

Leadership Academy for Student Success

Overview

The [Leadership Academy for Student Success](#) is designed to provide mid-level community college staff and faculty with an understanding of critical concepts in student success and leading for change. The goal is to prepare them to advance to more senior-level positions in their institutions or to lead more effectively from their current roles. It is designed to provide mid-level community college staff and faculty with an understanding of critical concepts in student success and change management.

Originally launched in 2019 through a partnership between the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program (Aspen), the National Center for Inquiry and Improvement (NCII), and the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC), NCII expanded this effort in 2023 with support from the Ascendium Education Group, ECMC Foundation, and the Kresge Foundation. The Academy now includes cohorts in Arizona, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Washington. Three more states will launch the program in 2027,

Syllabus

The core of the Leadership Academy curriculum builds on the [Aspen Institute College Excellence Program](#) curriculum for community college executive leaders. It has been adapted for mid-level leaders and expanded to include state-specific content.

This syllabus provides an overview of the curriculum, organized into 14 modules delivered over six sessions. Each state delivers the six sessions over the course of a year, typically one every two months. Most modules are drawn from the Aspen curriculum, then tailored to include state-specific context and engage college leaders as presenters, facilitators, and panelists. The remaining modules are state-specific and are developed and facilitated by the state leads. Modules, which span approximately one to four hours in length, include presentations, case studies, assessment tools, activities, discussion prompts, and panel conversations to deepen and apply the learning. Most sessions are delivered in person so participants in the state can gather, although states often conduct at least one session virtually.

The syllabus below details the module topics, learning goals, and readings for each session. Note: Sessions will include excerpts from a forthcoming publication from the Aspen Institute, to be published in the fall of 2026.

Modules	Learning Objectives	Resources: Readings and Assessment Tools
Session 1: The Essential Roles of Leadership in Student Success		
<i>The Essential Role of Leadership in Student Success</i> <i>Fostering a Culture of Evidence</i>	- Define student success as inclusive of access, completion, and strong post-completion outcomes. - Articulate the rationale for focusing on student success both in college and after college, with access and outcomes for all students. - Identify the critical data needed to monitor student outcomes aligned to student success, including post-completion outcomes. - Understand context for community colleges in the [state] higher education system. - Begin to define topics for applied projects.	Community College 3.0: What's Next for the Student Success Agenda? (2016) <i>National Models of Community College Excellence</i> , The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program (2025) <i>Forthcoming publication from The Aspen Institute</i>
Session 2: Keeping Students' End Goals in Mind		
<i>Improving Labor Market Outcomes</i> <i>Improving Transfer at Scale</i>	- Articulate scaled strategies and practices to improve workforce outcomes for all students, including through effective partnerships with employers - Articulate scaled strategies and practices to	The Workforce Playbook , The Aspen Institute (2019) Workforce Assessment Tool (College Excellence Program)

	improve excellence in students' transfer and bachelor's attainment outcomes, including through effective partnerships with four-year colleges and universities • Practice strategies to better understand the student experience • Analyze transfer and labor market data to identify challenges and opportunities • Identify a problem of practice and put forward a solution to address it (Applied projects or state equivalent)	The Transfer Playbook 2.0, The Aspen Institute and Community College Research Center (2025) Transfer Assessment Tool (College Excellence Program)
Session 3: The Student Experience		
<i>Improving Teaching and Learning</i> <i>Aligning Completion Strategies to Post-Graduation Success</i>	• Adopt a holistic view of the college's impact on student learning and the student experience—in and out of the classroom • Articulate strategies and practices leaders can use to drive improvement in teaching and learning • Understand the importance of centering post-graduation success in completion reforms • Articulate scaled strategies and practices leaders can use to drive improvement in completion • Refine and further develop applied projects	<i>Forthcoming publication from The Aspen Institute</i> Building a Faculty Culture of Student Success (The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, 2014) Teaching & Learning Within a Guided Pathways Framework (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2020) Building a Scaled Culture of Continuous Improvement in Teaching & Learning at Southwest Wisconsin Technical College, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program (2024)

		<u>Strengthening Community College Program Maps and Educational Plans for Post-Completion Value</u> , Aspen Institute College Excellence Program and the Community College Research Center (2024)
Session 4: Transformational Leadership for Student Success		
<u>Leadership Qualities for Student Success</u>	• Understand the strategies that mid-level leaders can employ to effect change at the college. • Understand the skills and qualities transformational senior leaders use to foster reform at the college. • Recognize the agency practitioners have at different levels of the organization.	<i>Forthcoming publication from The Aspen Institute</i> <u>Crisis and Opportunity: Aligning the Community College Presidency with Student Success</u>, Achieving the Dream and The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program (2013)
Session 5: Institutional Capacities to Advance Reform		
<u>Leading Finance Strategically to Advance Reforms</u> <u>Leading Strong Teams for Transformational Change</u>	• Understand how to approach institutional finance from a strategic mindset to advance change • Understand strategies to more effectively use limited institutional resources to advance reforms • Articulate strategies to build and manage effective teams to drive change • Apply strategies for leading and being a	<i>Forthcoming publication from The Aspen Institute</i> <u>Funding Guided Pathways: A Guide for Community College Leaders</u>, Community College Research Center (2020) <u>The Role of Presidents, Trustees, and College Leaders in Student Success</u> by Josh Wyner (excerpted from <i>Student Success in the Community College: What</i>

	member of a strong team	<i>Really Works?</i> , edited by Terry U. O'Banion and Marguerite M. Culp and published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2021)
Session 6: Strategic External Partnerships and the Leadership Journey		
<i>Leading Highly Effective External Strategic Partnerships</i> <i>Reflecting on Your Personal Leadership Journey</i>	• Articulate the reasons community colleges should foster strategic external partnerships • Articulate strategies used by community college leaders to foster strong external partnerships that lead to improved student outcomes • Explore and share expectations about personal leadership journeys • Identify a problem of practice and put forward a solution to address it (Please remove this goal if you plan to include applied projects at another time.)	<i>Forthcoming publication from The Aspen Institute</i>
<i>Scaling and Improvement Dual Enrollment (Optional Module)</i>	• Define the value proposition for dual enrollment for key stakeholders • Articulate scaled strategies and practices to expand access to and improve outcomes in dual enrollment	<i>The Dual Enrollment Playbook</i> (Community College Research Center and The Aspen Institute, 2020) Dual Enrollment Assessment Tool (College Excellence Program)

Applied Projects

Throughout the year-long program, participants apply the learning from the Leadership Academy to a group project. Teams of approximately four to six fellows identify a problem of practice, develop viable solutions, and most importantly, figure out how to turn their ideas into realistic action. They create implementation plans, decide how they will engage stakeholders, and consider what challenges may arise. Teams share their work with the cohort near the end of the program. In some cases, fellows bring the work from the applied project back to their campuses.