

PRACTICES EXCHANGE

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2022

<https://yeswemustcoalition.org>

Issue 45

This year the Practices Exchange Newsletter is dedicated with appreciation and admiration to the memory of Dr. Nia Lane Chester, the newsletter's founding editor and program manager of the Yes We Must Coalition.

Higher Education in These Times In order to provide a forum for YWMC members to share strategies and raise questions with one another during these uncertain times, the Yes We Must Coalition will continue the Open Forums begun last year. Each month we will offer a general session, open to anyone at a member school. Information regarding links to these sessions is sent out via the email lists for YWMC Google Groups. We welcome all members who wish to join the conversation.

Growing the Coalition If you know a school that should be a member of the Yes We Must Coalition, please connect us with them. Growing numbers make us stronger in the work we do together and the voice we raise on behalf of low-income students. Please get in touch with Gloria Nemerowicz, President, at glorianemerowicz@yeswemustcoalition.org.

YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: Blackburn College



Founded in 1837, **Blackburn College** is a four-year, Presbyterian-related, co-educational, liberal arts college located in Carlinville, IL. Blackburn is one of ten federally designated work colleges and the nation's only student-managed work program. The 600 students come from diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds with 33 percent first-generation and 57 percent Pell-Grant eligible. Blackburn became a member of the Yes We Must Coalition in 2018.

Built by students, for students, the Blackburn work program fosters growth, personal enrichment and an unparalleled approach to on-the-job skill building as well as providing unmatched career training. For more than 100 years, Blackburn has relied on students to help run the day-to-day operations on campus. As a result, the College is one of the lowest cost private, four-year colleges in Illinois and offers benefits like offsetting tuition. Ninety-five percent of students participate in 12 work departments, and students become involved in higher education decisions by serving on planning committees and helping to manage other students in the program. This kind of involvement not only helps to facilitate the operations at Blackburn but also provides students with a variety of leadership opportunities and work experiences.



With a 9 to 1 student-faculty ratio, students can build relationships with professors and mentors and receive personalized instruction as they balance academic courses with experiential learning and hone practical skills through the work program. Whether a business major gaining on-the-job experience in accounts payable or a biology student working hands-on in the College's vivarium, each student contributes to the community while building a resume and earning a degree. Ninety-four percent of Blackburn graduates are either employed or continuing their education within six months of commencement. Current top majors are biology, education and business.

The College has a long history of interest and leadership in sustainability, and there has been a recent resurgence of interest in environmental responsibility and efficient resource use across the campus. Blackburn's eight-acre solar farm is expected to provide 80% of the College's

energy needs within its lifespan. The 80-acre campus is now home to trees from 19 different family classifications, including over 10,000 walnut trees, and students help in all aspects of tree labor, dedicating nearly 445 hours toward planning, planting, and maintenance in the last year. In spring 2021, the Arbor Day Foundation recognized Blackburn with a 2020 Tree Campus Higher Education designation — the only college in downstate Illinois to receive this distinction. The Bee Program at Blackburn cares for almost one million pollinators and currently maintains 20 productive hives that provide honey sold in the campus bookstore. As part of an emerging Bat Program, students have built and installed bat houses around Carlinville to extend the range of pollinators and to educate the campus and the community about the role of bats in the environment.

U.S. News & World Report recognized Blackburn College as one of the top Liberal Arts Colleges in the Nation for Social Mobility in 2020, 2021, and 2022. The Center for Education & the Workforce at Georgetown University ranked Blackburn as a top performer for Earnings-Price Return and Net Price. The *Washington Monthly* twice ranked Blackburn as the best baccalaureate college in Illinois. For more information, please contact the Office of Marketing & Public Relations at pr@blackburn.edu.

Institutional Resources/Practices

Harnessing the Power of The Wheel

Like many colleges and universities around the country, **Ferrum College** struggles with student retention. To improve retention rates, Ferrum started promoting online winter courses in 2018 to all students through *The Wheel*, the Yes We Must Coalition online consortium designed to allow students at any YWMC member institution to take online courses offered by any other member institutions. *The Wheel* is managed and supported by Acadeum, a company that helps higher education institutions improve enrollment management, address the tangle of over- and under-enrolled courses, and streamline earning credits through a consortial model. Acadeum is an Associate member of the Yes We Must Coalition as well as a partner for collaboration.

At Ferrum, courses offered through *The Wheel* have been utilized to help students navigate curricular obstacles, assist in credit and GPA recovery, and allow students to advance through their degree requirements so they can meet their graduation goals. Whether students take a Ferrum College course or a course taught at a YWMC partner institution, they have benefited from the added choice and flexibility in their academic journey. As a result, Ferrum has experienced a significant increase in retention.

When Ferrum first started using *The Wheel*, we focused solely on academic recovery for our at-risk students. We reviewed the catalog of available courses and, in consultation with program coordinators, identified courses that met the academic rigor and requirements of Ferrum courses, especially freshman English and mathematics. As a pilot, students placed on Academic Probation after fall 2018 received a letter from the Office of the Provost offering them the opportunity to take the identified English and mathematics courses at no cost to them to recover academically and come into the spring semester in good academic standing. Several students took advantage of the opportunity and returned in the spring in good standing. Some may wonder how this approach differs from a student taking a course at a community college over the winter break and transferring it back. There are substantial differences. First, we embraced the consortial model, in which we awarded a Ferrum College course credit for a Ferrum course equivalent rather than a transfer credit. By using this model, students could

replace a class that they failed and boost their overall GPA, a boost that provided the students with further momentum in their academic recovery. Second, enrolling students in a course offered through *The Wheel* provided a mechanism to monitor student engagement and provide interventions when students fell behind in their coursework. With a dedicated group of specialists who frequently contact teaching institutions (TIs) to ensure students participate and complete coursework and who also contact the home institutions (HIs) to make them aware of student performance, Acadeum, as manager of *The Wheel*, provides a level of communication and interaction that promotes and results in a better success rate.

Utilizing *The Wheel* has become a cornerstone of our retention strategy, and we have seen a significant increase in retention as a result. The year after we implemented the pilot program, our first-year retention rate (from fall 2018 to fall 2019) increased by 5%. The following year (fall 2019 to fall 2020) it increased another 2%, and this past year (fall 2020 to fall 2021) it increased another 1%. Overall, we have had an 8% increase in retention.

Because of our students' success with courses offered through *The Wheel*, we have implemented additional initiatives. We now allow students placed on Academic Suspension at the end of a semester to take up to two courses through *The Wheel* for academic recovery. Because this is a fairly new initiative, we do not yet have any data regarding its effectiveness. To increase our graduation rates, we also plan to launch a Step Out program for students who may be lacking only a few credits to graduate.

For more information, contact Sandra Via, Dean of the School of Graduate and Professional Studies, at svia@ferrum.edu.

Submissions for Future Issues

YWMC members are encouraged to submit examples of policies, practices and/or resources that you have found to be effective in promoting student success and that you would like to share with your YWMC colleagues. We are particularly interested in examples of how members are addressing issues of social and racial justice. Send ideas for the newsletter to Barbara Kirby, Operations Manager, barbara@yeswemustcoalition.org.