



Employability: Skills for Work, Skills for Life

Frannie Bennett

Gateway Community and Technical College

Paula Barnes

Gateway Community and Technical College

Denise Fritsch

Gateway Community and Technical College

Anissa McBreen

Gateway Community and Technical College

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Employability: Skills for Work, Skills for Life

Frannie Bennett, Paula Barnes, Denise Fritsch, & Anissa McBreen

Gateway Community & Technical College

At Gateway Community & Technical College, the 10 Essential Skills are embedded in a strategic, multi-faceted manner: in the curriculum, Work-Based Learning Experiences, and Student Events. Since Gateway has designed intentional instruction related to employability skills in multiple environments, students obtain well-rounded support on their journey toward gainful employment.

Introduction

These four programs, represented by eight faculty members, completed a year-long professional development series dedicated to the importance of the Essential Skills and best practices for implementation. According to the American Association of Colleges and Universities, AAC&U, high impact practices allow students to achieve higher levels of learning success. Much of the year-long professional development series focused on creating high impact practices that allow students to develop their employability skills. The high impact practices created by the faculty in this year-long professional development include team-based projects, presentations tailored to various audiences, mock interview reflections, and research-based decision making. This year-long professional development series also created an “Employability Lessons Hub” SharePoint site. This is a digital location where all faculty at Gateway can upload their lessons and activities related to the 10 Essential Skills, serving as a repository of high impact practices directly correlating to employability skills. Additionally, these four programs are collecting feedback from employers evaluating students’ on-the-job performance in relation to the 10 Essential Skills. Supervisors are reporting whether a student exceeds, meets, or does not meet the expectations. As additional support beyond the academic program setting, Gateway’s Student Affairs department also developed various student events supporting the 10 Essential Skills. These employability-related events recur each semester and include faculty panels, career fairs, cultural competency sessions, and professional communication strategies for students.

Current Progress of Impact Plan

Gateway Community & Technical College is implementing the Essential Skills in four academic programs, in their correlating work-based learning experiences, and in all student events. The Business Administration, Diesel Information Technology, Health Information Technology, and Utility Lineworker programs have assigned course materials and assessments that measure students' performance on select skills. These programs have also sent feedback surveys to co-op, internship, and work-related supervisors. All data will be collected on a semesterly basis, starting with Fall 2023, and reports will be developed. Gateway's upcoming focus for this project is scalability. Additional programs at Gateway are starting to identify the 10 Essential Skills within their programs via curriculum mapping through Gateway's Office of Knowledge Management. To ensure these skills are present in all programs, the institution has committed to several professional development opportunities for all faculty. Similar to the year-long professional development series for the eight faculty members in the initial four programs, all employability-related professional development is designed around the benefit of high impact practices and how that connects to the 10 Essential Skills. Additionally, several professional development opportunities relate to accessing, reviewing, using, and contributing to the "Employability Lessons Hub" SharePoint site. All professional development sessions are run by Gateway's Faculty Fellows, who are two full-time, well-respected faculty members who design meaningful workshops for and with colleagues.

Transparent & Transferable Best Practices

1. Cross-Departmental Effort – Since the 10 Essential Skills are relevant to all students, Gateway Community & Technical College created a cross-departmental team on day one. This team has consisted of 15-20 individuals, representing general education faculty, technical faculty, students, and various staff from the following departments: Workforce Solutions, Office of Knowledge Management, Business Office, Advancement and External Affairs Office, and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office. The collaborative nature of this team has laid the foundation for a collaborative project.
2. Scalable Approach to Programs – To begin the project, Gateway Community & Technical College embedded Essential Skills in just one program from each of its four technical divisions. This concentrated approach created a smaller, more focused setting, which allowed for lessons learned, frequent

communication, and early buy-in from each division. With these four programs, Gateway was able to implement a Curriculum Mapping process, Work-Based Learning Surveys, and consistent Blackboard Assignments, like Mock Interview Reflections.

3. Employability Lessons Hub – With individuals from other disciplines, faculty are composing lesson plans and activities that enhance students' employability skills. These lessons are all recorded in an "Employability Lessons Hub" repository, and all lessons are tagged by skill, discipline, and modality. This allows faculty to view, analyze, and easily adopt employability skills into their courses.

Analysis & Application

Overall, Gateway Community & Technical College has experienced a general willingness to adopt the 10 Essential Skills throughout various programs and divisions. This can be attributed to several important and intentional practices: a collaborative effort from the beginning; a focused, scalable approach to program implementation; and a regular professional development cycle designed and facilitated by trusted Faculty Fellows. Throughout the duration of the project, open, honest, and realistic communication has been a major emphasis. The 10 Essential Skills spark new ideas for classroom implementation, but these skills themselves aren't new to education. For example, educators know critical thinking is essential for a student's long-term success. It's practiced in courses and programs regularly, but historically speaking, there hasn't been a consistent effort to measure and document it. When discussing the 10 Essential Skills with various audiences, this reasonable and rational explanation has been consistently offered, which has enhanced acceptance throughout the institution. As Gateway Community & Technical College continues to implement its impact project through the Kentucky Graduate Profile Academy, the 10 Essential Skills will expand to all programs and all graduates. Through course assessments, work-based learning experiences, and student events, the students at Gateway Community & Technical College are developing their employability skills. Behind the scenes, the great work happening through professional development at Gateway continues to enhance the already high-quality instruction, thus creating high-quality graduates.

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