



Working Together: A First Look at Lessons from the Cascades College and Career Academy and Other Job Corps Partnerships with Community and Technical Colleges

**An Implementation Brief from the Cascades Job Corps College and
Career Academy Pilot Evaluation**

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In 2016, the Department of Labor (DOL) launched an innovative Job Corps pilot—the Cascades College and Career Academy Job Corps demonstration—to test, among other things, a variant of the Job Corps program that aimed to provide all participants with the opportunity to take classes in college. The Cascades center partnered with the local community college, Skagit Valley College, to provide general education and occupational training in two occupational tracks, information technology and healthcare.

DOL funded a research team to evaluate the pilot to better understand the potential of this approach for improving education and employment outcomes for younger students (ages 16-21). Because the partnership between the center and the college was such a large part of the pilot and such partnerships are becoming more common in the rest of the Job Corps system, the Cascades pilot research team considered emerging lessons from the pilot’s experience as well as the experiences of three other centers that are believed to have strong partnerships with colleges. This brief shares these insights.

Introduction

For decades, technical and community colleges (“colleges”) and Job Corps centers have both provided education and career training to young Americans. Though the populations of students served are not the same, there is considerable overlap.

Technical colleges are public or private institutions that provide career and technical training and education geared towards one of several specific careers and leading to an associate’s degree or certificate of completion. *Community colleges* are two-year public institutions that provide general education in a wide variety of fields leading to an

associate’s degree, but also provide career and technical training resulting in a certificate of completion.¹ Additionally, community and technical colleges also offer secondary education classes.

The *Job Corps program* is administered by DOL and provides cost-free secondary general education courses; career and technical training; and career readiness, life skills, and stabilizing and supportive services (such as physical and mental health services) in a structured residential setting to those who meet certain eligibility criteria. Given the overlap in services, constructive partnerships between Job Corps and colleges can yield benefits for the colleges, for Job Corps, and for young Americans.

Indeed, over the last decade, Job Corps’ interest in working with colleges to deliver career and technical training has grown. For example, some Job Corps centers have collaborative arrangements with colleges to offer career and technical training services that are not available at the Job Corps center or to provide the opportunity to participate in additional advanced career and technical training programs beyond what is available at the center.

The Cascades College and Career Academy is unique in that it aimed to send all of its participants to the local community college in conjunction with, or in place of, a conventional Job Corps career and technical training program.

As part of the Cascades College and Career Academy Job Corps pilot evaluation, the research team met with key Job Corps center staff, college partner staff, and students from the Cascades center as well as three other Job Corps centers to

¹ There are for-profit community colleges that do the same thing, but Job Corps does not partner with them.

further explore how Job Corps partners with colleges.²

In this Brief, Section 1 describes how Job Corps and community colleges serve young people, how Job Corps currently works with colleges, and how partnerships between Job Corps and colleges could benefit students, Job Corps, and the colleges. Section 2 describes the evaluation’s methods.

Section 3 shares what the Job Corps centers identified as the core principles and practices undergirding their successful college partnerships. These core principles and practices include shared goals, clear roles and responsibilities, constant communication, and accommodating each organization’s different requirements.

Section 4 discusses emerging promising practices and challenges to support Job Corps students attending college. These practices and challenges include how to screen students, ensure students are ready for a college experience, and monitor and support students while they are taking college courses.

Section 5 presents emerging promising practices and challenges related to some of the operational details of running a successful partnership between a Job Corps center and a college. These operational details include how to staff the program, deal with transportation, and handle college funding issues.

The final section considers insights related to how Job Corps and colleges can work together and what additional research could be helpful.

1. An Introduction to Job Corps–College Collaboration

1.1 How Job Corps and Community and Technical Colleges Serve Young People

Colleges and Job Corps centers provide secondary-level education and postsecondary career training, but the scale of their operations and how they deliver their services differ.

Job Corps annually enrolls about 50,000 young Americans, ages 16-24, across its national network of approximately 125 centers.³ Centers differ in size, but most serve 300 to 400 students at a time. Public colleges—open to all Americans of any age, including those who do not have a GED or high school diploma—are much larger, ranging from 840 to 75,000, averaging 6,627. Total college student enrollment was about 5.4 million in fall 2019, two-thirds of whom (67%) were younger than age 24.⁴

In addition to differences in scale, colleges and Job Corps also differ in other ways. Job Corps provides a high level of non-academic support to its students. It is primarily a residential program, provided at no cost to the students. The program offers academic courses aimed at enabling students to obtain a secondary education credential (GED or high school diploma) and a choice of career training in certain in-demand

² The evaluation’s Detailed Report of the Implementation Analysis includes a discussion of data sources. See Olejniczak, K., J. Grossman, A. Ibok, J. A. Klerman, and C. Saunders. 2021. Cascades Job Corps College and Career Academy (CCCA) Pilot Evaluation: Detailed Report of the Implementation Analysis. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office.

³ “Student Outcomes/Who Job Corps Serves: A Breakdown of Job Corps Student Data Including Average Length of

Stay, Credential Attainment, Gender, Race, and Age (2007-2018).” Job Corps. May 27, 2020, <https://www.jobcorps.gov/reports/student-outcomeswho-job-corps-serves>.

⁴ National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. *Current Term Enrollment Estimates Fall 2019* (Table 6), https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Fall_2019.pdf.

occupations. In addition, the centers provide free medical care and counseling, when needed.

Traditionally, Job Corps services are provided at the center. The setting is highly structured, with a student’s day almost entirely scheduled. Most students live on center, but many centers also have a small number of non-residential students.

Colleges also provide both courses to raise students’ literacy and math skills to a secondary level and career training in a variety of occupations. Indeed, today colleges are a major provider of vocational preparation and workforce development through stand-alone adult training (Kasper, 2003) . However, college courses are not free, and few technical or community colleges provide on-campus housing, free or otherwise.⁵







Unlike Job Corps, which highly structures its students’ days and nights, colleges impose relatively little structure on students, leaving them

to manage when and how they eat, sleep, attend classes, study, work, and unwind. Exhibit 1 (above) illustrates some of these differences between the experience of students in Job Corps centers versus colleges.

How Job Corps and colleges are funded leads to other differences. Generally, DOL competitively chooses contractors to operate each Job Corps center. Because Job Corps uses a contractor’s ability to “control cost” to deliver the operator’s pre-specified set of service as an important selection factor, center operators may be less likely to make changes within its contract period (GAO, 2019). Public colleges, on the other hand, receive funding from federal, state, and local governments on a per-student basis, as well as tuition and grants. As independent nonprofits, the colleges can adjust more quickly than Job Corps centers, which are part of the large federal bureaucracy.

As a result, colleges can work more fluidly with employers and industries, adjusting training to

Exhibit 1. Student Experiences at Job Corps Centers and Colleges

	JOB CORPS	COLLEGES
 Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serves youth ages 16-24 in centers averaging 300-400 students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serve students of all ages (of whom two-thirds are younger than age 24) in campuses averaging 6,000-7,000 students
 Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free room and board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No room and board support
 Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free academic courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tuition-based academic courses
 Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free career and technical training (in a handful of occupations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tuition-based career and technical training (in a wide range of occupations)
 Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly structured time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little college-imposed structure
 Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GED and High School diploma courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remedial reading and math courses

⁵ Only 28% of community colleges offer on-campus housing. See American Association of Community Colleges, “On-Campus Housing,” *DataPoints* vol. 4, no. 23

(November 2016), https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/DataPoints_No23.pdf

meet the employers' needs. Thus, more than one Job Corps staff member said, their college partners often have better training equipment, more industry partnerships leading to high-quality placements, and - because colleges often can offer higher salaries - highly qualified instructors with significantly more industry experience than at a Job Corps center. Indeed, some career and technical training options offered at colleges would simply be too expensive to implement at a Job Corps center due to, for example, the need for high-priced training equipment that can require frequent maintenance.

1.2 *Benefits of Partnership*

Most Job Corps centers deliver career and technical training at the center using Job Corps employees. Some centers, however, have started collaborating with colleges to provide students with education or career and technical training that the center itself cannot provide.

- A few centers partner with colleges to provide instructors who teach courses at the center in certain programs or industries.
- Several centers allow Job Corps students who have finished the sequence of career training offered at the center the opportunity to remain in Job Corps for a third year. Over that year the students take advanced courses at a local college in order to earn advanced-level certifications.
- Finally, a limited number of Job Corps centers offer students the opportunity to receive their career and technical training in areas not covered by the center. Instead, students attend a local college.

Partnering with colleges in any of these ways allows centers to enrich their career and technical training options. Because centers serve fewer

students, hiring an instructor to teach a specific course or even a particular career track that only a few students take is likely not as cost-efficient as paying for students to take the courses at a nearby college.

Partnering with Job Corps centers can be advantageous for colleges, too. At the most basic level, Job Corps can help partner colleges increase their enrollment and thus revenue. Indeed, an interviewee at one college suggested that no college would refuse a Job Corps partnership, because it would only benefit from Job Corps' recruitment of eligible students who brought financial assistance with them. More than one interviewee suggested that the partnership with Job Corps is also valuable to the college because the wraparound services available to Job Corps students for up to three years help them succeed in their college courses.

Because colleges do not have the resources to provide a lot of support for their students, many attending 2-year public colleges, especially low-income students, leave without earning a certificate or degree. Three years after enrolling, only 27% of college students have earned a certificate or degree, and 45% of students in the lowest quarter of the income distribution have dropped out without one.⁶

Three challenges that many college students face make successful completion of college difficult. First, many students are required to take remedial courses before enrolling in college-credit-bearing courses, because they did not learn the material in high school. Many of these students are unable to pass the (largely online) required remedial math

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "2012/14 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:12/14),"

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_32_6.50.asp?current.asp

and reading courses, in a setting with little monitoring or support.⁷

Second, because the median number of students per advisor in a college is 441 to 1, students receive little help in navigating the large number of college course choices and requirements.⁸

Third, besides navigating school, many (especially older) college students juggle multiple priorities, including obtaining food and shelter, family responsibilities, and work. Almost 80% of college students work while they are enrolled,⁹ and 54% of those who drop out cite not being able to balance work and school as the main reason.¹⁰

Thus, though the freedom and choice that colleges afford students might seem appealing, many of these students are likely to benefit from the support and structure that Job Corps can provide them.

Because Job Corps provides food, shelter, transportation, and other services for free, students do not need to juggle work and school. Not having to worry about these issues, they can better focus on studying. The wraparound services available at Job Corps, such as counseling, and the extra monitoring Job Corps staff give to students also help its students succeed in college.

Thus, partnerships between Job Corps and local colleges offer many potential benefits, and Job Corps has been expanding these collaborations over time. Many challenges must be overcome to make the arrangements useful, however.

2. Methods

To help inform Job Corps centers and colleges seeking to establish productive partnerships, the research team conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups at four Job Corps centers (see box).

In addition to examining the Cascades College and Career Academy Job Corps pilot, the only center in the Job Corps system that expected all of its students to attend college, researchers selected three other Job Corps centers to study. The additional three centers were selected from a small number of centers recommended by Job Corps regional staff as having strong college partnerships. These three were chosen among that number to have a variety of center operators and locations in the study.

This final set of four centers provides information on a mix of old and new partnerships. The long-established partnerships are those between the Pittsburgh Job Corps center and the Community College of Allegheny County; between the Guthrie center and Rose State College; and between the Clearfield center and Davis Technical College. The relatively new partnerships are those between the Cascades center and Skagit Valley College; the Clearfield center and Salt Lake Community College; and the Guthrie center and Redlands Community College.

⁷ A CCRC study of 57 community colleges participating in the Achieving the Dream initiative found that only 33% of students referred to developmental math and 46% of students referred to developmental reading go on to complete the entire developmental sequence. See “Community College FAQs,” <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu>.

⁸ “ASAP: Accelerated Study in Associate Programs” (2-pager), <https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/ASAP%202-pager%2002.09.16.pdf>.

⁹ Mina Dadgar, “The Academic Consequences of Employment for Students Enrolled in Community College,” CCRC Working Paper No. 46 (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2012), Table 2.

¹⁰ “College Dropout Rate: Institutional Demographics (2020),” EducationData.org, <https://educationdata.org/college-dropout-rates#college-dropout-rate-institutional-demographics>.

The research team conducted in-person visits to the Cascades center in May 2018 and August 2019. Additionally, the team conducted COVID-era remote visits to the Cascades, Clearfield, Guthrie, and Pittsburgh centers between May and June 2020.

During the visits, the team conducted interviews lasting 60-90 minutes each with several key center staff such as the center director and education and training managers as well as administrative college partner staff. The team also conducted focus groups (60-90 minutes) with a small number of students from the Cascades, Clearfield, and Pittsburgh centers. Interviewers asked respondents to base their answers on their pre-COVID experiences, not issues that were unique to the pandemic period.

The research team engaged with about 50 staff and about 50 students about their ideas, experiences, and opinions about:

- Developing and operationalizing college programs and partnerships,
- The challenges they faced or face in creating and maintaining those college programs and partnerships, and how they might have addressed or are addressing those challenges, and
- Any emerging promising practices.

Interview and focus group data were collected and organized in a way that allowed the research team to elicit themes across the various respondents.

Four Job Corps Centers with Technical/Community College Partnerships

Traditional Job Corps Centers

Most students benefiting from these partnerships take training and education in areas not offered at the center. Some students also are furthering their training beyond what they received at their center.

- ◆ **Clearfield Job Corps Center** (Utah) partners with Davis Technical College and Salt Lake Community College to offer college certificate programs to about 150 of its 1,000 students.
- ◆ **Guthrie Job Corps Center** (Oklahoma) partners with Redlands Community College and Rose State College to offer associate degree and certificate programs to about 70 of its 530 students.
- ◆ **Pittsburgh Job Corps Center** (Pennsylvania) partners with the Community College of Allegheny County and Butler County Community College to offer associate degree and certificate programs to about 250 of its 670 students. Pittsburgh is among the centers with the largest numbers of Job Corps students attending college.

Cascades College and Career Academy Job Corps Pilot

- ◆ The *Cascades pilot* (Washington State) partnered with Skagit Valley College to offer associate degree and certificate programs. Unlike the other centers, where much of the career training is provided by center staff and only some students attend college, the Cascades center piloted an arrangement where all of its students were expected to attend college once ready, in conjunction with or in place of the traditional center-provided Job Corps career and technical training program. Over the 4-year pilot period, about 280 of its 500 students enrolled in college.

The balance of this brief discusses some of the challenges, along with some emerging practices as conveyed by staff and students from the four centers as promising.

3. Emerging Practices for Maintaining Strong Job Corps–College Partnerships

Center staff had two suggestions to avoid conflict and promote efficiency when a Job Corps center seeks to subcontract with a college to provide its students with career and technical training services. First staff suggested that to establish a written document that details the roles and responsibilities of each party is critically important. Second, because it is difficult to foresee all issues that will arise, staff suggested on-going communication and interaction are needed to maintain a successful partnership.

From the interviews, four elements appear to underlie the strong partnerships that these centers have established:

1. Agree on a set of *detailed goals*, including the approximate number of Job Corps students who can enroll in which courses; whether the course is online or in-person, delivered at the center or the college; and that the classes are delivered at times that do not conflict with students' center commitments.
2. Have a clear understanding among all parties on *roles and responsibilities*, especially when there are staff at each organization doing a similar job, such as college and Job Corps advisors. Job Corps and college staffs both noted that Job Corps staff might relate better to their students and know Job Corps policies better, but college advising staff are better positioned and better informed about the college policies. A clear division of labor is needed to ensure smooth operations.

3. Make *accommodations to the other organization's or agency's requirements*. For example, the college partner accommodates Job Corps' need to document its students' attendance, or Job Corps accommodates the college's need for students to consent before it can share the students' grades. Center and college interviewees also suggested thinking about how Job Corps students would react to each partner's standard procedures, such as the college's reminder email to pay tuition, which could worry Job Corps students (who are attending for free) or the Job Corps center's curfew.
4. Have *open and regular communication*. The partnership managers at the college and Job Corps center should speak regularly to ensure both organizations are on the same page. Beyond that, it also is useful for the Job Corps staff to communicate directly with college instructors and advisors to learn about any changes in required class materials, so they can be ordered for the students, and to learn when students seem to be struggling in a course so Job Corps staff can intervene to help the student.

Another very useful way for Job Corp staff to stay informed about their students' progress is to obtain access from the college to the college's student portal and to their students' administrative information—namely their grades.

4. Emerging Promising Practices and Challenges Concerning Students

Interviews with Job Corps and college staff revealed that not every Job Corps student wants to or is ready to attend college. Some lack confidence. Some do not understand how much time they will need to dedicate to completing a

college course. Some lack the time management skills to complete the course outside the structure Job Corps provides students when they are on center. Others are not yet academically ready to engage in college-level material.

One Job Corps staff member suggests that an unsuccessful start at college can cause the student to leave Job Corps early, and possibly discourage the student from going back to college in the future. Thus, it is important to make sure that the students Job Corps sends to college want to go, are ready for the experience, and are supported to be successful.

More than one Job Corps center staff said they helped ensure success in college by (1) employing recruitment and enrollment strategies, (2) applying readiness criteria and/or providing students with college readiness classes that convey the expectations and time commitment college requires, and (3) monitoring student progress and providing additional support.

4.1 Recruiting Job Corps–Eligible Students Who Want to Attend College

Interviews with center staff suggested that to help ensure there are enough Job Corps students who are ready to enroll in college once the partnership is established, centers find it useful to recruit and enroll students from an expanded set of sources.

Staff at two of the centers started asking high schools not only to refer students who would benefit from the traditional Job Corps program but also to refer students who wanted to go to college but would benefit from the support Job Corps can provide.

Another effective strategy for finding students who want to go to college is to collaborate with the nearby college(s). One of the centers accompanied college staff to college fairs, as well as accompanying them to high schools. College

partners at two of the study centers referred struggling students by college staff.

4.2 Ensuring Students Are Ready to Succeed in College

The four Job Corps centers employ a variety of techniques to gauge and enhance their students' readiness for college. All of them consider the students' academic abilities.

- One requires a minimum score on a standardized exam, such as the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), before allowing a student to apply to college.
- Two require students to have a high school diploma before enrolling in particular college courses. The need for a high school diploma is usually a college-imposed requirement.
- One have students take the college's placement exam, such as the ACCUPLACER, to ensure they are academically ready.

In addition, center staff realize it is important to determine whether the students also have the maturity and social and emotional competencies needed to succeed in college. For example, students need to know how to organize their time, persist to complete reading and other assignments, turn assignments in on time, and follow instructions.

Center staff use several strategies to help gauge and build these non-academic skills students will need for college:

- Two of the centers limit college opportunities to older students, assuming they are more mature.
- At least one center teaches college-specific skills such as knowing how to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid form (FAFSA®), enroll in college, and navigate the college's student portal.

- One center created a required College Readiness course. Developed and taught by Job Corps staff, the classes include teaching college-specific skills, as well as lessons to build students' ability to seek help and advocate for themselves and to strengthen their ability to take a growth mindset toward challenging material. Instructors of the course assess non-academic preparedness by evaluating the students' Job Corps class attendance, interactions in class, residential dorm room behavior, and hygiene. If students fall short, the course then covers time management and other soft skills.
- Staff at the one center also gauge whether students are socially and emotionally ready before they are permitted to enroll in college.

4.3 Monitoring and Supporting College Students

Job Corps college students need to know what is expected of them and how they will be held accountable if they do not meet those expectations. Centers need to set expectations about attendance, about how many credits students need to maintain, and about minimum grade requirements. Setting expectations is more of a concern with minors, whom staff said struggle more with college due to its lack of structure. Students also struggle to meet the center's accountability requirements when they are at the college: attendance, punctuality, and progress.

Monitoring is important to ensure the safety of students and the smooth operations of the Job Corps center. In addition, close monitoring enables the center staff to support the college students, if they need to modify their behavior before it affects their college success.

In theory, the students can and should ask for help from either center or college staff when they

do not understand something covered in class. Staff at several centers noted, however, that students often do not seek help until it is too late.

This lack of self-advocacy is no different from other college students, who generally do not ask for help early enough. But Job Corps evaluates a center operator's performance based on whether center students earn credentials. As a result, centers implement several measures and policies on the Job Corps side to ensure that students are being responsible and progressing well in their studies.

Job Corps staff at all the centers noted that ensuring that students are attending their college classes is difficult. As a rule, colleges do not monitor attendance, but the agreement Job Corps students sign upon enrollment requires that they attend all courses that their Job Corps center sponsors. One center solves this problem by issuing its college students ID cards and requiring students to scan their card at a reader located at the Job Corps counselor's office on campus. When students do not have class, they are required to send an attendance email. Another center is exploring a similar type of electronic attendance system.

The college partners also can implement strategies on their side to help keep Job Corps apprised of its students' actions. For example, one college flags Job Corps students in its information systems. This flagging approach allows the college to restrict these students' ability to drop or add courses without consulting the Job Corps staff.

Centers indicated several emerging practices to monitor Job Corps students' academic progress. First, privacy laws require a college to share grades only with the student (or a minor student's parents/guardians) unless the student authorizes the release to others. To monitor their students' grades and course enrollment, all centers require

students to sign releases allowing Job Corps staff access to their grades.

Second, three of the four centers negotiate access to the college's online learning portal for students and/or to the system that instructors use to issue progress alerts. But not all instructors use the portals for interim grades. Center staff say the challenge they face is being able to see a student's weak progress in time to help. To get more real-time information, several centers developed direct lines of communication between college instructors and Job Corps staff (often those located at the college, as described in section 5).

Another center holds academic reviews with students every 60 days to talk about their progress. During the academic review sessions, staff try to teach students how to advocate for themselves and encourage the students to ask for help when they are not getting the support they need in their courses.¹¹ Center staff and the student discuss the student's plans, goals, supports, and needs. If a student is struggling or needs additional support, staff work with the student to develop an action plan requiring the student to attend evening support classes, tutoring, and weekly check-in meetings.

Job Corps college students have access at the college to academic support and resources, such as tutoring centers. Additional support is also available from Job Corps staff. Though this Job Corps-provided support could seem redundant, one center staff member explained that college

staff were not sensitive to the range of Job Corps student needs.

For example, confidence can be a big issue for Job Corps students. To build confidence and a foundation for continued success, one center created a companion course for its students taking the college's required Introduction to College course. Held on center and lasting 45 minutes, this companion course is where Job Corps instructors review and debrief what was taught that day in the college course and give students the opportunity to ask clarifying questions, get extra practice, or ask for help.

All centers help students with non-academic issues. These include providing or subsidizing transportation; providing wake-up calls; helping students navigate college orientation, registration, and scheduling; and obtaining academic accommodations or referrals to other college resources. Job Corps staff also connect students to other Job Corps services and resources, such as counseling, as needed.

Staff suggested that the combination of the supports Job Corps is able to provide its students is likely to have helped students succeed. One college partner representative, who specifically tracks Job Corps students, notes that Job Corps students tend to stay longer and have higher completion rates than do other students at the college.

¹¹ Research shows that providing advising to low-income young people who are pursuing education and training is critical in helping them overcome challenges to completing. See David Fein and Jill Hamadyk, *Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Year Up Program*, OPRE Report 2018-65 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

Advising in Year Up was weekly, however. The proven Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) model requires twice-monthly advising sessions. See Susan Scrivener, Michael J. Weiss, Alyssa Ratledge, Timothy Rudd, Colleen Sommo, and Hannah Fresques, *Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for Developmental Education Students* (New York: MDRC, 2015).

5. Emerging Promising Practices and Challenges of College Program Staffing and Operations

5.1 Staffing and Advising

All four centers recognize that having the Job Corps staff located at the college is a critical link to all Job Corps services. These on-campus Job Corps staff help monitor students (e.g., attendance, grades), as well as link the students to both college and Job Corps services. Depending on the size of the college program, centers place one or more staff on campus.

Having more staff at a college allows the center to more proactively supervise and support its students. For example, at one center, there is one designated Job Corps staff member for every 40-50 of its students attending college. This advising caseload is substantially lower than the typical college advisor's of 400 students. The lower student/advisor ratio makes the Job Corps advisors better able to closely monitor grades and support students with, for example, registration, scheduling, and financial aid.

In addition, students know and trust the Job Corps staff more than the college advisors and so are often more comfortable sharing issues and concerns. To ensure that Job Corps students use these staff, however, the space the college provides to Job Corps needs to be reasonably convenient—one that students, who have limited time at the college free of classes, can get to easily.

5.2 Transportation

Another key feature of all the college Job Corps programs is transportation assistance to help students get to class. All the study centers provide shuttles to the college or public transit passes or both. One center also provides non-residential students gas cards. Buses, be they Job Corps

shuttles or public transit buses, are not the perfect solution because they have to run on fixed schedules. Long distances between the college and center further complicate things for both the center and the students.

One college interviewee says that despite the hassles, one of the most important support services that Job Corps provides is bus passes and gas cards. Non-Job Corps college students must cover transit, car, and parking expenses on their own.

5.3 Tuition and Expenses

Navigating the college financial aid system can be challenging for students and the centers. There are three typical funding sources available to Job Corp college students, each of which covers only certain expenses:

- Federal Pell grant,
- K-12 funding, in some states and/or districts and depending on the student's age, and
- Job Corps funds.

When Job Corps wants to send a student to college, it generally starts by determining whether the student qualifies for a Pell grant. This requires having the student fill out the FAFSA. Somewhat daunting to complete, this annual form requires specific financial and other documentation from the student and the parents/guardians.

The FAFSA is so key to funding that two of the centers decided to support a staff position just to help students complete the application. Because each student's situation differs (whether they qualify for a Pell grant, which state they reside in, etc.), center staff must learn to navigate the complicated financial aid process, especially how to combine the multiple possible sources of funding.

5.4 System Challenges

Extensive collaboration with colleges is still relatively new for the Job Corps system. The Job Corps program was developed to provide all its services to students at the center-by-center staff. Thus, legacy Job Corps policies, procedures, and infrastructure sometimes hinder college program operations. Below are examples of system challenges the four centers encounter:

- The Job Corps data system was not designed to track off-center participation and completion of multiple college requirements. Staff say that as a result, it is very hard to show college students where they stand in terms of progress toward their graduation from the Job Corps program.
- In the traditional Job Corps program, students do not access their courses online, so they do not need the internet for education or training. Further, to comply with federal internet security requirements, Job Corps restricts their access to certain websites. That internet access is not only a low priority but also restricted can hinder students' ability to complete their college homework. Waivers to get access can be obtained, but they take time. Staff reported that one student had to drop a course because the waiver came too late.
- Job Corps policy requires students who test below the 9th-grade level on the math or reading TABE be enrolled into the needed basic skills course (offered at the center) until they meet those benchmarks. However, depending on a student's performance on the college placement exam, they may also be enrolled in the college's remedial course. While this "double-dosaging" has been shown to increase the gains experienced by

students¹², the two remedial courses were not coordinated. Students at one center expressed the feeling that the center course was redundant and interfered with the time they need to attend, do homework, or study for their college courses.

- Job Corps staff at one center noted that curfew policies interfere with students being able to take courses that meet in the evening.
- Job Corps policy is to serve meals on center. For the many Job Corps college students who spend the majority of the day on campus, staff must arrange to provide them lunch there. Three of the four centers had a meal voucher system to avoid stigmatization from all having the same bagged lunches.

The four study centers address these challenges in a variety of ways. Examples include by creating a separate data system for recording college progress, getting waivers or exceptions for particular students from DOL, and negotiating arrangements with the college. These accommodations and adjustments all take time and resources.

If Job Corps expands its partnerships with colleges, the Job Corps' National Office will likely need to reexamine its policies to make them more supportive.

6. Summary and Implications

The experiences of the four Job Corps centers with their local college partners suggest challenges that other centers and colleges are likely to encounter if they try to partner similarly. Some challenges are common whenever organizations

¹² Dobbie, Will, and Roland G. Fryer Jr. 2011. "Are High-Quality Schools Enough to Increase Achievement among the Poor? Evidence from the Harlem Children's Zone."

American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 3 (3): 158-87.d

collaborate; others are unique to the Job Corps/college collaboration.

6.1 Emerging Promising Practices

This section pulls together some of the practices that appear to have been useful to the four centers in the study. While other programs may be interested in understanding what practices helped these four centers create productive partnerships, readers should keep in mind that the four centers are just a small fraction of centers that have partnerships with colleges. More research in a broader set of Job Corps centers is needed to generalize to the entire system.





Each of the study centers addresses its challenges in its own way, but looking across their interview responses suggests some emerging promising practices (see Exhibit 2):

- Supplement Job Corps recruitment sources with those that are particularly likely to attract Job Corps-eligible students who are interested in attending college. College fairs are an example of a productive recruiting source.
- Offer college training in a broad range of industries and occupations to attract a large

number of students. To make the investment in a Job Corps–college partnership cost-effective, common sense suggests that the college program needs to operate at an appropriate scale. This means that partnerships need to offer college programming that will attract enough students.

- Make the necessary logistical and policy provisions to enable students to get to college on time, be fed while on campus, fulfill any college or Job Corps requirements (such as getting internet access to do their homework, or making curfew), and have the time and ability to receive support when needed.
- Have a staff member who can work with the students, Job Corps, the college, and possibly the state to ensure that funding is in place to pay for the college courses that Job Corps students take.
- Locate at least one staff member at the college to manage the college relationship, monitor students, and help students navigate college and Job Corps requirements.
- Have a mechanism in place so that there is mutual understanding of which organization is providing which services. There should also

Exhibit 2. Emerging Promising Practices for Job Corps Centers and College Partnerships

 <p>Recruitment</p>  <p>Logistics</p>  <p>Staffing</p>  <p>Communication</p>	<p>EMERGING PROMISING PRACTICES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add recruitment sources that would attract Job Corps eligible students interested in college, such as college fairs at well-suited high schools.• Recruit students with a range of occupational interests that can be met by the college to ensure the college partnership is large enough to be efficient.• Arrange transportation to and from the college, accommodations for meals off center, and internet access needed to complete assignments.• Assign a Job Corps staff member in charge of managing the funding for college.• Identify enough Job Corps staff at the college to proactively monitor and assist Job Corp students.• Clarify roles and responsibilities so both the college and the Job Corps staff know what services each are providing to the students.• Facilitate Job Corps staff's ability to communicate with students' instructors.• Check in with students frequently to help students navigate inevitable problems.
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be regular communication between the center and the community college so that when an adjustment is needed, it can be made in a timely manner.

- Provide for regular contact between Job Corps staff and instructors teaching the Job Corps students.
- Communicate regularly with students attending college so that the center can offer them both academic and non-academic support when needed. It is especially useful if these staff are located at the college to provide proactive assistance to the students.

6.2 Additional Research Ideas

This study is just a first look at what might be some emerging promising practices for collaborations between Job Corps and local colleges. Because this study grew out of the Cascades College and Career Academy Job Corps demonstration, it had less flexibility and funding to pursue a larger agenda. Much more could be learned by examining the experiences of a broader set of these partnerships. Future research could examine the following questions, some of which emerged as a result of this study:

- How the challenges and practices varied by the distance between the center and the college, or by when in students' Job Corps experience, they attend college—that is, for their entire career and technical training or only after completing the Job Corps–provided training.
- What are the challenges and best practices around providing non-residential participants access to college.

- How are the partnerships' cost-effectiveness affected by factors such as the quality of the college readiness training provided at the center before students enroll in courses at the college, or the type and intensity of support the center provides when students are taking college courses.

This study showed that productive collaborations between colleges and Job Corps centers are possible. Furthermore, that the partnerships have been renewed for several years supports the impression that interviewees from both parties conveyed about their benefit.

Center staff report that the partnerships allow them to offer Job Corps students training opportunities that centers cannot provide. The partnerships also furnish the colleges with students and revenue to support instructors and courses.

Center staff also suggest that students benefited by attending college while at Job Corps, as it shows students that they will be capable of successfully maneuvering through and managing the college system on their own when they leave Job Corps. The hope is that such a realization might increase the long-term impact of Job Corps. Indeed, many of the Job Corps college students interviewed speak of plans to continue their college education after leaving Job Corps.

Though more research is needed to better understand the contours of sound practice, this examination of four Job Corps college programs draws attention to the issues that centers should consider as they explore partnering with technical and community colleges.