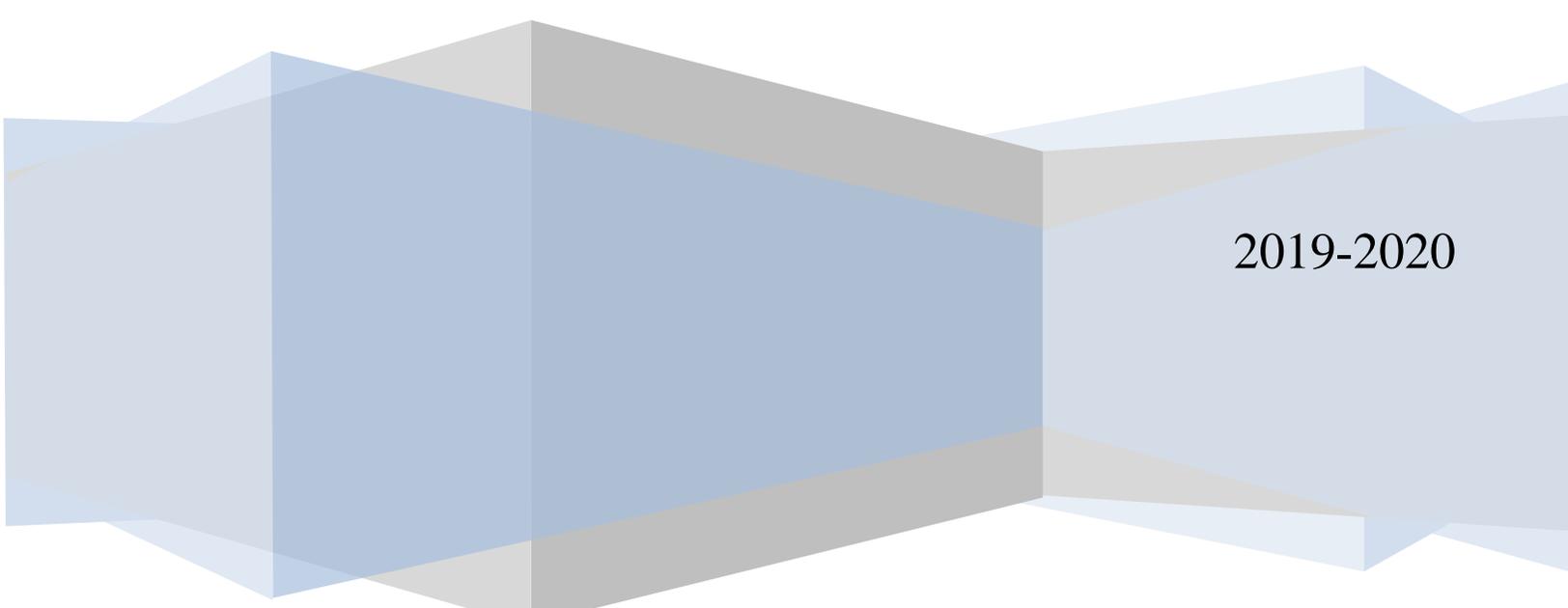


Castleton University

Title III External Evaluation Year One Report Development Institute, Inc.



2019-2020

Castleton University
TITLE III EXTERNAL EVALUATION
Year One Report
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Castleton University began its Title III Strengthening Institutions project—*Pathway to Graduation*—in October of 2019. The overall purpose of the project is to improve retention to graduation through three inter-related components: a strengthened First-Year Experience; improved teaching and learning excellence; and increased workplace readiness. With a focus on student success, Castleton will increase first-to-second year retention by 8 percentage points; increase four-year graduation rates by 5 percentage points and increase experiential learning by 14 percentage points. Additionally, the University’s Senior Exit Survey scores will show a 17-point increase in their rating of the Castleton experience as a measure of engagement and overall satisfaction.

During the inaugural year of the Title III project, the College contracted with Development Institute, a Boston consulting firm, with Dr. Katherine German, President, and her colleague, Dr. Philip Sbaratta, serving as the external evaluators. Drs. German and Sbaratta have been involved with the design, implementation, and evaluation of similar programs since 1980 and have held a variety of leadership roles within higher education over the past forty years. They are currently working with numerous institutions developing and evaluating Title III and Title V projects as well as other change efforts within higher education.

Because of restrictions caused by Covid-19 during the spring, the evaluators conducted an interim virtual assessment on July 23, 2020 followed by a virtual annual assessment on December 10, 2020. Prior to each assessment event, the evaluators reviewed the University’s overall five-year project plan and projected implementation strategies with a focus on the year

under review; subsequently additional documents relative to online registration, Connections' FYS and the FACT Plan, as well as the budget were also reviewed. During the assessments, they outlined the evaluation criteria specified in the project implementation as indicated through project objectives and anticipated results. These criteria have been incorporated into the evaluation report for use as benchmarks against which to measure the progress of the project to date.

As part of the evaluations, Drs. German and Sbaratta conducted structured interviews to assess the progress that occurred within the elements of the overall activity under development. During these discussions, the evaluators met with Kelley Beckwith, Title III Project Director, and President Jonathan Spiro as well as the following project participants to review activity development and impact as well as project organization, management, and budget:

Participant	Title
Chris Boettcher	Director of Center for Teaching and Learning
Sarah Chambers	Coordinator of Instructional Technology
Jessica Duncan	Director of Experiential Learning & Workplace Readiness
Gillian Galle	Associate Academic Dean
Amanda Richardson	Director of McNair Scholars Program & Institutional Research
Tom Mauhs-Pugh	Provost

Throughout the assessments, overall discussion focused on the achievements to date, issues that have arisen, and plans looking forward. Throughout the evaluations, participants described their involvement, accomplishments, and enthusiasm for the project. As part of the reviews, the evaluators shared their overall perceptions of project implementation, the experiences of other institutions addressing similar initiatives, and preliminary recommendations for continued development with the Title III leadership team and the President. The report which follows documents the progress of the project to date as well as the recommendations provided for consideration as the implementation process continues.

Needs Assessment

The University engaged in a thorough analysis of strengths, weaknesses, and major problems inhibiting self-sufficiency during the application development process. The analysis drew from multiple sources including IPEDS data, course evaluations, Faculty Survey, Graduating Student Exit Survey, Student Experience Survey, PERTS, and University financial records.

Building on the institution's academic, management, and fiscal strengths, *Pathway to Graduation* addresses the following six specific weaknesses in Academic Programs, Institutional Management, and Fiscal Stability that inhibit student success:

- student offerings that do not align with new delivery models or serve all student populations;
- under-utilized advising tools and inconsistent advising practices;
- inadequate staffing in professional support and insufficient institutional research capacity;
- limited support for student career readiness;
- under-utilized technology tools, and
- high tuition dependency, deferred expenditures and multiple negative external factors.

These weaknesses result in a single, major problem which serves as the focus of the project:

Only 7 out of 10 entering students are retained to the second year,
and only 4 will graduate on time.

To address this problem, the University's comprehensive development plan projects transformative improvements in the student experience from entry onward, expanded support for teaching and learning, and an intentional focus on career readiness—all aiming to increase student engagement, achievement, retention, and graduation over the next five years and beyond and increase institutional vitality.

Scope of the Project

Pathway to Graduation melds curricular reform with the development of a robust support system. To improve the student experience, an enhanced registration and orientation will include an online option along with online advising. Additionally, a revised first-year curriculum will be grounded in integrative learning theory with special emphasis on the first-year seminar and the general education program. To support these initiatives, a developmental advising model will use analytics and predictive models to monitor student progress.

Concurrently, a Teaching and Learning Center will consolidate professional development to support active learning and course redesign and delivery along with upgraded classroom technology to enhance instruction. Additionally, a Digital Learning Commons provides student support in a virtual “one-stop” that connects students with academic services and other supports. And finally, an office of Institutional Research will centralize ongoing research, assessment and data storage.

To increase workplace readiness, new financial literacy, career exploration and professional readiness curricula will be developed and coordinated with the General Education curriculum for first-year students. At the same time, experiential learning will be enhanced along with new curriculum that enables career exploration leading to a “purpose first” approach aligned with four-year academic planning.

Designed to transform the institution, by the end of Year Five, the Activity will produce significant increases in achievement, retention, graduation and engagement measured against the baseline data provided. With a commitment to institutionalize *Pathway to Graduation* upon project completion, the increases achieved in student success over the span of the project will continue to accrue into the future.

Year One Interim Assessment

The Castleton project is structured around a constant set of objectives with incremental increases anticipated over the five-year grant period; however, in the first year of implementation as the project is inaugurated, personnel hired, services established, and systems installed, improvements are not anticipated across all of the objectives. That said, this year only two of the objectives as designated using an asterisk – those addressing student perceptions of their experience and post-graduate planning and support – are expected to demonstrate any impact.

For Year One, the following metrics apply:

- Increase first-to-second year retention from 70% to 70%
- Increase 4-year graduation rate from 38% to 38%
- Improve the percent of students reporting that their experience was “excellent on senior exit survey from 28% to 30%*
- Increase the percentage of students participating in experiential learning from 68% to 68%
- Increase the number of graduating seniors reporting full-time employment, military service, volunteerism, or ongoing education from 55% to 55%
- Increase student the students reporting post-graduate planning and support from 68% to 70%.*

With the leadership team in place, essential progress on the Activity requires development work in three major areas: First-Year Experience, teaching and learning, and workplace readiness. Despite the lock down caused by the pandemic, significant progress has been made in all three major components, and, in fact, ahead of schedule on several fronts.

Component One: Strengthen the First-Year Experience involves enhanced registration and orientation, review of the First-Year Curriculum, and improved advising.

During the inaugural year a modularized online orientation using University talent has been developed in conjunction with the American Design Group (ADG). Responsive to the

individual student, the orientation provides easily accessible, useful information where and when they need it. This new orientation initiative is coupled with an onboarding process facilitated by three new Success Coaches hired with Title III funds, and four part-time Success Coaches hired with institutional funds, each assigned to first-year students. With targeted training for coaches, they quickly adapted to Zoom technology to establish and maintain contact with students. Through remote counseling from April until August, coaches interacted with all 425 entering students.

To facilitate a smooth start, a detailed registration flow chart lays out the onboarding and registration process, along with the hand-off to first-year advisors and student leaders known as SOS ambassadors once registration is completed. This process enables the staff involved to provide clear direction and direct assistance to students throughout their first year of study at Castleton University.

Concurrently, a proposal to reform the First-Year Seminar has been developed by a faculty committee working in parallel with the project. The proposed “Connections” will provide the tenets of a first-year seminar addressing college success strategies embedded within selected courses. This will be the first of three yearly integrative courses proposed for inclusion in the program. To support the six-section pilot of this concept in the fall, the faculty have defined the following six course goals to strengthen student abilities to:

1. Read, write, speak, listen and think critically;
2. Appreciate the joys as well as the challenges of academic work;
3. Understand that the freedom of college life brings with it responsibilities as well as opportunities;
4. Identify and access support services to help them succeed;
5. Learn to engage with new ideas and perspectives, and become informed, constructive citizens; and
6. Become life-long learners.

The proposed goals have been aligned with the overall goals of the general education program to ensure that the program provides a sustained introduction to the life and values of the university as it supports students' efforts to transition from high school to college successfully:

1. encourage students to make connections throughout academic courses, cultural events, and co-curricular activities;
 2. engage students in a wide range of disciplines, leading to adaptable and flexible thinking;
 3. teach students to search for, critically appraise and implement knowledge;
 4. prepare students to convey ideas through multiple means of expression;
 5. prime students to value different perspectives and cultures;
 6. promote students to be engaged as active citizens on campus and beyond; and
 7. stimulate intellectual curiosity, preparing students to be life-long learners.
- (<http://catalog.castleton.edu/content.php?catoid=18&navoid=1515>; circa 2018)

These goals are guiding a broader reform of the general education curriculum as a whole. The program is clearly outmoded and unwieldy; the development of a staged integrative component for the program is consistent with current research and theory on general education program efficacy. This needed reform is expected to be completed and voted upon by faculty in the fall.

Students completing the Connections pilots will be advised by their Connections instructor until they receive an advisor in their majors in the spring. With a strong focus on '30 to Finish' at the University, Connections will need to be synchronized with efforts to support student career exploration and development during the freshman year.

Meanwhile, work has begun on the advising process itself. Degree plans have been developed for all majors along with the students' individual Financial, Academic, Career, Transformation (FACT) Plans. The FACT Plan will be offered as a pilot for six FYS Connections courses this fall and is divided into three categories with specified delivery options and outcomes: Individual Assessment, Career Exploration, and Financial Literacy. Complementing these efforts has been the installation of Aviso retention/advising software. Now in Phase 1, the Connections faculty will pilot the new advising software this fall.

Component Two: Improve Teaching and Learning Excellence involves the establishment of a Faculty Teaching Center and a Digital Learning Commons, the creation of model classrooms and upgraded classroom technology, and the establishment of an Office of Institutional Research.

The second component focuses on teaching and learning with the centerpiece being the development of Center for Teaching and Learning. While space options are under consideration, the main professional development activity has occurred virtually during the pandemic, moving from integrative learning concepts aligned with the Gen Ed reform to remote teaching with an emphasis on Canvas, Zoom, and online learning. To that end, throughout the summer, a variety of professional development opportunities were held. Sixty faculty members undertook a self-directed course on online learning and LMS course design. To pace the work, the faculty members worked in small groups facilitated by peer faculty mentors. Weekly virtual workshops were conducted with 50-60 faculty and staff participants examining pedagogy and best practices, a process that will continue into the fall. At the same time, Gen Ed reform will move forward, and returning to its original mission, the Center is expected to play an important role in implementing the integrative learning elements of the new program. The Faculty Assembly's standing Teaching and Scholarship Committee will serve in an advisory role and actively support the faculty engagement. Additionally, three instructional design consultants were hired with Title III funds to further facilitate the faculty's transition to remote instruction for the fall semester.

Meanwhile, work has also progressed on the development of upgraded classrooms to ensure that they are on track to enable active learning. Two specific classrooms have been outfitted with integrated video projection systems, document cameras, and Blu-ray players, all controlled through a uniform system with a central administrative hub. Beyond these classrooms, a full interactive teleconferencing upgrade is in the works and work has progressed

on the development of an active learning classroom and teaching lab complete with moveable furniture, electronic whiteboards, and electronic teaching tools.

And finally, to support data-driven decision-making, an Office of Institutional Research has been established. Though in its infancy, the intent is to evaluate the effectiveness of assessment instruments; centralize data collection, storage, and reporting; and promote continuous assessment.

Component Three: Improve and Increase Workplace Readiness addresses the development of new financial literacy curriculum, enhanced experiential learning and workplace readiness, and career exploration underscored by a ‘purpose first’ approach implemented through four-year degree maps with attendant advising.

The third component builds on the new degree plans, the new Aviso advising/retention system, and the development of the FACT plan. To support the financial component of the FACT plan, the University purchased iGrad, a comprehensive software application that addresses money management, including paying for college, as well as career exploration and development and beyond. Additionally, to support the expansion of career readiness, the University has begun to expand upon its investment in experiential learning, e.g., co-op, internships, apprenticeships, service learning, study abroad, and civic engagement. With 99 designated experiential learning courses currently offered in 33 of 75 majors, the goal is to offer a required credited experiential learning course in each major. As the effort progresses, expansion of career readiness options is expected to grow with work underway on the refinement of the internship protocol, the expansion of web listings, the development of a career readiness toolkit housed in Canvas for Connections, and the initial realization of the FACT plan in the fall for the designated pilot courses.

And lastly, as part of the overall PTG effort, an all-faculty and staff Communication Day was held on August 10th at which participants will focus on collective efforts to foster

institutional change and identify the ways in which each community member contributes to student success and educational mission.

Year One Assessment

The first year is critical in establishing the foundation for the five-year term of the grant. Many initiatives need to be started simultaneously, requiring intensive planning and development. As mentioned previously in the Interim Report, the project is structured around a constant set of objectives with incremental increases anticipated over the five-year grant period. Overall, the following six objectives establish intended outcomes:

- Increase first-to-second year retention from 70% to 70%
- Increase 4-year graduation rate from 38% to 38%
- Improve the percent of students reporting that their experience was “excellent on senior exit survey from 28% to 30%*
- Increase the percentage of students participating in experiential learning from 68% to 68%
- Increase the number of graduating seniors reporting full-time employment, military service, volunteerism, or ongoing education from 55% to 55%
- Increase student the students reporting post-graduate planning and support from 68% to 70%.*

For Year One, two of the objectives – those addressing student perceptions of their experience and post-graduate planning and support as designated by an asterisk – are expected to demonstrate any impact. Despite the upending of the normal life at the University caused by the pandemic, Castleton has been able to make substantial progress on the three central components of the project: First-Year Experience, teaching and learning, and workplace readiness.

Component One: Strengthen the First-Year Experience involves enhanced registration and orientation, review of the First-Year Curriculum, and improved advising.

Using Slate, the CRM Platform, several onboarding processes have been developed including application, orientation, and registration with the assistance of a coach, and finally a “handoff” to a faculty advisor. As part of this effort, American Design Group was hired to develop an online orientation, using University talent. In Fall 2020, approximately half the students participated in the virtual orientation; however, in Spring 2021, orientation will be required of all new students.

In terms of the first-year curriculum, the current Connections course is being enhanced with the development of the F.A.C.T. – the Financial-Academic-Career-Transformation - Plan as a guidepost for the student journey. Under development in Year One, the FACT plan was piloted with 108 students to develop financial literacy and wellness, academic exploration, and career readiness and understanding. This individualized student plan begins with assessment and goal setting in each of the three designated areas and leads the students to develop their own paths toward self-understanding, actions, and awareness in the outlined three specific content areas.

Presently, this initiative is drafted to allow ease of offering in an ‘a-la-carte style’ to be incorporated in the first year seminar experience. Connections Instructors can select from the sessions offered within the listed content areas. The F.A.C.T. Plan in full capacity consists of six in-person staff/instructor led sessions and ends in a collective academic showcase in the form of a campus-wide major and minor fair in the spring semester. Depending on student need and professor/Connections group goals, this initiative can also be adapted to restrict face-to-face session time. In its most limited capacity, two in-person sessions can be offered with the remainder of the program sessions and content to be offered as asynchronous and independent

learning via video and email presentations of information. A break-out of the individual sessions identifies the intended outcomes:

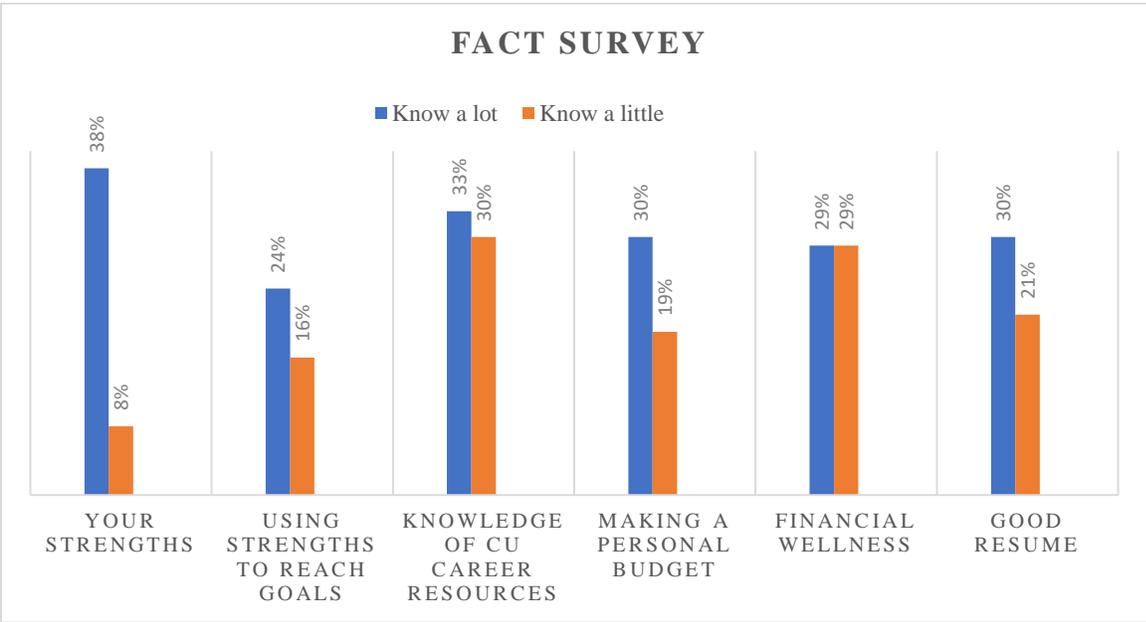
Category	Sessions/Activities	Student Outcomes
Individual Assessment	a.) Gallup Strengths Assessment b.) Gallup Strengths Follow up Activity c.) Motivated Skills Cards Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding of individual strengths to assist in determining or confirming major selection and how to best align with career goals. ▪ Further develop personal academic, career, and personal goals. Align strengths, values and interests with career path. ▪ To identify motivated skills and align with potential career paths using ONET OnLINE.
Career Readiness and Exploration	a.) Career Tool Kit: Resume, cover letter, references, LinkedIn profile, NACE career competencies. b.) Bucket list activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop skills to attain employment using professional product. Gain awareness of staff supports offered at CU. Product of resume and cover letter. ▪ Ability to envision and further career paths.
Financial Literacy and Wellness	a.) iGrad introduction b.) iGrad challenge (iGrad is a financial literacy platform that offers self-paced courses on understanding and financial wellness beginning with assessment followed by in person support, courses, assessments, calculators, counseling, data tracking, community, job and scholarship boards, articles, and tailors the user experience based on history and select preferences.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase understanding of financial literacy and individual financial wellness. ▪ Create budget. Understanding of student loan repayment. ▪ Ability to explore basic financial wellness software.

In addition, each core session has been aligned with germane general education outcomes:

Connections Core Session #1: Gallup Strengths Assessment	Connections Core Session #2: Career Tool Kit	Connections Core Session #3: iGrad Introduction
2 engages students in a wide range of disciplines, leading to adaptable and flexible thinking	2 engages students in a wide range of disciplines, leading to adaptable and flexible thinking	2 engages students in a wide range of disciplines, leading to adaptable and flexible thinking
3 teaches students to search for,	3 teaches students to search for,	3 teaches students to search for,

critically appraise and implement knowledge	critically appraise and implement knowledge	critically appraise and implement knowledge
5 primes students to value different perspectives and cultures	6 promotes students to be engaged as active citizens on campus and beyond	4 prepares students to convey ideas through multiple means of expression
6 promotes students to be engaged as active citizens on campus and beyond		6 promotes students to be engaged as active citizens on campus and beyond
7 stimulates intellectual curiosity, preparing students to be life-long learners		7 stimulates intellectual curiosity, preparing students to be life-long learners

To assess the pilot, a satisfaction survey was administered. The first part of the survey, asked students to rate the increase of their knowledge of key concepts using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 representing "Know a lot" to 4 representing "Don't know much." The following chart compares the percentage of the highest score (1=Know a lot) with a weaker score (3=Know a little):



From the survey the "Know a little" response probably is an area of further investigation. Two categories seem to stand out—knowledge of CU career resources and financial wellness. As the University collects additional data, an analysis may suggest adjustments to the curriculum.

Connected to the work on the FACT Plan, a work group has focused on enhancing advising. To establish a clear philosophy of advising, the following action plan has been developed for implementation in the spring:

- **By Jan. 15:** Review the literature (36 articles) on higher education advising approaches. (Incorporate other resources if appropriate.) Teams of three will each review six articles and recommend any that are especially relevant for a short list.
- **By Jan. 29:** Determine common bibliography of articles to serve as common resources for the committee's work.
- **By Feb. 12:** Determine the philosophical advising approach that is the best fit for Castleton based on the literature and submit to the Faculty Assembly Executive Council for consideration at Feb. 18 meeting.
- **By March 2:** Faculty Assembly considers endorsement of Joint Committee's recommendation for a philosophical advising approach, fulfilling the Joint Advising Charge.

Once the preferred approach has been identified, an implementation timetable has also been developed with a series of next steps identified for Year Two.

As part of this effort, the FSSE – Faculty Survey of Student Engagement - was conducted with a topical survey on advising. The results would suggest that the faculty are model advisors, ranking advising as a top priority. With the exception of having enough time to do advising, the faculty report that they are engaged and work with students in a variety of ways. That said, while the data does not appear very helpful in terms of development the advising model, it does appear to bode well for its subsequent implementation.

Component Two: Improve Teaching and Learning Excellence involves the establishment of a Faculty Teaching Center and a Digital Learning Commons, the creation of model classrooms and upgraded classroom technology, and the establishment of an Office of Institutional Research.

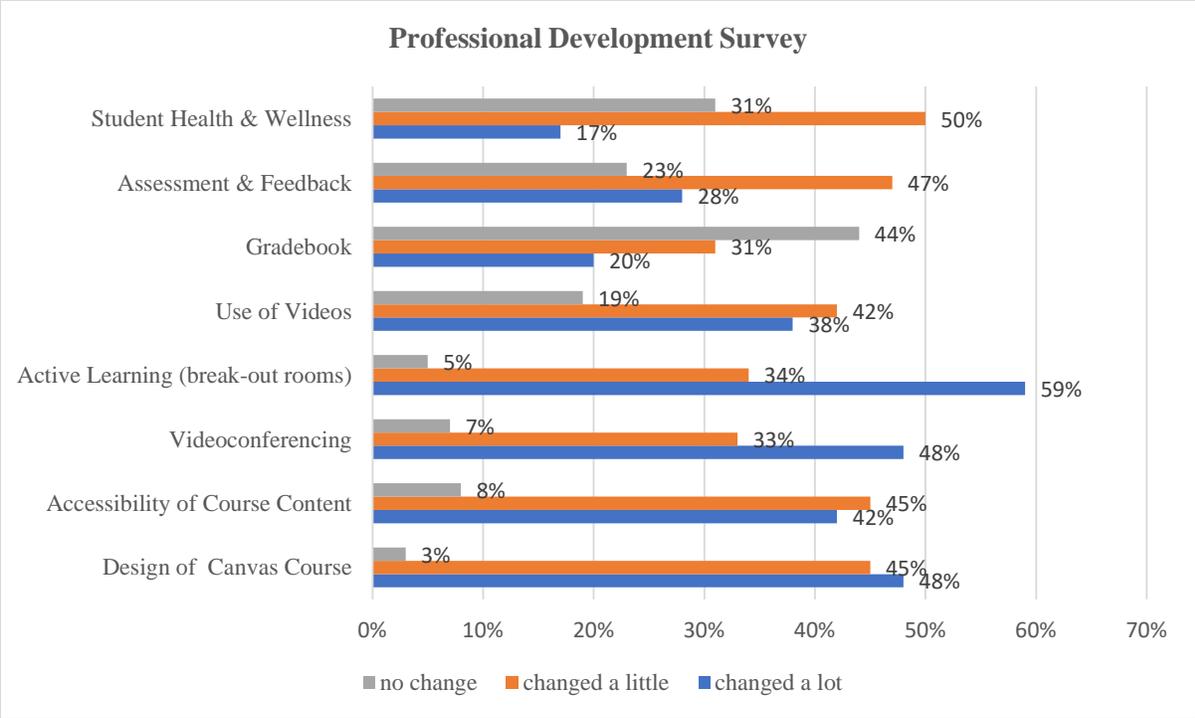
A central initiative of this component is the articulation of the General Education Outcomes entitled “Connections” particularly as related to the three Connections seminars that

span the student’s academic journey. The following table presents the general education map with information literacy threaded throughout the program:

CONNECTIONS - General Education Program		
Transferable Skills	Areas of Understanding	Seminars
English Composition (3cr.)	Mathematical Understanding (3cr.)	Connections Seminar 1: Creating Connections (4 cr.) <i>(transition to college-level inquiry and engagement; reflection on 4 Soundings events; initiating Connections Portfolio)</i>
Effective Speaking (3cr.)	Scientific Understanding (3cr.)	
Writing Intensive (WI) 2 courses (6cr.)	Social/ Behavioral Understanding (6cr.)	Connections Seminar 2: Critical Connections (3 cr.) <i>(critical reading and discussion on important issues across the curriculum, reflection on 4 Soundings events; adding to Connections Portfolio)</i>
Speaking Intensive (SI) course (3cr.)	Aesthetic Understanding (6cr.)	
Computing Intensive (CI) course (3cr.)	World Views: Cultural/Historical/ Philosophical Understanding (6cr.)	Connections Seminar 3: Culminating Connections (1-3cr.) <i>(projects integrating curricular and co-curricular experiences; reflection on 4 Soundings events; finalizing Connections Portfolio with culminating essay)</i>
To ensure breadth of experience, students can take no more than one course with the same prefix for credit throughout the “Areas of Understanding.”		

The culminating element is the digital Connections Portfolio, which includes evidence of student learning outcomes and student reflections. With this groundwork, the University has established a timetable for implementation covering subsequent years of this grant.

At the same time, the pandemic required intensive professional development to effect the shift to online learning. With the assistance and timely support of three instructional designers, faculty adjusted their teaching to incorporate synchronous and asynchronous elements; in addition, 99 faculty participated in a series of nine workshops hosted by the Center for Teaching and Learning. An assessment of the professional development was conducted by the Office of Institutional Research in Summer 2020 with the results highlighted below:



The results indicate that the workshops appear to have had a significant impact; however, it is somewhat difficult to interpret the results since faculty perceived they were already doing some of the items being rated. Based on this data, it would appear that workshops on remote course design, videoconferencing and break out rooms produced the most “change.”

Component Three: Improve and Increase Workplace Readiness addresses the development of new financial literacy curriculum, enhanced experiential learning and workplace readiness, and career exploration underscored by a ‘purpose first’ approach implemented through four-year degree maps with attendant advising.

Much of the work completed this year in Component Three has been fully integrated into the Financial-Academic-Career-Transformation (F.A.C.T.) Plan, a learning experience which addresses the development of financial literacy and wellness, academic exploration, and career readiness and understanding through an the creation of individualized student plans. To support this initiative the Director of Experiential Learning and Workplace Readiness and her team assisted with the creation of a F.A.C.T. Plan Career Services Toolkit with a series of activities to support the development of an initial resume and cover letter and the use of CollegeCentral.com,

a national career resource center. This inaugural session will subsequently be augmented with additional learning experiences addressing the identification of references, the development of a LinkedIn profile, and the acquisition of NACE competencies to prepare them for internship and employment opportunities related to their individual goals. Augmenting the focus on career services are additional sessions addressing the assessment of students' individual strengths using the Gallup Clifton Strengths Assessment, an instrument which provides personal insight relevant to career exploration and development, and sessions addressing the development of financial literacy with access to iGrad to support the learning experience. These three initial sessions provide an entrée to an expansive opportunity for personal exploration, linking personal strengths with career and financial considerations – a personal growth trifecta! In short, the continuing development and integration of the three key components of the F.A.C.T. Plan provide an essential opportunity to engage students in determining a personal path to the future. Initiated in the first year seminar through six sessions and culminating in an academic showcase at the end of the year, students in the initial pilot indicated that they “knew a lot” about their own personal strengths, though not necessarily how to use them to reach their goals, and that they had much more to learn about careers and financial literacy.

Additionally, as mentioned at the mid-point of the year, Castleton has begun to expand upon its investment in experiential learning - co-op, internships, apprenticeships, service learning, study abroad, and civic engagement – with the goal of offering a required credited experiential learning course in each of the University's 75 majors. To that end, work is already underway on the refinement of the internship protocol and the expansion of web listings. Off to a great start, the implementation of the career readiness initiative will continue in future years as

efforts to integrate financial literacy intensify and alignment with program maps and advising proceeds.

Across each of the three components, Castleton University has made significant progress despite the impact of the pandemic on the University community. However, what is most impressive is the level of engagement and collaboration established throughout the inaugural year of the project, a hallmark that bodes well for the future both in terms of project impact and ultimate University ownership.

Impact

Now at the end of the first year of implementation each of the three components has made impressive progress despite the turmoil of COVID-19. Moreover, developments within each component have been viewed systematically, each making its contribution to the overall student trajectory, whether on-site or on-line. And finally, the leadership of the project wisely pivoted to focus development efforts on the virtual world, ensuring essential support for students, faculty and staff as the learning environment is transformed. Coaches, orientation, Connections, and advising are poised to strengthen the first-year student experience; institutional research and professional development have already begun to impact teaching and learning; and the investment in financial literacy, FACT planning and career readiness is sure to excite continuing students. Hard to believe it's only the first year of implementation!

Project Management

Castleton University's Title III project was strategically managed and fully integrated into the institutional structure with the Provost of the University, Tom Mauhs-Pugh, assuming overall leadership responsibility. The Title III Project Director, Kelley Beckwith, reports directly to the Provost on the project with oversight for student success, and works directly with

the other members of the Leadership Team: Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, Chris Boettcher; Director of Institutional Research, Amanda Richardson; and Director of Experiential Learning and Workplace Readiness, Jessica Duncan, as well as Gillian Galle, Associate Academic Dean and Sarah Chambers, Coordinator of Instructional Technology. The Project Director's responsibilities include the organization, management and oversight of the project in its entirety with full authority and autonomy to administer the project, managing all project initiatives, expenditures and personnel. In this capacity she promulgates Title III policies and procedures, establishes and supervises data collection and reporting, approves all grant expenditures, supervises the evaluation process, and engages the University community's support for the project. Director Beckwith also serves as the institutional liaison with the Program Officer, Yolande Badarou.

A Title III Leadership Team consisting of these principals provides oversight for the project, assesses progress, and provides input on implementation, modification and policy decisions as needed, addressing issues impeding progress and opportunities to accelerate and enhance impact. Responsible for all components of the Activity, the Team members address project tasks and refine implementation strategies to meet challenges and ensure progress within the University culture. In accordance with the Policies and Procedures Handbook developed to ensure effective project management, staff hired for Title III positions are selected in accordance with established hiring procedures at the University with position descriptions and annual evaluations on file for all program personnel. Those paid directly by the project or contributing their time in accordance with the project plan also maintain time and effort tallies to document their efforts in accordance with federal regulations.

All program expenditures are initiated by the appropriate individuals, reviewed for compliance with Title III regulations, processed through the Project Director, and approved by the Chief Budget and Finance Officer of the University and/or Vermont State College System (VSCS) officers to ensure compliance with the approved budget. All documentation relative to expenditures is maintained on file by the Project Director or by the VSCS Grants Accounting Office. The budget is reviewed and reconciled as necessary on a monthly basis, and audited periodically. As of September 30, 2020, \$324,923 of the \$449,083 first year budget was spent, leaving \$124,000 to be carried over into the second year of implementation due to delays in hiring, technology installation, and the establishment of the Center for Teaching and Learning. With a second year budget of \$449,337, including carryover a total of \$573,337 is available for investment in the project going forward.

With the start of the project and the establishment of the Office of Institutional Research all relevant data has been stored in a data warehouse to ensure appropriate benchmarks through the implementation of the project. A comprehensive evaluation plan outlines the data to be examined to assess increased retention and graduation, as well as participation, satisfaction and engagement. Additional metrics developed to augment the evaluation plan as outlined will be identified as the implementation progresses and impact intensifies. By the end of the five-year effort, the Institutional Research Office will document substantive change resulting from the full realization of the project activity, both in terms of impact on the key goals and objectives and in terms of the various initiatives undertaken.

Reports addressing program accomplishments are prepared and shared regularly throughout the University community. A Title III website houses the project and artifacts of implementation including minutes of meetings, reports and other documents such as annual

performance and evaluation reports. As such, the project has been fully integrated into the institution with widespread involvement and extensive support, a hallmark of Castleton University.

Conclusions, Commendations and Recommendations

Clearly much has happened with regard to the implementation of *Pathway to Graduation* at Castleton University despite the pandemic in the first year of the project! Each component has moved forward apace with faculty and staff – educators all – aboard. Moreover, the University’s ability to pivot and refocus key initiatives to respond to the current situation has been commendable. Kudos to the project leadership, the implementation team, and all of the faculty and staff for their engagement and responsiveness!

Because Title III is a five-year effort, the first year tends to set the agenda for the duration of the effort; it establishes the infrastructure to strengthen the institution and creates a framework for sustained progress during the grant period and beyond. It is clear from the accomplishments in this first year of implementation that the Castleton University project has both effective leadership and enthusiastic faculty and staff participation. The Team has identified the ways and means of planning, implementing and assessing impact both within and across the multiple initiatives included in the Activity, working in a collaborative manner that will pay off as the project moves forward. As a result, the onboarding experience has significantly improved as has the clarity of the First Year Experience, the cohesion of the General Education Program, and the potential of the Workplace Readiness. Clearly the implementation of strategies employed during this initial year will make a significant difference in the student experience going forward.

However, as with any new project, getting started presents challenges as unanticipated issues arise which require attention as the project continues. At the mid-point of the year it was

suggested that the Title III Team focus on coach training, advising model identification, the FACT plan integration, and the Center for Teaching and Learning, all of which have made substantive progress. Now as the project moves through the second year of implementation, the Title III Team might give consideration to the following additional recommendations:

- First, several key initiatives are underway in terms of planning and development. As this work continues, it will be important to establish links among the initiatives so that coaching, advising, and FACT planning are inter-related and moving together.
- Second, Aviso, the alert system has gotten off the ground with approximately 4,000 alerts, which is terrific! However, as the campus gets back to normal, it will be critical to ensure an effective rollout so that the process of alert, intervention, and feedback becomes a part of the responsibilities of faculty and support staff as a matter of course.
- Third, as suggested in the Interim Report, the nascent Center for Teaching and Learning should develop both a long-term plan as well as a tactical plan for the short-term. Within this work, clarification of what the University expects faculty to do will be important to articulate and align with the development of appropriate structures to accomplish the work.
- Finally, with the data that have been collected on the FSSE and internal surveys, it would be useful to critically analyze the results to help determine where *Pathway* resources should be mounted in order to produce desired outcomes.

Throughout this inaugural year, despite the pandemic, Castleton University has successfully implemented *Pathway to Graduation* with each of the three components of the Activity established to provide a solid foundation for the continued development that will occur in the ensuing four years. Building on this strong start, the Title III Leadership Team is challenged to move ahead expeditiously, creating whole cloth from the threads that have been spun from the start to increase the impact on student persistence and retention.

Congratulations to the faculty and staff of the Castleton University Title III Team for their creativity, tenacity, enthusiasm and collaborative spirit!

Now let's see how far you can take the *Pathway to Graduation* in the year ahead!