

Opportunity Partnership Program 2023-2024

Project Overview – An integrated Collaboration

House Bill 1096 created the Opportunity Grant Program in 2007. The program provides financial aid and other services to students 200% below the federal poverty rate, while recipients are also enrolled at state community or technical colleges in employer-demand programs of study.

Additionally, the legislation provides funding for the coordination of industry mentorship activities benefiting Opportunity Grant recipients who choose to enroll in the Opportunity Partnership Project (OPP).

In 2023, the three geographical regions represented by Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) included Skagit Valley, Yakima, and Spokane. The WDCs design and facilitate regional OPP mentorship programs in concert with area businesses and community and technical colleges. Participating Opportunity Grant recipients are exposed to work-based activities with the intent of reinforcing the relevancy of academic coursework while also developing valued work skills and professional connections.

Opportunity Partnership - A Dynamic Reflection

The Opportunity Partnership highlights how the program has adapted to dynamic change in regional communities, colleges, and workplaces. It also serves as a source for real-time observation of promising practices as Washington builds on developing a highly skilled workforce in high-demand occupations with living wages. Changes brought about by COVID-19 continue to affect student attendance and engagement, college enrollment and service environments, and employer resources and staffing.

From the time the state legislature conceived of OPP's inclusive, integrated, and collaborative structure, the program has been responsive to student conditions, education-training models, and changes in industry and technology. The mentor/mentoring focus has necessarily evolved to include students in workplaces, employers in classrooms, resume building, mock interviews, group tours, individually designed job shadows, unpaid and paid internships, social media for development of career networks, and virtual trainings. Industry tours and job shadowing through virtual media were introduced as internet access and cellphone ownership allowed extensive web-based entry points for those at differing economic levels.

2023-2024 OPP Participant Demographics

The demographic data collected during this program year was not consistently available to provide valid analysis.

Barriers to and Improvements in Opportunity Partnership Enrollment

Post-pandemic conditions continue to influence the number of Opportunity Grant students enrolled in the community and technical colleges. The Washington Student Achievement Council looked at undergraduate enrollment in Washington and found that two-year institutions experienced an 8 percent decline in undergraduate enrollment from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022 (source: www.wsac.wa.gov/sap-dashboard). Colleges participating in OPP also affirmed that staffing levels in both financial aid and programmatic areas were reduced. Students eligible for OPP mentoring services conveyed that job and/or income loss; childcare business closures, irregular work schedules, e-learning curves combined with limited technological resources, and lack of time impacted their enrollment.

Prior to 2019-2020, Opportunity Partnership enrolled a combined average of nearly 164 participants across four regions each year. One of the WDC regions suspended their OPP participation after a two-year effort of attempting to restart their program at the same time as the pandemic unfolded. As of last year, OPP student engagement steadily declined to a total of 46 students across the three remaining regions. This year, Opportunity Grant students enrolling in OPP mentoring activities increased across the three WDC regions—a hopeful rebound when compared to 2022-2023. For the 2023-2024 program year, Opportunity Grant student participation is 52 percent of the pre-pandemic average: 85 student enrollments versus a pre-pandemic average of 164. However, student participation last year was only 28 percent of the pre-pandemic average.

Northwest and Spokane WDCs did not receive lists of eligible Opportunity Grant students until later in two quarters because of changes in staffing and interpretations of legislation. The WDCs and the Workforce Board in collaboration with the colleges identified factors contributing to the barriers. For Skagit Valley College, there had been a turnover in seasoned personnel familiar with both financial aid processes and the Opportunity Grant and OPP programs. Yakima Valley College’s financial aid officers and special funding coordinator have established a strong relationship with South Central WDC’s OPP contractor, People For People. Successfully coordinating with Yakima Valley College’s special funding group, People For People have increased their presence at both campuses of the college to enhance greater visibility and student access.

For Spokane Falls College, formal memos of understanding specific to data share agreements did not advance with area colleges’ external partners. The reasons provided by the college primarily centered on loss of knowledgeable personnel, re-establishment of formal data share processes, and restrictions to access to sensitive data external to the college. The Spokane WDC and their contractor, Talent Solutions, gained access to Opportunity Grant scholar lists at Spokane Falls College after follow up by college program managers in collaboration with the WDC and the Workforce Board. Additionally, Spokane WDC contractors in previous years had established relationships directly with instructors interested in the Opportunity Partnership program at Spokane Community College.

For the Northwest WDC and their contractor, the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce Foundation, barriers to enrollment in the Opportunity Partnership program were associated with the significant drop in eligible Opportunity Grant scholars and those who had been identified through WorkFirst programs. The number of businesses interested in mentoring continues to fluctuate. Participation levels remain far below the average count of 120 regional businesses participating in Opportunity Partnership prior to the onset of the pandemic. OPP mentor host counts are 39 percent of their pre-pandemic average: 47 mentor hosts versus an average of 122. This may not be entirely related to limitations in mentors’ resources and staffing since COVID-19’s onset. Some high-demand education programs offer more readily accessible mentorship activities from a single employer or mentoring group. Examples include cosmetology and Addiction Studies. Community and technical college financial aid staff and program managers have expressed concerns about the federal changes in financial aid application processes and policy. Mirrored in that concern is the Washington Student Achievement Council’s research that indicates a 7 percent drop in FAFSA completion rates for the class of 2024 (source: www.wsac.wa.gov/sap-dashboard).

Opportunity Partnership 10-year Summary			
Program Year	Number of Opportunity Grant Students who enrolled in OPP	Number of Participating OPP Mentor-Business Hosts	Notes
2014-2015	152	121	
2015-2016	159	129	
2016-2017	186	96	
2017-2018	175	131	
2018-2019	146	133	
2019-2020*	80	34	*COVID-19 onset with statewide school and business closures; SBCTC terminated contracts. 3 of 4 WDCs reporting.
2020-2021	60	20	Pandemic school and business closures in full effect. 4 of 4 WDCs reporting.
2021-2022	57	38	Hybrid return to colleges and workplaces. 3 of 4 WDCs reporting, after 4th WDC subcontractor requested termination of contract when Opportunity Grant scholars were unable to engage with OPP activities.
2022-2023	46	76	Expanded hybrid return to colleges and workplaces; 1 WDC opted out of OPP engagement; Opportunity Grant lists not readily available to OPP contractors. 3 of 3 WDCs reporting.
2023-2024	85	47	Expanded hybrid return to colleges and workplaces; development of protocols for Opportunity Grant list access by WDC OPP contractors. 3 of 3 WDCs reporting.

Table 1 – Illustration of Opportunity Partnership Project enrollment 2023-2024

Workforce Board 2023-20234 Summary of Active OPP Projects

Northwest Workforce Council and the Chamber of Commerce Foundation

One of OPP’s demonstrably effective projects involves the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce Foundation as Northwest Workforce Council’s OPP subcontractor. The Chamber coordinates with Skagit Valley College and local industries to recruit and host OPP students for in-person tours, one-on-one job shadows, and internships. This highly effective, personalized investment was disrupted by the continued closure of area colleges and businesses. As was established in the previous year, Northwest Workforce Council’s project leads provided both in-person and hybrid engagement opportunities for students and businesses.

Northwest Workforce Council Program Activities

To engage a larger group of students, Skagit Valley College and the Mount Vernon Chamber Foundation agreed on doing two presentations and orientations per quarter (hybrid/in person and virtual)

4 students attended the orientations, 3 students enrolled in EWP, 1 of them no longer qualifies for the program.

The local area has full support from employers for these workforce development efforts. Between April 2nd and April 12 were able to confirm:

Industry Tours

- Janicki Tour for Welding and Manufacturing students
- PeaceHealth tour for Medical, Nursing and Allied Health students
- Skagit Transit tour for Auto Mechanics and Diesel students

Career Panel

- Community Action of Skagit County and Pioneer Human Services – Skagit Community Detox will be presenting for Human Services and Human Services SUD students

Project enrollment:

Per discussion with Skagit Valley College, these are the estimated number of students who could potentially participate at the upcoming events

Welding and manufacturing students: 7

Diesel and automotive students: 8

Medical/nursing/allied health: 25-30 students

Human services: 25 students

To increase project enrollments:

1. The last work-based learning opportunity (industry tour or career panel) is scheduled for May 20 which will result in increased enrollments.
2. Marketing: Creation of EWP fliers available for SVC navigators to share with qualifying students and to be posted on SVC board.

Plan of Action

In Person Industry Tours

A combination of virtual and in-person work-based learning opportunities will be held to meet grant objectives by 05/31/2024. Most of the work-based learning opportunities described here are already confirmed or have been confirmed but the logistics are still in progress.

Students: Welding and Manufacturing Technology

Date: Monday April 29

Employers: Janicki (Hamilton -WA)

Skagit Valley College currently has around 7 welding and manufacturing students who could potentially join this tour.

The MV Chamber is also working with Skagit Transit to host an industry tour for diesel and automotive students. Skagit Valley College has around 8 students enrolled in these programs.

Students: Medical – Nursing – Allied Health

Date: Monday May 20

Employer: PeaceHealth (Sedro-Woolley – WA)

This tour is in the process of being confirmed. At the time of this report, the employer is working on the logistics of this event, including departments to be visited and department heads who will be presenting. Skagit Valley College has estimated 25-30 students who could be part of this tour.

In Person Career Panel

The MV Chamber has also confirmed a career panel to be held in person at Skagit Valley College

Students: Human Services (Generalist and Substance Use Disorder Students)

Date: Tuesday May 14

Employers: Community Action of Skagit County (Mount Vernon, WA)

Pioneer Human Services-Skagit Community Detox (Sedro-Woolley, WA)

Currently Skagit Valley College has estimated 25 students enrolled in Human Services.

Individual Learning Opportunities

The MV Chamber has identified up to 5 candidates to complete internship opportunities in the human services, business management, early childhood education and graphic art programs.

4th Quarter:

Student presentations and orientations were held on:

- Tuesday April 16 (in person), 7 students attended
- Thursday April 18 (virtual), 16 students attended

Student Work Experiences:

1. Industry Tour at Janicki Industries April 29

Attendees: 6 students Programs: Welding and Manufacturing Technology.

2. Industry Tour at Skagit Transit, May 13

Attendees: 2 students Programs: Automotive, Diesel Power and Business Management.

3. Career Panel for Human Services Students May 14

Attendees: 3 students Presenters: Community Action of Skagit County and Pioneer Human Services

This quarter, two on-the-job learning opportunities were scheduled for Allied Health students. Due to lack of RSVPs, both opportunities were canceled.

40-hour internship

At the time of this report, the contractor is also working with students who will be completing their internships during their summer break.

- EWP Industry Tour at Janicki Industries flier
- EWP Janicki Industries Sign In Sheet
- EWP Industry Tour at Skagit T. flier
- EWP Skagit Transit Sign In Sheet
- EWP Human Services Career Panel
- EWP Human Services Career Panel Sign-in Sheet
- EWP Allied Health Career Panel flier
- EWP Industry Tour at Camp Korey flier

Northwest Workforce Council Observations

Northwest Challenges:

- SVC has experienced some changes in staffing, leadership, and processes. This slightly disrupted the delivery of services and some school data is unavailable.
- At the beginning of the academic year MV Chamber provided a list of students from the previous year to SVC who would curate the list. Once this was done, we would be able to work with those students as well as additional students newly enrolled. Unfortunately, the response time has slowed down and we are not able to start working with those students until later in the year.
- Due to privacy issues, we are not able to contact the students before a release of information has been signed with SVC which normally takes place during/after the EWP orientations.
- In addition to quarterly EWP orientations, we were able to present at welding and manufacturing classes. This was not brought back after 2020 which has made a significant decrease in the number of students who enroll in the program.
- Skagit Valley College is no longer providing this information nor student contact information. For future activities, NWC and the Mt. Vernon Chamber will have students sign an SVC student release form that meets FERPA requirements thus allowing project staff to connect with students for follow up and data.

Northwest Successes:

Post-2020 most learning opportunities were limited to virtual experiences which didn't allow interactive opportunities to take place, i.e. industry tours. During the spring of 2024 the project was able to offer in-person on-the-job learning opportunities again which allowed students from programs like welding and manufacturing or diesel and automotive to participate again. Although the plan is to continue delivering on-

the job learning opportunities in the virtual setting, being able to offer both in-person and virtual opportunities gives the program the flexibility to serve more students.

Northwest Sustainability and Best Practices:

The relationship with our employers has been fruitful and critical for the success of the project. Internships have been successful for both parties. However, due to student schedules, they (5) will not participate in their internships until summer. We have used different channels to promote the program and those employers who have taken part of the project have referred us to other businesses who are ready to host a student. This is in addition to the outreach we have done within the business community.

South Central Workforce Council and People for People

South Central Workforce Council’s partnership with People For People (PFP) has allowed for sophisticated integration of wraparound federal and state services over a large and diverse geographic area. Part of PFP’s success in previous program years was directly related to long-established hybridized in-person and remote access services already utilized and familiar to their clients. That infrastructure aided in PFP’s ready shift from hybrid services to mostly virtual. With the Workforce Board’s encouragement and South Central’s approval, PFP expanded access to Virtual Job Shadow resources offered through CareerOneStop.org wherever in-person engagement was not possible. Significant gains in coordination of services and outreach with Opportunity Grants students were made by college financial aid and special programs personnel with the OPP coordinator at PFP. This coordinated effort meant greater access to Opportunity Grant students in-person and at both Yakima campuses.

South Central Workforce Council Program Activities:

During the final reporting period, the program successfully facilitated mentorship or job shadowing arrangements for an overall total of 18 students, 16 of whom have completed their mentorship experiences. This accomplishment underscores our commitment to fostering professional growth and development among the students enrolled in the program.

The collaborated event held on the YVC Grandview campus in April served a dual purpose, providing valuable resources to our students while it also presented invaluable Opportunity Mentorship opportunities. PFP continued to foster their partnerships within the community and connect the students to the many resources available to them at YVC and their communities. The previous event, hosted on November 8, 2023, at the Yakima campus was also successful and helped to foster the relationship with the OPP Coordinator and YVC. People For People (PFP) continued to be engaged in strengthening their presence within Yakima Valley College (YVC) campuses, aiming to effectively showcase the Opportunity Partnership Program (OPP) to students. The dedication of the OPP Coordinator, who now allocates one day per week on campus, has been instrumental in

providing vital information directly to students about the opportunities available through OPP. During the final reporting period, we enrolled 6 new students for an overall total of 26.

The strategic positioning of the OPP Coordinator in the Special Funding Office allowed for more personalized engagement and support. The OPP Coordinator did presentations at three separate student events in the month of April that continued to gain more awareness of OPP to a wider audience, both students and faculty.

Recognizing the significance of classroom outreach, PFP has increased its presence within YVC's I-BEST classrooms, specifically targeting Business Tech and Pharmacy Technician classes. By delivering tailored presentations, they aimed to effectively communicate the benefits of OPP and its relevance to students' academic and career aspirations. The OPP Coordinator also continued to meet weekly with the I-BEST Coordinator to streamline the referral process and facilitate direct access to potential OPP candidates.

In addition to these efforts, PFP has worked closely with YVC to organize resource events across multiple campuses, including Yakima and Grandview. These events served as invaluable opportunities for students to access essential resources while simultaneously being introduced to the various opportunities available through OPP. They successfully facilitated an outreach event in April at the Grandview campus that included five other community partners. Although it was a smaller event, the students were able to spend extended time learning more about OPP and other resources. They are planning to hold another event in September during new student orientation week. During the year, they were able to coordinate with YVC and local partners to hold two resource fairs at YVC.

The OPP Coordinator played a crucial role in establishing mentorship and internship opportunities for the I-BEST Pharmacy Assistant program through the local Walgreens Pharmacy. This included facilitating a connection between the I-BEST instructor and the Pharmacist at Walgreens to ensure smooth coordination and implementation of the program. Four students were connected to this mentoring opportunity this year.

The impact of our initiatives is reflected in the development of several mentorship opportunities across diverse industries. Sixteen students embarked on mentorship or job shadowing experiences during the reporting period with the possibility of two more, pending coordination with their schedules. From healthcare to retail, automotive to social services, PFP has successfully established partnerships with businesses spanning a range of sectors, ensuring that students have access to a broad array of experiential learning opportunities.

The greatest success during the reporting period was the successful partnership facilitated by the OPP Coordinator between YVC's I-BEST Pharmacy Assistant program and the Pharmacist at Walgreens. In the process of establishing mentorship opportunities, the OPP Coordinator connected the Pharmacist with the I-BEST Pharmacy Assistant program instructor, enabling onsite internships at Walgreens Pharmacy.

This relationship, which had existed previously with the Pharmacy Technician program, had not been reestablished after COVID. The Pharmacist expressed immense gratitude for the assistance in renewing this

partnership, as he valued the opportunity to share his knowledge with students. As a result of this redeveloped relationship, four Pharmacy Assistant students enrolled in OPP were able to complete their mentorships with the Walgreens Pharmacy department and will also complete their internships there.

This success highlights the profound impact that mentorships have on both students and the community.

In-class presentations with the I-Best programs have emerged as a highly effective method for engaging students in OPP. By delivering these presentations in person, PFP effectively conveyed the myriad benefits of the program and showcased the valuable mentorship opportunities it offers.

These presentations served as a platform to elucidate the tangible advantages of participating in OPP, such as gaining access to mentorship networks and leveraging industry insights for personal and professional growth. Moreover, the interactive nature of in-person presentations allowed PFP to address students' queries directly and tailor the messaging to resonate with their aspirations and interests.

As a result, PFP observed heightened enthusiasm and interest among students, leading to increased participation and uptake of OPP offerings. Moving forward, we remain committed to leveraging in-class presentations as a pivotal tool for promoting student engagement and fostering a culture of opportunity and empowerment within the academic community.

Another aspect that worked well this year was the strong relationship between YVC's funding coordinator and the OPP Coordinator. By fostering this partnership and demonstrating PFP's commitment to mutual benefit, we have been able to collaborate more effectively with YVC. This collaboration has facilitated better opportunities to provide resources to students and maintain an on-campus presence, thereby meeting students where they are.

South Central Workforce Council Observations:

South Central Challenges:

The biggest challenge during the reporting period remained to secure student participation in mentorship or job shadowing opportunities. While students initially expressed enthusiasm, their engagement waned as the school quarter progressed and their workloads increased, leaving them with limited time for additional activities. Although many students are more available during their summer break, OPP lacks the necessary funding to support programs during this period. We acknowledge the significant demands on the students we serve and their difficulty in finding extra time. To address these challenges, we offer a range of mentorship options and strive to accommodate both students' and mentors' schedules. Additionally, we are planning industry presentations to the I-BEST programs to reach a broader audience and maximize our engagement with classes next year.

South Central Successes:

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South Central Sustainability and Best Practices:

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Spokane Workforce Council and Talent Solutions Team at WorkSource Spokane

Spokane Workforce Council had informally developed their next generation of online industry and career outreach through videos paid for by local businesses and hosted on a local, public television website. These virtual tours and in-depth career explorations were accessible to any interested party across the state.

Spokane discussed and strategized with the Workforce Board on the expansion of their videography as an

integral part of their student engagement with local businesses. OPP students were alerted to the existing video resources but the videos have not been a required component due to barriers in tracking and attestation methodologies. Prior to the coronavirus impacts, Spokane discussed with WTB their vision to utilize platforms such as Linked-In and Facebook to help students and other WDC clients build their online professional presence and to create career networks. COVID-19, in effect, accelerated the need for virtual engagement for all job seekers. One of Spokane’s innovative and equitable engagement strategies occurred because of the willingness of a college department to provide virtual access to OPP presentations independent of OPP eligibility. This had the effect of energizing the interest of all students and resulted in successful engagement with those eligible for the services available under OPP funding. Another innovative strategy was college instructors offering extra credit to all students who participated in OPP activities.

Spokane Workforce Council Program Activities:

Student Communication:

Spokane Community College (SCC):

I contacted **22** students in the Early Childhood Education, Information Tech, Occupational Therapy Assistant, Physical Therapy Assistant, Integrated Community Services and Addiction Studies programs. These programs were chosen due to their high concentrations of Opportunity Grant recipients. This included **22** emails and **9** texts/calls.

The number of students who agreed to enroll in the program are as follows:

3 from Cosmetology

1 from Nursing

Spokane Falls Community College (SFCC):

I contacted **62** total students in the Early Childhood Education, Information Tech, Occupational Therapy Assistant, Physical Therapy Assistant, Integrated Community Services and Addiction Studies programs. These programs were chosen due to their high concentrations of Opportunity Grant recipients. This included **62** emails and **41** texts/calls.

The number of students who agreed to enroll in the program are as follows:

2 from Early Childhood Education

2 from Occupational Therapy Assistant

5 from Integrated Community Services

11 from Addiction Studies

Every time we have an event, I text and email every student in the relevant department.

Program Communication:

We reached out to the program of study for each Opportunity Grant recipient, sharing information about the grant and networking opportunities that we would like to partner with them on. Programs included in the communication include:

2023-2024 Opportunity Partnership
Project report
Contract IAA 2023-24-061
SBCTC – Workforce Training Board (WTB)

Spokane Community College (SCC):

Cosmetology
Health Information Management
1st year HVAC
Cosmetology
Nursing
Automotive Technology
Aviation
Welding

Spokane Falls Community College (SFCC):

Addiction Studies
Integrated Community Services
Early Childhood Education
Physical Therapy Assistant
Occupational Therapy Assistant
Information Technology

Networking and Mentorship Events:

Addiction Studies/Integrated Community Services Networking Event – Feb. 22nd, 2024
Addiction Studies/Integrated Community Services Networking Event – Apr. 4th, 2024
PLANNED Addiction Studies/Integrated Community Services Networking Event – Apr. 25th, 2024
PLANNED Cosmetology Networking Event – May. 6th, 2024
PLANNED Cosmetology Networking Event – May. 13th, 2024

Virtual Resource Room (Premier Virtual):

The resource room was open January through March. There were 8 businesses and 5 students registered.

Employer/Mentor listing:

The following employers are participating in the program:

Group Networking Events

Spokane Tribe of Indians
Department of Corrections

CareerExplore NW Video:

Shredfast (Hydraulics/Pneumatics)
The Glow Co. (Esthetician)

Introduced Directly to Students:

Spokane Tribe of Indians
Department of Corrections

Spokane Workforce Council Observations:

Spokane Challenges:

The largest challenge was cooperation with the schools around student information sharing that set back the start of work by several months. There was also no expectation of this program from the school staff which made connecting with every dean and department very laborious. Almost every relationship had to be started from scratch and the program had to be “sold” numerous times. In conjunction with this, there was no incentive for instructors to partner with the program. This left me in their inbox/voicemail with no response or limited their desire to set aside time/energy to support our efforts.

Student contact was also very difficult. Correspondence rarely received a response, the desire to participate was low, and the number of students who showed up to the resource room or events was minimal.

Student tracking for grant obligations was also difficult. I had no way of confirming the identities of students who showed up to networking events or who were in the classes for my presentations. This information could only be confirmed by the instructors, but they won’t confirm it due to fear of data sharing policy. This problem is currently being resolved.

Spokane Sustainability:

The sustainability of ensuring success for this grant will depend on continuity of relationships and process development between the school year. If we can utilize this program year to understand how we might introduce improvements, then we can set up expectations, systems, and tools to make a more seamless process next year. Ideally, we’ll be able to leverage the experience to remove several barriers which limit connectivity, and instead focus on depth of service for the students and businesses.

This includes:

Several introductory meetings with staff during the summer/fall.

Communication from the school staff explaining the program.

Several meetings with advisory boards during the summer/fall to ensure employer cooperation.

Preparing data sharing agreements over the summer to ensure immediate start on the grant.

Communication with students early to build familiarity with the program and improve response rates for communication.

Collaboration with the Cosmetology program should be prioritized, as their desire to participate as a group was the only reason we hit most of the grant obligations.

Spokane Best Practices:

Partnering with the Cosmetology department has been very effective. They are a large department, and all their students are taking the same classes on the same schedule. This makes connecting with them much easier. Finding other programs that operate similarly should be a priority. The most effective part of working with Cosmetology is that the instructors had their entire program join the calls, guaranteeing a very high

participation rate. They said the events were amazing and they would like to do them once per quarter if possible.

Communicating expectations early will be a vital practice moving forward. Connecting with instructors and students early in the school year, who we are and what they should expect will probably make communication much improved when the work truly begins.

Working with Wendy Jones and Kathy Albin from SFCC and SCC was also very helpful. They recognized the barriers to success for this program and have been communicating about how we can improve them for next year. Creating systems to ensure that communication is clear, timely, and provides an expectation for instructors will be critical.