the program. These students, who constitute about a third of those enrolled in the program, are assigned to a career navigator, who meets with them on a regular basis to assist with personal needs such as textbooks, childcare and transportation. “We are committed to maximizing the opportunities for all our students to succeed, in the classroom and in the workplace,” says Dr. Sessions.

Related Links

Austin Community College

<http://www.austincc.edu>

Capital IDEA

<http://www.capitalidea.org>

Seton Family of Hospitals

<http://www.seton.net>

Saint David’s Healthcare

<http://www.stdavids.com/home.aspx>