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Benchmarking St. Petersburg College: A Report to Leadership

Project Eagle Evaluation Question #5

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What Are the Appropriate Models for St. Petersburg College and the University Partnership Center to Expand Access to Bachelor's and Master's Degrees?

Executive Summary

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*"...at St. Petersburg College, getting your four-year or graduate degree has never been easier."
(Lars Hafner, UPC Vice-President, in the SPC University Partnership Bulletin, 2001-2002)*

Introduction

In 1999, [St. Petersburg College](#) (SPC) received a multi-year federal grant ([Project Eagle](#)) to build a national model for increasing access to four-year degrees and workforce training for students attending community colleges. Access would be enhanced by increasingly flexible educational opportunities – with courses, programs and support services delivered at a time and place, in a way and at a pace, best suited to the needs of the individual learner.

Part of Project Eagle is an evaluation of e-learning practices at the college, using a series of six critical questions formulated by the Project Eagle Action Committee (previously known as the Project Eagle Working Group) and shaped into a [plan](#) by the project's external evaluator. The evaluation for the fifth question began with an examination of the best e-learning practices related to that question, both nationwide and worldwide, using the Web as the primary source of information. The results were published in [Best Educational E-Practices \(BEEP\), Issue 14, Providing Four-Year and Graduate Degrees in a Community College Setting](#).

Then a list of all practices related to the question and currently in use at SPC was compiled and compared to those included in [BEEP #14](#). A [report](#) was prepared that benchmarked SPC with the best of what is occurring nationally and the results submitted to the college leadership. This is a summary of the findings and recommendations of that report.

Background

The fifth question to be evaluated dealt with ways to expand access to bachelor's and master's degrees at the community college level. In October 2001, such activities were investigated nationwide. The results appeared in [BEEP #14](#) and included two-year colleges offering baccalaureate degrees, community colleges partnering with four-year colleges and universities, and other unique innovations.

From February to the middle of March 2002, SPC's efforts in those areas were examined. Current programs were analyzed, and selected staff, administrators and faculty interviewed.

***This report was originally scheduled for completion on February 28, 2002, but was postponed one month because of delays in the publication of previous Project Eagle Evaluation Questions.**

Results

When current practices to increase access to four-year degrees at community colleges nationwide were examined, SPC's upper-level efforts were found to be exemplary. Activities fell into three categories:

A. Two-Year Colleges That Now Offer Baccalaureate Degrees. At the present time, SPC is one of a very small number of community colleges nationwide that has made the transition to a four-year institution. While some have made application, no others in Florida have been approved at this time.

The college planned its initiative very carefully: identifying areas of critical need, then working with local agencies and educational institutions to present its plans in a most positive, non-threatening light. The success of their efforts where others in the state have failed demonstrates the importance of knowing community needs and both informing and cooperating with others involved or impacted. These two factors seem to be very important for any two-year school to achieve four-year-status.

With an expected initial enrollment of 600 in August 2002, the three bachelor's programs selected - [Education](#), [Nursing](#), and [Technology Management](#) - will provide needed opportunities for the Pinellas, Pasco and Hernando county population to further their education without long-distance travel.

B. Community College and University Partnerships. SPC's [University Partnership Center](#) (UPC) is one of the largest of such ventures in the country. 1800 students are currently enrolled in 30 baccalaureate and 14 graduate programs offered by 12 partnering institutions both in and outside the state of Florida.

Like SPC's recently approved four-year degree initiative, the UPC has been carefully planned. Critical need areas are clearly defined before any new programs are offered or additional partners approached. With the completion a new and impressive building, the UPC now has the capability to offer a full range of services to students, both present and potential.

C. Other Ideas for Increasing Access to Four-Year Degrees. Interestingly, most of the innovative ideas found in an examination of colleges and universities nationwide have been or are being explored at SPC. These include the following:

1. Military partnership - SPC has applied to be a participating institution with [eArmyu](#).
2. Teacher recruitment program - A program is under discussion with Pinellas, Pasco and Hernando counties. SPC is also under contract with the Florida Department of Education to provide training materials for a statewide electronic alternative certification program.
3. Bridge program - SPC's Hospitality Management program allows students to continue their studies at UPC partner Florida International University with support from the local Hotel and Restaurant Association.
4. Reverse transfer program - UPC students take needed prerequisite courses at SPC.
5. Post-graduate certificate - A Visual Disabilities certificate is offered by UPC partner Florida State University.

Review and Recommendations

In a county in which access to upper-level degrees ranks 67 out of 67 in a state that ranks 49 out of 50, the college has taken four unique positive steps to turn the problem around: increasing access points throughout the county, including coursework at the [St. Petersburg Campus of the University of South Florida](#); developing a large [eCampus](#) thereby opportunities by means of online courses (165 this session); creating the UPC; and changing the college's status to a four-year institution.

If not the only one, SPC is the in the company of very few colleges in the country that have taken on these initiatives so ambitiously, particularly in the offering of upper-level courses. If it succeeds in coordinating and balancing the diverse types of programs it is now able to offer, the college can certainly claim to be national model in improving access to four-year degrees.