



American Career College incorporates Pearson Career Success to grow students' essential skills and professionalism and to infuse growth mindset among faculty and students alike



Pearson

About Pearson Career Success (PCS)

Pearson Career Success is a centralized learning experience that helps students discover their best career options and the skills required, develop those professional and interpersonal skills through instruction and practice, and demonstrate their skills effectively to prospective employers.

PCS includes assessments on college and career readiness and on the mindset necessary to succeed professionally. Also, PCS provides practical, expert instruction on key career development topics like: creating effective resumes and e-portfolios; offers preparation for interviewing and networking; and it prepares candidates to showcase their qualifications and competencies through work artifacts and digital credentials on skills such as communication, collaboration and teamwork, and leadership.

Challenges and goals

American Career College (ACC) adopted PCS for all 13 certificate and degree programs because it wanted a content-rich, centralized learning platform to enhance its learners' professional and essential or soft skills and to help them develop a stronger growth mindset to better overcome obstacles and challenges.

Kim Cook, ACC's Regional Director of Clinical & Career Success, says, "We were convinced that soft skills should and could be taught. We searched until we found a partner who believed as we did and a learning program that delivers for our students. Pearson Career Success is working for us where so many previous initiatives fell short of our ambitious goals."

Cook and her colleagues selected PCS because it has excellent content: a full curriculum of career development assets and instruction; a GRIT Mindset assessment and GRIT-development instruction; and digital modules on key soft skills that allows students to practice these skills and earn badges as evidence of their skill development. Also, ACC evaluates the user experience as the best available.



Key findings

In the early stages of the implementation, employers report ACC program graduates recently exposed to Pearson Career Success are transitioning into career positions with stronger essential skills and enhanced professionalism.

Instructors also say the high-quality career development and mindset content is driving student engagement along with personal and professional development.

Implementation of Pearson Career Success

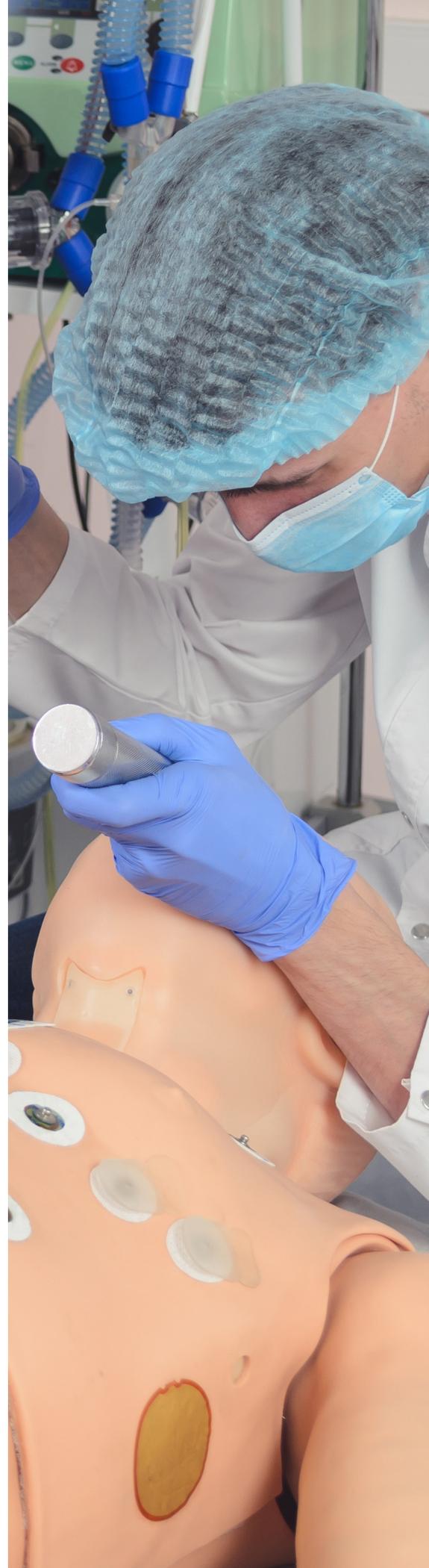
ACC's first stage consisted of a "staggered roll-out," where they started with embedding the materials in 5 of their programs. PCS materials were assigned in a number of courses across 5 programs in Allied Health career fields: Pharmacy Technician, Surgical Technician, Physical Therapy Assistant, Respiratory Therapy, Radiography Technician. These programs had Career Success assignments embedded throughout the syllabi. Pharmacy Technician is a diploma program, which encompasses 6 months of coursework and 300 hours of externship, and PCS assignments are embedded in each class for all courses. The other programs are associate degree programs, lasting approximately 2 years, and these programs cover career development topics (soft skills badges, academic success modules, GRIT, resumes) in a required Career Success course. ACC employs continuous starts throughout the year, so students encounter career preparation at different stages of their work, depending upon the academic calendar.

The courses in which PCS is used last 4 weeks (required modules for certificates) or 10 weeks (a single "term" in the Associate Degree programs). Assignments are customized for each program to reflect the needs of those students and their career goals. Students completed required assignments in the PCS modules during each lab class and were given credit upon completion of each assignment. Instructors monitored student performance during class and using the PCS dashboard that provides an overview of students' work and access to actual documents they create.

While the courses have been face-to-face in the initial rollout, ACC is changing to a "hybrid" instructional model later this year so the syllabi will be adapted to allow students to do more work outside of class rather than in the computer lab with an instructor present. Many courses consist of two lecture classes and two lab sessions a week. The instructors have been selected for their hands-on experience as professionals in these specific careers, so many do not have traditional teaching backgrounds when they start but have considerable real-world knowledge of these careers as practitioners.

A key element to this implementation was ACC's decision to emphasize GRIT instruction to help both faculty and students become aware of their capacity for overcoming challenges and reaching goals and improve their ability to do so. Dr. Paul Stoltz' model of GRIT (Growth, Resilience, Instinct, Tenacity) gave them a structure to engage students in discussions of their GRIT and strategies for growing it.

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In addition to having all faculty take the GRIT Gauge, a research-validated assessment, ACC set aside time in their annual all-faculty professional development day in January to discuss the concepts of GRIT and strategies for teaching it in their classes. After the instructors had been working with GRIT for 6 months, Dr. Paul Stoltz visited campus to train faculty and administrators on how to provide more guidance for students as they embraced a growth mindset and developed habits that would lead to greater achievement. The faculty responded warmly to this professional development workshop and planned to keep the momentum on GRIT instruction going.

Instructor experience and perception

Numerous instructors interviewed reported that PCS had “great tools and great content,” but they found the first roll-out was slowed by the time required to get used to the platform and to understand how to cover all the material, both that of the traditional courses and the new career skills material in the same amount of time. They report that as time goes on and the faculty become more familiar with the platform and the curriculum, they expect to be able to effectively cover more of the content and make greater use of PCS.

Instructors also reported that Dr. Stoltz’s presentation on how to help students grow their GRIT was inspiring and practical. They now feel much better equipped to talk about this topic in their classes and conferences with students and to direct students on how to increase their ability to overcome obstacles in school, life, and career.

Maria Armstrong, a clinical instructor in the Surgical Technology program who teaches both face-to-face and online courses, reports that she is seeing a great difference in her students’ engagement in her Career 200 course with PCS materials and the introduction of GRIT. She says her students, many of whom have 40-hour a week internships and jobs are still finding time to do much more work with GRIT and the Career materials than they have in the past, often far exceeding the required amount of writing in response to course discussion questions. Further, she sees an improvement in the quality of these responses.

She believes that sharing GRIT’s message of positivity and persistence is one of the best things educators can do to help their students move ahead with their lives.

They are being extremely thoughtful as they discuss their GRIT, their goals, and their professional skills.

— Maria Armstrong,
Clinical Instructor



Student experience and perception

Students found much of the assigned work relevant, and most indicated that they really needed the extra work on soft skills. Also, the Learning Skills modules (topics like Test-Taking, Notetaking, and Time Management) were recommended to students on an “as-needed” basis. These proved very helpful to students: one student reported that she had always had trouble with time management, but after working through the Time Management module and practicing some of the key strategies for managing her time, she showed up on time for class every day and submitted all required work on deadline. The faculty indicates they will use these skills modules more often in upcoming terms.

Conclusion

ACC has learned a number of lessons from their initial implementation of Career Success. First, they realized that this first roll-out was very ambitious on many fronts. They were adopting a new digital platform, covering new content and topics in their courses, and following a new, very rigorous syllabus. Much new work had been added into the already content-intensive courses. As they move toward implementing a schedule of blended courses, they realized they are in the process of recalibrating their sequence of assignments to work on the PCS materials since they will no longer be expected to do all work in computer labs on campus and in their classrooms.

They also feel they have a deeper, more personal understanding of GRIT now and can be more confident in presenting it to their students. For 2020, they plan to designate some faculty as “GRIT Champions,” who will work directly with Pearson staff and Dr. Stoltz to increase their understanding of GRIT concepts and pedagogy. They will lead sessions for their colleagues at the next Annual Professional Development Day in January, 2020.

Finally, they also feel they have more understanding of PCS so that, in subsequent implementations, they will continue to fine tune their roll-outs, adapt syllabi to better accommodate class time and homework expectations, and create a repertoire of new instructional strategies that will serve their students well. They regard PCS’s customizability as a very important feature that allows material and assignments to be better targeted toward what different programs and students most need. Now that the digital platform is more familiar, ACC can more easily make necessary improvements in their programs and train staff more effectively to achieve better outcomes for students.