

College Connections Initiative (CCI)

Creating authentic and lasting relationships for student success.



LEAP 2022

SOLUTIONS TEAM MEMBERS

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MISSION OF THE COLLEGE CONNECTIONS INITIATIVE (CCI)

The Mission of the College Connections Initiative (CCI) is to help College of the Canyons (COC) students move forward with their professional and academic development in the wake of disruptions such as COVID-19 by making connections with other students, the college campus, and the community, thereby reclaiming interpersonal connectivity and in-person collaborative skills.

VISION

The vision of the College Connections Initiative (CCI) is to accomplish its Mission by hosting a series of Connect, Discover, and Network workshops, events, and activities (Workshops) geared toward first-time learners at College of the Canyons (COC) and students returning to college after a substantial period of time outside of academia.

BUSINESS SUMMARY

The College Connections Initiative (CCI) seeks to connect students to one-another and to College of the Canyons (COC) via a series of on-campus Connect, Discover, and Network workshops, events, and activities (Workshops) which are broadly geared toward either first-time learners or returning/adult learners.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The College Connections Initiative (CCI) is organized under the slogan: “Creating authentic and lasting relationships for student success”. CCI will be spearheaded and sustained by four (4) committees each with its own focus:

1. Organizing and Fundraising
2. Marketing and Outreach
3. Workshops Planning
4. Activities, Food, and Facilities

These committees will help put together a series of Connect, Discover, and Network workshops, events, and activities (Workshops), which seeks to enhance social connectedness and connect first-time learners and returning/adult learners to college and career opportunities highlighting cultural, personal, educational, workforce, and community resources.

TARGET POPULATIONS:

- **First-time learners (between the ages of 18 and 25)**
 - Characteristics / Shared Traits:
 - Transitioning to adulthood
 - Less clear pathway than peers at four-year institutions
 - Likely to be currently living at home
 - Have more limited economic resources

- Common Concerns and Challenges:
 - Social, general, and test anxiety, or panic attacks.
 - Family expectations or problems.
 - Depression, lack of energy or motivation, hopelessness, being overwhelmed, low self-esteem, homesickness, loneliness.
 - Relationship difficulties.
 - Stress, perfectionism, procrastination, time management.
 - Lack of confidence, assertiveness, self-esteem.
 - Choosing a Major.
 - Academic Stress.

➤ **Returning / Adult learners (over the age of 25)**

- Characteristics / Shared Traits:
 - Delayed entering college for at least one year following high school.
 - Usually employed full-time.
 - Usually has a family and dependents to support.
 - May have started college as a traditional student but needed to take time off to address other responsibilities.
 - Generally, looking to enhance their professional lives or may be switching careers.
 - Generally, have more experience than traditional students, having already started a career or served in the military.
 - Generally, more mature, independent, and motivated than traditional

students.

- Common Concerns and Challenges:

- Balancing a busy schedule between work, school, and family responsibilities.
- Feelings of anxiety about going back to school and may fear failure.
- Tighter budget than traditional students.
- Need the flexibility to take classes on-campus or online.

BENEFITS:

Students and COC will experience many benefits by having these workshops held on-campus, including progress toward diversity, equity, inclusion, and access goals resulting from students of varying background getting to meet each other; the improvement of students' educational, workforce, and social skills as a result of substantive learning that students will undergo while attending Connect, Discover, and Network workshops, events, and activities (Workshops); and an increase in enrollment, retention, and persistence until completion because of the strengthened ties that newer students will feel with each other and to COC after attending CCI Workshops.

- Making Connections: Provide students with a place where they feel they belong to be able to connect with individuals from diverse backgrounds and engage in activities intended to expand their understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) topics.
- Gained Workforce Skills Through Educational Workshops: Provide students with opportunities to enhance their educational tools and social skills and learn about various campus resources that will help them succeed at COC, as well as toward their career goals.

- Increased Enrollment, Retention, and Persistence: Prospective and current students will develop key relationships with campus and community stakeholders.

INCENTIVES:

Note that faculty will be encouraged to offer extra credit or other incentives to persuade students to attend and therefore boost turnout and attendance. Other incentives which will be considered include certificates of completion, mini-scholarships for students who complete a certain number of Workshops, scholastic competitions for students to earn additional scholarship money, and so on. Among the Workshops and other events that will be held for first-time learners are a presentation on clubs available to students of COC, an opportunity to identify and explore career/professional strengths, and so on. Returning learners can look forward to different categories of events, such as a workshop on resume-writing or finding an internship.

NEED/PROBLEM

A persistent issue that many students face is lack of connection to each-other and the inability to network effectively during their time in college. This is particularly acute among community college students, since the absence of on-campus dormitories removes one common venue where learners have the chance to meet and become more familiar with each other. The transient nature of community colleges (students tend to stay for only two years before transferring, rather than four years at a more typical higher education institution) adds to this.

The COVID-19 pandemic in many ways further exacerbated this issue and prompted leaders at COC to consider how to more proactively combat students' self-described sense of

isolation and failure to network with each other and connect with the school they are attending. Two years of remote learning took their toll not only on students' mental health but on their social skills and their ability to adapt to traditional academic expectations. Students further became detached, disconnected, and disengaged. Why students are detached, disconnected, and disengaged:

1. Social isolation / no sense of connection
2. Lack of urgency
3. Lack of motivation
4. Thinking that their schoolwork is purposeless
5. Feeling powerless and lost

The isolated learning pattern that students were forced into due to shutdowns and stay-at-home mandates shifted many students into a mindset where they no longer see in-person interactions as critical to getting the best value from their time in higher education. It is completely understandable that, having had ZOOM and similar e-platforms replace their classroom experiences, these learners now think that even basic network can be done online just as well as if it were done in-person. This has sapped many students of the desire to meet their peers face-to-face, in favor of easier and more convenient online interactions. While these substitutes were perfectly acceptance in lieu of not having students engage in interactions with each other at all, the slowly-receding tide of public health-required lockdowns makes it imperative that students are made to realize the amazing opportunity they will have to take advantage of if they enthusiastically engage in networking-related, in-person events while they

are at their community college.

SOLUTION

With the barriers to student networking/engagement understood, the CCI team will collaborate to create a series of Workshops, to aid students in meeting each other and getting more familiar with the resources available on-campus. The Organizing and Fundraising committee will be the primary body handling this responsibility, as it will actually schedule and host the Workshops, plus secure the funds necessary to make them a success. The Marketing and Outreach Committee will focus on getting the word out and creating a buzz among students and COC stakeholders, including reaching out to faculty and ensuring that as many as possible offer extra credit or some other incentive to encourage student attendance. The Workshop Planning committee will handle the substantive task of finding interesting, helpful, and engaging speakers who will be able to offer advice and tips to help students with networking in the future. Finally, the Food and Facilities committee will support the organizing/fundraising committee by taking the lead on the basic details for setting up the Workshops once each one is scheduled and the theme/topic is decided (namely by finding a room, getting food, etc.).

The four Workshops for each cohort and their various focuses are described here:

1. EDUCATION RESOURCES

- Sample Locations: TLC, Academic Advising, AAC, Other Departmental Resources (MESA, Nursing, etc.)
 - First Time Learner Focused:

- Counseling presentation on success strategies
- Student panel on daytime, in-person, degree, and transfer programs.
- Returning/Adult Learner Focused:
 - Hyflex counseling presentation on success strategies.
 - Hyflex student panel on evening, short-term, online, degree, certificate, and career education programs.

2. PERSONAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES

➤ Sample Locations: Multicultural Center, BANC, ASG, Club, Athletics

- First Time Learner Focused:
 - Workshop on identifying and exploring strengths.
 - Basic needs fair to highlight resources from the BaNC and other on campus services.
- Returning/Adult Learner Focused:
 - Hyflex workshop on identifying and exploring strengths.
 - Basic needs fair to highlight resources from the BaNC and other on campus services.

3. COMMUNITY RESOURCES

➤ Sample Locations: Santa Clarita Chamber of Commerce, SCVEDC

- First Time Learner Focused:
 - Open house highlights on-campus opportunities for community engagement as well as volunteer opportunities in the local area.

- Returning/Adult Learner Focused:
 - Hyflex Workforce Development presentation on local workforce prep programs and volunteer opportunities.

4. CAREER RESOURCES

➤ Sample Locations: Employment Center, Resume Preparation, Job Fair

- First Time Learner Focused:
 - Workshop on building your resume.
 - Resource fair highlighting internship opportunities and on-campus jobs.
- Returning/Adult Learner Focused:
 - Hyflex workshop on resume writing and interview skills.
 - Resource fair highlighting local job opportunities.

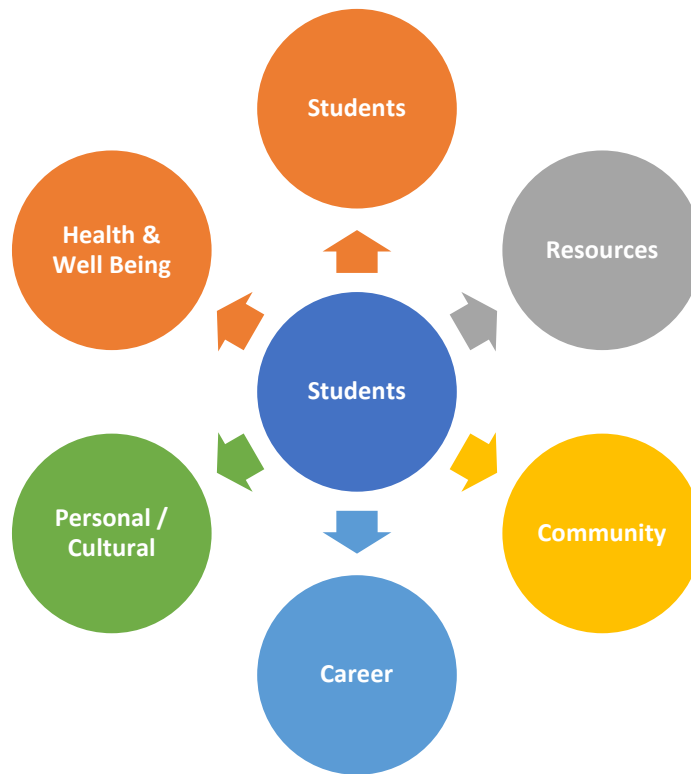
The intention is for there to be a total of eight (8) Workshops held during the regular academic year. A mix of offerings throughout the academic year will ensure that there is always something to engage each student, no matter where they are in their journey as a learner in higher education. The Workshops themselves will seek to impart important information or life-skills to attendees, and all Workshops will be followed by a networking mixer/lunch so that students can apply what they learned and get to know each other. They will start with some kind of ice-breaker activity to help students begin engaging with each other, while a number of resource tables will be present so that students can learn more about campus offerings and be connected to them as relevant. Faculty and staff will be on-hand at each Workshop and the after-event mixer to facilitate student interactions and ensure that everyone who attends gains as

much as they can from having gone.

In addition to the speaker, there will be fun, collaborative activities for students to engage with one another. The Workshops in total will last ninety (90) minutes each, with sixty (60) minutes devoted to core programming and the final thirty (30) minutes used for this fun activity to conclude the Workshops; this final time will also be used to serve lunch and give students the chance to stop by the resource tables that are present, as applicable. Incentives will take the form of free food primarily, as well as raffle prizes for gift cards and mini-scholarships for participants.



The ultimate goal of CCI is to engage students more on campus and to guide them to resources that will make their college journey as successful as possible. An additional desire by the team is for this to serve as a kind of template that academic departments and other offices at COC can use to reach out to their learners. One possible way to proceed on this would be for each meta-major group to have its own version of CCI each year, so that students in those majors feel more connected to their home department.



COMPETITION

Given that CCI is taking place on a college campus and is meant to be oriented around public needs, there is unlikely to be competition in the traditional sense (within the context of private industry). Nonetheless, students have many different focuses which could keep them from participating in CCI workshops, such as work, classes, family obligations, and so on. That being understood, there is also likely to be other worthwhile campus programs which seek to connect with students and occupy their time outside class, so the team will have to develop an approach to help students see the utility of attending CCI workshops. CCI is fundamentally meant to largely augment, rather than compete with, these other programs, which will inform how its advocates approach the question of competition. To give a specific example, while Discover Day offers some similar programming, CCI is quite distinct in that it is more oriented around

networking, rather than delivering information. The hope would be for Discover Day and CCI to be presented as part of a package of services that COC offers its students, so that advertising/marketing endeavors by one benefits the other as well.

MARKET DIMENSIONS, ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

The market dimensions that the CCI team foresees are centered on new students who are just starting their college careers and returning learners who may have attended previously and left to work for a substantial period. This maps neatly onto the student population of a successful community college like COC. The way of reaching these potential participants is via outreach and partnership with community and campus groups (discussed below).

A few examples of planned outreach are:

- College of the Canyons Alumni messages (for returning learners)
- City of Santa Clarita Events Advertising
- Personal Invitations (mailings)
- Posters and Banners
- Email Blast to Alumni and Current and Incoming Students

MARKETING AND SALES PLAN

The keystone of marketing for CCI will center on partnerships with community organizations who can effectively get the word out to campus stakeholders and interested

citizens.

A few of these groups are the:

- Santa Clarita Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Santa Clarita Valley Economic Development Corporation (SCVEDC)
- College of the Canyons Associate Student Government

The specific mechanisms that will be used for outreach include mail/postcards, emails, social media channels, and other such avenues, as referenced above. The key that will drive these decisions is ensuring that as many students are made aware of CCI as possible. That is the reason for partnering with special campus organizations, like ASG, alongside the Public Information Office, which specializes in outreach to the campus community. The team will also use COC-specific communication methodologies, such as COC's Monday report or an alert sent out via Canvas.

While the above will be the chief methods employed to reach out to newer students, returning students tend to be from a different age bracket and may present a unique communications challenge. As such, the CCI team will contact them using more personalized messaging, such as customized emails. This is also the reason that the team will highlight the availability of childcare at events where that is the case.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The nature of CCI is such that no substantial intellectual property issues are foreseen.

While the methods of outreach and the workshops themselves may be innovative in nature, they are by no means intended to be trade secrets. Indeed, one of the key benefits of CCI is that it is meant to be replicable by academic departments and offices across the campus, as discussed earlier. Moreover, if another institution wanted to borrow these ideas to improve connections between and with their own students, the CCI team would not consider that a problem at all!

FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS

The current numbers anticipated are based on internal discussions and estimates generated by consultation with relevant officers at COC. The CCI team expects that there will be roughly fifty (50) students per session for the Year 1, followed by seventy-five (75) per session in Year 2 (as word gets out about the Workshops and their benefit), then one hundred (100) per session in Year 3. The hope is that further numbers will join in future years. Plans are in place for there to be ten to fifteen (10-15) campus resources represented at each Workshop, most likely in the form of tables that student can visit during lunch and after the ice-breaker activity (please see above).

Focusing on the first academic year, the team estimates that there will be a total of four hundred (400) participants across the eight (8) Workshops. CCI anticipates funding the program through departmental budgets, fundraising, corporate sponsors as well as applying for COC Foundation and ASG grants to secure financing for mini-scholarships and other such awards. As such, the estimate for the first three (3) years paid for by District funds, with additional monies to come from outside grant funding, if possible, is as follows:

	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
FIRST TIME LEARNERS			
Guest Speakers	\$800	\$1,000	\$1,200
Food and Refreshment	\$2,000	\$3,300	\$4,800
Outreach (postcards, mailers, etc.)	\$5,000	\$6,000	\$7,000
T-Shirts	\$600	\$935	\$1,320
Misc. Givaways (backpack, pens, gift cards, etc.)	\$320	\$455	\$640
Subtotal	\$8,720	\$11,690	\$14,960
RETURNING LEARNERS			
Guest Speakers	\$800	\$1,000	\$1,200
Food and Refreshment	\$2,000	\$3,300	\$4,800
Outreach (postcards, mailers, etc.)	\$5,000	\$6,000	\$7,000
T-Shirts	\$600	\$935	\$1,320
Misc. Givaways (backpack, pens, gift cards, etc.)	\$320	\$455	\$640
Subtotal	\$8,720	\$11,690	\$14,960
GRAND TOTAL	\$17,440	\$23,380	\$29,920

COLLEGE CONNECTIONS INITIATIVE (CCI) TEAM

JOHN GARZON: Contract Management and Agent Relationship Assistant, Office of International Services & Programs

- John is a COC alum who transferred to UC Berkeley before returning to work at COC's international students office, after which he graduated from Harvard Law School and worked as a debt finance attorney in Los Angeles, California. He brings years of experience in academia and strong organizational and written capabilities.

MICHELLE GOODMAN: Senior Contract/Risk Management Technician

- Michelle earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from the University of California, Riverside in 2002. Before coming to COC, she worked for several years as a Real Estate Manager at CBRE, Inc. where she oversaw all the marketing, operations, and financial activities of a high-rise commercial office building in San Diego. Michelle has been with COC since 2015 and is now a Senior Contract/Risk Management Technician at College of the Canyons. Michelle brings many years of experience in commercial real estate management, contract administration and negotiation, risk management, and procurement.

CYNTHIA MADIA: Administrative Assistant IV, Office of Instruction

- Cynthia has a wealth of knowledge and experience having been both a student (she holds two associates degrees from COC) and employee for nearly twenty years. As a SCV native

she understands the culture of the student populations and can connect with them on a personal level.

CONNIE PALAZZOLO: Director, Enrollment Support

- Connie brings over 30 years of professional sales, marketing and management experience, most notably as Regional Training Manager for the American Red Cross, along with her direct involvement in Enrollment Management here at College of the Canyons. She holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Organizational Communications from The Ohio State University.