

Columbus State Community College

Introduction

Since 2011, Columbus State Community College (Columbus State) has convened the Central Ohio Compact, a regional strategy initiative to help build the region's workforce. The Compact aims to ensure that 65 percent of Central Ohioans hold a postsecondary credential by 2025. By leveraging the collective strength of partner members — including K–12, higher education, business, and community organizations — the Compact is actively responding to current issues related to inclusive economic development, diversity hiring, and building coherent academic and career pipelines. As Desiree Polk-Bland, Vice President of Student Affairs, states, “getting and keeping folks in good jobs means partnering across the region to address real issues like childcare and transportation and housing, the same ‘non-academic’ issues that force our students to leave.”

To help grow workforce talent, Columbus State is thinking transformatively — not transactionally — about addressing the full and real needs of students. It is fundamentally changing how students experience the college, inside and outside the classroom, and setting new expectations for roles and responsibilities for college personnel. Jen Gilbride-Brown, Associate Vice President of Holistic Student Experience, states, “You can throw 1,000 programs at this, ... but if you don't have brave leaders at the highest levels of the institution who get that this isn't just about programs, but a full-on institutional commitment — reworking folks' jobs to think about our whole systems — you'll never have a chance.”

Senior leaders at Columbus State have prioritized centering equity and supporting the whole student. Leaders are consistent in messaging that the design of college work will be holistic and inclusive — students will feel a sense of belonging and be welcomed as part of the college community. And, as a community, faculty, staff, and administrators will educate and support each other to collectively carry out these

COLLEGE QUICK FACTS*

Location:
Columbus, OH

Campus Setting:
Large City

Fall 2020 Enrollment:
25,102

% Pell Grant Recipients:
47%
(First-Time, Full-Time Students)

**Most recent data available in Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)*

STUDENT FINANCIAL STABILITY DEFINED

Colleges that foster student financial stability work to ensure that students are financially secure across their higher education journey, through both financial aid and other sources. They are intentional about helping students:

- **Cover college costs**, such as tuition, books, supplies, materials, and fees.
- **Address basic needs**, including housing, food, childcare, technology, transportation, health care, mental health, and utilities.
- **Make informed choices about their education and career** so their decisions improve their economic and social mobility.

priorities. As Polk-Bland shares, “We, as a college, are doing this work. While we can’t do it all, we can all do more, we will all do more for our students. They are deserving and our community will be better for it.”

And, what is the work of the college? To build a streamlined and coherent experience that brings together guided pathways, holistic supports, and workforce transitions in a way that centers and supports each and every student to success. With equitable student outcomes at the core, the college is redesigning major internal systems, from student supports to capital planning efforts. The key is breaking silos and integrating the infrastructure. For example, the recently formed Holistic Student Experience team integrates academic and non-academic services, including basic needs assistance, retention programs, career and academic advising, and early alert. This new, expanded team makes it easier for students to receive multiple supports at once and integrates the work of departments so they are less siloed, think collaboratively, and ask different questions about their collective work and its impact on students.

Student Financial Stability in Action

Equipping Students to Meet Their Basic Needs

Initially known as CState CARES (Connections and Resources for Every Student), the college’s Student Advocacy Center offers students a suite of resources addressing student essential needs and financial stability (e.g., rental assistance, transportation, community resources, childcare, health care, food). Staying on brand, Columbus State leverages key community partnerships across central Ohio to build a shared capacity to supplement available college supports.

To communicate their needs, students complete an intake form, which prompts a staff member to proactively reach out to the student while keeping the “administrative gymnastics” in the background. While open to all students, students in certain cohort programs are actively directed to complete the intake form. If a student wants more high-intensity support, they can choose to or be referred to participate in the Stay the Course program that pairs them with a navigator who provides personalized, in-depth support in addressing obstacles (e.g., loss of housing, family emergencies). Every student has access to strong academic advising. Soon, every student will be assigned to a guided pathways advisor who can connect them to holistic supports and services as well as serve as their main point of contact throughout their time at Columbus State.

The college is clear in its desired student experiences: Students (1) can get relevant resources throughout their college journeys instead of primarily in the onboarding phase, and (2) do not have to tell and retell their often-traumatic stories in order to access services. With these outcomes in mind, Columbus State is prioritizing ways in which students can simultaneously access multiple services at once as well as receive just-in-time communications about services for which they may be eligible. Additionally, there is investment in professional development (e.g., strategic cross-training between personnel), career-laddering on coaching adult students, and an intentional referral system. For example, if a faculty member refers a student to tutoring services, tutors are trained to identify and direct students who may benefit from retention support services. To further facilitate students’ access, the college is implementing its Workday student platform, which will offer students a single portal to do it all — from reviewing their financial aid to requesting support to monitoring their progress.

Supporting Students in Making Informed College and Career Choices

Integrating holistic supports into the student experience is critical, but to what end? For Columbus State, the focus is on increasing student access to in-demand careers, identifying and building additional pathways of value, and eliminating student debt along the way, all which can contribute to long-term student financial stability.

When Intel selected Columbus for its \$20 billion semiconductor or “chip” fabrication factory complex, the college knew this choice could be a big “win” for the region. The complex will not only offer high wage job opportunities, but a new path to economic mobility for individuals and the surrounding community. Following Intel’s announcement, the college launched a consortium of community colleges and training organizations to develop a set of new education pathways to support sustainable careers in semiconductor manufacturing — an industry that did not previously exist in central Ohio. The college continues to lead this effort and champion the value of both standard degree programs and well-crafted short-term certificate programs, helping employer partners better understand the beneficial impacts of the latter to getting workers into career opportunities sooner.

Columbus State is also building partnerships to offer debt-free educational opportunities. For example, its Exact Track business program is employer-funded and offered through a partnership with Franklin University. Exact Track offers students an accelerated program to earn both an Associate of Applied Science in Business Management from Columbus State and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Management and Leadership from Franklin University. The program is actively eliminating barriers to college education by funding curricular costs (i.e., tuition, fees, books) up front and providing a consistent, predictable, cohort-specific schedule for instruction. Students are automatically scheduled each semester, and courses are held at the same day and time throughout the program.

Helping Students Know and Cover College Costs

Columbus State is committed to providing students a high-quality education without a high price tag. The college offers the lowest tuition in the region, and its grants, scholarships, and paid work opportunities bring the total cost of college down further. Combining its affordable quality with its career-ready program offerings for in-demand fields and a college experience that fits into students’ busy lives, the college has been actively communicating its value proposition to students, families, and the community.

Columbus State’s strategy includes building intentional, tailored approaches — incorporating cost — for specific student populations. For example, through the Columbus Promise launched in spring 2022, Columbus City Schools graduates now have a guaranteed tuition-free path to a college degree or certificate at Columbus State. In addition to full financial support, Columbus Promise Scholars are assigned a dedicated advisor to connect them to academic advising, career counseling, social and wellness opportunities, and essential support services. Given that completion of the Federal Application for Free Student Aid (FAFSA) is a condition for participation in the program, the college has already seen its FAFSA completion rates for traditional and new students increase. The program also has a focus on integrating financial wellness and building confidence in students’ skills to afford a Columbus State education.

Moving Forward

Knee deep in this work of institutional transformation, Columbus State’s guiding questions remain: What can we build, rebuild, or unbuild to support our students to success? Who can we partner or better

partner with? How can we take features of effective models and ensure that all students experience those? And, how can we support those who support students?

Columbus State has been on a journey to support students holistically for years. The college is beginning to implement its 10-year capital plan — with funding support from the city — which includes intentionally building a holistic student support environment from the student perspective. Immediate priorities for the college include directly addressing essential student needs such as providing on-campus child care for students (beginning in autumn 2023), understanding students' specific needs more dynamically throughout their college journeys, redesigning the advising ecosystem in a way that provides holistic and timely support for all students, and organizing a full-time enrollment campaign that takes into account both financial and non-financial considerations. Additionally, the college is exploring ways to make cost more transparent and talk about the total cost of programs with students.

Now more than ever, the Central Ohio workforce needs education and training as well as equitable opportunities to succeed for all residents. And Columbus State is doing its part. Its relevant and expanding educational pathways are informed by meaningful employer engagement and respond to industry demands. There is greater capacity to deliver holistic supports via deeper community partnerships. There is a consistent focus on affordability, including short- and long-term financial stability, and an emphasis on how students experience and move through the college. Such values offer much promise for students and their families as well as the Central Ohio region.