



Clarendon College: Small But Mighty

Clarendon College (CC) has an eight-county service area with a total of 7,200 square miles. Some of its 1,400 students live a long way — a four-hour or longer drive — from campus. While this distance creates challenges, the college focuses on capitalizing on the advantages of its small size.

Creating Community with the Library at the Center

The library is an important gathering spot for students, so the college also uses that space as a hub. For example, many faculty hold office hours — which are now called *student hours* to avoid confusion — in the library.

“We call them ‘Power Hours,’” says Tex Buckhaults, president. “We have faculty, staff, and students, as well as peer mentors, all working together in the library in group meetings and one-on-ones. We’ve been having a lot of success with quite a few students participating.”

The common student hours is just one part of CC’s approach to building community. Students’ ID cards are actually QR codes that the students store on their mobile devices and use to log in to various activities.

“It’s a system that we developed in house,” Buckhaults explains. “We know when they are going to tutoring, advising, and even sporting events and other student activities. We can see how many students are — or are not — using which services and how often.”

Even dorm mail is delivered to the library. “We are so small that we don’t have a post office. We just have the mail at the library desk,” Buckhaults adds. “And the library staff do a good job of engaging students. If someone doesn’t pick up their mail for a few days, we know.”

CC’s small size also means it has a limited number of faculty and staff. In fact, at CC, most faculty members are departments of one — one person is essentially the sociology

department, one is the speech instructor, one is the chemistry instructor — along with some adjunct faculty who teach online courses.

In the past year, however, the college expanded its student support team so it now has two full-time student success specialists, along with an enrollment advisor who advises students, and a dual credit administrator.

Scheduling Designed Around Student Needs

“We used to take an entire week off at Thanksgiving,” Buckhaults says. “But that was not a student-focused approach. That was an employee-focused approach. And closing for a week leads to holiday creep.”

Buckhaults explains that when the college was closed for a week, he would give employees the opportunity to leave early the Friday before. Employees appreciated the gesture, but faculty and staff recognized it created a disconnect for students.

“Students would say, ‘Well, I just have one class on Friday, so I’m going to blow it off,’ and then it extends to Thursday or Wednesday. And then they’ve taken off two weeks,” he continues.

The real danger is that students may go home for Thanksgiving and then not return to the college at all.

“We would have a week off for Thanksgiving, then one week of classes, and then the next week would be finals,” Buckhaults says. “Many of our students live more than four hours from campus, and when they go home, they often don’t want to come back.”

So CC stopped taking the week of Thanksgiving off. The new schedule keeps students more engaged so they complete the semester successfully. In addition, if students stay on campus for the holiday, they save the travel cost of an additional trip home in the middle of the semester.

The college now has classes until Wednesday at noon, and it is closed Thursday and Friday of Thanksgiving week. “But the cafeteria stays open, and there are some services on campus,” Buckhaults says. “We have some extra expense for that, but the students know they’re welcome to stay.”



TSC Provides Focus and Accountability

Buckhaults appreciates the Texas Success Center (TSC) for providing data and helping the college analyze it — and for helping the CC team get more focused.

“In the past, we would go to a conference, and we’d all get our batteries charged, but then there was no follow-up. It was a one and done,” he says. “Now we are focused on building on what we’ve done and pushing it one step higher. The TSC provides focus, follow-up, and accountability.”

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