

Career KEYS: A Quality Enhancement Plan

Tri-County Community College

QEP Co-Coordinators

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Tri-County Community College (TCCC) serves three counties in rural, far western North Carolina. Since 1999 the area has endured the closing of major employment sources, specifically furniture and textile plants. Recent unemployment rates have been staggering, and TCCC students have been increasingly concerned about whether jobs will be available at graduation. **Career KEYS**, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), was supported both by internal data and by a careful analysis of the economic situation in our service area. It was designed and refined based on months of surveys, interviews, focus groups and college-wide or community-based presentations beginning in the spring of 2008.

Career KEYS is a comprehensive process to help our students succeed by enhancing learning for career readiness. The essence of the plan is to integrate specific career readiness elements into a cross-section of classes and course work in order to offer students an effective and practical advantage for career preparation. After the topic was identified and found to be aligned with the College mission “to help students succeed and to enrich the communities we serve,” the QEP team explored how its implementation would achieve both academic integrity and practical application.

Implementation of the plan will be guided by three intersecting career readiness KEYS.

- **Key #1: Career Explore**—ensuring that students’ interests and skills are well-matched with preferred careers in order to increase the return on investment in their education.
- **Key #2: Career Equip**—ensuring that students are well prepared academically and technically to apply knowledge in a variety of life situations.
- **Key #3: Career Engage**—ensuring that students possess an assortment of job search skills that will aid them in pursuing employment in their preferred fields.

The QEP team identified six critical employability skills that could be measured and evaluated on an ongoing basis. These employability skills span all industry types, business sizes and job levels because they are generic in nature rather than job specific. The six employability skills identified by the TCCC QEP team are: 1) General Education; 2) Knowledge of career expectations and skills; 3) Interpersonal communication and self-presentation; 4) Effective listening; 5) Effective observation; and 6) Teamwork.

Students are introduced to the Career KEYS process early in an introduction to college course where career inventories and skill assessments are administered. The final phase is a nationally recognized career assessment which is administered during the student’s capstone course. The resulting certification will provide the student with a powerful tool to gain access to the employment market.

The College has earmarked significant human, financial and physical resources to **Career KEYS** and has established a reasonable timeline to ensure accurate and comprehensive assessment of the project.