

I. Executive Summary

East Central Community College (ECCC), in the interest of supporting the success of students during enrollment, post-enrollment entrance into the workforce or transfer to a baccalaureate program at a four-year college or university, and lifelong flourishing in general, is implementing a financial literacy program as its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The QEP, designed to prepare students for their college journey and beyond with real-world knowledge gained in an engaging setting with personalized attention, is titled *Dollars & Sense*, and is designed to accomplish the following aims:

1. Enhance student knowledge of practical financial principles in both personal and educational contexts.
2. Enhance student capacity and confidence in making financial decisions.
3. Improve student completion, retention, and educational loan default rate outcomes.

ECCC is a public, open-admissions, community college offering associate degrees and certificates as well as non-credit workforce training and adult basic education. In the state of Mississippi, each of the fifteen public two-year colleges is assigned a district, from which the large majority (at ECCC, in excess of eighty percent) of students reside. ECCC's district, made up of Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Scott, and Winston counties in the east central region of the state, is one of the Mississippi's most economically disadvantaged. In the district's largest county, Neshoba, nearly a quarter of residents live below the federal definition of poverty, and less than thirteen percent have completed a bachelor's degree or higher. About two-thirds of ECCC students receive federal Pell funds for postsecondary education. Research indicates that an inadequate base of practical financial literacy among college students, particularly those coming from generational economic challenges, is a barrier to retention, completion, and transfer.

ECCC, with a pre-pandemic fall/spring 2019-20 full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment of 2,535, expects approximately 800 individual first-time college students annually. *Dollars & Sense* content will be delivered to all first-time freshman students as a component of a newly created freshman orientation course, Learning & Life Skills (LLS) 1312, beginning with the fall 2021 semester. The QEP financial literacy content will occupy about five weeks out of a fifteen-week semester, and be taught by two full-time instructors dedicated to the course, one of whom is the Director of the QEP. The instruction will primarily be delivered in a face-to-face format using three classrooms in a wing of a campus academic building that has been renovated and outfitted to be home to the freshman experience. An online component will also be provided for distance education students. The QEP curriculum, while including some diversity of sources, including expert speakers, will largely utilize course modules developed and provided by a widely-used, national, third-party provider of electronic financial literacy educational content.