

ADMISSIONS/FINANCIAL AID VS. DATA COLLECTION

Two concerns have existed for many years at all WTCS colleges when considering laddering credentials (certificate to short-term technical diploma to technical diploma [one year and two year] to AAS degree). These concerns are related to tracking successful completers and granting financial aid to students.

The problem for the colleges has been that Certificates (or any credential with fewer than 25 credits) is not financially aidable, so students need to enroll for something greater than a 25 credit credential to qualify for financial aid. Financial aid is needed by almost x% of all students in the technical colleges system. However, if a student applies for and is admitted into a credential that is financially aidable, the data tracking their success a student is negatively impacted if they only complete the coursework for a certificate and job out. Unfortunately that is exactly the way the Pathways model is designed. Additionally there is a funding concern for the college in demonstrating the success of students completing their credential within three years for Perkins funding, when the Pathways model does not encourage a rapid completion of all courses in the pathway. Finally the WTCS QRP (Quality Review Process) data that is required to indicate program success at colleges only cites a successful completer as one who completes a 2-year program within three years.

MATC staff met many times in 2013 and the first half of 2014 looking for ways to financially aid certificates and manage college data collection to capture the data on those students who completed certificates/short-term technical diplomas. This was a continuing source of difficulty in attempting to reconcile these two competing goals in coding admissions. However, as the group met they developed many ideas to attempt to solve this dilemma.

The VP of Student Services had experienced some methods of dealing with this same type problem at other colleges. He suggested some methods by which the initial credential (certificate or short-term diploma) could be eligible for financial aid and also capture positive data on program success. As students move up the Pathway they are progressively graduated from the previous credential and begin course work in next higher credential, still financially aidable when the student declares their intent to complete the entire AAS or Technical diploma. Institutional student success data is collected only when the student completes the courses to fulfil the requirements for credentials below the 2-year degree. This thinking led to more discussions on how to code students for admission and registration. The initial idea for coding students in the admission process is seen in Figure 1:

- Step 1 Application
 - Step 2 Assigned admission status to ALL program codes based on Accuplacer
- ADM - P
 PLI - P
 REABE - P
 REABE (not admitted to program)

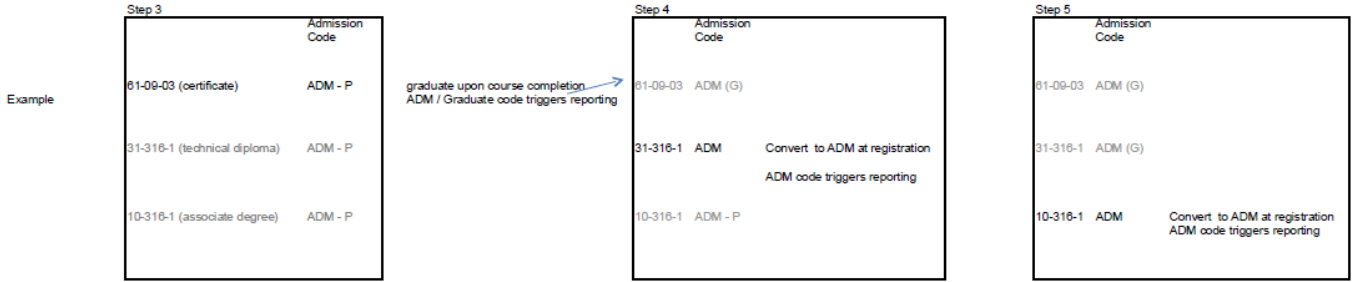


Figure 1

However, there were still problems with this model. It took many meetings between Financial Aid, Admissions, the Registrar, and Institutional Research to find a way to meet all of the competing goals. Not finding a successful process was **not** an option. The most recent model (Figure 2) was not complete until June 2014.

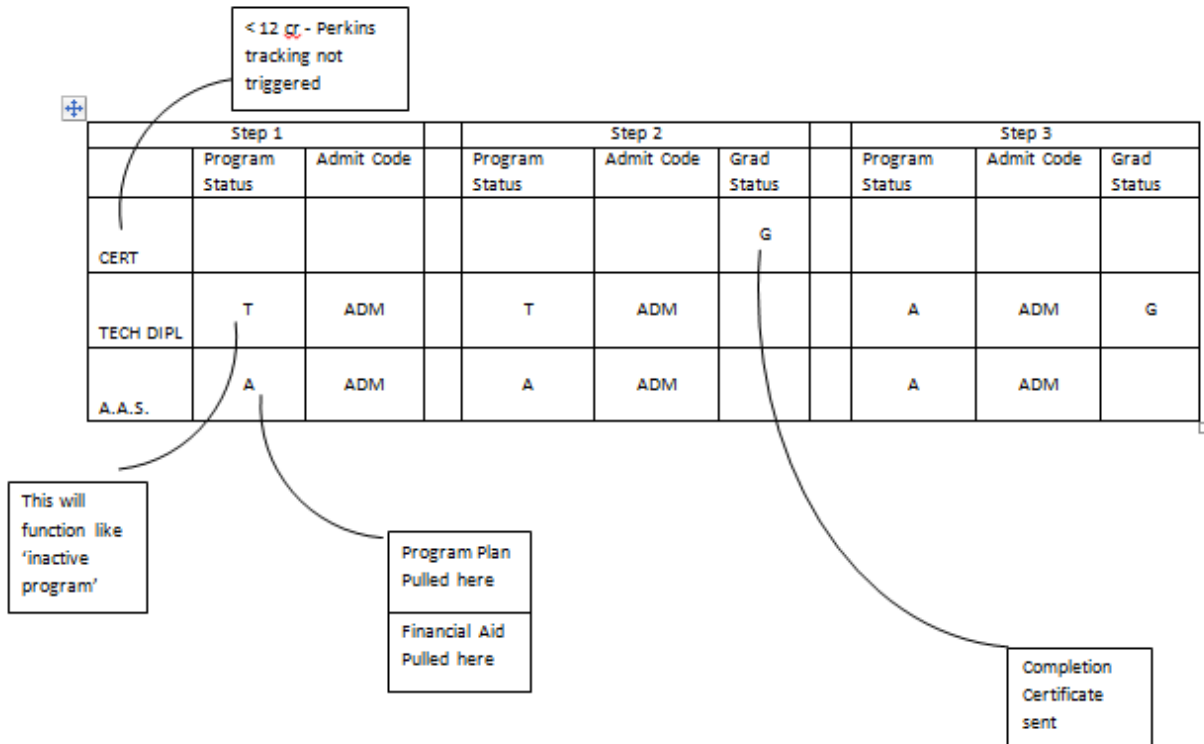


Figure 2

The solution that was developed to overcome the barriers related to Federal and State program data reporting and Financial Aid are visually represented in Figure 2. In Step one the student is admitted to the technical diploma and the AAS degree. The program status is Active for the AAS degree and not active in any lower credentials (in this example the certificate and the technical diploma). The goal is to show the student the entire program plan for the highest level credential. It is important that the design of the program show the courses in order of credential development. This way the student can see the pathway. This will require programs to reconfigure their program plans in the enterprise system as the current program plans are not designed along a pathway model. One can see the importance of embedding coursework for the highest credential within the lower credentials. It also becomes more critical that students take coursework as sequenced.

In step one the Program status is inactive and the student is not admitted to the certificate or technical diploma. To capture the completion of the initial credentials, the college will run a query in the enterprise system each term. The query will look for students in an AAS degree or 2-year diploma that have completed the required courses within their program path which qualifies them for a certificate or diploma. Although the start and end date for these graduates would be identical, it is irrelevant to those that examine the data. However, the college will be able to look at admit date to the AAS/2-year Technical diploma and graduation date of the certificate to gather information on how long it takes learners to complete the certificate.

One of the additional concerns for MATC was to ensure that the student was informed that they have been granted the certificate or technical diploma, as that credential is *bestowed upon* the student, not *petitioned by* the student. The onus of denying the lower credential remains with the student. The college will send a letter to student explaining that they have completed all of the requirements for a particular credential in the program. If MATC does not hear back within a predetermined number of days to the contrary, the college will infer that the student desires the credential and will grant it.

Another concern the college had related to the impact of Perkins funding if students began a pathway, but did not complete within the three year Perkins graduation success parameter. Perkins determines funding for a college based on the success of students completing their two year program within 3 years. If this success rate drops, funding is decreased. However, if a certificate has fewer than 12 credits and the student is not in program or “admit” status, the three year parameter for that student data is not activated.

Certificates need to be created based on the skills needed by industry to fill the entry level job requirements, not to ensure funding. The college did some calculation what the funding impact might be if some certificates were 12 credits or more in a career path. The computations determined that if at least 80% of the certificates had fewer than 12 credits, the new offsetting successes that would be captured at the technical diploma level (due to the new procedure of running the query in the enterprise system each term) would neutralize any negative funding impacts.

An example of the current admissions/advising/registration process follows:

INSERT SARAH's WORKFLOW INFORMATION HERE

One last concern remains and that is with tracking WTCS state required data. The WTCS State office also tracks data for program completion based on a 2-year program being completed within three years. Currently when a student begins their 2-year program, if they do not complete in three years the college experiences a negative impact on their Quality Review data for the program. MATC will be able to “scrub” the data to show where the successes are, however, the hope is that the WTCS State office will adjust its means of determining program success more in line with the Pathways model.