FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

DOCTORATE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

CELEBRATING **10** YEARS

DCCL Dissertations: Making an *IMPACT!*

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF DCCL DISSERTATION RESEARCH

Where We Started

When Ferris' Doctorate in Community College Leadership (DCCL) program welcomed its first students in 2010, most of us never envisioned what the program would look like in 2020, the talented students we'd prepare, the successes we'd have, and definitely not the incredible volume of valuable, scholarly work our students would produce.

The DCCL program prides itself on providing a strong applied focus, emphasizing effective practice informed by theory. Our program and our students are future oriented, professionally networked, strategic and relevant, and participate actively in a global educational community. Their academic work reflects these features.

DCCL began in 2010 with an all-Michigan based cohort and started its 13th cohort — the 2nd Texas-based cohort — in January 2020. Over these 10 years, the program has continued to impact community colleges across the country with the research, solutions, and innovations reflected in our graduates' dissertation work.

DCCL Dissertations

As part of our 10th year Anniversary Celebrations, we'd like to highlight the dissertations produced by our students. In these quarterly reports, we'll summarize a selection of these — describing the work and the implications of the studies and the solutions their work embodies. At the time of this first quarterly newsletter, the number of completed, published DCCL dissertations is 112, with another dozen going through final revisions, and another dozen moving ever closer to the magical Defense Date. By the time this 10th year anniversary celebration concludes in March 2021, the number of completed DCCL dissertations should reach 150.

That's a lot of dissertations to celebrate! So, what's the best way to handle this task? Describe them by cohort, or maybe by methodology? While those organizational methods would provide an interesting picture, possibly more impactful is looking at them by their focus: What areas of the community college did the students examine? What problems did they address?

Following that pattern, this first report focuses on the dissertations that studied a wide range of student success programming: from first-year courses to program-based initiatives, advising, and special population support. Our next issue describes the dissertations that examined effective teaching and learning, as well as innovations supporting teaching and learning.

A note from the DCCL Program Director, Dr Roberta Teahen:

From its initial conception, the DCCL program was designed to be relevant, practical, and applied. When the late Dr Robert Ewigleben pitched the idea to Ferris' president, Dr David Eisler, these concepts were at the center of his vision.

Given the emphasis on relevance, DCCL learners were encouraged to conduct research that would enhance and advance the effectiveness of their colleges. In that same vein, Ferris' DCCL was among the first in the nation to encourage and support the product dissertation.

Over the past 10 years, we have built a program that instills a culture of learning and contributes to scholarship for application. Our dissertation research holds great promise for maximizing our impact on students, colleges, and communities across the nation.

We are making a difference.

The third report discusses the important questions surrounding organizational culture, institutional strategies, and institutional approaches. The fourth, final report centers on leadership: starting with examining leadership development and competencies and concluding by listening to the voices of leaders as they share their journeys, challenges, and legacies.

These clusters aren't magical: many of the dissertations would fit in more than one category. But they will, at least, provide a starting point for this journey. Please join us as we celebrate our graduates' work.

STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAMMING

Research into student success programming of the community college is by far the largest group of DCCL dissertations. The number is so large, in fact, that one "cluster," program-based student success initiatives, found its home in the effective Teaching and Learning category (where we'll discuss them next issue).

The First Year Experience

Several DCCL dissertations examined the success of existing First Year Experience (FYE) courses. Two students from the first DCCL cohort completed research on broader aspects of FYE. Tanya McFadden examined award-winning FYE courses and programs to identify twelve "gold standard" best practices.

Kathryn Flewelling examined existing FYE courses and programs and developed a model addressing the needs of first-generation students in rural colleges. Her model adapted the components of several existing FYE models and re-designed these into a 6-part construct allowing these students to overcome the barriers created by their socio-economic and geographic backgrounds and supporting them throughout the entire academic year.

Three students from Cohort One studied the impact of FYE programming on various aspects of their institution's successes. Lilly Anderson (C1) examined the curricular topics covered by her institution's FYE course, and the perceptions of students and faculty about which contributed the most to students' persistence and completion. Anderson's study indicated that social and academic integration, skill development, and academic and career planning were significant learning objectives for the FYE course and contributed to student persistence.

Anderson's C1 colleague, Naomi DeWinter, also examined her institution's FYE course, to determine the effect of the course on student motivation and grit. While no direct correlation could be determined between students' motivation/grit scores and course completion, qualitative analysis identified many positive gains including use of college resources, focus on career goals, and social integration.

Another Cohort 1 student, Cindy Seel, studied her institution's FYE course and its effect on student engagement. The research found the course to be effective in meeting the four institutional goals, but also identified several opportunities for enhancing the course's effectiveness by modifying course content, structure, and delivery methods.

The First Year Experience

(from top: McFadden, Flewelling, Anderson, DeWinter, Seel, Wong, and Moore)

Lam Wong (C4) also studied the impact of his institution's FYE program on the retention rates of its students and examined several interrelated retention data points. Wong determined that, while the FYE program didn't seem to have significant impact on student retention, the outcomes of the FYE success seminar were significantly connected to retention rates. Students who passed the FYE seminar had higher retention rates than those who failed; and full-time students had higher retention rates than part-time students.

Cohort 5 student, Brooke Moore, also focused on her institution's existing FYE model and investigated the effect of using peer educators to support student growth and engagement. While the quantitative data did not indicate significant impact, qualitative measures identified positive impacts and suggested adjustments for future iterations of the course. The peer educators in the study gave valuable input on improving the overall first year experience.

Advising

A key component of student success programming is an institution's advising process. The DCCL students who had advising as the focus of their dissertations evaluated institutional programs, proposed enhanced advising models, and provided tools to improve advising. An innovative option for DCCL dissertations is the creation of a "product": a solution intended to fill a void, develop opportunities, or create materials for a larger community college population. Three of the dissertations in this group fit into that category.

Advising

(from top: Orbits, Hoffhines, Crockett, Yancho, Piriano, Godish, and Kattuah-Snyder)

First, two DCCL students evaluated use of the case management advising model. Liz Orbits (C2) examined the supportive elements provided by the case management approach needed especially by nontraditional students. By examining two institutions' use of the model, she identified the key elements supporting retention and completion for nontraditional students, including intrusive outreach, collaborative relationships with a caring institutional agent, career assessment, value clarification, short- and long-term goal development, and navigation of the postsecondary system.

Kris Hoffhines, from the Harper College (HC) cohort, also evaluated the case management model, focusing on the impact of the model on student persistence, as measured by perceptions of students, advisors, and counselors and re-enrollment from one semester to the next. Her research also supported the importance of rapport between student and advisor/counselor, proactive communication, and creating an academic plan.

Mecha Crockett (C5) examined the features of the successful TRIO advising model that, if applied to the institution's entire student population, could enhance student retention and completion. These features include ongoing advising relationships and communication, and institutional support for advisors in the form of training and robust advising systems.

The three product dissertations that focused on advising provided a range of solutions to help institutions in their efforts to provide effective advising support for students.

Mari Yancho (C1) developed a 3-part assessment tool to develop the advising skills of new academic advisors. The tool reinforced advisors' knowledge of the institution's general education requirements, specific degree program requirements, and ability to review academic transcripts and develop accurate academic plans.

In a co-authored product dissertation, Sara Piriano and Jennifer Godish (HC) supported the needs of the institution's newly adopted Guided Pathways model by developing a training program and guide for faculty advisors. They created the faculty guide to address gaps in the Guided Pathways model where faculty need training to provide career-focused advising, especially for undecided students.

The third product developed in this group also supports the academic advising that is a foundation of Guided Pathways. Laurie Kattuah-Snyder created a guide for advisors that disassembled the existing registration model of academic advising and presented ways to assess and redesign academic advising services to improve student success outcomes. Kattuah-Snyder's guide provides advisors with assessment exercises and implementation practices, including activities and checklists.

Support for Specific Populations

Understanding the needs of their students and providing essential support systems is the mission of the student services divisions. When the populations have unique needs or represent special populations, these support systems must be flexible and, more importantly, grounded in a thorough understanding of the complexities within these populations.

Linda Holoman (C1) researched the lived experiences of underrepresented minorities who graduated from a community college with a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) degree or certificate, focusing on their experiences beginning in developmental mathematics courses and extending through their completion of a STEM credential.

Also focusing on underrepresented minority students in STEM programs, Moaty Fayek examined the barriers and influencers for African American and Latinx students in completing STEM programs. Using a mixed-methods approach, Fayek focused on students' lack of interest in STEM fields, the motivation that led some to pursue STEM careers, and the barriers or obstacles that discouraged others from doing the same.

Parents of underrepresented students seeking STEM careers were the focus of Veronica Wilkerson-Johnson's (C3) product dissertation. Understanding the importance of family support and encouragement for this population, Wilkerson-Johnson developed a primer to help the parents advocate and support their children's career aspirations.

(from left: Holoman, Fayek, and Wilkerson-Johnson)

Focusing on the creative side of STEM students, Mara Fulmer (C2) examined how the creative process, learned through college visual and performing arts courses, can affect academic success and what impact college arts experience can have on STEM or other non-arts career success. Fulmer's research indicated that experiential arts courses can strengthen skills in patience, persistence, improved communication, collaboration, and understanding complex systems.

The motivation to pursue careers in the healthcare system was the focus of Romona Williams' (C3) dissertation study. Williams explored the effects of the Great Recession (2007-09) on enrollment in three nursing and health science programs, assessing whether the recession was a motivating factor for students selecting academic training in these fields and a career with economic security, stable employment, and opportunities for advancement.

Wanda Hudson's (C4) dissertation study compared college preparation of students from traditional high schools and those completing high school degrees through cyber schools. While her research indicated lower levels of college-readiness, the evolving nature of these schools and the students electing to attend them suggests a more complex picture. Hudson's research provides community colleges with recommendations for assessing the students' readiness for college courses and the college environment.

Kimberly Klein (C5) examined the lived experiences of seven Muslim American women students to better understand the barriers affecting their persistence and completion. These women strongly identify as members of multiple groups based on their religion, race, ethnicity, gender, class, and family role; understanding how the complex intersectionality of their identities affected their decisions about education and career as well as their comfort level in the college environment can help community colleges provide the important supports they need.

Ida Short (C5) examined internal and external factors that influenced persistence and completion for twelve African American men who had been involved with the criminal justice system. A major finding of the study was the importance of family support in helping these men attend, persist, and complete.

Tina Hummons (C6) also researched the supports community colleges provide for African American male students. Hummons explored the experiences of 14 students in their journey to earn a post-secondary credential, focusing on institutional responsiveness to their needs as an underrepresented and marginalized group.

Jennifer Bell (HC) focused her research on the experiences and needs of nontraditional adult learners in the community college environment. Bell's research explored the experiences of nine nontraditional students with a high school equivalency credential who successfully transitioned to college. These students' experiences emphasized the importance of the community college's support system, including financial support, dedicated faculty and advisors, and socio-academic integration, and the need to overcome institutional barriers, including unfamiliar college culture and lack of adequate information.

Dustin Heuerman (C3) also examined the needs of nontraditional students and provided a product solution in the form of a completion
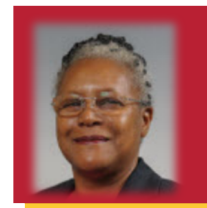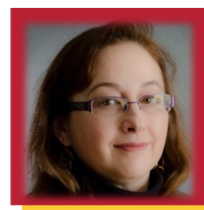
Supporting Specific Populations

(from top: Fulmer, Williams, Hudson, Klein, Short, Hummons, Bell, Heuerman, Harris, and Countryman)

program designed especially for these students. Heuerman's plan includes critical components to encourage nontraditional student retention and completion, including orientation, a student success course, mentoring, work-study, and academic and social support.

Student-athletes come to community colleges to represent their schools on the playing fields and in athletic arenas, but they also come to advance their education. Sedgwick Harris (C6) developed a cluster of services designed to address the specific needs of student athletes and help community colleges monitor and support their progress and growth.

Within the larger category of nontraditional student populations is a subset of female students with their own set of needs and barriers to overcome in their attempts to earn a college education. Toni Countryman (C6) explored the efforts of community colleges to address these needs and provide essential support systems. Built on a foundation of the best practices, programs, and resources, Countryman's model describes the components of a comprehensive women's center to further the institutional mission and culture of inclusion, create a source of advocacy for equality, and address academic and social concerns facing these students.

(from top: Wildfong, Bolhous, Ferris-McCann, Danielson, and Stakley)

Support for Specific Populations (continued)

Another growing population of community college students is the veteran population. Three DCCL students focused their dissertation work on this population and how institutions can support their transition to the college environment.

Dave Wildfong (C2) was interested in developing strong institutional supports for student veterans. Wildfong's research examined best practices at four community colleges recognized for their veterans' services and resulted in a streamlined success model for these students designed to minimize or eliminate barriers and provide access to essential resources and services.

Courtney (Friedlund) Bolhous (HC) explored the reasons behind the decision to pursue a college education by nontraditional veterans (30 years or older). To identify better ways to recruit and support this population, Bolhous studied the "why" associated with veterans' decisions.

Lisa Ferris-McCann (C5) developed a concept model for community colleges to transition military medics to paramedic degree programs. Her product dissertation, while focusing on a crosswalk for paramedics, could also be adapted to other courses of study and provide community colleges with a model for helping these students maximize their military education, training, and experience with prior experiential credit and shorten the time to degree completion, certification, licensure, and ultimately civilian employment.

Marsha Danielson (C7) also developed a product supporting prior learning and experiential credit programming. Danielson's Credit for Prior Learning Guide provides community colleges with the information and detailed implementation strategies needed to establish a robust program to increase educational attainment of adults with extensive college-level experiential learning, military experience, or workforce certifications.

Deedee Stakley (C1), one of the first DCCL students who embraced the option to develop a product solution as the focus of the dissertation, focused her work on transfer students and provided higher education institutions with an efficient transfer process and structure. Stakley provided an outline for a Center capable of handling the complexities of transfer, from determining equivalencies to building relationships and negotiating legislative requirements.

Join us next quarter for Issue 2, highlighting dissertations on Effective Teaching and Learning

CONNECT WITH US!

DCCL produces several publications, including a quarterly newsletter for program alums and the monthly *Perspectives* — a compilation of leaders' views of critical current issues. Access all of our ***Publications* here**, or contact ccleadership@ferris.edu to be added to our mailing list.

**Doctorate in Community College Leadership
410 Oak Street, ALU 115
Ferris State University, Big Rapids, MI 49307**

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ccleadership@ferris.edu

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