

Parkland College

2023 Under-represented Groups Report



Office of Institutional Accountability and Research

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Institutional Effective Practices

The following institutional effective practices at Parkland College are aimed at college improving student access, retention, and completion to close the achievement gap for under-represented groups.

Institutional Effective Practice 1: *PRECS: Phenotypic Plasticity Research Experience for Undergraduates*

A. Purpose, goal or objective:

Phenotypic Plasticity Research Experiences for Undergraduates is a Parkland-UIUC inter-institutional program supported by a Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) grant from the National Science Foundation. The objective of PRECS is to provide research opportunities, mentoring, and scientific training for students pursuing degrees at community colleges (CCs) and thereby increase their likelihood of maintaining successful trajectories in STEM. The NSF REU program is designed to broaden participation in science and CC students are under-represented among participants. PRECS focuses on increasing this participation by specifically focusing on this population. In addition, it seeks to support participation of students who are under-represented in other ways, including under-represented minorities, students with disabilities, non-traditional age students, and 1st generation college students.

B. Date of implementation:

PRECS hosted 32 students from CC across the country during the summers of 2017-2019. We were awarded another three-year grant to support the program during the summers of 2021-2023. Through this second on-going award, we hosted 11 students during Summer 2021 and 10 students in Summer 2022.

C. Description of program elements or strategies that make the program successful:

PRECS participants undertake an authentic laboratory research experience and receive training on

how to successfully navigate transferring to a 4-yr institution. Toward this goal, we incorporate the following activities into PRECS:

1. *Student on-boarding and preprogram activities:* During the on-boarding process, we connect students with institutional resources and to each other. In addition, students connect with their research mentors and start to develop a relationship before the program starts.
2. *Research boot camp:* Because many CC students are unfamiliar with a research environment, the first six days of PRECS takes place at Parkland and comprise an intense training period to ensure that all participants have the basic skills necessary for success in the program. Furthermore, this extended orientation builds student confidence and assists in creating community among the PRECS participants.
3. *Social and professional development activities:* During the research immersion, the full group meets two to three times a week for professional development seminars and other group activities. Some seminar topics include creating scientific posters, graduate school and careers, and imposter syndrome. Together, these meetings contribute to the professional development of the participants and reinforce the community within the cohort. Also, during the research immersion, PRECS participants take part in outreach activities. First, PRECS participants volunteer at a “Science at the Market” booth at the Urbana Farmers Market one Saturday morning during the program. Second, the participants discuss their research and tips for success in a STEM major in college with a UIUC summer program that hosts high school students. PRECS students also interact with other undergraduate summer researchers in the UIUC College of Engineering programs and the Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP), run by the Graduate College. As a capstone project, PRECS participants design and

present a research poster at the Illinois Summer Research Symposium (ISRS). After ISRS, the posters are uploaded to Parkland's online and publicly available scholarly repository, SPARK. PRECS's connections with CCs are strengthened through student presentations given at their home CC during the fall semester after participating in PRECS. For local students, PRECS collaborates with the William M. Staerkel Planetarium at Parkland to host a Friday night presentation where participants present to the public.

4. *Research immersion:* Each participant is matched with a UIUC faculty mentor. The participant becomes fully integrated into the host lab and received direct mentoring from the UIUC faculty mentor and a day-to-day research mentor, often a graduate student or postdoctoral fellow. In this mentored setting, the student conducts research on their own project, gaining more independence as the summer progresses. As mentioned above, this research culminates in the participant presenting their research at ISRS.

D. Evidence of success:

During the four years of the program, we have supported 43 students from community colleges from across the country, including IL, CA, CO, NJ, PA, MA, NC, MO, MD, and TN. These majority of these students have continued their degrees in science fields by either continuing at their home institution or transferring to a 4-yr institution. Several students from earlier cohorts have since entered the scientific workforce or graduate programs. Many students continued to pursue research opportunities and have presented at conferences or have published scientific articles. The students that have been supported by PRECS have been 43% 1st generation college students, 9% students with disabilities, 34% non-traditional aged students, and 34% students from under-represented minorities.

Across all five years of PRECS, the results from surveys were positive. Students showed gains in all areas, including personal gains, thinking like a scientist, and skills. They also showed gains in an interest to pursue research in a future career. The open answer responses were also insightful and affirming, with many students stating that participation in PRECS was transformative. One participant wrote, "This was so helpful to me. It reaffirmed my desire to be in a science career, something which I had been questioning, and I've regained my excitement for my education and eventual career. Thank you for the opportunity!"

Institutional Effective Practice 2: *Support for Workforce Training (SWFT) Programs*

A. Purpose, goal or objective:

The purpose of the Support for Workforce Training Program at Parkland is to support underrepresented students, particularly Black/African American students, in accessing training with wrap-around supportive services to facilitate successful completion and positive employment outcomes. SWFT programs are funded by the statewide Workforce Equity Initiative, the Pipeline for the Advancement of the Healthcare Workforce (PATH) Grant, and a grant from the Lumina Foundation.

B. Date of implementation:

The SWFT program was initially implemented in September 2019 and was funded by the State of Illinois Workforce Equity Initiative (WEI). Now in its fourth year, the program expanded in August 2022 to include the SWFT + Healthcare program through funding received from the **Pipeline for the Advancement of the Healthcare Workforce Program (PATH)** in July 2022. The SWFT program is part of the WEI Consortium Lumina Employment Connection Project, which was implemented in July 2022.

C. Description of program elements or strategies that make the program successful:

Support for Workforce Training (SWFT) - Short-Term Training

The Support for Workforce Short-Term Training program coordinates with a network of community partners to ensure that underrepresented, primarily Black/African American, students have access to free, short-term training in 15 career areas, including certifications in healthcare, transportation and

distribution, construction and manufacturing, and business and IT. The office accepts applications from potential students in the community and attempts to match them with training opportunities that are compatible with their aptitude and interests through consultation, assessments, and career planning.

In addition to receiving free tuition, fees, and books, SWFT offers a weekly stipend tied to attendance. The stipend is intended to assist students in overcoming day-to-day financial barriers to higher education such as living expenses, transportation, and childcare. Students elect to use the stipend in the way that fits their current needs.

SWFT participants receive wraparound support, career services, and engagement opportunities. All academic students are enrolled in SWFT's Employment Skills class. In this class students work to develop job search and readiness skills to succeed in their chosen career area. All students complete the class with an employment portfolio, a job search plan, and experience in interviewing.

Once students complete their programs, they have available to them Parkland's Career Services which can assist them in connecting with employers in their field about job opportunities. SWFT also has its own Career Counselor who provides additional assistance to SWFT students. The SWFT Career Counselor works with community and employment partners to provide students with information about job openings in SWFT program areas.

In addition to meeting the requirements of the grant programs, the SWFT program has brought together professionals from Academic Services, Community Education, and Adult Education to formulate a seamless approach to working with diverse students. This allows for a single point of entry for career training that does not force students to navigate through these typically segmented

departments and reduces a barrier to entry for those unfamiliar with the structure of higher education institutions. This approach has had a significant impact on the college and the way it welcomes students into the institution.

Support for Workforce Training in Healthcare (SWFT + Healthcare)

The SWFT + Healthcare program supports students in eligible Parkland allied health and nursing programs. Much like the SWFT Short-Term Training program, SWFT + Healthcare provides scholarships for tuition, fees, books, supplies, and stipends for qualified students through the SWFT Healthcare Scholarship. Additionally, students receive academic supports, intensive wrap-around advising, and job skills preparation.

The SWFT+ Healthcare program is available to students who have been admitted to one of Parkland's qualified programs and who meet one of four expanded criteria, per the PATH program requirements. These include low-income students, identified underrepresented minorities or ethnicities, first generation college students, and entry level incumbent healthcare workers.

Lumina Employment Connection Project

Positive employment outcomes are central to the goals of the Support for Workforce Training programs. The SWFT program works to connect students to community employers through networking and the subsequent creation of the student to employee pipeline. Through the Lumina Employment Connection Project, SWFT is leading unified and coordinated approach for employer engagement across the institution through the Employer Engagement Steering Committee. With support from the Lumina foundation, SWFT is creating an institution-wide customer relationship management system to facilitate employer information sharing and to promote coordinated

interactions with employers. Additionally, the Employer Engagement Steering Committee creates meaningful interactions with employers that highlight Parkland workforce development programs, including the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion through hiring SWFT students.

D. Evidence of success:

Since the implementation of the program at Parkland, the program has served more than 650 individuals through SWFT programs. More than 70% of the SWFT Short-Term Training participants are Black/African American, exceeding the 60% benchmark for the program set by the Illinois Community College Board. Additionally, during 2022 and 2023, 26% the SWFT Short Term program has self-identified as formerly incarcerated, and one-third of participants reside in high-poverty census tracts. 15% of participants during 2022 and 2023 were ESL students. The SWFT + Healthcare program also serves a significant number of identified minority students with 45% of the participants identifying as either Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino and over 50% of the students are low-income.

In 2022, SWFT Short Term Training served 159 students, while SWFT + Healthcare has provided 110 students with services in the inaugural year. Currently, there is a 74% overall completion rate for the awarded students, with a 75% completion for Black/African American students. Additionally, 70% of students who completed short-term certifications are meeting the target wage of \$19 per hour or more at their new places of employment, with the average wage being \$22.34 per hour.

More importantly, many participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to attend college and start their career who may not have otherwise accessed higher education. These personal stories speak to the overall benefit to the community for the statewide initiative and the program at Parkland College.