

Palm Beach Community College's Data-Driven Approach to Regional Development and Effective Program Planning

Colleges Are Key to Human Capital Development

If the global economy has taught us anything, it has been that the constant development of human capital is foundational to regional economic success and vitality. Many businesses are good at innovating and competing, but if they don't have access to the workforce they need, they can't put their ideas into practice. As a direct result, community and technical colleges, perhaps more so than any other educational or training provider, have become essential to the development of the nation's economy.

The Need for Fast, Relevant Regional Information

For colleges to play a beneficial role in developing the local workforce, they must stay up-to-date with what is going on around them, which means constantly scanning the local and state labor market to be aware of industry, occupation, demographic, and educational trends, as well as dislocation events, business activities, and any other conditions that affect the way people live and work. Knowing all of these things will help the colleges create programs to train and retrain the local workforce according to what the local economy needs. This in turn will help area businesses be more successful and profitable, and could also help to attract new businesses to the area.

"Strategic Advantage is cost-effective, time-saving, and provides up-to-date, objective intelligence on the local labor market, which allows us to align our programs to local demand. If we didn't have it, our process would not be as responsive or well-informed."

—Dr. Ginger Pedersen, Dean of Curriculum, Palm Beach Community College

Regrettably, there is no standardized approach to utilizing data more effectively, so colleges often just do what they can with available data, resources, and manpower. To deal with this issue many community colleges have become very innovative and entrepreneurial—taking advantage of a wide range of products and services that can supercharge the data collection and analysis process.

The Solution: Efficient, Integrated Data Tools

A good example of this innovative and entrepreneurial approach comes from Palm Beach Community College and **Dr. Ginger Pedersen**, Dean of Curriculum, Planning & Research, and **Dr. Jennifer Campbell**, Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. Over the past three years they have used a wide range of products and services, and, as a result, have become very successful at providing programs and curriculum that are responsive to the needs of the local economy and workforce.

Recently PBCC purchased a web-based tool from Economic Modeling Specialists Inc. (EMSI), called **Strategic Advantage**.¹ Strategic Advantage is a web-based data integration and analysis tool that offers efficient access to detailed and integrated industry, occupation, demographic, and education-related data for any county- or ZIP-based region. The tool includes multiple data crosswalks to help analysts perform tasks such as estimating the labor market outlook for jobs that are trained for by specific postsecondary programs of study.

¹ For college users, Strategic Advantage was formerly known as the Community College Strategic Planner, created by CCbenefits Inc. Following the merger of EMSI and CCbenefits, the CCSP and EMSI's Strategic Advantage were merged into a single tool that integrates data for strategic planning in workforce development, higher education, and economic development.

Over the past year, Palm Beach Community College (PBCC) has successfully implemented Strategic Advantage to:

1. Scan environmental factors and describe trends likely to affect the College for their Blueprint for Program Planning report;
2. Produce a comprehensive, detailed Campus Demographic Profiles report; and
3. Aid in the development of a career pathways initiative, which has become a nationally recognized, award-winning model.

Below you will find a short description of the reports and links to learn more.

PBCC's Blueprint for Program Planning

PBCC used Strategic Advantage, data from the state LMI site, and a research consultant to produce a comprehensive program planning report. Specifically, Strategic Advantage was used to provide educational attainment projections for the service area and to produce occupational projections in the fields of Health Care, Business Management, Computers, Trade and Industrial, Public Safety, Creative Arts/Communication, Landscape/Horticulture, and Education.

Campus Demographic Profiles

In this report, PBCC used Strategic Advantage to quickly compile 2005-2015 demographic projections (population growth, gender, ethnicity, and age) for its local campuses. Knowing the population of each service area is a crucial component for environmental scanning and SWOT analysis, and ultimately to better serve each community.

Award-Winning Career Pathways Model

PBCC is now using Strategic Advantage as part of its career pathways model for guiding students into higher-wage, higher-skill programs—a model that recently won a Bellwether Award for instructional innovation. Strategic Advantage, with its integration of occupational outlooks with the career clusters/pathways framework of the States' Career Clusters Initiative, will be used to monitor demand and add additional pathways to the system.

Links and References

PBCC's Blueprint for Program Planning:

http://www.pbcc.edu/documents/institutional_research/reports/blueprint.pdf

Campus Demographic Profiles:

http://www.pbcc.edu/documents/institutional_research/reports/CampusReports.pdf

Career Pathways Model Press Release: <http://www.pbcc.edu/x10321.xml>

Career Pathways Model Article:

http://www.pbcc.edu/documents/academic_services/bellwether_article.pdf

About EMSI

Economic Modeling Specialists Inc. (EMSI) is a professional services firm that offers integrated regional data, web-based analysis tools, data-driven reports, and custom consulting services. EMSI has served thousands of workforce, education, economic development, and other policy professionals in the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom, and the company's web-based **Strategic Advantage** research and



analysis suite is used by over 2,500 professionals across the U.S. For more information, call (866) 999-3674 or visit www.economicmodeling.com.