

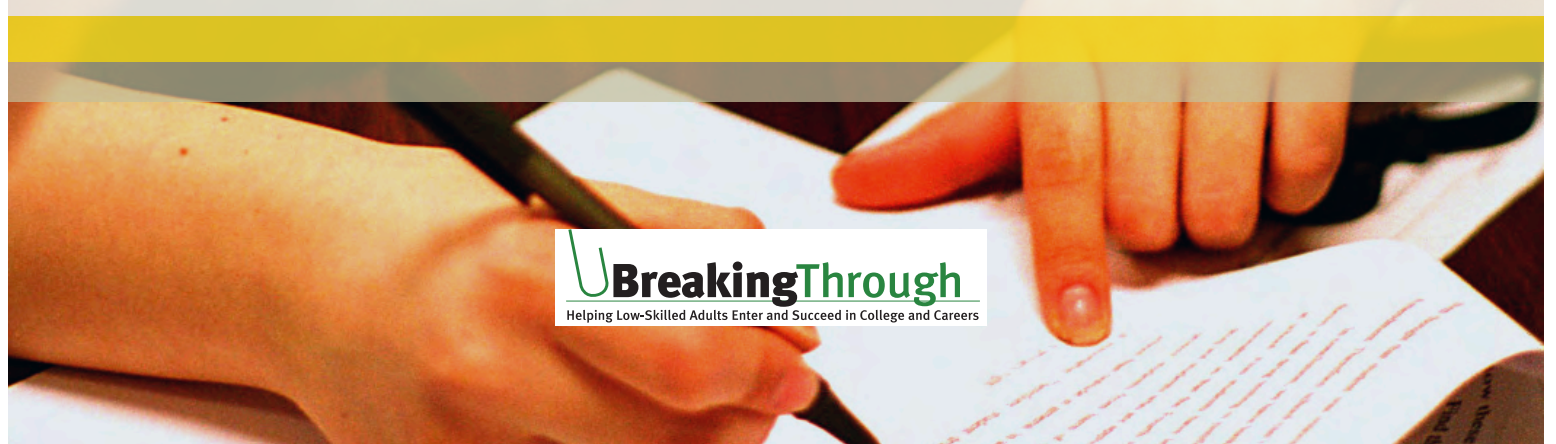


# BREAKING THROUGH

## CONTEXTUALIZATION TOOLKIT

A TOOL FOR HELPING LOW-SKILLED ADULTS GAIN  
POSTSECONDARY CERTIFICATES AND DEGREES

SPRING 2010



 **BreakingThrough**  
Helping Low-Skilled Adults Enter and Succeed in College and Careers

# THE *BREAKING THROUGH* PRACTICE GUIDE

TOOLS FOR HELPING LOW-SKILLED ADULTS EARN POSTSECONDARY CERTIFICATES AND DEGREES

THE *BREAKING THROUGH* PRACTICE GUIDE IS DESIGNED FOR PRACTITIONERS WHO WANT TO CONNECT ADULTS WHO HAVE LIMITED READING AND MATH SKILLS WITH POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS LEADING TO JOBS PAYING FAMILY-SUPPORTING WAGES. IT COMPILES PRACTICES DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED BY COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN THE NATIONAL *BREAKING THROUGH* INITIATIVE.

The *Practice Guide* has four components, each devoted to one of four “high leverage strategies” that community colleges and other programs can adopt to increase their success with low-skilled younger and older adults.

- > Accelerated learning
- > Comprehensive support services
- > Labor market payoffs
- > Aligning programs for low-skilled adults

These components can be used individually or as a set to put low-skilled adults on the path to family-sustaining incomes.

The *Practice Guide* also includes:

- > The Contextualization Toolkit
- > Supplementary materials, including information about the Advisor Training Toolkit

## ACCELERATED LEARNING

Perhaps the most formidable barrier facing the adults targeted by *Breaking Through* is the combination of a huge academic-skill gap and the lengthy process to close the gap—the “barrier of time.” To accelerate the pace of learning, *Breaking Through* colleges:

- > Compress the material for two courses into the time of one course—an approach sometimes called “accelerated learning.”
- > Customize the content and delivery of remediation to meet individual students’ needs.
- > Contextualize remedial content for the occupation or industry in which the student seeks to advance.

The Contextualization Toolkit, an integral component of the *Breaking Through Practice Guide*, can help community colleges and other educators accelerate learning for low-skilled adults by integrating career subject matter with pre-college skills development.

## COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT SERVICES

Low-skilled students require significant support to succeed, yet such services are rarely available to them. To provide comprehensive support services, *Breaking Through* colleges:

- > Connect students with an array of academic and nonacademic supports.
- > Provide “coaches” to connect students with support services in the college and the community.
- > Train coaches to work effectively with low-skilled adults.

The Community College Advisor Training Toolkit supplements the *Practice Guide* with a comprehensive, cost-effective approach to guiding students through the maze of academic, financial, and personal challenges toward college credentials and family-supporting careers.

## LABOR MARKET PAYOFFS

Programs serving low-skilled adults have provided little in terms of short-term economic payoffs that would encourage students to continue, and too often the focus is on low-wage jobs. To provide labor market payoffs, *Breaking Through* colleges:

- > Offer career exploration opportunities that lead to sound career choices.
- > Ensure that programs have and use up-to-date information about local labor markets.
- > “Chunk” training programs into shorter sections that meet employer needs, lead to credentials, and build toward more comprehensive certifications.
- > Participate in regional efforts that target industries offering advancement opportunities for low-skilled adults.

## ALIGNING PROGRAMS FOR LOW-SKILLED ADULTS

The profound disconnection between education and training programs for adults and postsecondary education is a crucial barrier to the educational and economic advancement of people with low skills. To align the program areas that serve low-skilled adults with college programs, *Breaking Through* colleges:

- > Align the content and aspirations of adult education with the prerequisites for postsecondary programs.
- > Link the content of noncredit workforce training with college-level work.
- > Infuse career content into developmental education for students who have strong career goals.

*Breaking Through* is a collaboration between Jobs for the Future, an organization committed to helping community colleges serve low-income students, and the National Council for Workforce Education, an organization of community-college-based workforce-development leaders. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supported development of the *Practice Guide*, based on *Breaking Through* projects at colleges throughout the nation funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and other foundations.

For information on *Breaking Through*, see [www.breakingthroughcc.org](http://www.breakingthroughcc.org) or contact Jobs for the Future, 617.728.4446, [info@jff.org](mailto:info@jff.org).

## Acknowledgments

The information in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 was gleaned from visits to Central New Mexico Community College, Community College of Denver, Dawson County Community College, LaGuardia Community College, North Shore Community College, Owensboro Community & Technical College, Portland Community College, and Tacoma Community College. The colleges generously shared in-depth information about the structure and content of their contextualized learning programs, the process used to develop and implement contextualized learning, and strategies for addressing the challenges they encountered. LaGuardia Community College's Bridge program was particularly detailed in outlining the key principles in doing contextualization, which helped to organize the framework for Chapter 2. Myrna Manly provided significant assistance to a number of *Breaking Through* colleges on methods and principles for contextualizing mathematics.

This toolkit was primarily written by Rebecca Arnold, under contract with Jobs for the Future.

Laura Dowd, Maria Flynn, Theresa Klebacha, Marc Miller, Rachel Pleasants, and Judith Combes Taylor all contributed to the creation of this toolkit.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>USING THE TOOLKIT</b>	<b>1</b>
<hr/>	
<b>1. TYPES OF CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING OFFERED IN <i>BREAKING THROUGH</i> COMMUNITY COLLEGES</b>	<b>2</b>
What Courses Are Appropriate for Contextualization?	2
What Is the Content for Contextualization?	3
Profiles of Contextualization Programs	5
<b>2. HOW TO DO CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING</b>	<b>15</b>
Goals and Common Characteristics	15
Designing a Contextualized Learning Course or Program	16
<b>3. STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING STUDENTS IN CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING COURSES OR PROGRAMS</b>	<b>31</b>
Make Explicit How Class Activities Develop the Skills Needed to Improve Career Prospects	32
Develop and Implement a Refined Intake/Screening Process	32
Use Instructional Strategies that Leverage Contextualized Learning Approaches	33
Address Varying Skill Levels in the Same Contextualized Learning Class	35
<b>4. SUSTAINING THE CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING COURSE OR PROGRAM</b>	<b>36</b>
Implement Processes Developed during the Design Phase	36
Promote Contextualization Throughout the Community College	37
<b>5. APPENDIX: CONTEXTUALIZATION TOOLS</b>	<b>38</b>
Tool 5.1. Building a Contextualized Learning Program or Course Advisory Team	38
Tool 5.2. Determining Data Needs	39
Tool 5.3. Budgeting for a Contextualized Learning Program	40
Tool 5.4. Budgeting for a Contextualized Learning Course	41
Tool 5.5. Checklist for Starting Contextualized Learning	42
<hr/>	
<b>ENDNOTES</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>44</b>



## Using the Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help community colleges and other educators serve low-skilled adults through the use of contextualized learning. This approach integrates career subject matter with precollege skills development, allowing adult learners to get started more quickly on their chosen career path. And while this toolkit has been designed as part of *Breaking Through*, any adult education provider can use it to inform contextualization practices.

Contextualization is not easy to develop or to implement, yet it presents the opportunity to create a program or course that meets the distinct needs of a vulnerable population, offering a unique approach for reaching low-skilled adults. Research and practice indicate that contextualization can motivate students and ease transitions into higher-level academic and career courses. Moreover, this approach makes it possible to introduce career skill development at the earliest stages of basic skills coursework, rather than forcing students to wait until they complete all basic skills courses.

For the designers and implementers of contextualized learning courses, this toolkit offers a guide to the key characteristics of contextualized learning, concrete steps to take when designing their contextualization approach, strategies to engage students, considerations related to promoting contextualized learning at their institutions, tools to guide their work, and models from the *Breaking Through* colleges. The experiences of the community colleges participating in the *Breaking Through* initiative have informed the practices detailed in this toolkit. In particular, the toolkit's "how to" framework draws deeply on the ways in which *Breaking Through* community colleges have used contextualized learning to promote retention, academic and career skill attainment, motivation, and connection with content in higher-level course offerings.

The toolkit is essential for "basic skills programs," a term that encompasses both adult education and developmental education. Adult education comprises adult basic education (for individuals

with below-high-school-level skills in reading, writing, or math), adult secondary education (for individuals with high-school-level skills working to obtain a high school credential), and English literacy programs (for individuals with limited English proficiency). Adult education programs are funded in part from the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Title II of the Workforce Investment Act). Developmental education serves individuals enrolled at community colleges who need skill development before enrolling in and succeeding in college-level work. Financing for developmental education can come from the state, institution, or local government, or a combination of these sources.

The toolkit has four main sections, plus an appendix of contextualization tools:

- > *Part I. Types of Contextualized Learning Offered in Breaking Through Community Colleges:* This chapter describes the types of courses appropriate for contextualized learning and the sources of content for this approach. The chapter includes profiles of the *Breaking Through* colleges that contributed to the knowledge base for this toolkit.
- > *Part II. How to Do Contextualized Learning:* This chapter covers the key characteristics of a contextualized learning program and outlines the steps to follow when designing contextualized courses and programs.
- > *Part III. Strategies for Engaging Students in Contextualized Learning Courses or Programs:* This chapter addresses the strategies that faculty and staff can use to attract and retain students in contextualized learning courses and programs.
- > *Part IV. Sustaining the Contextualized Learning Course or Program:* This chapter describes the essential next steps for colleges once the curricula and course offerings have been developed. It also covers how colleges that have successfully created contextualized learning can ensure continued funding and support.

## Part 1. Types of Contextualized Learning Offered in *Breaking Through* Community Colleges

Contextualization accelerates the progress of students in career pathways by offering them career content immediately, even as they develop their basic skills. It also improves students' motivation to persist in their education and pursue further academic and career courses. And it teaches students how to apply their skills and knowledge in the real world. Course offerings in GED preparation, English as a second language, developmental education, and general education are all appropriate for contextualization.

Contextualization has two components:

- > The courses to contextualize; and
- > The contextualization content to integrate into these courses.

### WHAT COURSES ARE APPROPRIATE FOR CONTEXTUALIZATION?

*Breaking Through* programs reflect a spectrum of options in terms of courses to contextualize: GED, ESL, developmental, or general education courses contextualized for specific careers, general career fields, and/or career exploration, as well as contextualized career exploration and employability skills courses.

#### GED Courses Contextualized for Specific Careers and Occupations

In New York City, LaGuardia Community College's GED Bridge to Health Careers and GED Bridge to Business Careers programs teach GED content using the context of their respective career fields. LaGuardia also integrates career-skills training and exploration into its GED Bridge programs.

LaGuardia has found that using broad career fields, rather than a specific occupation, allows for more flexibility to build in career-related skills and GED subject matter. The curriculum is less restrictive than it would be if one had to weave the skills from a single occupation into the GED subject areas.



#### **Selected Contextualization Program Profiles**

See page 6 for detailed profiles of contextualized learning programs at selected *Breaking Through* colleges.

#### ESL Courses Contextualized for Specific Careers and Occupations

North Shore Community College, with several campuses in northeastern Massachusetts, uses contextualization in its English for Childcare Providers courses. Students concurrently receive ESL instruction and develop their skills related to early child care and education.



ESL courses are a natural place to build in contextualization because language practice and skill development require a context of some sort (e.g., basic life skills or navigating community resources). Thus, using an occupational context accomplishes multiple aims simultaneously.

### **Developmental Courses Contextualized for Specific Careers and Occupations and for Career Exploration**

In Albuquerque, Central New Mexico Community College's *Breaking Through* program offers applied developmental reading and mathematics courses that are contextualized for the construction trades.

The Community College of Denver's FastStart@CCD program offers developmental English/reading with career exploration as the lens for determining the course content. Contextualization is also central to a concurrent college-experience course emphasizing career exploration and planning.

### **General Education Courses Contextualized for Specific Careers and Occupations**

In Kentucky, Owensboro Community & Technical College has contextualized a general-education communications class for the industrial maintenance occupation. It uses the approach to encourage students to continue their education beyond the certificate level.

When students view general-education requirements as intimidating, foreign, or too difficult, contextualization offers a way to make the course accessible, build on students' prior occupational experiences, and give students a successful experience in the general-education realm. This can encourage them to take more courses and potentially pursue more advanced certificates and degrees.

### **Contextualized Career Exploration and Courses Providing Employability Skills**

Many *Breaking Through* programs offer a career-exploration or employability-skills class that is contextualized for the career field the program targets. For example, students in Central New Mexico's employability-skills class focus on their careers of interest in the construction trades. They complete job searches, do research on occupational outlooks, and discuss workplace-conflict scenarios.

## **WHAT IS THE CONTENT FOR CONTEXTUALIZATION?**

Community colleges can use career fields, specific occupations, or career exploration as the context for building content into the curriculum. However, each context will offer advantages and disadvantages that community colleges should consider when deciding which approach to implement. The ultimate decision on content will rest upon decisions about: the need for diverse materials to use for contextualization; the importance of students' obtaining technical skills compared with general career skills; the importance of

students' obtaining occupational course credits; the depth and breadth of instructors' familiarity with career content; the size of the student population interested in particular occupations and career fields; and students' need for general career-exploration experiences.

### Contextualization Using Career Fields or Career Clusters

Contextualizing using a broader career field or career cluster has a number of advantages for programs and students:

- > Career fields offer a large pool of career content to draw upon when designing course activities and assignments. By drawing from an entire career field, a college has more flexibility to build in career-related skills across the five academic areas covered by the GED exam. The curriculum is less restrictive than it would be if one had to weave the skills from a single occupation into all of the GED subject areas. LaGuardia Community College has found this to be particularly useful for its GED Bridge programs.
- > A course covering a career field is relevant to a larger student population. This is particularly important for small community colleges that may not have enough students interested in a particular occupation to fill a course contextualized for that occupation alone.
- > Contextualizing using career fields/career clusters can offer students an increased ability to generalize the content. Even if they switch their occupation of interest within the same career field, they still benefit from the skills/credits obtained in the program.

Community colleges also should be mindful of the disadvantages posed by this approach.

- > It is more difficult to build the technical, in-depth skills required for a particular occupation. This may reduce the likelihood that students will earn occupational credits that count toward a credential for a contextualized course. (This, of course, depends on a college's curriculum review and approval procedures and program requirements.)
- > Some programs may see developing general career skills as an advantage and focus on skills and competencies that are common across the career field, but it may be difficult for instructors to gain a good enough understanding of all the different occupations within the career field to create course activities that represent the range of occupations in the career field.

### Contextualization Using Specific Occupations

North Shore Community College contextualizes ESL courses for child care providers. Contextualizing using specific occupations has the advantage of helping students develop technical, in-depth skills required for an occupation, potentially qualifying them to receive occupational course credits. It also offers a focus for instructors to develop thorough activities that target students' specific occupational interests while the instructors develop their own extensive knowledge about one occupation.



### The Sources of Contextualization

See Table 1 for a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of the various sources of content for contextualization.

Disadvantages include potentially inadequate numbers of students interested to fill a course, students' inability to generalize course content if they change their occupation of interest, and less material to draw from when contextualizing academic content.

### Contextualization Using Career Exploration

The Community College of Denver contextualizes courses using career exploration. Career exploration can involve such content as: students' discovering their aptitudes, goals, and interests; investigating career options; interviewing professionals in different fields; performing labor market analyses; learning about comporment at the workplace; and developing interviewing skills.

Advantages to using career exploration as the contextualization content include:

- > Students can apply skills to any career field.
- > It places students at the center of their learning and career exploration process.
- > It takes advantage of career advisement staff and builds students' comfort with accessing these professionals on their own.
- > Contextualization using career exploration facilitates acceleration. Students identify their career goals at the outset of their education, which builds motivation and jump-starts them on the paths they want to pursue.

The disadvantage is that students do not obtain concrete skills and credits related to a particular occupation.

### PROFILES OF CONTEXTUALIZATION PROGRAMS

The *Contextualization Toolkit* draws primarily on the experiences of six *Breaking Through* colleges:

- > Central New Mexico Community College
- > Community College of Denver
- > Davidson Community College
- > LaGuardia Community College
- > North Shore Community College
- > Owensboro Community & Technical College

Additional information and examples come from the twenty-five other colleges participating in *Breaking Through*.

Table 1. The Content for Contextualization

Contextualization Content	Advantages	Disadvantages
Career Fields and Career Clusters (e.g., health care)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can draw on a large pool of career content</li> <li>• Large potential student population interested in career content</li> <li>• Can generalize content to other occupations within the career field</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult for instructors to gain in-depth knowledge of all occupations within the field</li> <li>• Less in-depth, targeted skill development that would apply to particular occupations</li> <li>• Reduced likelihood of receiving occupational credits for courses</li> </ul>
Specific Occupations (e.g., child care providers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth, technical skill development for particular occupation that could increase likelihood of receiving occupational credits</li> <li>• Focused activities target students' specific interests</li> <li>• Instructors can develop in-depth knowledge about occupation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be too few students interested in specific occupation</li> <li>• Skills may be less transferable if students change occupation of interest</li> <li>• Less material to draw on to contextualize academic content</li> </ul>
Career Exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills applicable to any career field</li> <li>• Student-centered learning and career exploration, enabling students to set appropriate academic and career goals</li> <li>• Increased student familiarity with career advisement staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No occupation-specific concrete skills/credits</li> </ul>

## CENTRAL NEW MEXICO COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### General Program Features

The *Breaking Through* program at Central New Mexico Community College offers contextualized developmental education courses, compression, case management services, and remediation through learning labs and Web-based programs (e.g., KeyTrain). The program has reached out to and served low-skilled adults and some of the most vulnerable populations: previously incarcerated individuals, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients, the unemployed/underemployed, and people recovering from drug abuse and other challenging situations. Achievement coaches support students with academic and life challenges.

The college places students in the program after they complete an extensive intake process. Achievement coaches assist with the registration process, identify students' immediate life challenges, begin case management, and ensure that students complete the ACCUPLACER exam. The coaches support students while they are in the program and also help students through the transition out of *Breaking Through* and into employment, further training, or credit-level coursework. They create transition plans that look at each student's occupational objectives, ACCUPLACER scores, prerequisite needs, financial aid, and barriers causing students to miss class during the previous term, and make recommendations for the next semester.

## Contextualized Courses

Courses are offered in two six-week blocks. Each block consists of six weeks of applied developmental reading or math, three weeks each of two different trades courses, and six weeks of an employability-skills class or a college-success class.

*Applied developmental reading contextualized for the construction trades:* Students read a construction textbook and practice reading strategies (e.g., summarizing, note taking, outlining, mapping, identifying and paraphrasing main ideas, and learning word parts and vocabulary related to construction). All of this teaches a reading process and specific reading skills.

*Applied developmental math contextualized for the construction trades:* Math faculty draw heavily from a math textbook that is contextualized for the construction trades. Some examples of contextualized activities in the course include calculating the area of a roof using the Pythagorean Theorem, determining the volume of a concrete slab for a house, and interpreting scale drawings. Skills covered in the course include estimating; working with whole numbers, decimals, fractions, and percentages; setting up and solving a percentage or problem; solving real-life problems in the construction trades; and developing geometry sense.

*Short, introductory courses in electrical work; carpentry; and air conditioning, heating, and refrigeration; a college-success course; and an employability skills course:* Students explore career interests, learn proper protocol in the workplace, practice job-search skills, and develop resumes and cover letters.

## Process Used to Contextualize Courses

Faculty members were deliberate about contextualizing the developmental curriculum for the construction trades. The college paid math and reading faculty members to develop course curricula, who met with faculty in the construction trades to learn more about the skills that students would need in the trades, opportunities to contextualize, and the activities that students would be expected to complete in the construction trades courses. At curriculum meetings, instructors in the trades, reading, and math discussed required course components and reviewed syllabi from other courses. The instructors also met with upper-level developmental education instructors to learn about the skill level required in those courses.

The math instructor uses a contextualized math textbook. There is no English text contextualized for construction, so faculty members adapted an upper-level developmental reading course and a construction textbook to create handouts that addressed different reading skills.



### The Intake Process

Colleges have found that assessing students' goals, interests, learning styles, and other needs is an essential part of the student intake and screening process. For more on intake, assessment, and creating customized learning plans, see the Supplemental Materials section of the *Practice Guide*.

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## COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF DENVER

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### General Program Features

Community College of Denver developed and implemented the FastStart@CCD program, an accelerated developmental education program for low-skilled adults that uses career exploration to contextualize developmental courses.<sup>1</sup> All daytime students at CCD must take a college-experience course emphasizing career exploration and planning concurrent with the developmental course. The program has contextualized curricula, a learning community, accelerated mathematics or reading developmental courses, case management, academic support in learning labs, and career planning and advising.

FastStart@CCD takes advantage of extensive faculty collaboration through joint curriculum development, faculty observations of one another's classes, feedback about class observations, and discussion of student challenges. Students interested in the program must have an interview with a case manager who determines their motivation to participate in the program and life challenges they face, and then advises prospective students appropriately.

### Contextualized Courses

*Developmental English/reading and math:* The reading course focuses content on career exploration, including reflections about students' strengths and interests, informational interviews, interviews with individuals in students' careers of interest, and an "I-Search" paper documenting students' career research. For the math class, instructors assign a variety of outside projects that target students' interests, both personal and vocational.

*College experience/career-exploration course:* This is only for daytime students, and is taken concurrently with a developmental course. Students take career-interest inventories, research their careers of interest, make presentations based on their findings, develop resumes, learn about time management and education etiquette, and create career and education goals in addition to an education plan. Students round out the courses by participating in a Career Majors Fair where they meet with college advisors and former students working in specific career fields.

### Process Used to Contextualize Courses

The instructors for the college-experience course modify the syllabus each semester based on the students' career interests and needs. The reading/English instructors work in conjunction with the college-experience course team to align their career-exploration activities so that students work on the same exploration topic



#### The Intake Process

For more information on the intake and screening process, see the Supplemental Materials.



#### Complementary Strategies: Acceleration, Customization, and Student Supports

*Breaking Through* colleges use contextualization in conjunction with other high-leverage strategies to create programs that address the needs of low-skilled adults. To learn more about these complementary strategies, see "Accelerating the Pace of Learning" and "Support Services" in the *Practice Guide*.

for both classes. The program instructors have access to the career-development center for ideas about contextualizing classes. The director of the career-development center works with instructors to bring workplace experiences to students through videos and contacts with employers. Instructors can receive some reimbursement for developing contextualized curricula. The same process is used by the academic faculty, who work with the Career Development Center and college-experience instructors to create meaningful activities for students that help them clarify their goals.

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## DAVIDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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### General Program Features

Davidson County Community College offers a Basic Skills program that incorporates contextualized learning in a number of occupational areas and provides customized instruction. Adult basic education reading, writing, and mathematics are all taught in one classroom, with individual or small-group instruction.

The college uses contextualization to help motivate students to move into credit-level programs after obtaining their GEDs. Students receive the contextualized curricula if their aptitude and identified career interests correspond with the curricula that have been developed. ABE and GED students have varying career interests, so they receive the contextualized curricula on an individual or small-group basis.

In an important hands-on learning component, students use a tactile kit from the Microcomputer Evaluation of Career and Academics program (MECA) to complete tasks specific to their career areas (e.g., taking blood pressure for nursing students). These activities facilitate learning in context and also help students ascertain whether they are interested in pursuing the career area. Finally, students visit for-credit classes as part of an effort to connect with other students pursuing degrees in their career areas of interest.

### Contextualized Courses

Davidson County Community College has contextualized its Basic Skills program (adult secondary education, GED, and adult basic education) in the areas of math, reading, and writing using these occupations: certified nursing assistant; pharmacy technology; phlebotomy; medical office; truck driver; automotive technician; HVAC; welding; and early-childhood education. Basic Skills instructors are able to customize learning for a group of students with varied interests, so that all students can have their lessons and assignments contextualized for their career goal.

Occupation contextualization content is under development for: biotechnology; industrial systems; computer information; technology; business; motorcycle mechanic; and cosmetology.

### Process Used to Contextualize Courses

The college used information about labor market demands, placement rates, and the availability of short-term certificates to identify which occupational areas to use for contextualization. Connections with business and industry and the local WIA agency helped provide up-to-date labor market information. The input and expectations of employers are incorporated into the program through their participation on the Basic Skills

program advisory committee. Information about employers' needs from worksite literacy classes also informs the program curricula.

To develop the contextualized curricula, Basic Skills staff first met with deans and department chairs in the occupational areas to determine the skill expectations of college-level students. This often reflects employers' input through their involvement with the departments' program advisory committees. Instructors then obtained texts from the introductory college-level courses in each occupational area they wanted to use for contextualization. Vocabulary and excerpts from college texts were integrated into the curricula, and instructors developed assignments based on these texts. Portions of the college-level texts that were relevant to basic skills competencies (e.g., fractions or paragraph development) were copied and placed in three-ring binders organized by basic skills competencies and occupational areas.

Now that these materials have been developed, instructors can pull out readings and assignments for each student based on his or her occupational interest and skill gaps. Having the three-ring binders accessible in the classroom and training instructors to use the materials and incorporate contextualization into "standard" curricula enables instructors to readily contextualize and customize instruction. This is particularly important in classrooms in which students have varying career interests and skill needs.

During the college orientation for new employees and faculty, the Basic Skills Department conducts outreach explaining the importance of the department's work, including its use of contextualization.

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## LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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### General Program Features

LaGuardia Community College's GED Bridge to Health Careers and GED Bridge to Business Careers programs offer contextualized GED instruction, with career-pathways activities integrated into the program and coursework. These activities include internships, career panels, and career profiles of individuals in the healthcare industry. LaGuardia also provides case management services, including social-services referrals, attendance and performance monitoring, and interventions.

College and career advisement as well as postsecondary transition services are other key elements of the program. For example, the Bridge program offers "college student for a day," vocational training workshops, and preregistration college counseling with information about learning academies. Program staff make efforts to save seats for graduating students in workshops that will prepare them for the City University of New York placement exams.

The Bridge goals are to have students pass the GED exam, develop a career and education plan, and either enter into a postsecondary education program or advance their career or both. The program features nine hours of instruction per week for fourteen weeks. There are morning and evening class options, computer lab once per week, weekly drop-in times for tutoring and computer access, and multiple forms of assessments.



### Contextualized Courses

Each GED Bridge program operates as a single course in which the contextualized curriculum covers the GED subject areas, health or business/technology content, and career-skills training and exploration. Through the program, students develop GED-related skills, professional knowledge and competences, and employability skills.

*Academic lesson plans in the GED subject areas contextualized for the business or health career fields:* One sample activity in the GED Bridge to Business class involves conducting a community-needs survey, analyzing the survey results and other community data, and proposing a future business or service based on the data. The skills addressed through this activity include geometry and number conversion, research and academic writing, and “entrepreneurial” skills. Another example in the GED Bridge to Health includes reading a book about cholera and mapping the epidemic.

*Activities such as career planning workshops, resume/interview clinics, and internships:* These activities can focus on the health or business/technology career fields, or they may have broader applications to general career exploration.

### Process Used to Contextualize Courses

The instructors meet with credit/credential faculty from health care courses to learn more about the tasks and skills required of health care professionals and the texts the faculty uses in order to incorporate them into the GED Bridge program. Instructors consider students’ college and career goals, skill and activities related to the career field, the five GED subject areas, and professional proficiency (employability skills) when designing the curriculum. The program coordinator/counselor and instructors collaboratively create curriculum outlines in weekly meetings. Instructors develop many of their own materials because the curricula are unique: there are no ready-made GED/health and GED/business and technology contextualized curricula. Because the curricula are authentic, student centered, and inquiry based, they require a great deal of time to develop and implement.



#### Using Customization and Compression to Further Accelerate Learning

To read about how colleges use customization and compression alongside contextualization, see “Accelerating the Pace of Learning” in the *Breaking Through Practice Guide*.



#### Assessing Students’ Readiness for Accelerated Programs

Many *Breaking Through* colleges use an extensive intake/screening process to determine whether students are appropriately suited for the rigor of the program. See the Supplemental Materials that accompany the *Practice Guide* for more information.

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## NORTH SHORE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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### General Program Features

North Shore Community College offers a program in which students can receive a Child Development Associate credential that is aligned with the Associate’s degree in early care and education so that the credits transfer. The college has designed a contextualized ESL/CDA track for child care providers needing to

bolster their English skills. The CDA program compresses and integrates courses. The classroom observations required by the CDA program can be completed in students' home-based day care settings, which allows students to remain employed while completing the program.

### Contextualized Courses

The program offers ESL courses that are contextualized for child care providers.

*Bilingual early-childhood content-based workshops infused with ESL instruction:* This thirteen-week series of workshops that meet once per week is designed for lower-skilled ESL individuals. A Spanish-speaking achievement coach uses children's storybooks and related literacy materials as teaching tools to work with child care providers to develop appropriate early-childhood practice.

*English for Childcare Workers I:* This is a noncredit, contextualized ESL course that has been offered using various schedules to meet the needs of participants (e.g., Saturday mornings and one evening a week for either ten, twelve, or thirteen weeks or twice a week for six or eight weeks). The course is designed for students at the next ESL skill level. They use an ESL book, read children's books, improve their English, and build professionalism. The college would like to make the class more intensive so that students develop their English proficiency more rapidly.

*English for Childcare Workers II:* This course is similar to English for Childcare Workers I in that students are not grouped by ESL skill level. The intention now is to create a curriculum for this course that "builds in intensity" from the previous course to use with future cohorts.

*CDA Prep Class:* North Shore offers a two-week class that reviews the syllabus, course expectations, and vocabulary for the first credit-level CDA course. However, it has not adequately prepared students needing more ESL support, and the college is designing a more intensive prep class for English Language Learners. This six-week, noncredit, intensive class will prepare intermediate and advanced ESL students for the first credit-level CDA class. It will introduce students to the major themes and concepts in the CDA course, review vocabulary, and include simplified versions of some of the assignments in the CDA course.

### Process Used to Contextualize Courses

North Shore Community College recognized that child care providers needed professional development, credentials, and degrees but had limited English proficiency. This became a natural combination for contextualizing learning. ESL faculty met with CDA staff to learn the topics, themes, and competencies addressed in the CDA courses and designed the ESL curriculum to cover these at an introductory level. As an example, one ESL classroom activity involves observing a classmate and later a videotape of a child and describing what each person was doing. This addresses the theme of observing and recording children's behavior, which is covered in the CDA courses, and appropriately using verb tenses and vocabulary, which is ESL content. The ESL department chair created ESL lessons to complement the chosen children's literature for each module in the bilingual workshops and is helping develop the intensive CDA prep class.

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## OWENSBORO COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE

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### General Program Features

Owensboro Community & Technical College offers programs in a number of career and occupational areas, including industrial maintenance and nursing. The nursing program, funded by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Hitachi Foundation, has built upon strategies promoted by *Breaking Through* to meet the needs of low-skilled adults. The program features an accelerated pace of learning, drawing on both contextualization and a hybrid course-delivery approach—including on-line and in-person instruction—to adapt to students' needs. Support through case management helps students with multiple barriers to persistence achieve academic success. In addition, incentives provided by the participating health system in the form of tuition, books, and release time, as well as on-site instruction, make the program more appealing to students.

Another Owensboro program offers a career pathway in industrial maintenance that culminates in an Associate's degree. Key features of this program include contextualized courses, acceleration, case management, Web-based instruction, and self-paced remedial work on-line.

### Contextualized Courses

Owensboro utilizes contextualization in both its nursing and industrial maintenance pathways. For industrial maintenance, math is taught alongside the technical content. In addition, a basic communications course was contextualized for the industrial maintenance pathway; previously, students had been reluctant to take communications, which is a required course for the two-year degree, because it was too similar to the classes they struggled with in high school and in previous attempts at postsecondary education. Contextualization made the course more relevant to students' goals. Similarly, in the nursing program, contextualization makes the basic skills content relevant for students because they can see how it applies to skills they will need as nurses.

### Process Used to Contextualize Courses

For the remedial math course for the nursing program, the college's Workforce Solutions division led the curriculum development process. The division facilitated discussions that brought together the math teacher for the course, the math division chair who approves course competencies, hospital personnel who understand math competencies required on the job, and the nursing faculty who know the skills necessary for nursing courses. All of this helped develop a framework for the course.



### Other Strategies Used at Owensboro

For a description of how Owensboro integrates contextualization with *Breaking Through's* other high-leverage strategies, see "Four Strategies at Owensboro" in the *Breaking Through Practice Guide*.



### Customized Developmental Math and Industry-based Credentials

For more information about programs offering customization for developmental math as well as industry-based modularized accelerated credentials (e.g., stacked credentials), see the *Breaking Through Practice Guide*: "Accelerating the Pace of Learning" and the Supplemental Materials.

For the industrial maintenance program's basic communications course, a general course outline already existed, but it needed to be contextualized. The division worked with faculty from Industrial Maintenance who approved the assignments, ensured that the vocabulary was appropriate, and suggested different ways of teaching the material. Drawing on the expertise of instructional designers or experts in curriculum design was very valuable in curriculum design efforts when faculty needed assistance.

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## SOUTHEAST ARKANSAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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### General Program Features

The *Breaking Through* program at Southeast Arkansas Community College seeks to develop and implement a pipeline for low-skilled adults to become licensed practical nurses. To speed up the process of gaining licensed practical nurse credentials, SEARK created and linked two intensive courses of study: the Fast Track Developmental Education Program, which leads into a college-level curriculum. Developmental education courses are contextualized for nursing or allied health. The leaders of the developmental education program decided to contextualize courses when faced with poor student outcomes; they wanted to try an approach that would help students succeed.

Southeast Arkansas Community College provides various forms of support as students prepare to take the licensing exam. The college partners with the Southern Good Faith Fund, a local community-based organization, to offer counseling, financial literacy classes, and other comprehensive supports aimed at increasing students' financial stability. Also, the colleges offer "fall-back" options for those who cannot keep pace with the three-semester program.

### Contextualized courses:

The Fast Track program offers basic skills in reading, writing, and math in a compressed format: students receive in one semester the same remediation they would have received in two to three semesters. All developmental education courses are contextualized for nursing or allied health occupations, and they are designed to prepare students for the accelerated interdisciplinary Practical Nursing Tract (IPNT).

### Process used to contextualize courses:

SEARK has developed the accelerated curriculum through an organic, ongoing process, with instructors continually researching the competencies needed for National Council Licensure Examinations (NCLEX) and further education. Initially, SEARK contextualized math instruction: the college paired an academic specialist and a field specialist—a nurse practitioner—to teach students how nurses apply math skills. Then SEARK staff realized that students were struggling with reading as well—many had not read a book or a magazine in years. Here, too, contextualization became a way to engage students in learning to read better: the instructors incorporated into the curriculum a biography of Florence Nightingale and other books with a nursing connection.

## Part 2. How to Do Contextualized Learning

There are four main components for a college to consider when it seeks to create and use contextualized learning programs or courses:

- > The goals and key characteristics of contextualized learning;
- > Design steps and principles;
- > Engaging students; and
- > Sustaining the effort.

This section addresses the first two items. Part 3 discusses engaging students, and Part 4 covers sustaining the effort. The examples from *Breaking Through* community colleges are offered to elucidate concepts and provide ideas for community colleges seeking to create their own programs.

### GOALS AND COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Most programs serving low-skilled adults seek to facilitate transitions into higher-level academic and career courses. Contextualized courses and programs offer an opportunity to build into the curricula of basic-skills courses an overview of key themes, skills, and materials from higher-level technical courses, as well as general career skills and competencies; all of these can smooth transitions for students. Contextualized courses and programs are a means of accelerating student learning by beginning the acquisition of career skills during basic skills coursework.

All *Breaking Through* contextualized learning programs share several key characteristics, regardless of the type of course that is being contextualized or the specific contextualization content. These key characteristics guide the process of designing and developing contextualized offerings and engaging students:

- > Students are actively engaged and appropriately placed, given the skill level in the course or program.
- > The curricula and classroom activities address academic skills and career competencies simultaneously.
- > Instructors are dedicated and committed to the work and have appropriate knowledge of the career field.
- > Instructors use instructional strategies that complement contextualized learning.
- > There is a deliberate, sustained curriculum development process.
- > There is collaboration among program staff and among faculty in a number of departments.
- > There is a devotion to continuous course or program improvement.

## DESIGNING A CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING COURSE OR PROGRAM

There are six key steps and principles to follow when designing a contextualized learning program or course:

- > Decide the courses to contextualize and the contextualization content.
- > Establish buy-in.
- > Determine costs and obtain funding (if necessary).
- > Create institutional mechanisms to support the course or program.
- > Recruit and retain the “right” faculty.
- > Develop contextualized curricula that incorporate career skills and competencies.

This section discusses career fields as the content used to contextualize courses, but community colleges may also use career exploration or specific occupations to contextualize their courses.

By following these steps, program or course founders and implementers will be able to evaluate the numerous options available to them, put appropriate processes in place, and bring critical people to the table before the program/course begins, thus smoothing implementation. Community colleges can add more steps depending on their unique circumstances. Individuals who are designing a single contextualized learning course may find that it is appropriate to scale back some of these steps, especially those related to the advisory team and institutional mechanisms.

### Designing a Contextualized Learning Course or Program

#### 1) *Decide the courses to contextualize and the contextualization content*

- Consider labor market demand and target population's needs
- Research other contextualized learning programs or courses

#### 2) *Establish buy-in*

- Obtain administrators' support
- Develop a program advisory team
- Develop a program management team
- Engage employers
- Reach out to technical, general education, and noncredit/workforce-development faculty

#### 3) *Determine costs and obtain funding (if necessary)*

- Ascertain figures for cost categories
- Use state grant funds, if available
- Seek other grants, if necessary

#### 4) *Create institutional mechanisms to support the contextualized course or program*

- Establish a process for data and cost tracking
- Develop a process for continuous course or program improvement

#### 5) *Recruit and retain the "right" faculty*

- Seek out faculty with characteristics well suited for contextualized learning
- Offer incentives for faculty to teach contextualized courses, and work to retain faculty
- Provide professional development, as needed

#### 6) *Develop contextualized curricula that incorporate career skills and competencies*

- Support faculty learning from a variety of sources about the career field and skills required in upper-level courses
- Provide support for curriculum development, such as funding and instructional designers, where appropriate

### Decide the courses to contextualize and the contextualization content

- > Consider labor market demands and target population's needs
- > Research other contextualized learning programs or courses

The design of a contextualized learning program or course begins with a decision about which courses should be contextualized and what content will be used to contextualize them. Staff should consider the labor market needs in their community and the career interests and needs of the target population they wish to serve when making this decision.

Bringing employers into the process at this stage can help in ascertaining the local, current labor market realities, projected labor shortages, and the skill gaps among individuals newly entering the field. Once a decision has been reached about the contextualized courses and content, staff can clearly articulate the rationale for this decision and the goals of the program/course. Note that this will be critical to data collection efforts later in the project.

As a next step, research programs or courses that serve a similar population, cover similar career fields, or offer similar contextualized courses. This research can inform decisions about the structure (e.g., duration and intensity of the program/course), instructional strategies, screening/intake procedures, student recruitment, data approaches, and costs.

### Establish buy-in

- > Obtain administrators' support
- > Establish a program advisory team
- > Establish a program management team
- > Engage employers
- > Reach out to technical, general education, and noncredit/workforce development faculty

Establishing buy-in for the program or course among the various constituencies establishes a foundation for support throughout the contextualization effort. Formalizing this collaboration also sets expectations from the beginning and clearly establishes roles.



#### Using Labor Market Payoffs

See "Labor Market Payoffs" in the *Breaking Through Practice Guide* for more information on understanding the local labor market and working with local employers.



#### Courses and Content for Contextualization

See page 6 for more on the different types of courses and content that are appropriate for contextualization and on the pros and cons of each type.



### Obtain the support of relevant administrators

Selling administrators at the outset on the program or course conception and design, as well as on its benefits for the target population, lays the groundwork for sustained administrator support. It is helpful to demonstrate how contextualized learning and its anticipated outcomes align with or promote administrators' policy and program agendas for the college. Once the effort is under way, staff can sustain administrators' support by including them on an advisory committee, keeping them abreast of progress based on data, sharing information about grant awards, and helping build the college's reputation by speaking about the contextualization offerings at conferences. Administrator support increases the capacity to overcome barriers to implementation, survive budget cuts, and become a core aspect of the institution.

### Establish a program advisory team

Establishing a cohesive, representative advisory team at the beginning can help establish buy-in among all of the critical players. The program or course advisory team can help at the outset with design decisions. When the program or course is under way, the advisory team can assist when determining necessary modifications at a macro level.

Staff may want to define at the outset the expectations of the team and their core responsibilities. Representatives on this team may include administrators and faculty from relevant academic/technical/noncredit or workforce development departments (these are core team members); representatives from the college's administrative departments in the areas of admissions, career services, student support, the registrar, and institutional research; employers; workforce investment board representatives; and community-based organizations, especially those operating in the career field used for contextualization.

For LaGuardia Community College, collaborative relationships with representatives from administrative departments help program staff better understand the systems that students have to navigate, making it easier for them to help students access appropriate services.<sup>2</sup> The *Breaking Through* program at Central New Mexico Community College has found that including a member from enrollment services ensures that the team understands the administrative challenges that come with modifying the program in ways that impact enrollment procedures, thereby helping to avoid design pitfalls. CNM's experience also demonstrates that administrator representatives from different departments can make or enact program decisions expeditiously and with an understanding of each department's administrative requirements.

### Establish a program or course management team

Creating a management team at the outset ensures that the coordinator, instructors, and student support staff associated with the program or course form a cohesive unit that works collaboratively to develop and implement contextualized learning. At many *Breaking Through* colleges, the program management team operates like a "faculty learning community" in which instructors in different areas, program coordinators, and case managers meet together to discuss the curriculum, instruction, program improvement, and struggling students. *Breaking Through* programs have found it useful to formalize this arrangement through regular meetings.

### Engage employers

Engaging employers early on ensures that they are committed to the contextualized program or course and invested in the outcomes. Employers can act as vital partners in contextualized learning, bringing tremendous value to students and instructors. They can help shape the design based on their knowledge of the labor market and career competencies. A good relationship with employers can position them to play key roles once the program or course is under way, such as:

- > Assisting instructors in understanding the career-field competencies to enrich the curriculum;
- > Being active members of the advisory team;
- > Offering students hands-on learning experiences through internships;
- > Sharing feedback about exiting students' competencies;
- > Coming into the classroom to discuss workplace realities; and
- > Participating in students' career research for their coursework through interviews or observations at the workplace.

### Reach out to technical, general-education, and noncredit/workforce development faculty

Faculty members are a powerful political voice at a community college. The more faculty who believe in contextualized learning, and see the benefit of using it in their courses, the greater the likelihood that they will participate in and advocate for contextualized learning at the college and assist with curriculum development efforts. Accordingly, the program or course designers need to work to obtain buy-in from these faculty members.

Some strategies for engaging faculty up front include: sponsoring conversations among faculty groups in which they gain an understanding of the expertise that each possesses; including faculty on the advisory team; and including them in contextualization professional development so that they understand the approach and the importance of their role in curriculum development.

Once the program or course is under way, increase faculty buy-in by using data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the approach, and by encouraging contextualized learning instructors to share their experiences with colleagues.

As an example of obtaining buy-in from faculty, Owensboro Community & Technical College facilitated a conversation between technical faculty and general-education faculty. This helped each side understand the other's experience on a daily basis and gain respect for how their efforts are complementary in enhancing students' career progression. During this conversation, general-education faculty gave examples of content and assignments, and technical instructors explained what particular examples or applications would motivate or interest their students. Such conversations can reduce barriers, foster mutual respect, and enhance the likelihood of faculty collaboration and buy-in.

### **Determine program costs and obtain funding**

- > Ascertain figures for cost categories
- > Use state grant funds, if available
- > Seek other grants, if necessary

Contextualized learning can be costly, particularly due to start-up costs associated with curriculum development, and to many costs are incurred prior to student enrollment. Julie Strawn (2007) recommends using state-grant funds to support curriculum development, if the state has these funds. It is helpful to have the contextualized learning program or course included in the community college's regular budget.

At minimum, contextualized learning programs can expect to incur costs for materials, student recruitment, staff salaries and benefits, training and curriculum development, assessments, and data collection and analysis. Staff may need to add to these categories depending on the structure of their program or course.

Programs and courses needing additional funding to design or implement contextualized learning may want to seek grants. Such applications may be more likely to succeed when they respond to a labor market need that was identified as part of the design process. When completing applications, staff should be realistic about data and program commitments. That said, pressure from funders to fulfill such commitments can be used as leverage with administrators to remove barriers to implementation and institutionalization.

### **Create institutional mechanisms to support the contextualized course or program**

- > Establish a process for data and cost tracking
- > Lay the foundation for a continuous improvement process

#### **Establish a process for data and cost tracking**

Staff need to determine at the outset of the program or course which data will be needed to inform continuous improvement, meet funders' requirements and commitments, and make the case that contextualization improves retention rates, transitions to higher-level academic and career courses, and academic achievement. Staff will need to balance these competing data requirements.

Having data systems in place to collect this information at the outset ensures the collection of baseline achievement data that can later be compared with post-program/course achievement levels. Staff also may find it helpful to engage institutional research staff or to seek out other technical assistance to identify and design data-collection tools before the program/course begins.

Staff must also determine how to track costs to ensure that they remain in line with budgetary estimates. Staff will have to comply with cost-documentation requirements and budget-amendment procedures from the college and funders.

#### Lay the foundation for a continuous improvement process

Many *Breaking Through* programs use a student-centered approach in which they work constantly to align their programs with the needs of their target population, without being inflexibly constrained by the original program design. Although changes in program design, course offerings, or delivery approaches make it difficult to analyze the data and to control for different factors impacting student achievement, the end result of this student-centered approach is a contextualized program or course that meets the unique needs of each cohort of students.

*Breaking Through* programs offer many examples of the continuous improvement process in action and of the use of management teams. Staff at LaGuardia Community College constantly review their data to make program improvements. Based on feedback from apprenticeship employers, Central New Mexico Community College modified its program to incorporate employability skills. North Shore Community College identified a need among ESL students for more extensive support prior to the first Child Development Associate credential course, and it is designing an intensive prep course to meet these needs.

Owensboro Community & Technical College employs a “SWAT team” approach: program staff examine the program frequently to determine changes that need to be made. They use formal assessments, examine the population of students in the programs and what their needs are, assess what is working and not working with the program, examine their resources, and design programs to meet students’ changing needs. The basic approach is “try it-modify it-try it-modify it.” For example, a self-paced remedial lab in math was too overwhelming for students with lower scores and who had not done well in school the first time. In response, the program is developing an intensive “on ramp” preparation course for these students. The course will offer ninety minutes of intensive math each day before the hands-on welding class. The opportunity to do hands-on work will help students make progress while remaining motivated. Once this program is in place, the college will examine its efficacy and modify it if necessary.



#### Tools for Determining Data Needs

Tool 5.2 was developed to help colleges assess what data to collect.



#### Data Sources for Program Evaluation and Improvement

See page 23 for a list of possible sources of data that colleges can use to evaluate and improve programs and curricula.

### Sources of Data for Program and Curriculum Improvement

Staff can establish at the initiation of a program or course what systems and processes will be used to gather information to aid improvement efforts related to design or curricula. The program management and advisory teams can guide improvement efforts using these sources of information:

- > Data about student outcomes;
- > The success of different lessons;
- > Instructors' observations on students' skill gaps and grasp of different topics;
- > Feedback from students about the course;
- > Feedback from employers;
- > Feedback from other faculty at the college about students' skill levels in subsequent courses;
- > Changes in the competencies required in the career field;
- > New technologies that students will have to use in the career field; and
- > Modifications to the standards or skills tested in formalized assessments.

### Recruit and retain the "right" faculty

- > Seek out faculty with characteristics well suited for contextualized learning.
- > Offer incentives for faculty to teach contextualized courses, and work to retain faculty.
- > Provide professional development, as needed.

*Breaking Through* community colleges emphasize the importance of having the "right" instructors for contextualized learning that targets low-skilled adults. For many of these students, their experience in contextualized courses is their first upon returning to school. This population of students is often dealing with a number of life challenges simultaneously. It is vital that they encounter competent, committed, caring instructors who connect learning with students' interests and encourage them to work hard and remain in programs. The wrong instructor can turn these students off very quickly, making it exceedingly difficult to reengage them.

### Characteristics to Seek in Instructors of Contextualized Teaching of Low-Skilled Adults

Contextualized learning courses can be more difficult to teach than other courses because of the need to develop curricula, create unique activities and materials, teach two subjects simultaneously (the target course and the career field context), become familiar with the career context, and reach a challenging population. The characteristics of the instructors best suited for contextualized learning programs include:

- > An understanding of the unique challenges of the population;
- > A desire to work with the population;
- > Creativity and the ability to make learning exciting and fun;
- > An interest in or experience with contextualizing instruction;
- > Familiarity with the career field/occupation used to contextualize the course (or a willingness to spend the time to become familiar with this content);
- > Comfort with crossing disciplines; and
- > Dedication and willingness to adapt and change to help students succeed.

### Types of Instructors

There are at least three different options for types of instructors for contextualized learning courses:

- > ABE/developmental education instructors;
- > Occupational/technical instructors; or
- > Both types of instructors coteaching the course.

*Breaking Through* programs are more likely to have adult basic education/developmental education instructors learn the career content and use it to teach a contextualized basic skills course, as opposed to occupational/technical instructors infusing basics skills content into career and technical courses. In either model, Instructors can benefit from professional development. ABE/developmental education instructors are familiar with common skill-development challenges and specific basic skills-teaching strategies. These instructors may need professional development or professional experience to obtain the career knowledge necessary to develop authentic activities, use proper vocabulary, and demonstrate the application of course skills in the career areas.

Occupational/technical instructors may need professional development covering specific strategies for teaching basic-skills courses. Of course, occupational/technical faculty do some academic skill building in their courses, but they are probably accustomed to the majority of the course content being occupational/technical and to students entering the course with a higher skill level.

Coteaching—ABE/developmental education instructors and occupational/technical instructors in the same classroom—is a way for both types of instructors to use their expertise to teach the content. *Breaking Through* programs at Portland Community College and Cuyahoga Community College use coteaching strategies. This permits just-in-time developmental skill instruction so that students can immediately access the occupational content. This can be supplemented by additional skill-building courses. Coteaching builds collaboration among these faculty members into the program.

### Faculty Recruiting Strategies

Some *Breaking Through* contextualized learning programs use permanent faculty and others use adjunct faculty. When designing a contextualized learning course or program, this categorization is less important than recruiting and retaining the “right” faculty.

Many *Breaking Through* programs “handpick” the faculty for their contextualized learning programs. They reach out to like-minded faculty who believe in the need to contextualize learning and are dedicated to working with low-skilled adult learners. Department chairs can be important partners in this effort, helping to identify and recruit potential instructors as well as devising incentives for teaching and developing the courses. However, instructors should not need too much convincing, or they might be inappropriate for the program: instructors should *want* to teach these courses.

Hiring strategies usually target instructors who are familiar with contextualization and the creative teaching approaches used in the program. For example, LaGuardia Community College’s GED Bridge programs require candidates to submit a contextualized lesson plan based on a *New York Times* article used in the GED Bridge classroom. This exercise makes clear which candidates have an aptitude for contextualization.

Owensboro’s Center for Workforce Solutions division is always seeking qualified teachers. Its extensive network in the community provides information about good teachers or industry professionals who become available, and the division can bring these individuals in to work with students at the college.

### Faculty Incentives

Incentives for faculty to teach contextualized courses are important because of the commitment required for gaining background knowledge about the career field and developing curricula, materials, and activities. *Breaking Through* colleges offer various mixtures of release time, course reductions, and stipends for teaching and curricular development. LaGuardia Community College, for example, employs teaching assistants and interns for contextualized learning courses who assist with developing and delivering lesson plans. This extra help makes it more appealing for faculty to teach these courses. The most common incentive used at the *Breaking Through* colleges is stipends for curriculum development.

### Faculty Retention

Community colleges should consider the tangible and intangible resources they have to encourage faculty to remain with the program/course. Retaining faculty over multiple course cycles has many advantages in terms of cost, continuous improvement, and institutionalization. When a college retains faculty members, the start-up costs of developing the curriculum are lower. There is also more cohesion within the management team, making it easier to run the program or course and to make changes expeditiously. Moreover, instructors often become “evangelists” for the contextualization approach, spreading good practice among faculty and recruiting others to teach courses. One retention approach used by Community College of Denver is to offer peer-to-peer meetings for instructors in FastStart@CCD. This helps keep instructors motivated and gives them the opportunity to learn from one another.

### Professional Development

*Breaking Through* colleges have used a variety of approaches to facilitate professional development and build a cadre of instructors equipped to teach contextualized courses. LaGuardia Community College’s GED Bridge programs hire interns who teach alongside the main instructor and develop unit plans, customize instruction, and run lessons. This serves two purposes: it lightens the load for the main instructor, while interns learn to do contextualization well, thereby increasing the pool of qualified instructors.

Community College of Denver brings in external speakers on various topics, pays instructors to attend external professional development, offers observations of “traditional” instructors teaching “nontraditional” students, provides feedback about their instruction, and supports faculty observations and feedback about each other’s practice.

In the absence of formal professional development, tools such as the *Breaking Through Practice Guide* or the Advisor Training Manual can help ensure that new faculty have the background information necessary to succeed. Some programs have also created their own handbooks tailored to their specific program features. Central New Mexico Community College’s *Breaking Through* faculty handbook communicates information about the project’s norms and student populations, the role of contextualization, college administrative information, customized instruction tools such as KeyTrain, and assessments.

### Develop contextualized curricula that incorporate career skills and competencies

- > Support faculty learning from a variety of sources about the career field and the skills required in upper-level courses.
- > Provide support for curriculum development such as funding and instructional designers, where appropriate.



The process of developing a robust contextualized course curriculum is extensive and hands-on. Course faculty can obtain information from employers, other faculty members, job shadowing, and other sources that will inform curriculum development in regard to:

- > The skill level necessary in subsequent courses;
- > The key themes, assignments, and assessments used in subsequent courses;
- > The career skills and competencies of the target occupation or field;
- > Advances in the career field; and
- > Areas of weakness among students entering academic and career programs.

Doing so allows instructors to create authentic classroom activities that address career competencies, use appropriate career-field vocabulary, and establish credibility among students. All of this can help faculty build students' skills to requisite levels, expose students to higher-level course content, and facilitate their transitions to these courses.

### **Get familiar with the career-field and academic-skill requirements to inform curricula development**

*Breaking Through* program staff and instructors use a number of approaches to gain career-field knowledge. Some, but not all, instructors are familiar with the career-field content from prior work experiences or coursework. As part of the work to develop contextualized course curricula, instructors conduct research to understand the academic and career competencies that their students need. For example, they can:

- > Meet with technical and noncredit/workforce instructors who can explain the technical skills required in a career field, based on their direct work experiences or the competencies they cover in their different career courses.
- > Meet with employers in the career field who can share on-the-ground knowledge about the skills needed by their employees, advances in the field, and deficiencies among new hires.
- > Use WorkKeys, which has job profiles containing detailed information about job tasks and skill levels required to perform successfully on the job.
- > Job shadow a professional in the career field.
- > Attend or observe technical classes at the college.
- > Review syllabi from other courses.

These approaches require an initial time investment by faculty, which highlights the importance of retaining these individuals.

### Learn about academic-skill requirements

General-education faculty can provide information about the themes, materials, assessments, and skill-level requirements in subsequent academic courses. ACCUPLACER score requirements for subsequent courses are another source of information about students' required skill levels.

### Strategies to facilitate instructors' curricula development

Instructors will likely need support in their curriculum development efforts. At Owensboro Community & Technical College, curriculum developers or instructional designers assisted with the curriculum development process, helping instructors who otherwise felt ill equipped to create an entire curriculum.

Staff can work collaboratively with instructors to look at syllabi from other courses, determine which topics should be covered, and brainstorm curriculum ideas; LaGuardia Community College uses this approach.

Staff can facilitate collaboration among faculty in different departments to support curriculum development by sponsoring structured conversations or meetings among different faculty groups at the outset of the program (Owensboro); using curriculum development funds to pay faculty for meeting to share information about academic and career competencies; having periodic curriculum meetings among faculty members; using coteaching (Portland Community College and Cuyahoga Community College); and creating learning communities to formalize faculty collaboration in the delivery approach (Central New Mexico Community College).

Designing contextualized learning curricula and appropriate classroom activities and materials can be time consuming. Strategies for addressing this challenge include sharing curricula and materials across programs or courses, saving materials so that instructors are not reinventing the wheel, and researching and customizing curricula that already exist. For example, LaGuardia's GED Bridge program is standardizing its lesson plans and determining how to make them easily accessible for other instructors on line.



### Examples of Building Contextualized Curricula and Activities

See page 29 for examples of how *Breaking Through* colleges have developed contextualized curricula and activities.

## Examples of Building Contextualized Curricula and Activities

### *Incorporating career skills and competencies into curricula*

At LaGuardia Community College, an instructor met with credit/credential faculty from health care courses to learn more about the tasks and skills required of health care professionals and the texts that the faculty uses in order to incorporate them into the GED Bridge program. He found out how industry professionals take notes on patients, which helped formulate a classroom activity in which students took notes on patients in a book as if they were health care practitioners. This activity simultaneously covered the summarizing and reading-comprehension skills needed for the GED and developed health care competencies.

At Central New Mexico Community College, a math instructor was also an assistant in the applied technologies classes. He knew the electrical calculations that students had to do and built these skills into his math course.

At Portland Community College and Tacoma Community College, ABE/developmental education instructors observe workplace interactions, identify skill gaps, and address these in the classroom, working with technical instructors.

### *Using academic-skill requirements in subsequent courses to inform curricula*

Knowing the skill level that students need in order to enter subsequent courses can inform course goals, the particular skills covered in the curriculum, and the standards for success. At Central New Mexico Community College, the developmental reading instructor knows the ACCUPLACER reading scores of her entering students and the score required in the next developmental reading course. This sets the framework for addressing the skills that need to be developed during the course.

### *Incorporating key themes and materials from higher-level courses into the curricula*

Exposing students to key themes and materials from subsequent courses is not mere duplication of content. Instead, it offers students their first exposure to challenging content in a setting designed to offer support in addressing their developmental-skill needs.

At North Shore Community College, an ESL instructor met with faculty in the Child Development Associate credential program to learn about the themes, materials, and assessments from the credit courses. She used this information to build an ESL curriculum that touches on key CDA themes, exposes students to activities they will do in more depth in the credit courses, and builds the vocabulary necessary to understand the theories in the CDA courses and the assessments that are used.

The applied-reading instructor at Central New Mexico Community College uses a portion of an upper-level construction-trades book to work on students' reading skills. She also learned about the assignments and tasks covered in the next developmental reading course and now exposes students to simplified versions of them. This better prepares students for when they enter these courses.

### Davidson Community College's Contextualized Curricula Development Process

Decide on target occupations to use for contextualizing basic-skills courses based on labor market demand, availability of short-term certificates, and high placement levels.



Meet with deans/department chairs to learn about skill expectations in college-level courses in the target occupational areas.



Understand employers' expectations in the target occupational areas.



Obtain introductory college-level texts in the target occupational areas.



Photocopy portions of target occupation texts relevant to basic-skills competencies.



Place text excerpts in binders in each basic-skills classroom, organized by competencies and occupational areas.



Offer professional development for instructors in how to use contextualized content, materials, and binders.



Give readings/assignments to students from binders based on their basic skills competency gaps and identified career areas of interest, customizing and contextualizing simultaneously.

## Part 3. Strategies for Engaging Students in Contextualized Learning Courses or Programs

Once goals and key characteristics of contextualized learning are established, the next step is to consider ways to engage students. Often, low-skilled adults are dealing with major life challenges, in addition to skill gaps and academic needs. Instructors need to be armed with numerous strategies to reach out to these students effectively.

There are four key steps and principles in engaging students in a contextualized learning program or course:

- > Make explicit how class activities develop the skills needed to improve career prospects.
- > Develop and implement a refined intake/screening process, including a variety of assessments, to determine the appropriate skill level for contextualized content.
- > Use instructional strategies that leverage contextualized learning approaches.
- > Address varying skill levels in the same contextualized learning class.

### Engaging Students in Contextualized Learning

*Make explicit how class activities develop the skills needed to improve career prospects.*

- > Tap into student motivation.

*Develop and implement a refined intake/screening process, including assessments, to determine the appropriate skill level for contextualized content.*

- > Lower assessment barriers to enrollment.

*Use instructional strategies that leverage contextualized learning approaches.*

- > Scaffold learning.
- > Use hands-on/active learning.
- > Apply learning in a variety of contexts.

*Address varying skill levels in the same contextualized learning class.*

- > Use group/pair work.
- > Customize instruction.

## MAKE EXPLICIT HOW CLASS ACTIVITIES DEVELOP THE SKILLS NEEDED TO IMPROVE CAREER PROSPECTS

> Tap into student motivation

For many students, the primary motivation for returning to school is to get a better job, advance in a career, and earn more. Often, students enter basic skills classes interested in a particular career field or occupational area. Yet the content they encounter is dry, divorced from real-world applications, and disconnected from the source of their motivation. If educators contextualize classes in a way that aligns with students' motivation for returning to school and career interests, students will be more invested in the course content and in their class performance. Instruments such as WorkKeys, which is used at Central New Mexico Community College, can demonstrate the reading or math skills required for students' target occupations, thereby linking basic skills coursework to students' career goals.

Students at Central New Mexico and Community College of Denver understand that the purpose of their research assignments is to learn more detailed information about their careers of interest. North Shore Community College students know that the purpose of classroom exercises in which they observe and describe children's behavior is to develop the skills that are used every day as child care providers.

A common experience for instructors is to encounter students who resist learning a particular skill or subject when they see no application to the real world. A common question is, "But when will I ever need this?" Contextualized courses by their very nature address this challenge. An industrial maintenance student at Owensboro Community & Technical College said he failed to understand how he would benefit from a general-education class in communications. Later, though, he returned to the college to thank them for the contextualized class that taught him how to make a presentation, write up ideas, and use technology for a presentation: after he completed the communications class contextualized for his industry, he got a job with a leading manufacturing company and had to pitch a proposed manufacturing-improvement process to the corporate office.

## DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A REFINED INTAKE/SCREENING PROCESS

> Use assessments to determine the appropriate skill level for contextualized content

Contextualized courses can be challenging for students who have to master both the target class competencies and career-field content. Accordingly, staff must identify the skills and characteristics of students who can succeed in their contextualized learning courses, and should develop appropriate intake/screening procedures during the design phase to identify these students. Programs may consider using both assessments and in-person interviews as components of the intake process. An in-person interview can give students a point of contact at the college and help them to begin relationships with staff immediately. It also enables staff to tease out information, including students' backgrounds and characteristics, that assessments may not fully capture.



### Intake & Screening of New Students

See the Supplemental Materials that accompany the *Practice Guide* for more on how the intake/screening process is used to determine whether students are appropriately suited for the rigor of the program.

Assessments such as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), ACCUPLACER, ESL assessments, and WorkKeys can help staff identify students' skill levels and ensure that the contextualization content is appropriate for them; these can inform modifications to the curriculum, if necessary, to address the skill level of a particular cohort of students. During the design phase, staff can select the appropriate instruments, determine how to administer them, and set the target scores for admission to different contextualized courses.

Central New Mexico Community College administers ACCUPLACER in part to ensure that students' skills do not exceed the level taught in the program. Despite counseling to the contrary, some students with more advanced skills have chosen to enroll in the program because of its blend of academics, employability skill development, and career exposure. The developmental reading instructor at the college uses ACCUPLACER results to diagnose the skill level of her cohort of students and to focus contextualized activities on raising students to the next level. North Shore Community College uses an ESL assessment to place students into the appropriate ESL/Child Development Associate course.

> Mitigate assessment barriers to enrollment

Assessments at the beginning of a contextualized course can intimidate students, potentially forming a barrier to enrollment. Central New Mexico Community College seeks to mitigate this by having a staff member meet with the new student, walk him or her through the enrollment process, and take the student to the assessment center. At North Shore Community College, students take the ACCUPLACER after they enroll in the program, and sometimes after they have an opportunity to take Child Development Associate classes. The program provides a pared-down ESL assessment that is shorter and less burdensome.<sup>3</sup> North Shore is also considering starting the ESL/CDA classes the first night and having students sit for the ESL assessment the second night, so that they take the test only after a positive experience with the school.

## USE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES THAT LEVERAGE CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING APPROACHES

> Scaffold learning

> Use hands-on/active learning

> Apply learning in a variety of contexts

A contextualized curriculum without good instructional practice is like having the finest rowboat but no oars. A number of instructional strategies function synergistically with contextualization, increasing its impact. Scaffolding and active/hands-on learning are two of these approaches. Instructors should also consider using *both* contextualized and decontextualized instruction.



### English Language Learners at North Shore

North Shore Community College's *Breaking Through* program initially mixed ability groupings, but it determined that it was more efficient to group students with similar English-language competencies and deliver the appropriate contextualized content targeted to them. To learn more about North Shore's *Breaking Through* program, see page 12.

### Scaffolding

Many *Breaking Through* community college programs talk about the need to scaffold learning for their students. “Scaffolds” refers to instructional supports that help students complete classroom activities that otherwise would be too difficult (Graves 2008); they are “forms of support provided by the [instructor] to help students bridge the gap between their current abilities and the intended goal (Rosenshine & Meister 1992). More scaffolding is needed for students who are less proficient, so in basic skills classrooms this practice is particularly important (Graves 1995).

One example of scaffolding in *Breaking Through* contextualized learning courses comes from LaGuardia Community College, which builds students’ background knowledge in a subject before they read a difficult text on health conditions by having them read about the subject as discussed in a newspaper article. LaGuardia also offers progressively more difficult math problems on the same topic, such as area and perimeter. Central New Mexico has students build their trade vocabulary before a reading on construction safety. North Shore Community College helps ESL students develop career-specific vocabulary about child observation in order to prepare for Child Development Associate courses. By exposing students to portions of texts or tasks that they will experience in higher-level courses, instructors help build students’ confidence in their skills. Contextualized learning programs and courses may consider offering professional development in this area if instructors are not fully comfortable with these concepts.

### Active/Hands-on Learning

Active learning involves students doing tasks and thinking about what one is doing (Bonwell & Eison 1991). Instead of expecting students to passively absorb materials in a lecture, active learning affords them the opportunity to engage with the material, to complete tasks that are done by professionals in the career field, and to take responsibility for their learning. In *Breaking Through* contextualized courses, active learning takes a variety of forms. At Central New Mexico Community College students complete job searches and research occupational outlooks for their occupations of interest. Community College of Denver students create individual education plans based on career assessments, informational interviews, job shadowing, occupational-outlook investigations, and exploration of individual goals. LaGuardia Community College students do math problems and then complete meta-analyses/reflections for each problem, outlining how they solved the problem and the “trick” contained in the problem. North Shore Community College CDA students create Professional Resource Files, documenting their child care competencies, and they write papers outlining their early-childhood-education philosophies.

Hands-on learning ensures that students have authentic experiences in their career fields of interest. This can range from building actual structures in a carpentry course (Central New Mexico Community College), to using children’s books in ESL courses for child care workers (North Shore Community College), to being observed teaching children (North Shore), to job shadowing (Community College of Denver), to completing a health care internship (LaGuardia). Instructors need to ensure that these experiences build upon the basic skills and competencies that students need to master. Extensive hands-on experiences such as internships can be challenging for students who are working, so instructors may need to be creative about alternatives for these students.



### Applying Skills in a Variety of Contexts

Clearly, contextualized teaching is an important approach to teaching skills in a meaningful way, yet students also must have facility applying their skills in a *variety of contexts*. This suggests that students need activities that are decontextualized as well, so that they can succeed on formal, decontextualized assessments like the TABE, ACCUPLACER, or GED. Instructors can alternate between contextualized and decontextualized teaching. In areas such as math, an approach used by LaGuardia Community College entails doing decontextualized skill building initially, then working with students to apply these skills to a particular context, and finally practicing the same skill in a decontextualized format. Offering students *solely* contextualized classroom experiences—or activities based on only one context—deprives them of the opportunity to practice generalizing these skills.

### ADDRESS VARYING SKILL LEVELS IN THE SAME CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING CLASS

- > Use group work
- > Customize instruction

Contextualized courses can appeal to students with a full spectrum of skill abilities. Even “low-skilled” adults as a group vary individually in where they fall on the skill spectrum. Especially in math, students often have varied skill gaps that need to be addressed before they can move on to more complex concepts.

One strategy for addressing this variability is having a screening process to determine the appropriate skill level for contextualization content, as discussed previously. Another is having students work in collaborative groups of two or more, as LaGuardia does; students with skill gaps in a particular area can learn from a student doing more advanced work in this area.

A third approach is customizing instruction to address students’ skill gaps. Central New Mexico and North Shore Community College do this through Web-based programs; Central New Mexico uses tutoring; Owensboro uses pull-out remediation, and LaGuardia Community College assigns work at varying levels of difficulty. At Davidson Community College, ABE and GED courses have students with mixed career interests and skill gaps. Students receive customized, contextualized instruction to address needed competencies using college-level text excerpts in their occupations of interest.



#### Customize or Contextualize?

While this toolkit focuses on contextualization, customization can also be a beneficial strategy when working with low-skilled adult students. Customization can be used in conjunction with contextualization or on its own. For more on customization, see “Accelerating the Pace of Learning” in the *Breaking Through Practice Guide*.

## 4. Sustaining the Contextualized Learning Course or Program

The structure has been set, students have been taking the courses, and student outcome data are beginning to support the need to continue the program or course. How will the designers and implementers put in place the processes established during the design phase, modify processes as necessary, and begin efforts to promote contextualization throughout the college?

The *Breaking Through* colleges have been developing their contextualization programs since 2004, when *Breaking Through* began; some had created contextualized courses even before the grant's inception. Now that successful programs are in place, *Breaking Through* colleges are investigating how to make sure that their programs are sustainable. This section offers guidance to *Breaking Through* colleges, as well as to any other colleges or departments offering contextualized learning, on how to sustain a successful program.

There are two key steps and principles to follow for sustaining a contextualized learning program or course:

- > Implement processes developed during the design phase
  - Use management and advisory teams to make programmatic improvements
  - Support and retain faculty
  - Implement data and cost-tracking systems
- > Promote contextualization throughout the community college
  - Assess the costs and benefits of contextualized learning

### IMPLEMENT PROCESSES DEVELOPED DURING THE DESIGN PHASE

A number of processes and activities developed during the design phase should be implemented during this phase:

- > Use management and advisory teams to make programmatic improvements

The management team is critical for making appropriate programmatic and curricular improvements based on student-outcome data, changes in the skill level of cohorts of students, feedback from employers, and other sources of information identified during the design phase. Additionally, the advisory team can make macro changes when needed (e.g., redesigning the course offerings or changing enrollment procedures).

> Support and retain faculty

To promote sustainability, staff should work to retain faculty and encourage them to reach out to other faculty to spread good practice and potentially recruit others. It is important to identify faculty professional-development needs and to provide offerings targeted to these needs, as well as to support instructors in modifying curricula.

> Implement data and cost-tracking systems

Consider initial student outcome data and determine if data elements are providing the information necessary for continuous improvement, for the college, and for any funders. It may be necessary to modify data collections, systems, or analysis as the program or course evolves. It will also be important to track expenditures to make sure that they conform with the budget.

## PROMOTE CONTEXTUALIZATION THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

> Assess the costs and benefits of contextualized learning

To move beyond “boutique” contextualized learning programs or individual courses and spread the practice throughout the community college, program or course staff will need to make the case about the value of the approach by using improved student outcomes, explaining the costs and benefits of the approach, and sustaining a cadre of trained faculty who can help nurture administrators’ support. Student outcome data are an important tool for persuading administrators. This is why it is important, at the outset of the project, to determine the data elements to collect.

A “simplified cost benefit analysis” can demonstrate how any additional costs per student that accompany contextualized learning that are due to curriculum development, faculty collaboration, and data collection are ultimately cost effective when increased student retention and credit hours are taken into account (Corash & Baker 2009). With this approach, Community College of Denver demonstrated that the additional costs of a case manager in the FastStart program would improve retention—and thereby increase the college’s revenue. In addition, a cadre of faculty trained in, and actively involved in implementing, contextualized learning demonstrates faculty support for the approach. Finally, staff can sustain administrators’ support by keeping them involved in the advisory team, sharing successes, and enhancing the reputation of the college.

**TOOL 5.1**  
**BUILDING A CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING PROGRAM OR COURSE ADVISORY TEAM**

An advisory team from the college and community can help with program and curriculum changes at a macro level. This tool offers a list of representatives you may want to consider including on your team. Customize the list to reflect your unique needs for input and political realities.

Type of Representative	Area of Expertise This Representative Offers	Areas of Expertise Still Needed and Ideas for Additional Representatives
Administrative departments: admissions, financial aid, registrar/enrollment services		
Administrators from departments in which contextualized courses will be offered and from which faculty will come*		
ABE, ESL, and GED faculty*		
Career and technical/occupational/training faculty*		
Developmental education faculty*		
General-education faculty*		
Noncredit/workforce-development faculty*		
Career services or career counseling		
Community-based organizations operating in the career field used to contextualize courses		
Employers		
Institutional research staff		
Student support/achievement coaches		
Workforce Investment Board		
Others		

\* Indicates core team members

**TOOL 5.2**  
**DETERMINING DATA NEEDS**

Data are essential to maintaining and improving quality—and to making the case that a program or course has value. Use this tool to help determine the types of data you already have, what you need to collect, and resources for obtaining the requisite data. Complete the tool before the program or course starts in order to have appropriate data systems in place for collecting baseline data and recruiting technical assistance with data as soon as possible—and to be realistic about making commitments to administrators and funders about data collection, analysis, and use.



**Data Tools from *Breaking Through***

*Advancing Adults into Community College Programs: Data Tools from Breaking Through* offers specific data elements to consider, strategies for collecting data, and many other data insights.

Program/Course Goals and Objectives	Data You Need			Data You Have	The Data Gap	Resources
What are the goals and objectives of your program/course?	What information do you need to determine whether the program/course is working and how it can be improved (link this to the goals and objectives)?	What data do you need to make a case for continuing your program/course and/or scaling it up? Be sure to consider your administrators' program and policy objectives.	What data or information do your funders require?	What data does your college already collect?	Which key data points are missing (the gap between the data you have and the data you need)?	What/who are resources that can help with data collection and analysis?

### TOOL 5.3 BUDGETING FOR A CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING PROGRAM

This tool outlines budget categories to consider when designing a contextualized learning program. In preparing a budget, consider ways to mitigate costs by leveraging resources with other programs at the college (e.g., offering joint professional development), seeking in-kind support from the college, and tapping into expertise on staff at the college for professional development or data assistance.

General Category	Specific Cost	Estimated Cost
Data/Assessments	College placement tests/job-skills assessments (e.g., TABE, ACCUPLACER, WorkKeys)*	
	Program data collection and analysis*	
Materials/curricula	Customized instruction (e.g., ALEKS, KeyTrain)	
	Computer lab/CTE lab time	
	Textbooks	
Recruitment/advertising	Printing, travel, release time	
Staff salary/benefits	Achievement coach/case manager/counselor salary and benefits	
	Faculty salary and benefits*	
	Program administrative oversight salary and benefits*	
	Stipends/release time for program management team (if necessary)	
Training/curriculum development	Professional development*	
	Curriculum development (stipend and/or release time)*	
	Travel (related to professional development)	
Indirect costs		

\* These are the fundamental costs associated with a contextualized learning program; without these expenditures the program would be severely impeded from operating.

## TOOL 5.4 BUDGETING FOR A CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING COURSE

This tool outlines some budget categories to consider when designing the budget for a contextualized learning course.<sup>4</sup> The same cost-mitigation strategies that apply to a program apply to a course: leverage resources with other programs at the college (e.g., offer joint professional development), seek in-kind support from the college, and tap into expertise on staff at the college for professional development or data assistance.

General Category	Specific Cost	Estimated Cost
Data/Assessments	College placement tests/job-skills assessments (e.g., TABE, ACCUPLACER, Work-Keys)	
	Course data collection and analysis	
Materials/curricula	Customized instruction (e.g., ALEKS, KeyTrain)	
	Computer lab/CTE lab time	
	Textbooks	
Staff salary/benefits	Faculty salary/benefits*	
	Course administrative oversight salary/benefits *	
Training/curriculum development	Curriculum development (stipend and/or release time)*	
Indirect costs		

\* These are the fundamental costs associated with a course; without these expenditures the course would be severely impeded from operating.

## TOOL 5.5 CHECKLIST FOR STARTING CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING

Use this checklist when initiating a contextualized learning program or course. It offers a general approach; add steps that are customized to the political, programmatic, and budgetary realities at your community college.

- Research other contextualized learning programs and courses.** Learn about other contextualized learning programs or courses that are similar in population, courses taught, and content used to contextualize the offerings.
- Determine the program or course design.** This can include the courses to contextualize and the career content to use for contextualization, the target population, and the cost structure for the program.
- Obtain support for the program/course from high-level administrators.**
- Create an advisory team.** The team can help to design the program/course, troubleshoot issues, and advocate for contextualized learning.
- Create a program/course management team.** The team will meet frequently to engage in continuous improvement efforts.
- Cultivate relationships with employers.** Employers can help with program/course design through labor market research, solicitations for funding, curricula development, and opportunities for students to do hands-on work in the career field. Employer engagement can be achieved by including them on the program/course advisory team.
- Develop collaborative relationships with administrative departments (financial aid, the registrar, career services, support services, testing, etc.)** This will help staff to understand students' experiences and identify and address institutional barriers. This can be done, in part, by including these individuals on the program/course advisory team.
- Seek college funding for the program/course.** Make the case to administrators about the need for the program/course, and how it fits with the leadership's priorities, and begin to build the case about potential outcomes.



### Advisory Teams

For more on how to create an advisory team, see Tool 5.1.



### Budgeting

For creating program and course budgets, see Tool 5.3: Budgeting for a Contextualized Learning Program and Tool 5.4: Budgeting for a Contextualized Learning Course



- Seek grant funding for start-up and ongoing costs.** Curriculum development is one of the major costs for program start-up. Be thoughtful about the commitments made in grant applications about data and institutionalization.
- Recruit appropriate faculty and offer professional development, if necessary.** Reach out to faculty who are already doing contextualization or are supportive of instructional innovations. Department administrators can be key allies in identifying and recruiting potential faculty members.
- Develop course curricula and obtain course approvals.** Determine the college's course approval process early to ensure that you meet appropriate deadlines and conform to the administrative procedures. Provide incentives for faculty who are developing curricula and support their efforts by bringing together faculty in different areas, brainstorming course goals, and reviewing other courses' syllabi.
- Determine data that will be gathered to prove program/course effectiveness and to inform continuous improvement efforts.** Have baseline data tools in place. Staff may need to engage institutional research staff or other experts to help identify and design data-collection tools before the program/course starts.
- Develop administrative program/course procedures for admissions, intake, and assessment.** Staff can design these procedures in order to capture students within the target population who are best suited for the program as currently conceptualized. Recognize, however, that the program/course will probably need to be modified to better meet these students' needs.
- Implement the program/course and make adjustments based on data and feedback from students, faculty, and employers.** Staff should constantly explore ways to improve the program to better meet students' needs.



#### Data Collection

For more on the data-collection process, see Tool 5.2: Determining Data Needs

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The information in this section comes from a forthcoming publication, "FastStart@CCD Accelerating Developmental Education," in *Contextualized Teaching & Learning: A Faculty Primer*, a cooperative effort of the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges, Center for Student Success, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges' Basic Skills Initiative, and the Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative.

<sup>2</sup> LaGuardia's collaborative relationships with the administrative departments were not formalized through a program advisory team, but they did participate on other intracollege committees and teams with these individuals.

<sup>3</sup> The college may change this practice and require a more extensive test.

<sup>4</sup> Many ideas for the budget items came from North Shore Community College and Central New Mexico Community College.

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