



NECHE Non-Credit Programming Quality Framework

Campus Case Study

Rhode Island College

Jenifer Giroux, Vice President for Corporate Relations and Professional Studies

Miko Nino, Assistant Vice President for Adult and Online Education

Holly Shadoian, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs

Institution Overview

About Rhode Island College

Rhode Island College (RIC) is a public college located in Providence and North Providence, Rhode Island. The college started operations in 1854, making it the second oldest institution of higher education in the state. RIC offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional/continuing education programs in a wide variety of disciplines and across its five colleges: the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development, the School of Business, the Zvart Onanian School of Nursing, and the School of Social Work. In addition, the college has the Office of Professional Studies and Continuing Education that also offers for credit and non-credit programming. Currently, the college offers more than 90 undergraduate programs, 40 graduate programs, and approximately 100 professional and continuing education programs.

Mission

As a leading regional public college, RIC personalizes higher education of the finest quality for undergraduate and graduate students. We offer vibrant programs in arts and sciences, business, and professional disciplines within a supportive, respectful, and diverse community. Dedicated faculty engage students in learning, research, and career attainment, and our innovative curricula and co-curricula foster intellectual curiosity and prepare an educated citizenry for responsible leadership.

Student Population

RIC has an undergraduate population of approximately 7,000 undergraduate students, 300 graduate students, and 1,600 professional and continuing education students.

Non-Credit Programming Quality Framework Narrative

Mission and Purposes

As part of the college mission and vision, RIC is committed to offering meaningful learning experiences that strengthen undergraduate, graduate, and co-curricular programs. RIC is also committed to support the professional development of students and alumni. Even though the non-credit programming is not explicitly encompassed in the language the university uses for communications, the goal is to provide equal support, planning, and programming for non-credit students. In addition, the college is aware of the importance of developing innovative curricula and co-curricula, which in many instances include the creation and promotion of non-credit programs.

The major alignment that the college has to a commitment to lifelong learning is the Office of Professional Studies and Continuing Education (PSCE). In addition to its presence on the main campus, PSCE manages and oversees the Workforce Development Hub in Central Falls, RI. Through PSCE, current students, alumni, and the general public can access high quality credit and non-credit programming in a variety of topics. The programming is based on identified current needs in Rhode Island and surrounding areas, including financial and digital literacy, English as a second language, medical assistant training, bookkeeping and accounting, and others. PSCE partners with existing academic departments to develop the curriculum and deliver these instructional credit and non-credit programs.

Current challenges include a lack of awareness about the scope of PSCE and non-credit programs at the internal level, as well as some resistance in some academic departments to increase the number and scope of non-credit programs. Furthermore, more work needs to be

done to promote non-credit programs as a lifelong learning tool for those who have already obtained advanced degrees.

Planning and Evaluation

The design, development, and implementation of non-credit programs is an integral part of the strategic planning and evaluation of the university. PSCE is part of the RIC President Executive Cabinet, which has given the unit goals, metrics, budget, and a long-term plan for development. Working closely with the college's economic analyst, the college ensures that non-credit programs respond to the market needs in the area and that their development is financially feasible.

Since several of the non-credit initiatives are sponsored by grants, key performance indicators and regular evaluation for the programs have been established. These includes number of participants per program, learning outcomes, and how participants actively apply knowledge in areas of needs for the community. As part of regular grant reporting, systems and personnel have been assigned to collect and use data to inform the continuity and improvement of the non-credit programs.

Several partnerships have been developing through the years with industry and employers in the area to develop non-credit programs. Currently, RIC has 22 partners. Some of these industry partners and employers include Lifespan Corporate Services, Charter Care Health Partners, Hospital Association of Rhode Island, and others. These partnerships inform the curriculum of non-credit programs, based on the needs of the employer. Moreover, these partnerships have increased engagement of prospective learners, given that employability upon completion of the programs is guaranteed in many instances. Even though systematic feedback from employers take place, it would be positive to conduct formal transfer of knowledge

evaluations to determine the extent to which learners are actively applying the curriculum in the workplace. In addition, it would be positive to include in future plans an evaluation of the return of investment for the non-credit programs.

Organization and Governance

One of the main challenges for the sustainability of non-credit programs within PSCE is the lack of more personnel. PSCE has a limited number of full-time employees, and most staff members work at a part-time basis. Some full-time positions are currently vacant, and the addition of new positions is still under development. As PSCE undergoes a strategic planning phase, the need for new roles and duty changes in existing positions have become a priority.

Since the Vice President for Corporate Relations and Professional Studies is part of the President's Executive Cabinet, non-credit programs are integrated into the institution's internal governance structures. Given that partnerships with academic departments are required to develop non-credit programs, RIC has an active participation from faculty and staff in the decision-making process and development of these programs. A key element for RIC and PSCE has been the development of non-credit programs that satisfy industry needs in Rhode Island and surrounding areas. As part of the duties and responsibilities for PSCE, there is regular analysis of the industry and employer needs in the area to develop competitive non-credit programs or modify existing ones accordingly. Since there is some resistance in some academic departments, one of the challenges currently faced is that some non-credit programs that are in need cannot be developed and implemented.

RIC and PSCE are active members of the community and have developed strong relations with state agencies, employers, and alumni. This has provided the college with the tools and resources that are required to develop non-credit programs. RIC and PSCE have developed

non-credit programs through the sponsorship and collaboration of state agencies such as the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, the RI Commission for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, RI Housing, RI Department of Education, Department of Labor and Training, RI Department of Health, and others.

Academic Program

The design and development of non-credit credential programs at RIC takes place as a joint initiative between the Office of PSCE and interested faculty, academic departments, and programs. As part of the partnership, a non-credit program curriculum proposal is prepared outlining workforce and industry development needs with an associated delivery plan and budget forecast. This programming is offered at two different locations: the Rhode Island College main campus and the Central Falls Workforce Development. At the main campus, there are 16 non-certificates offered. Currently, the Central Falls Workforce Development Hub offers 12 workforce development/adult education non-credit certificates. In addition, five certificates of continuing education and four credit-based courses are offered by this location.

Through these partnerships, academic content specialists ensure the rigor and quality of the curriculum, while PSCE and RIC senior administration ensure the need for a certificate and its feasibility given industry and workforce needs. The curriculum of a non-credit program must be approved by the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs and the college President.

These collaborations between PSCE and academic departments provides an opportunity for the development of pedagogically sound competencies and learning outcomes, which are identified for each course. In addition, all non-credit programming falls within one of these three categories: professional development, vocational training, or personal enrichment. As previously

mentioned, all non-credit programming must be connected to an identified industry or workforce need in the state of RI and surrounding areas.

Even though the goal for RIC is to build pipelines and pathways for non-credit students to continue in credit-bearing programs and historically there have been occurrences of this, more work needs to be done in this area. Similarly, RIC and PSCE would like to have alumni and graduates from RIC to continue their education as lifelong learners through non-credit programs. One of the challenges to achieve this is that most of the non-credit programs take place at a different location from the main campus. In addition, more work needs to be done to communicate this potential pipeline and pathways to non-credit students and there is a need to actively recruit non-credit students. This could take place through the development of initiatives that connect the non-credit certificate or program to the requirements of credit-bearing programs. Another challenge is that more work needs to be done to share communications with alumni, so they can find in non-credit programming alternatives to advance their career, acquire relevant skills for their jobs, or participate in personal enrichment programs.

Students

RIC, through PSCE, has developed a system to enroll non-credit students, as well as to keep their records, progression in the programs, and the issuing of credentials and transcripts. Unfortunately, the system is not the same as the one used for credit-bearing programs, which has been a challenge. The process has been manual and does not integrate with the admissions and customer relationship management platforms used at RIC. Currently, RIC serves approximately 1,000 non-credit students.

In terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion, several of the non-credit programs developed at RIC target underrepresented minorities, especially Latinx. Many of the grants and partnerships

that support these non-credit programs actively target underrepresented populations to give them resources and tools to work in areas of need in the community and RI. This is aligned with the Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) designation that RIC recently obtained. English as a Second Language non-credit programs have been a mechanism to close the language gap for population who have career limitations for lack of knowledge of English. Because many of the English as Second Language are contextualized and tailored to specific industries, the number of underrepresented populations in certain fields has increased. Approximately, 70% of students served in non-credit programs are Latinx/Hispanic.

RIC has developed a variety of learner support systems in place to ensure student success and retention. This includes part-time social workers to assist students with housing, health, and food. In addition, some of the programs funded by grants offer free tuition and books to the students. Non-credit students have access to some of the facilities and resources that credit-bearing students do; however, one of the challenges is that several offices on the main campus are not open during the evening to cater to working adults and non-traditional students. Another challenge is several that non-credit programs are not housed on the main campus, where student support offices are located.

Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship

A partnership between PSCE and Academic Affairs, including academic departments, have ensured that the curricula of these non-credit programs are developed and taught by qualified instructors. Either RIC full-time or adjunct faculty are usually the instructors for the non-credit courses; however, approval from the academic department connected to the non-credit program is necessary to hire or choose additional instructors.

Institutional Resources

The strong partnerships with employers, industry, and state agencies have provided RIC the financial ability to fund many of these non-credit programs. In addition, RIC has been able to secure grants to develop non-credit programs, hire personnel, and support students. Although the grant funding has allowed operations and growth of the non-credit programs, there are some limitations to expand in some instances. Currently, the non-credit programs could benefit for more personnel on a full-time basis and more resources to aid students. As it happens with grant funding, there are stipulations to follow that do not use to the money to cover all existing needs and operations of the non-credit programs. Since non-credit programs bring over \$1 million dollars of external funding, these initiatives have been developed.

Besides access to the main campus and facilities to complete their courses, non-credit students also have access to the Workforce Development Hub, which is an extension of RIC and the building where most non-credit courses take place. This facility is equipped with all the technology, computers, labs, and other assets needed to complete instruction. Furthermore, both the main campus and the Hub have space for learners to study and build community.

Educational Effectiveness

RIC's non-credit programs and courses have clear, measurable learning competencies, and outcomes. This is ensured through the partnership between PSCE and Academic Affairs. In addition, the development of non-credit programs and their curricula are aligned to industry and employer needs, which also informs the strength of measurable learning competencies and outcomes.

Some areas that need further work when it comes to educational effectiveness include the need to have a deeper assessment plan of learner outcomes and competencies. Since regular reporting of the grant activities and outcomes is a requirement for several non-credit programs,

RIC conducts regular data collection and analysis. However, this work can also be extended to programs that do not require this frequency in reporting. Furthermore, more metrics can be used to collect data and not only the ones required by the grant agency. Some examples of these metrics include licensure rates, employment rates, job promotion rates, and return on investment. The challenge for this work with data is connected to the lack of more personnel and software/resources for data collection and analysis.

Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure

RIC publicly discloses to the public information about program costs, requirements, learning outcomes, dates, and information about sponsorships. This is done through the college website and social media. Some areas of work in this area include publicizing information about measures for student success, as well as to have a stronger online and digital presence. The current marketing and communications model in the institution cannot cater to individual offices or programs, which limits the updates and sharing of information.

Future Plans

RIC plans to continue its offering of non-credit programs. This includes the development of new programs, based on needs in RI and surrounding areas, as well the enhancement of existing programs. Some of the plans for non-programming at the institution include:

- Offering more online options for learners who cannot physically take courses on campus
- Integrating current system for records, transcripts, filing, and enrollment of non-credit students into the ecosystem built for credit-bearing students.
- Extending operation hours in offices on campus that offer support and services for students.
- Increasing the number of student support services and improving their quality. There are plans to audit RIC to determine its adult learner readiness and use this information to promote changes that support adult learners, including non-credit students.

- Increasing the number of partnerships with industry partners and employers in areas that are in current and future demand like cybersecurity, data analysis, artificial intelligence, and others.
- Creating a formal and official pipeline and pathways for non-credit students to enroll in credit-bearing programs upon successful completion of the program. Similarly, there are plans to promote non-credit programs to graduates and current RIC employers so they can expand their knowledge, advance their careers, or enrich their personal lives.
- Increasing the number of on-campus partners. Even though several academic programs have partnered with PSCE to develop non-credit programs, there is still resistance in some programs. Through the presentation of case studies based on current offerings and market data at relevant campus meetings and events, there is a goal to increase the number of non-credit offerings in areas that have not been explored on campus so far.
- Securing grant funding from other state agencies, which will ensure that non-credit programs can still be developed and offered.