



## **North Central Texas College: Deeply Rooted Pathways at a Deeply Rooted Institution**

North Central Texas College (NCTC), now celebrating its centennial, is the oldest continually operating, publicly funded community college in Texas. In recent years, the college has viewed all of its work through the lens of guided pathways.

“Pathways encourage motivation and help students engage with their classes,” says Sara Flusche, dean of instruction. “They also foster supportive relationships and give students the direction and purpose they need to persist.”

The pathways initiative has become deeply rooted at NCTC. When college teams consider introducing a new practice or initiative, they first determine whether it aligns with the college’s pathways work. “Pathways have made a big, big change at our college, so we always ask how anything new will tie to students’ pathways and further completion goals,” explains Flusche.

### **Guided Curriculum Maps and Embedded Advising**

Every NCTC pathway includes multiple entry points, including noncredit, GED, and ESL, and maps students’ progress to an associate degree, transfer, and jobs. The college’s curriculum maps show the classes students will take each semester for a particular program of study. Students always know exactly what courses they still need to take.

Advisors are embedded in content areas, and they participate in meetings with faculty. “The advisors have a clear understanding of what the program is about and what the workforce demands are,” Flusche explains. “As a result, they’re better able to engage with students and discuss their interests and aspirations.”

### **Every Credential Matters**

NCTC is in a quickly growing area, with new employers coming in almost daily. Local governments are working to identify both current and future needs, and NCTC is partnering with employers and workforce boards in the three counties it serves.



NCTC also is creating quick-turnaround programs, including micro-credentials and Occupational Skills Awards (OSAs). The college has introduced 32 OSAs over the past two years.

“Micro-credentials and OSAs are a way to help students demonstrate mastery quickly and become more marketable for specific jobs,” Flusche says. “We’re offering noncredit OSAs, and we’re also including them in credit programs. There may be micro-credentials within courses or within programs.”

NCTC develops micro-credentials by working with employers. A local employer will explain the specific skills it seeks, and NCTC will develop a certification that might even be named for the company. When a student or graduate has the certification, the employer knows they are proficient in the particular area or skill.

### **Measuring Progress Along the Way**

NCTC recently introduced midterm grades for all students. This interim evaluation helps the college both actively monitor progress and connect students to tutoring, advising, or other services when needed.

“We don’t want students thinking, ‘There’s no way I can pass this course,’” Flusche says. “Many times, a student just needs a bit more coaching or support, and that support is the difference between passing and dropping out.”

### **TSC and a Comprehensive Approach to Student Success**

Flusche credits the Texas Success Center (TSC) with professional development throughout the college.

“The TSC helps us understand the comprehensive approach to student success. They help us gather, analyze, and use data to identify areas of improvement,” she says.

Perhaps most important, the TSC helps NCTC collaborate with other colleges. “At Institutes, we are told to come with a problem of practice in a particular area, and then

we discuss them with three or four other colleges,” Flusche explains. “We’re able to hear what other colleges have done, learn what has or hasn’t worked, and consider new ideas. It really helps us grow and move forward.”

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