



Kilgore College: Connecting With Students Begins With Understanding Them

The work at Kilgore College is driven by unwavering empathy for students' life challenges and educational hurdles.

“When a student enrolls with Kilgore College, they have certain expectations of us. And one of those expectations is that we will partner with them to help them achieve their educational goals,” says President Brenda Kays.

“When you have designed pathways for students, they are going to stay away from courses that are not part of their path,” she continues. “And then they can avoid excess tuition and fees and remain Pell eligible, if that is the case, for as long as possible.”

Kays also recognizes that the college can benefit from tapping into the mindsets of younger students. She notes that Gen Z and Gen Alpha students think like gamers.

“They are comfortable with the idea of earning a badge that builds toward something else, such as a micro-credential that will then lead them toward something bigger,” Kays explains. “That helps us get students through to their end goal, or even to a midterm goal, such as a stackable credential.”

Using insights such as these, along with quantitative and qualitative data to guide decision-making, Kilgore has developed four math pathways and converted programs to eight-week classes to remove hurdles that keep students from attaining their educational goals. The college also embedded advisors into each of its academic divisions.

Four Math Pathways Have Increased Math Success Rates

Each of Kilgore's Career Pathways has math requirements that are aligned with its content and career goals. The four math pathways are: College Algebra, Math for Business, Quantitative Reasoning, and Statistics. In the past, College Algebra was required for all students — and data showed that it was a barrier for many of them.





Through conversations with four-year institutions as well as businesses, the Kilgore team learned that better-aligned math classes could more effectively prepare students for both transfer and careers. Math that is aligned to students' programs of study opens the door for more students to earn credentials — and gives students the math skills they actually need for their careers.

“If you are studying welding, why do you need College Algebra?” Kays asks. “And if College Algebra was the barrier that kept you from earning a credential, then it stopped you from getting a job and earning a family-supporting wage.”

Kilgore's introduction of math pathways was grounded in work with the Texas Success Center (TSC) and Charles A. Dana Center Math Pathways. Kilgore introduced math pathways in 2015 along with corequisite education. In 2019, the college continued these reforms and also converted to eight-week terms. Scaling math pathways, along with other institutional improvements, led to higher math completion rates.

Before the 2015 model was introduced, College Algebra was mandatory for every degree. Developmental education students were required to take Intermediate Algebra before taking the required College Algebra class. Intermediate Algebra had only a 48 percent completion rate, so more than half of developmental students never had the chance to start college-level math.

In 2015, Kilgore introduced two college-level math classes that were not algebra intensive. Students who were not college ready took these courses with corequisite support. Completion rates in the college-level alternate math courses jumped to 73 percent.

In fall 2019, Kilgore introduced some changes to the corequisite model as part of its conversion to eight-week terms. The success rates held, even with the accelerated course format. With these changes, 76 percent of underprepared students and 78 percent of college-ready students who enroll in their first college-level math course complete that course.



Welcoming Challenges From the TSC

“I have nothing but appreciation for the Texas Success Center,” Kays says. “They challenge us, and they have helped us to challenge ourselves.”

She continues, “When you’re working on a college campus, there are always so many priorities and needs. It’s a constant. It’s a hamster wheel.”

The TSC’s Pathways Institutes help the team step off the hamster wheel, focus on planning, and build camaraderie. “This is how you build good solid teams of people who feel comfortable working and taking on challenges together,” Kays says.

She also appreciates the way the TSC helps Kilgore think through data and use it to make critical improvements.

“I still remember a Pathways Institute session when we talked about needing to get our withdrawal rates down,” she recalls. “Initially, we did lower our withdrawal rates, but in doing so, we also increased our D/F [course grade] rates. Of course, that was not the end goal that we wanted.”

But Kilgore continued its work with the TSC and its Texas Pathways coach. “We unpacked the data and the plans a bit more,” Kays adds. “And we were able to lower both our withdrawal and D/F rates. We succeeded because we had built a culture of problem solving together.”

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