2019 Interim Performance Report

Submitted:

U.S. Department of Education

Title III - Part A - Strengthening Institutions

ED 524B Cover Sheet

1. PR/Award #:   P031A180007
2. Grantee NCES ID#:   230913
3. Project Title: Success in the First Year and Beyond: Transforming Curriculum and Academic Support Systems
4. Grantee Name: VERMONT STATE COLLEGES
5. Grantee Address: 337 COLLEGE HILL RD
                        JOHNSON, VT 05656
6. Project Director Name: Kathleen Brinegar   Title: Associate Academic Dean
   Ph #:   802-635-1472   Fax #:
   Email Address: kathleen.Brinegar@northernvermont.edu

Reporting Period Information

7. Reporting Period: From: 10/01/2018 - 03/31/2019

Budget Expenditures *(To be completed by your Business Office.)*

8. Budget Expenditures:

	Federal Grant Funds	Non-Federal Funds *(Match/Cost Share)*
a. Previous Budget Period		
b. Current Budget Period	$23,697.33	$0.00
c. Entire Budget Period *(For Final Performance Reports only)*		

Indirect Cost Information *(To be completed by your Business Office.)*

9. Indirect Costs
   a. Are you claiming indirect costs under this grant?   No

Human Subjects (Annual Institutional Review Board (IRB) Certification)

10. Is the annual certification of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval attached?   N/A

Data Privacy and Security Measures Certification

11. Is a statement affirming that you are aware of federal and state data security and student privacy regulations included, with supporting documentation attached?   No

Performance Measures Status and Certification

12. Performance Measures Status
   a. Are complete data on performance measures for the current budget period included in the Project Status Chart?   Yes
   b. If no, when will the data be available and submitted to the Department?

12. Authorized Representative Name:
   Date:
   Phone:
   E-mail:

Executive Summary

Northern Vermont University-Johnson (formerly, Johnson State College) received official notice of its Title III award on October 2, 2018. The institution was well poised to begin work on its approved project as soon as the award period began; NVU-J (JSC), however, was no longer exactly where it had been at the time of original application to the Strengthening Institutions program. Progress had been achieved in some areas, and planning had proceeded in others. This passage of time between application and award necessitated certain changes in our plans for Title III implementation. Most important of these was the approved change in Project Director. (The previously named individual continues service as advisor to the Project Director and President for Title III.) Other changes to the four part-time and two full- time positions outlined in the proposal include the merging of the Student Success Director with the Coordinator of Student Retention and Student Success Coach (for near-completers). This merger was possible due to a change in the responsibilities of our current Director of Advising that allowed her to take on many of the responsibilities outlined in the Student Success Director position. Merging them has resulted in a base salary that has given us the ability to launch a search for a more senior staff member. Additionally, there is no longer a need for the Center for Teaching Excellence Coordinator, as the university established a Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL) prior to the grant award, although some monies allotted for this position were used to increase the hours the current director has to focus on CTL projects. Finally, the university has yet to launch a search for the Institutional Researcher as we are part of a state-wide university system that has a committee focused on building system-wide infrastructure to support institutional research. Once that work is complete, we will launch the search for an institutional researcher.

Since receiving notification of the Title III award on October 2, 2018, much work has occurred in moving the university closer to meeting its stated goals. A summary of that work follows:

Overall Academic Programs and Institutional Management Goal:

Foster early and ongoing student success through implementation of college-wide initiatives, systems, and processes.

Strategy 1: Centralize and improve advising and student success services

• Created a Title III Committee made-up of representatives from the following units: First-Year Experience, Dean of Students, Advising, and Faculty. The committee is led by the Associate Academic Dean.
• Hired a full-time academic advisor in January to support students in their second year and beyond. Responsibilities include walk-in advising, coordinating our national and international exchange programs, and completing degree audits for all sophomores as well as juniors and seniors identified in our student concerns process.
• Reorganized space to create a collaborative office/workspace for our Advising, First-Year Experience, and Career & Internship units. These units now share a single, large office suite. Previously the offices were separated by location and/or closed doors in between units. This creates more of a one-stop-shop for student support services. Our Academic Support Services unit has also been able to use rooms in this space for academic coaching and tutoring.
• Revised the exit notification and leave of absence form and process. The revised form allows us to collect better data on an individual's reason(s) for leaving. The new process requires an exit interview to aid in data collection and support students in staying.
• Developed position and launched a search for a Director of Student Engagement & Persistence. Responsibilities will include: program evaluation of student success initiatives; identification, collection and analysis of student retention data across various student populations, conducting exit interviews with individuals wishing to exit the college, and working with 'near completers' to reach graduation.
• Organized a team made up of our Director of Advising, Associate Academic Dean, professional advisors, and faculty advisors to attend the summer NACADA (National Academic Advising Association) Institute. The goal of the weeklong experience is to examine our current advising model and processes to identify ways that we can improve delivery and consistency of academic advising, with a focus on improving student success and persistence.

Strategy 2: Increase student engagement/experiential learning

• Developed a plan for collecting quantitative data related to student success and persistence. This involved researching and meeting with organizations offering student success surveys and data analysis (i.e. Hanover Research, EAB, Eduventures, and Hobson's Starfish). In the end, we decided to use four available measures—CIRP, BCSSE, NSSE and the Noel-Levitz Sophomore Experience Survey—for the 2019-2020 academic year and will provide a stipend through the grant for a faculty member to collaborate with our Director of Student Engagement & Persistence to perform the data analysis.
• Conducted a listening tour with student leadership groups across campus to introduce students to the Title III grant and collect qualitative data around perceived barriers to student success and persistence.
• Launched a Course Redesign Mini-Grant program. The first round of applications for mini-grants are due April 26, 2019. Course instructors who attend professional development related to teaching & learning can apply for $500-$2000 in funds towards course redesign work, and for direct costs related to implementing high impact practices with students.
• Developed and distributed an RFP for travel funds available for students and faculty to present collaborative research and projects.
• Funded professional development and experiential learning opportunities for faculty and students. For example, we funded attendance at a digital humanities workshop for a faculty member and a student. The faculty member is launching a digital humanities course in the spring and the student is working on using techniques learned from the workshop to enhance data collection for her senior thesis.
• We are currently examining institutional data regarding course WDF percentages in order to target future professional development as well as consider staffing changes for gateway courses.

Strategy 3: Establish Center for Teaching Excellence

• As NVU had already established a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) in the years between the submission of the Title III grant proposal and notification of the award, Title III funds were used to provide the Director of the CTL with an additional course release during the spring 2019 semester to increase the CTL's capacity to offer professional development opportunities.
• Launched a monthly workshop series in the spring 2019 semester, titled, 'Teaching and Learning for Student Success". Each month faculty and staff gather over lunch to explore topics integral to student success and persistence. The topics were identified by examining retention data and the workshops are led by faculty and staff.
• Sponsoring a May 3, 2019 workshop titled, 'Teaching First-Year Undergraduates: Promoting Students' Active Involvement in the FYS' for instructors of first-year seminars and gateway courses.
• Currently planning professional development programming around diversity and inclusion for the fall 2019 semester. Current plans include a workshop on social justice considerations for syllabi.

Fiscal Stability Goal: Strengthen NVU-J's fiscal future

Strategy 4: Build NVU-J's Endowment

• As noted elsewhere, endowment-building and endowment-matching have gotten off the ground slowly. The major reason has to do with the recent reorganization and restaffing of the Development and Alumni Relations Office, which had been under-resourced. With the University's development program now emerging from this transitional phase, meeting the Title III match is a priority. Staff members together with the President have been occupied identifying endowments that meet Title III criteria and planning the institution's fund-raising efforts to meet five years of match grant opportunities. To that end, major donor solicitation is scheduled to occur during Summer 2019.

Section A: Performance Objectives

Project Objective: 1 By September 30, 2019, increase fall-to-fall retention of first-time, full-time students to 70%.

Number	Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
			Target			Actual Performance Data		
	By September 30, 2019, increase fall-to-fall retention of first-time, full-time students to 70%.	Project	Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
			179	125 / 179	70		/	

Explanation of Progress (Include qualitative data and data collection information)

Because the performance measure requires data based on Fall 2019 enrollment figures, we are unable to provide performance data for this objective until the year 1 APR.

Project Objective: 2 By September 30, 2019, increase fall-to-fall retention of students from sophomore to junior year to 80%.

Number	Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
			Target			Actual Performance Data		
	By September 30, 2019, increase fall-to-fall retention of students from sophomore to junior year to 80%.	Project	Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
			197	157 / 197	80		/	

Explanation of Progress (Include qualitative data and data collection information)

Because the performance measure requires data based on Fall 2019 enrollment figures, we are unable to provide performance data for this objective until the year 1 APR.

Project Objective: 3 By September 30, 2019, increase fall-to-fall retention of students from junior to senior year to 88%.

Number	Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
			Target			Actual Performance Data		
	By September 30, 2019, increase fall-to-fall retention of students from junior to senior year to 88%.	Project	Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
			125	110 / 125	88		/	

Explanation of Progress (Include qualitative data and data collection information)

Because the performance measure requires data based on Fall 2019 enrollment figures, we are unable to provide performance data for this objective until the year 1 APR.

Project Objective: 4 By September 30, 2019, increase completion rate of "near-completers" to 50%.

Number	Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
			Target			Actual Performance Data		
	By September 30, 2019, increase completion rate of "near-completers" to 50%.	Project	Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
			265	132 / 265	50		/	

Explanation of Progress (Include qualitative data and data collection information)

We intend to compare the current list of 265 near-completers with the same list at the time of the year 1 APR, taking into account August 2019 graduates and the list of applicants for December 2019 graduation. Thus we are unable to provide performance data for this objective until the year 1 APR.

Project Objective: 5 Increase six-year graduation rate.

Number	Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
			Target			Actual Performance Data		
	Increase six-year graduation rate.	Project	Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				/			/	

Explanation of Progress (Include qualitative data and data collection information)

This objective measured in Years 3-5.

Project Objective: 6 Obj. 6: By September 30, 2019, increase student overall satisfaction with advising to 50%.

Number	Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
			Target			Actual Performance Data		
	Obj. 6: By September 30, 2019, increase student overall satisfaction with advising to 50%.	Project	Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
			164	134 / 164	82		/	

Explanation of Progress (Include qualitative data and data collection information)

Because the performance measure requires data based on Spring 2019 advising survey data, we are unable to provide performance data for this objective until the year 1 APR.

Project Objective: 7 By September 30, 2019, decrease failure/withdrawal rates in four gateway courses by 10%.

Number	Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
			Target			Actual Performance Data		
			Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
	By September 30, 2019, decrease failure/withdrawal rates in four gateway courses by 10%.	Project		/			/	

Explanation of Progress (Include qualitative data and data collection information)

Because the performance measure requires data based on Spring 2020 WDFI data, we are unable to provide performance data for this objective until the year 1 APR.

Project Objective: 8 By September 30, 2019, increase endowment by at least $179,000.

Number	Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
			Target			Actual Performance Data		
	By September 30, 2019, increase endowment by at least $179,000.	Project	Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
				/			/	

Explanation of Progress (Include qualitative data and data collection information)

For purposes of this performance measure, solicitations will continue through September 2019, at which time we will report on this objective as part of the year 1 APR.

Section B: Budget Information

Actual budget expenditures total $23,697 through March. As noted elsewhere in the executive summary, Northern Vermont University-Johnson (formerly Johnson State College) was well poised to begin the award period. Nevertheless, a slower-than-anticipated drawdown occurred at the start, owing to circumstances having to do both with the Vermont state system of higher education (of which NVU-J is a part) as well as with the institution itself. At the system level, a new grants office had just been formed, a new Grants Compliance Officer hired and, most salient, a new protocol for grant expenditures and drawdowns adopted. At the level of the institution, some delay in launching Title III owed itself to the key change in Project Director. In addition, the President had formulated plans to reorganize and restaff the development office, which affected endowment-building, and thus endowment-matching, efforts, an important dimension of the grant. It is also fair to say that a great deal of executive and institutional attention was paid to preparations for an April 2019 accreditation visit, which temporarily took pride of place. At the level of the project, over a period of months the Project Director and project advisor expended many hours in exploratory interviews with various educational research firms. The upshot, however, was a conclusion that none could provide what we needed, especially at a price consistent with what was available in the grant budget ($22,500/grant year #1).

Thankfully, these impediments were very temporary and all have been overcome. The new grants system has taken root; the approved Project Director has been hard at work for months; an excellent, new development officer, in charge of endowments, has joined the senior staff; a successful accreditation visit took place several weeks ago; and we have adopted and have moved forward rapidly to implement a more customized and home-grown approach to gathering baseline data on student success/attrition, one that also fits well within the grant budget. The data gathered will form the evidentiary basis for a revised system of supports and interventions. Following these consequential steps, a number of important, grant-supported activities are planned for the rest of this semester and, especially, this summer. These should draw down the first-year balance considerably.

There are no significant changes to the budget resulting from modification of project activities. The only changes result from Northern Vermont University-Johnson's having received its award more than a year after applying for one. As discussed in the executive summary, this created some altered needs, in personnel and activities, all the while adhering consistently to the overall objective of the grant activity.

There have been no changes to the budget that affected our ability to achieve the approved project activities and/or project objectives. Nor are there anticipated changes in the operational budget for the next budget period.

Section C: Additional Information

We recognize the importance of standardizing the collection and analysis of data bearing on student success, and of bringing evidence together in a usable manner. As noted in the project proposal, we also seek to develop a predictive model to identify students at-risk and isolate system barriers to degree completion. The purpose of doing so is to enable the development of more personalized care and support pathways for students.

To assist with this, the Project Director and Advisor considered an engagement with, and in almost all cases met with, several educational research firms, including Eduventures, Hanover Research, Hobson's Starfish, and the Education Advisory Board. None, however, could provide what we needed, especially at a price consistent with what was available in the grant budget. For grant year #1 we decided, instead, to gather baseline data by administering several well-tested, well-regarded and cost-effective instruments: CIRP (UCLA), SYSA (Noel-Levitz), BCSSE and NSSE (both Indiana University). As noted in the Executive Summary, we will provide a stipend through the grant for a faculty member to collaborate with the Director of Student Engagement and Persistence to perform the data analysis. Most recently we learned of the Veera platform, developed by Rapid Insight, which seems a promising and affordable tool to help us merge our data-gathering efforts and create predictive models for student success and attrition without having to resort to outside consultants. We are in the early stages of considering a license to use this tool.