

Three Samples of 2020 College Project Award-Winning Entries

**Alpha Epsilon Iota Chapter
Shelton State Community College
Tuscaloosa, Alabama**

Briefly describe your College Project and what your chapter set out to accomplish with your college administration.

Fewer than 40 percent of community college students earn a certificate or degree within six years of enrollment. While this may seem acceptable, it simply is not. Persistence, retention, and graduation rates can be higher. Scholarship from the Association of American Community Colleges and the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveals that those who do not complete any type of certificate or credential beyond a high school diploma will earn less than their counterparts do over a lifetime and will be more susceptible to falling into unemployment. Thus, completion is a serious issue in higher education. Hundreds of thousands of Alabamians are seeking a way into the middle class and for a more comfortable lifestyle while employers are seeking a qualified and skilled workforce. As a member of the Alabama Community College System, Shelton State Community college (SSCC) is not immune to these problems. Our College Project (CP) is rooted in confronting the topic of persistence, retention, and graduation rates.

Specifically, we were tasked with discovering why students enrolled in fall 2018 had not returned, and what—if anything—would influence them to return. To ascertain this information, a list of students was compiled, a survey designed and put in the field, phone-calls were made to respondents, measurements taken of project facilitators, an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data rendered, and a report submitted to the college's administration.

Through our project, we sought to strengthen the already strong and well-established relationship between the chapter and the college administration as well as help the college fulfill its mission and goals.

Describe the planning process in detail including who was involved in determining the project and who your chapter collaborated with to carry out the project.

In early spring, our advisors met with the Dean of Student Services to discuss the chapter's goals, budget, and specific projects including the CP. Previous projects were discussed along with issues challenging the college that PTK could help with. With no surprise, the consistent topics of persistence, retention, and graduation rates arose (Shelton's 2017-2018 drop-out rate was 42% for full-time students and 60% for part-time students). Building off the success of last year's CP, which focused on similar issues, the chapter was asked to begin a project to discover why some students did not persist from 2018 to 2019. Because it can be difficult to meet with the college president on a consistent basis, the Dean of Student Services (DSS) was our primary administrative contact.

A CP team was created to review current scholarship on retention and to work with the Director of Institutional Research (DIR) to access reports showing student enrollment in the recent semesters (i.e. fall 2018, spring 2019, summer 2019, and fall 2019). We were then directed by the Associate Dean, whose focus is on student success, to sign FERPA waivers since we would be working with sensitive student information. The DSS also gave input on what questions she wanted our team to ask in a survey we were drafting. Our research reinforced what the relevant questions should be asked. The DIR then edited our survey questions and used the Qualtrics platform to create the survey.

While waiting on the DIR to create the instrument, we worked with one of our advisors to extrapolate information from the enrollment lists provided and to make sure we had the correct population for our study. Once our list was ready and the survey prepared, we had our advisor put it in the field. A sample list was also created for CP team members; we called those on the sample list whereby some more qualitative data could be recorded. After a three-week window, the DIR ran a report and supplied us with survey results. By this time, the telephone surveys had also been finished. Working with our advisor we analyzed the results.

How did chapter members develop their leadership and/or knowledge, skills and abilities needed for project implementation?

From the outset of being named chapter officers, we are trained on the importance of the CP. As students, we can work through our degree plan without ever being exposed to issues consuming the college administration. The CP makes us aware of issues such as performance-based funding, service-area turf wars, and re-accreditation struggles. Coming to view ourselves as stakeholders in the overall success and performance of our college fuels the pride we already have as students for Shelton State.

Following a meeting between our chapter advisors and the Dean of Student Services, chapter officers were educated on the significance of persistence, retention, and graduation rates. We were shown statistics and began discussions about possible projects we could undertake to address those numbers.

Furthermore, by working with our advisors (one of which is a part of the Student Services Division and the other who teaches mathematics, statistics, and who has also worked closely with the Director of Institutional Research), we learned much about how data is collected and specific rates determined. We talked through what data we needed for our project, had our advisor request it, and then had her show us how to decipher the enrollment reports we received.

Our advisor also taught us about a study's population, what a sample is, the differences between qualitative and quantitative data and findings are, and how to analyze collected data collected. It was invaluable information.

Describe in detail how the chapter collaborated and communicated with others before, during and after the project.

Chapter officers were introduced to the concept of the CP during our officer orientation in February. Their advisors and outgoing officers provided training on what a CP is and why it is important. What they provided was reinforced in Education Forums (attended by officers) at both Regional Convention and Catalyst. Thus, when our advisors announced what the DSS and college administration would like our chapter to do, we were cognizant of why we had the task and what expectations were upon us.

Meeting with our chapter advisors, we designed a project which included a two-pronged study: putting a survey in the field and making telephone calls to a sample. We had our advisors report the idea to DSS who gave us approval for the CP.

By the late spring, we learned that our CP idea would face a logistic obstacle. Beginning in summer semester, student identification numbers changed. As part of the Alabama Community College System (ACCS), Shelton State's student records be being aligned into OneACCS, an integrated student data management system. The DIR explained that the reporting software we had used in-house for years would no longer work for the new ID-numbers. Thus, there would be a problem creating enrollment reports for the summer and fall terms. With this in mind, our CP's work slowed during the summer semester. Returning for the fall semesters, we reconnected with the DIR who revealed that fortunately, the enrollment reports we requested were available. We were able to inform the DSS that our CP was back on track. We worked with one of our advisors who teach statistics to examine the reports and the DIR to create the survey. Given our sample list, team members wrote a script to use while making our telephone calls and split the list into manageable parts.

Progress reports were given to members during chapter officer and chapter meetings and by our advisor to the DSS at weekly Student Service Division meetings.

Once the survey window closed, team members worked with our advisor to review what we learned during the telephone calls (not only from the respondents but from our experiences too) and to review the survey instrument's results. Conclusions were shared with the DSS who was asked to share them further with the college president's cabinet.

With our conclusions in hand, team members met to complete this Hallmark application. It will be interesting to see if any of the results influence policy or procedural changes in areas of student success, financial aid, or course offering and schedule.

What were the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of your project, including the lessons learned by your chapter members and others?

The chapter wanted to identify issues hindering the completion of a certificate or degree for Shelton State students. To do so, we put our survey in the field and made telephone calls. Six hundred nineteen students who were enrolled at SSCC in Spring 2019 but who had not graduated by Fall 2019 were identified and became our study's population. The 619 were a mixture of returning and non-returning students. Of those 619, a sample of 50 was separated for phone interviews. The remaining 569 were emailed to complete the online survey. There was only a 3% return rate for the emailed survey. Based on these results, it was noted that 50% of the students who were not enrolled in the Fall 2019 semester indicated that they were not made aware of any programs or organizations that could have assisted them with continuing your enrollment. Of those who were enrolled in Fall 2019, 8% indicated they would not be returning in the Spring 2020 semester. Of the 50 phone surveys conducted, only 11 or 22% answered the phone and were willing to complete the survey. Of the 11, 7 were enrolled currently and 4 were not. Of those not currently enrolled, a general negative feeling was gleaned from the respondents. Respondents indicated that their time spent at Shelton was not worthwhile and were not provided assistance in finding programs that could assist them in continuing their education. On a positive note, the currently enrolled phone respondents indicated that they had a positive experience with the college. The online courses and low tuition were big contributors to them returning to Shelton.

They felt positive about the level and type of communication with faculty and felt that the classes are worth the price paid. Overall, they seemed happy here and plan to return in spring.

Chapter members learned about issues typically hidden from the common student's experience. Moreover, we learned how to conduct a proper survey. Even as students, we can help Shelton achieve its mission, vision, and goals.

**Alpha Iota Chi Chapter
Northeast State Community College
Blountville, Tennessee**

Briefly describe your College Project and what your chapter set out to accomplish with your college administration.

At our College president's direction, the Chapter facilitated the development of a campus community supportive of students (and their families) recovering from or struggling with substance use disorder (SUD) by establishing Tennessee's first registered community college collegiate recovery program (CRP). According to the Association of Recovery in Higher Education (2019), CRPs provide students with recovery support in a higher education setting. In collaboration with several College and community stakeholders, we (1) created Students Hold. On. Pain. Ends. (Students HOPE); (2) designed a two-tiered organizational structure; (3) secured funding; (4) researched and fulfilled the requirements to become a registered CRP through the Association of Recovery in Higher Education (ARHE) and a fully sanctioned student organization; (5) created a survey to gather student and faculty input; and, (6) recruited staff and faculty as advisors. The Director of Counseling Services (DCS) will serve as CRP staff advisor, and a Sociology professor will serve as faculty advisor for the student organization. The program kick-off date is February 4th, 2020.

Describe the planning process in detail including who was involved in determining the project and who your chapter collaborated with to carry out the project.

We realized the opportunity the College Project provided to introduce our new College president, Dr. Bethany Flora, to PTK. We could foster open communication and establish a positive working relationship between the Chapter and the College. To prepare, we reviewed the College's mission and vision, which is to advance lifelong learning and strengthen the social and cultural aspects of the community. We then perused Flora's interviews to better understand her first-year goals. Flora began by sharing her desire to establish the first registered community college CRP in Tennessee. Together, we considered how this could aid the administration in achieving the College's vision to "best prepare individuals to meet current and emerging needs," such as providing support within the academic community for those struggling with SUD. We also discussed the Chapter's capacity to take on this project, established expectations for (at least) bi-weekly email updates, and mutually agreed on two CRP components: a peer support program and a student organization.

Eight Chapter members led the effort, creating a planning/implementation timeline and delegating responsibilities between four teams. Team one researched local student-related SUD issues. Team two investigated existing college CRPs and contacted Texas Tech University to gather information about their

CRP to serve as a model for our own. Team three designed a survey to gauge student and faculty interest in--and need for--a CRP. Team four conducted asset mapping, analyzing existing recovery and family support programs such as 12-step, SMART recovery, Alanon and LifeRing, and they researched local mental health agencies to identify appropriate professionals to lead group sessions. In subsequent meetings, Flora suggested potential collaborators, especially the DCS and the Faculty Senate President, both of whom had expressed interest in a SUD program. We assembled a project planning team, including these collaborators and the College's social work intern. Because our research suggested significant potential for increasing student success with the program, after four meetings we invited interested faculty and staff to a planning session.

In accordance with ARHE requirements, we developed a Students HOPE vision and mission statement, worked with marketing to create a logo and collaborated with administrators to secure a discrete CRP meeting location. In consultation with the planning team and webmaster, we created a Students HOPE email address and website. Finally, we established a Memorandum of Understanding with Frontier Health, the region's leading provider of behavioral health services, which will partner with the College to offer SUD treatment.

How did chapter members develop their leadership and/or knowledge, skills and abilities needed for project implementation?

Initially, Chapter members expressed anxiety about meeting with the President. Understanding the need to confidently approach this first meeting, we considered professional communication norms and brainstormed potential projects in case she preferred to rely on our suggestions. After the first meeting, we realized this project was a significant undertaking, making clear roles and organization imperative. Thus, in addition to forming research teams, we established actionable goals, determined needed outside assistance, created a diverse planning team, and composed clear requests for specific assistance from appropriate offices, such as marketing and facilities management. Because much of the project required balancing competing ideas and personalities--and necessitated clear, effective communication between multiple stakeholders--we scheduled weekly Chapter meetings to troubleshoot and ensure a thoughtful approach to each new challenge. We also rotated who would reach out to the administration when necessary changes to our initial plan arose and to offer regular updates.

Through research, we collaboratively built collective knowledge. However, we recognized a need to develop and strengthen technical skills to be successful. For example, before disseminating our survey, we sought input from experienced faculty to ensure our survey was appropriately written and that we had provided opportunities for qualitative student and faculty input. Additionally, prior to asset mapping, we established a base knowledge of what it entailed and a strategy for locating community resources, discovering a "Community Resources" page on the College website which offered an additional opportunity to serve the College by updating that resource list.

Describe in detail how the chapter collaborated and communicated with others before, during and after the project.

We met with and/or sent email updates weekly to Flora and select faculty and administrators to track progress, foster collaboration on program design, secure funding, and build community support. In weekly meetings, the planning committee established goals and brainstormed solutions for potential obstacles, reviewed ARHE requirements, designed a marketing campaign, and secured program funding.

ARHE required a name, logo, mission statement, vision, and location to host meetings. We agreed upon Students HOPE as the name and collaborated with the College's marketing department to create a logo, website, and flyers, and for social media announcement support.

Per our agreement with Flora, we created a two-tiered structure: a CRP and a student organization. We worked with the vice president of student success to establish a fully sanctioned student organization after securing student signatures and providing the faculty advisor with a sampling of CRP constitutions and by-laws. We identified a faculty advisor for the club component of Students HOPE. The DCS will lead the recovery program.

Continuous (at times daily) communication through email, twice weekly team meetings, weekly committee meetings, and biweekly check-ins with Flora and/or administrators were all key in the process. During sessions with faculty and staff advisors, the College's marketing director, and the community relations editor we developed a marketing strategy to announce the College's intention to establish a registered CRP. We collaborated with grant development to designate the College's Appalachian Regional Commission Technical Assistance Grant, which aids opioid-afflicted areas, to fund the first year of Students HOPE. These funds will cover ARHE annual dues, CRP expenses, and travel costs to send a student to the 2020 National Collegiate Recovery Conference. The club will fundraise, recruit guest speakers, and assist with program logistics to ensure the CRP remains focused on student, faculty, and staff needs.

What were the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of your project, including the lessons learned by your chapter members and others?

Students HOPE is Tennessee's first community college CRP and the College's latest fully sanctioned student organization. After a final meeting with Flora, during which we discussed the project's status and final outcomes and collaborated once more on a public event, she proudly announced this accomplishment to the Tennessee Board of Regents and issued a communitywide press release. We launch next month with a kick-off event in which we will present the program to the campus, including the entire administration. This will fulfill the College's goal to signal support for students seeking recovery. Finally, because we drove the completion of one of Flora's first initiatives, she is acutely aware of the power of partnering with PTK.

To determine the need and potential leadership for the CRP, and to gauge interest, we surveyed students, faculty, and staff, both online and in-person, receiving 113 responses. We found that our input, research, and survey results were key to the administration's decision-making process and their enthusiastic support.

Though 91% of respondents reported no personal struggle with SUD, 48% indicated family members struggle. While 62% of respondents reported suffering from anxiety and/or depression, 96% reported never seeking professional help. These results suggest that the CRP best supports those whose family members struggle with SUD. However, this may reflect self-reporting bias.

When asked how Students HOPE could best meet students' needs, students responded:

"It will give me something to focus on other than intoxication."

"[H]elp me understand my family members."

Students expressed concerns about “being judged by other students or my professors,” and with confidentiality, asking, “how public will it be?” Some recommended offering additional online resources and telephone counseling.

As the Chapter began working with faculty and staff, we experienced difficulty scheduling meetings. We responded by offering multiple meeting options. Early on, we also struggled to agree on the purpose of and distinction between the student organization and the CRP. Through collaborative problem-solving, we ultimately articulated the distinct functions: the organization would provide organizational, funding, and marketing support for the recovery program; and, the recovery program would conduct professional recovery group sessions. Navigating this tension taught us necessary professional skills, such as effective teamwork, and about the benefits and challenges of collaborative leadership and shared control. Moreover, entrusted with leading this effort, Chapter members learned invaluable lessons about the inner-workings of college administration, professional communication, organization, and program design.

More importantly, however, this program is personal. One-third of our officer team has been impacted by SUD, either personally or as a family member. One of our officers formerly suffered from SUD and understands that recovery is not a simple fix, but an ongoing battle. Another has seen immediate and extended family members struggle with SUD for years, leading to a feeling of uncertainty and isolation. Thus, upon reflection, this project not only allowed us to serve the College and grow as scholar servant-leaders, but Students HOPE will continue to provide us with a safe space to seek encouragement, guidance, and, indeed, hope.

**Alpha Sigma Zeta Chapter
Onondaga Community College
Syracuse, New York**

Briefly describe your College Project and what your chapter set out to accomplish with your college administration.

In January our team met with our college president to discuss how our chapter could help support the college’s mission. Before the meeting we researched the mission and felt that student engagement, retention, and workforce development were areas where our college could improve. At the meeting, the conversation moved to our experiences at OCC. They had been positive, but many of us agreed that we were worried because we weren’t sure what careers awaited us following the completion of our education. Our president felt that many students feel similarly and have difficulty connecting their majors to careers or even knowing what to major in at all.

Part of the college’s mission is to prepare students for the workforce, so the president suggested we create a project aimed at connecting majors with careers. After the meeting our team devised a plan to create a faculty-led speaker series where faculty discuss career options for their majors. We then met with our president again to discuss our ideas. She suggested we strengthen the impact by also organizing a campus-wide event to help students connect with future employers. Therefore, we created a two-tiered project to help students connect their majors to careers. We organized OCC’s “Major” Event Educational Expo and created a faculty speaker series on connecting majors to careers.

Describe the planning process in detail including who was involved in determining the project and who your chapter collaborated with to carry out the project.

In planning the faculty-led series, "Connecting Your Major to Careers," we researched the most common majors on campus and created a list of seven majors to contact. We met with each department, discussed our project, and asked if faculty members would be interested in leading a session on careers in their majors the following fall. Initially Music was on our list, but after speaking with the department we learned they have career planning built into their program. Other departments enthusiastically agreed to participate.

During the spring we created a presentation calendar, scheduling the sessions at lunchtime on Wednesdays in September and October. The majors included: Social Sciences, English, Communication, Engineering, Criminal Justice, Computer Studies, and Physical Sciences. We scheduled the presentations early to secure space and make sure there was no conflict for our faculty presenters. We emailed the schedule to the presenters for further confirmation.

We created a schedule for our leadership teammates to host/organize. At each session, PTK members introduced our project and speakers and facilitated the Q & A at the end. Each team was responsible for advertising/marketing to get students to attend the presentations.

For the Expo, our college president encouraged us to partner with Career Services and Economic and Workforce Development. Several members of our team met with our college president and the directors of both departments. Our president discussed the need for students to connect with local employers to learn about the majors and backgrounds they seek in employees. The director of Career Services was excited about the idea but concerned since most employer events are job fairs which bring employers to campus to hire people immediately. We discussed the importance of this being an educational event, not a job fair.

To create a plan for the Expo, we met with our administrative partners. They asked us what employers might be of interest to students and we all went silent. Like most students, we felt clueless about employers in our area. The directors listed employers they have connections with and what each employer focuses on. This started the conversation, and some of our team members suggested places where their friends or family members worked. We then created a plan to divide the tasks. The administrators focused on securing the employers and our team worked on marketing and getting students to attend. We set a date for early November and secured a location. We scheduled weekly sessions to review our progress and to share our marketing materials and surveys.

How did chapter members develop their leadership and/or knowledge, skills and abilities needed for project implementation?

A big piece of our project was communicating with faculty and administrative partners, and our team felt that we needed to strengthen our soft skills. Our Co-Vice Presidents for Leadership led several Competitive Edge trainings for our chapter and each teammate completed Competitive Edge. Because our project was connected to employment, they also led an Employment Edge training. A communication professor conducted training for us on communication styles and public speaking. This helped us to work together, communicate as a team, and hone our public speaking skills. The project required significant outreach to faculty, both in person and over email. Our advisors helped us craft emails that were professional and concise.

Marketing and advertising were essential, and we needed to learn about best practices to encourage attendance at events. We met with the Service-Learning Coordinator and Campus Events Coordinator to devise a marketing plan. We learned that offering extra credit, catchy posters, distributing flyers the day of, social media, and personal invitation are some of the best tactics to get students to attend events. We also worked with a professor who trained us on using Canva, a program to create posters and flyers.

Describe in detail how the chapter collaborated and communicated with others before, during and after the project.

The project was a collaboration between our leadership team, faculty, and administration. At each step of the project we sought advice from our college administration and advisors.

We held weekly planning meetings and used a Facebook group to communicate. The Facebook group kept a record of our ideas, action items, and completed tasks. We made an outline of our events and each teammate contributed in ways that aligned with their strengths and interests.

We partnered with 17 faculty members from 7 majors who led our “Connecting Your Major to Careers” sessions. Each department wanted guidance on presentation expectations. We met with each department and suggested including a discussion of what students can do with the major, educational requirements for careers in the major, salary expectations, and local employers that offer internships or hire recent graduates. Because we scheduled the fall sessions in spring, we sent reminders at the beginning and throughout the fall semester and created flyers to advertise each presentation. After each presentation we wrote thank-you notes to each presenter.

We collaborated with Career Services on our faculty-led series. Career Services attended each presentation and after each presentation shared information on job shadowing, internships, and other employment resources for that major.

We also partnered with Career Services and Economic and Workforce Development on our Expo. We met weekly with them to go over progress and get feedback on our marketing/advertising strategies and materials. We brainstormed ways to get employers to participate and suggested asking faculty for their employer connections to expand our network and generate faculty interest in our event. We also wrote prompts to help students talk with employers at the event.

We collaborated with a sociology professor to create student and employer surveys for the Expo. After the event she helped us analyze the data and compose a final project report that we shared with our administrative partners.

What were the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of your project, including the lessons learned by your chapter members and others?

We held 7 faculty-led career sessions and one “Major” Event Employer Expo. 124 students attended the faculty-led sessions. Based on student participation and questions, we learned that these sessions were important and necessary. At most sessions we ran out of time and students continued their conversations with faculty after. One attendee said he felt lost before the session. As a History major, he didn’t know what he could do as a career other than teaching. After the session he felt he was on the right path because he learned options for using his degree.

For the Expo, we had 29 companies represented: 131 companies were invited to participate, 34 companies registered, 2 canceled that day, and 3 didn't show. We had 138 attendees: 111 students, 15 community members, 4 faculty, and 8 staff.

After the event, we surveyed student attendees and employers. We had 40 students and 23 employers respond. Around 50% of our employers had never taken part in this type of educational event. Almost all noted that this was a great opportunity for students to network with employers and practice face-to-face communication, since most students need stronger soft skills. The students felt this event was valuable and helped them learn about careers in our community. Students learned that most companies are not just looking for one type of major and they offer many different opportunities. Students reported that getting comfortable talking with employers face-to-face is important.

Through our project we were able to create opportunities for students to see beyond OCC and plan for the next step, which helped fulfill the college's mission: to prepare students for the workforce. However, we learned that putting your major to work requires more than just a degree. Soft skills are central to being able to put your major to work, and we need to help students strengthen these skills.

The relationships we built with our administrative partners helped our team strengthen our own communication and soft skills, and we learned how important it is to listen and learn from our expert partners but to not be afraid to share our own ideas. Throughout the project we became more comfortable working with our faculty and administrative partners, speaking in front of groups, and personally inviting students to attend our events.

We received a lot of positive feedback on our events. Almost all attendees, both students and employers, said we should have a "Major" Event again. After the events we held a debriefing session with our administrative partners and shared our data and thoughts. The College plans to hold a "Major" Event again and ask departments to hold faculty-led career sessions as part of Welcome Week. Our leadership team plans to hold more Competitive Edge trainings for our members and create a soft-skills training for all students on campus.