

PLANNING STORY

Transform the Program Strategy, Transform the College

by Ronnie L. Booth and Galen DeHay

An effective program strategy improves both student access and success while helping the college be more nimble in meeting emerging labor market needs.

COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES need to be more nimble in meeting workforce needs while holistically allocating diminishing resources. Tri-County Technical College, a public two-year community and technical college serving Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens counties in the northwestern corner of South Carolina, enrolls nearly 9,000 students annually and offers more than 70 major fields of study, including computer technology, industrial electronics, mechatronics, nursing, and university transfer programs. The college boasts the highest student success rate among two-year colleges in South Carolina and ranks in the top five percent nationally among community colleges whose students successfully transfer to four-year colleges and universities.

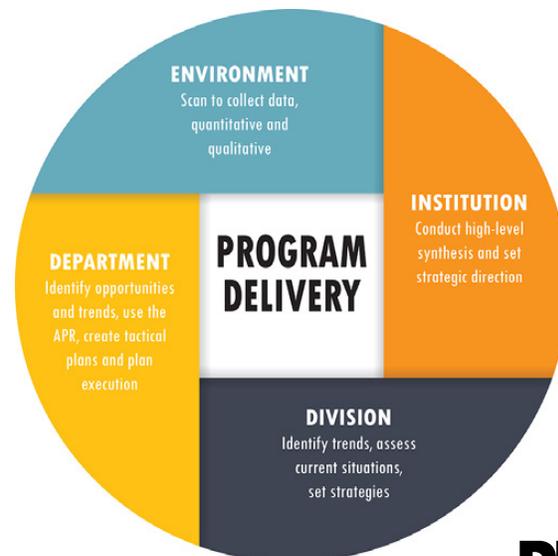
Tri-County developed a proactive academic program strategy to determine which programs will be offered in the future, including where, how, and when they will be offered. In addition, the program strategy evaluates which existing programs will be maintained or grown. Business and industry have long used *product* strategies to determine what will be delivered to the market to best meet consumer needs; similarly, Tri-County created its *program* strategy to be more responsive in meeting employer and community needs. The approach uses labor market data, engages faculty in decision making, and leverages insight from business and industry partners as well as advisory committees. It is necessarily nimble, responding to labor market changes, political interests, governance assessment requirements, and the need for continuous program improvement. Using this proactive

approach, academic programming decisions can strategically impact curriculum design, enrollment management, learner support and engagement, student transitions programming, and facilities design. Overall, an effective program strategy improves both student access and success while helping the college be more nimble in meeting emerging labor market needs.

PROGRAM STRATEGY COMPONENTS

The program strategy evaluates new and existing programs using comprehensive, data-informed processes. This novel approach integrates market analysis and program feasibility and viability to assess existing and new programs as a complete program mix (figure 1). The overall process is divided into new and existing program elements.

Figure 1 Program Strategy Model



MARKET ANALYSIS

Both new and existing program analyses begin with a market analysis. The analysis consists of an environmental scan of the labor market/conditions as well as emerging trends. The data are generated from a combination of sources: the Department of Institutional Effectiveness, college deans, area economic development entities, and advisory boards. Using these data, each division conducts an analysis to identify opportunities for new programs as well as needed modifications to existing programs.

NEW PROGRAM TRIAGE

Faculty and deans evaluate new program ideas using criteria related to economic development impact, program delivery capacity, effect on student success, and program sustainability and risk. Key external stakeholders are involved in the evaluation process, providing insight from business, industry, economic development, and K–12. The evaluation could yield one of many outcomes:

- » The program is deemed not viable.
- » The program may not yet be viable for various reasons but may become so if environmental or market conditions change, so the program is queued.
- » The program is deemed sufficiently viable for a full feasibility study in one of three formats:
 - » as a stand-alone credit program;
 - » as a stand-alone non-credit program;
 - » as a non-credit-to-credit aligned program.

Results are then incorporated into the college's quadrant analysis to assess the overall program mix.

EXISTING PROGRAM TRIAGE

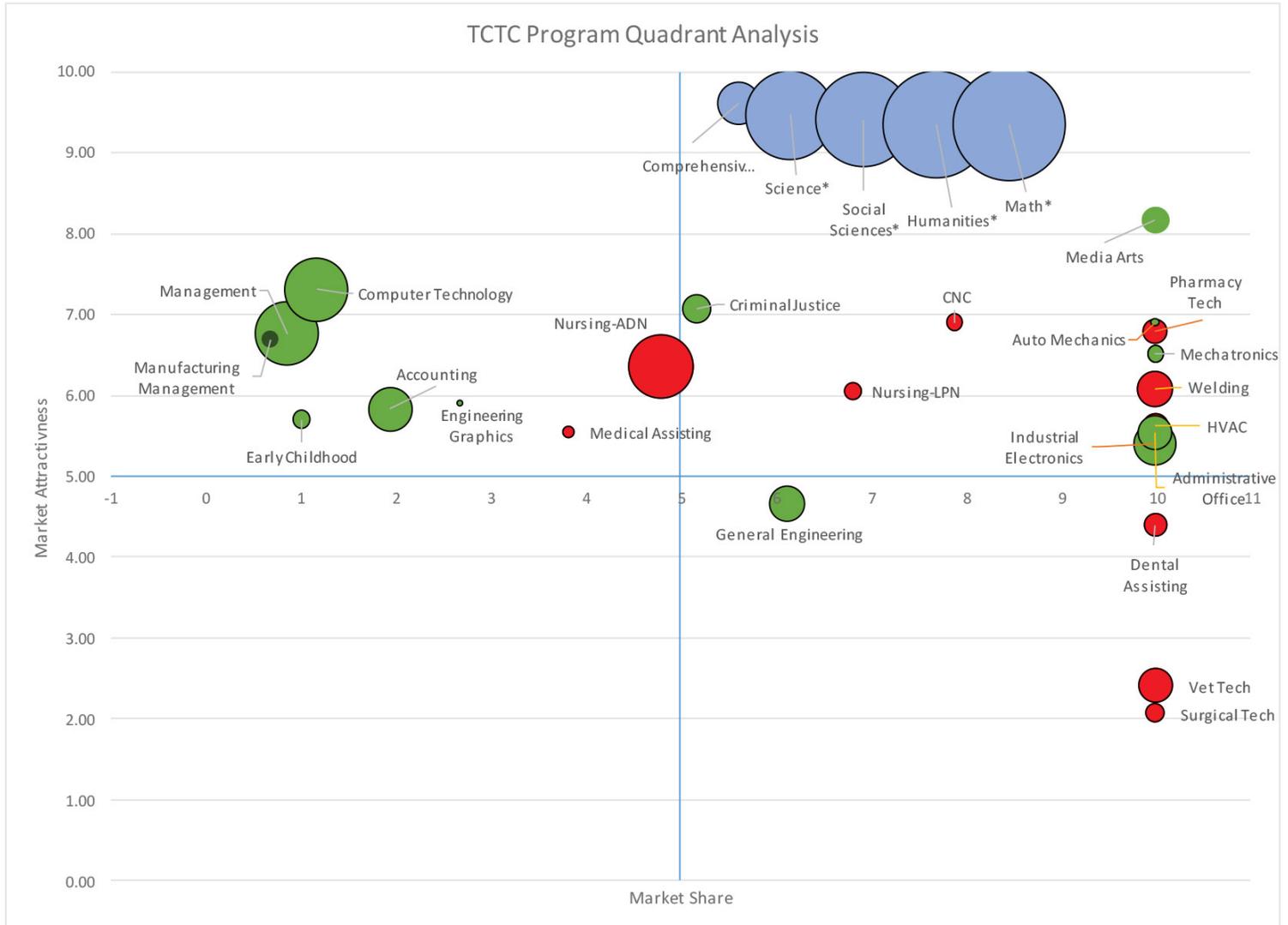
Department heads and deans use data from their academic program reviews (APR) and market analysis to conduct a similar criterion-based review of existing programs. The results are incorporated into a division-specific quadrant analysis as well as into the overall college quadrant analysis.

QUADRANT ANALYSIS

Results from the new and existing program triage are analyzed using a novel quadrant analysis approach. The quadrant analysis compares each program's market share against its market attractiveness. A color-coded bubble chart represents market share, market attractiveness, and program contribution margin, with each bubble representing one program (figure 2). Program contribution margin is illustrated by the size and color of the bubble.

At the division level, these analyses are used to identify needed changes to existing programs. At the college level, the analyses are used in the process of evaluating and updating the program mix. Each division develops an academic plan to take advantage of opportunities and continuously improve existing programs. New programs are prioritized and corollary budget and infrastructure needs are integrated into the three-year strategic plan.

Figure 2 Example Quadrant Analysis



Note: Red = negative contribution margin; Green = positive contribution margin; Blue = Arts and Sciences Departments (all positive contribution margins).

LESSONS LEARNED

- » *Accounting for codependences in processes and systems can result in stronger outcomes.* Recognizing that many processes are codependent allows the college to reinforce synergies and thereby enhance institutional effectiveness.
- » *Engaging stakeholders in development permits co-creation rather than buy-in.* Deans, department heads, and program coordinators have critical decision-making roles throughout the strategy process steps. Engaging

these internal stakeholders in each stage transfers ownership of the outcomes to a wider constituency. Likewise, engaging advisory committees and business and industry partners provides an avenue for further collaboration and shared ownership of how programs meet workforce needs.

- » *Academic programming drives more effective academic decision making.* Identifying the programs to be offered in the future, analyzing existing programs, and creating a prioritized program rollout plan are critical to the success of subsequent strategies, systems,

and processes. Knowing what programs will be offered provides the information needed for curriculum development, marketing, recruiting, and a multitude of other strategic decisions.

- » *Focusing on labor market needs drives college and community success.* Proactively assessing labor market needs creates opportunities for colleges to partner with external agencies. Delivering relevant programs has generated economic development in the college's service area. Additionally, identifying program needs in the community led to a unique partnership between K–12, a service area economic development office, and county officials, resulting in the creation of a new campus co-located with a high school career center.

The community college can serve as the nexus between economic development, business and industry, and education to bridge the gap between workforce development and economic development. The result is a transformed community and a transformed college that meets the needs of a 21st-century workforce.

The community college can serve as the nexus ... to bridge the gap between workforce development and economic development.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

DR. RONNIE L. BOOTH currently serves as president of Tri-County Technical College. During his 14 years at Tri-County, he has launched three community campuses, three workforce training centers, an economic development center, and a state-of-the-art industrial technology center, as well as several groundbreaking initiatives, including the nationally-recognized Bridge to Clemson program with Clemson University and the Connect to College program for high school dropouts. He holds a bachelor of science degree in business administration, a master's in education in student personnel services, and a Ph.D. in higher education leadership and policies from the University of South Carolina; a master's in theological studies from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; and an honorary doctorate of humanities from Clemson University.

GALEN DEHAY is the senior vice president at Tri-County Technical College. He holds a B.S. in biological sciences and an M.S. in zoology from Clemson University. His higher education experience includes full-time faculty service teaching biology, serving as department head of science, leading institutional strategic planning and research, and most recently serving in a leadership role in curriculum and instruction. His honors and awards include the South Carolina Governor's Professor of the Year Award.

Planning for Higher Education

Society for College and University Planning

www.scup.org

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ISSN 0736-0983

Indexed in the Current Index to Journals in Education (ERIC), Higher Education Abstracts, and Contents Pages in Education.

Also available from ProQuest Information and Learning, 789 E. Eisenhower Parkway, P.O. Box 1346, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48108.

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Integrated planning is the linking of vision, priorities, people, and the physical institution in a flexible system of evaluation, decision-making and action. It shapes and guides the entire organization as it evolves over time and within its community.

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