



Office of the
Chancellor

November 10, 2011

Mr. Dan Broun
Program Director
MDC
307 West Main Street
Durham, NC 27701-3215

RE: *Financial Empowerment Strategies for Student Success Initiative*

Dear Mr. Broun:

On behalf of Houston Community College, I am honored to pledge our support of the goals and strategies outlined in our response to the *Financial Empowerment Strategies for Student Success Initiative RFP*.

I attest to HCC's commitment to collect and report on performance measures, participate in overall program evaluation, implement the sustainability strategies outlined in the enclosed proposal, and share lessons learned and materials created with Achieving the Dream, MDC, Bank of America, and other Achieving the Dream colleges.

As one of the earliest Leaders Colleges, HCC has a long history in working closely with ATD and other ATD schools. Achieving the Dream has been a seminal experience for Houston Community College—so much so that the HCC Board of Trustees specifically included institutionalization of Achieving the Dream in our most recent strategic plan.

As the Request for Proposals emphasizes, community colleges are a crucial resource for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is not enough for these students to enroll in classes—they must succeed. Thank you for partnering with Bank of America and Achieving the Dream to help make these students' dreams a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Spangler". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Mary S. Spangler, Ed.D.
Chancellor



Financial Empowerment Strategies for Student Success

**Proposal Submission Deadline:
November 10, 2011**

College Name: **Houston Community College**

Contact person regarding this proposal:

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Please answer the following questions. Your total response should not exceed six pages. Since opening in 1971, more than 1.5 million students have improved their lives through education and training obtained from Houston Community College. Our mission is to be the most relevant community college in the country, to act as the opportunity institution to every student we serve, and to be essential to our community's success. Toward this end, we are an open-admission public institution, providing an array of programs tailored to students' needs including academic programs that transfer to every public four-year institution in Texas, 70 workforce programs, and adult education and ESL.

HCC is among the nation's five largest community colleges. Our enrollments continue to grow, reaching nearly 80,000 students this year. Our student body reflects the demographics of the

people who actually live in the region: 31% Hispanic; 29% African-American; 18% white; 10% Asian; and 13% international, unknown, and “other.” Enrollment trends indicate that the college will serve an even higher minority population in the coming years. No other institution of higher education in the city serves such a diverse student population—or devotes greater resources to meeting their unique educational requirements.

The HCC District has six Colleges with campuses strategically located in each quadrant of Houston and in geographic centers that reach out to underserved populations. Colleges are accessible via freeways and bus routes and are convenient to those in the under-served communities surrounding the campuses. Nearly two-thirds of HCC students are economically and/or academically disadvantaged, and a key part of HCC’s mission is to assess and meet these students’ needs to ensure they continue on to complete their degree or certificate.

HCC is a certified Minority Institution and designated Hispanic Serving Institution. It was ranked as the 13th Associate Degree Producer in all Disciplines Combined for Hispanic-Americans by *Diverse Institutes in Higher Education*, 2010. Further, *Community College Week* recently ranked HCC as number one in Texas and fifth in the nation for associate degrees conferred in 2011.

HCC is also recognized for our ability to implement demonstration projects and participate in learning communities. HCC can leverage the experience we have gained in launching broad-based pilot projects through our work in initiatives such as *Achieving the Dream*. In fact, HCC was designated as one of the first 15 Leader Colleges in the country.

I. *Description of Current Services Aimed at Enhancing Financial Capability*

1. What types of services aimed at enhancing financial capability does your college currently provide?

HCC currently provides financial capacity services in two forums, with another large program in the planning stages.

- A. HCC has incorporated an array of financial literacy topics into our primary Student Success course, GUST 1270: College and Career Exploration. GUST, designed for the undecided academic student, is by far the largest of our five Student Success courses. (A second Student Success course is for workforce students and the other three are tailored for students pursuing specific fields – education, health care, and engineering.)

Student Success courses were first piloted by HCC in 2006 for 195 students and today reach approximately 13,000 students each semester across the System. GUST is a semester credit hour class and is our primary forum for introducing critical topics to orient new students to college life, available services, and tools/skills required for college success. Financial topics covered during the GUST class include:

- Credit card comparative analysis; discussion of interest rates; debit versus credit cards; how to build a credit score; credit card loans; payday loans; no credit versus bad credit.

- A review of different types of student aid, including a comparison of grants and loans; unsubsidized versus subsidized student loans; discussion on reputable scholarship search sites. Students are assigned to conduct a search for scholarships.
 - Students also complete a budgeting component, tracking their expenditures over a week and analyzing the money spent on “wants” versus “needs.” There is discussion on the appropriate amount to spend on servicing debt.
 - Students use a tool at *finaid.org* to estimate how much debt they may have upon completion of a four-year degree, depending on their major. They discuss the differences in public, private, and for-profit universities.
 - Students use a tool called “Reality Check” to determine the income required to live a student’s preferred lifestyle. Based on a student’s selected field of interest and how much education they plan to complete, the tool identifies occupations within that career field that may generate enough salary to provide the student’s desired lifestyle. Students are often forced to re-evaluate their lifestyle or expectations or what kind of education they plan to complete.
- B. In a separate program, HCC provides a required financial literacy workshop as part of the TRIO program. TRIO Programs are Federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. HCC’s program has a 200-student maximum and is specifically designed to reach low-income students who want to pursue a four-year degree. TRIO students are required to attend a financial seminar in the fall and/or spring each year they are in the program. The workshop covers topics such as budgeting, being smart with student loans, payday loans, credit card abuse, and needs versus wants. The actual agenda changes each semester to encourage repeat attendance.
- C. Finally, it must be noted that HCC has developed a plan to launch and institutionalize a large-scale evolution of our support services function and integrate strategies and collaborations that will increase students’ understanding of and access to public benefits. We are prepared to provide HCC students with information, access, and assistance in applying for four key public benefits – Food Stamps and Nutritional Programs (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Texas Medicaid, and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). HCC would offer onsite screening and application assistance for these programs through our reorganized Advising function and in close collaboration with Texas’ Health and Human Services Commission, which administers these programs. This program would launch in Fall 2012, conditional on receipt of the *“Accessing Benefits to Improve Community College Retention and Completion”* grant award. HCC is a finalist for this major six-figure grant from the Center for Law and Social Policy and the American Association of Community Colleges. The grant will be awarded in mid-December 2011. Five of the seven finalists will be funded.
- D. Also of note, HCC’s Division of Extended Learning and Money Week Houston hosted “Smart Money: Conversation About Financial Wellness” in spring 2011. The free seminar

was designed to educate people about managing their money and create awareness of financial education programs available to them. Money Week is the largest money management education program in Texas.

2. Which students (first year, developmental, all, etc.) and how many students (per semester/quarter or per year) participate in these services?
 - A. All first-time-in-college (FTIC) students entering HCC with less than 12 college-level credit hours are required to take a Student Success course. The FTIC cohort is essentially our “gateway” for all credit students, and spans all of our Colleges. In Fall 2010, HCC enrolled 9,672 degree-seeking, first-time freshmen and 3,922 “other” first-year degree-seeking students. Our Student Success courses reached more than 13,000 students – about 20% of our credit hour (degree-seeking) student population. Of these students, 11,036 of them took the GUST course in Fall 2010 through Summer 2011.
 - B. There is a 200-student maximum for our TRIO program. Some of these students attend two financial workshops each year.
 - C. Should we receive funding to launch our “*Accessing Benefits*” initiative, more than 13,000 students each semester will be automatically pre-screened by HCC for potential needs that could be met through public benefits. Each of these students will be required or incentivized to meet with an Advisor who will be specially trained to provide students with information, access, and assistance in applying for public benefits.
3. What quantitative or qualitative evidence do you have to suggest that the college’s financial capability offering(s) has increased students’ knowledge and/or students’ success? If available, please provide information about the impact of the financial capability program on participating student’s retention and completion rates.

HCC conducted a longitudinal analysis in Spring 2011 reviewing three subsequent long semesters, which showed that almost all Student Success course participant subgroups distinguished by ethnicity and Pell recipient status (demonstrating economic vulnerability) made significant gains in term-to-term persistence, particularly among Hispanic and Asian students. Other research consistently supports the value of College Success courses and concurrent enrollment of students using a cohort model.
4. Has your college previously involved community volunteers in providing financial capability services? If so, how have the volunteers been engaged and from which organizations have these volunteers come?

Some of our GUST faculty members already engage volunteers to teach the financial literacy component in their class. Some come from Money Management International (the largest nonprofit, full-service credit counseling agency in the U.S.). The TRIO program also uses this volunteer group to teach its financial workshop each fall and spring semester.
5. How is your current program financially supported?

As our Student Success classes are semester credit hour courses, they are financially supported through tuition and HCC’s operating budget. TRIO and its financial workshops are funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

6. How many staff support your program? Are these full time or part time?
From Fall 2010 through Summer 2011, there were 708 sections of GUST across all HCC Colleges, 54.5% of which are taught by part-time faculty, with the remainder taught by full-time faculty.
- II. *Proposed Expansion of Services Aimed at Enhancing Financial Capability*
1. How will the college use this grant to scale (in breadth and/or depth) its current financial capability services?
HCC will increase both the depth and the scale of our current financial capability programs. We propose the following strategies to build on our current offerings:
- A. **Create HCC's own "Financial Literacy Week"**: HCC will develop and deliver a week-long series of financial literacy/management workshops scheduled to take place each long semester (Fall and Spring) the week after the GUST financial literacy section is covered. Our goal would be to raise awareness of the importance of sound financial management among all students – not just GUST students – while providing an array of easily accessible resources. HCC would pilot the program at one College during the first year. We would expand the program to two additional Colleges for Fall 2013 (three Colleges if it is very successful). Workshops on a variety of topics would be held during the week, featuring BOA speakers as well as other financial literacy professionals/volunteers. Information tables hosted by staff/volunteers would also be erected in key student areas. Some of these tables would be manned by counselors who could see students on a walk-up basis (during "peak" student hours for that campus).
 - B. **Create a team of Financial Literacy Counselors**: After completing a GUST course, students have been known to reach out to their GUST instructor – even years later – with questions regarding their finances, loans, or other money-related topics. There is a clear need for resources that can help these students on a one-on-one basis after financial capability fundamentals are discussed in class. To address this need, HCC would recruit, orient, and engage a cadre of BOA volunteers (and other volunteers as needed) to serve as financial counselors for our students. These counselors would be available to students in two ways: (1) Each GUST section would be assigned a volunteer counselor. The GUST instructor and assigned volunteer would determine how the structure would work for that section (e.g., walk-in hours, scheduled face-to-face counseling, on-line counseling, etc.). (2) For students who have completed GUST, they can contact the College's designated coordinator to schedule time with a counselor. In Year One of the grant, HCC would center these activities at one College (the same College participating in Finance Week) as a pilot site.
 - C. As an outcome of a strategic planning process currently underway, a **Pre-Enrollment Seminar** is likely going to be launched for all new students. Financial capability topics (likely focused on paying for college) would be incorporated into this curriculum as well.
2. How will the college use volunteers to scale its current offerings?
Volunteers will be leveraged to provide most of the expertise in the proposed programs, particularly as financial counselors. Furthermore, we will encourage all GUST

faculty/instructors to utilize BOA volunteers to teach their class on the days devoted to financial literacy (some sections already use volunteers). HCC could also consider integration of some of Bank of America’s financial literacy tools into our existing curriculum.

3. Have any community organizations agreed to partner with the college and provide volunteers to help scale financial capability at the college? If so, which organizations? Money Management International has been providing volunteers for some of our financial capability programs. We anticipate that they would be ready to augment BOA volunteers to help these new and expanded programs launch and grow.

4. Will the college or other entities provide additional financial support to assist in scaling these services?
 We do not anticipate that any additional financial investments will be required during the grant period to scale these programs. However, HCC will be providing in-kind support (such as computers, software, support for those coordinating the programs as well as meeting spaces for workshops, counseling meetings, etc.).

5. How will expanded financial capability services *and* volunteer engagement be sustained after the two-year project?
 HCC is about to complete a new strategic plan. As a result of this process, a single imperative appears to be emerging: to do more than deliver on the promise of student access and devote ourselves to the achievement of student success – the timely completion of degrees and certificates. Giving our student body the tools for increased financial capability – and thereby increasing their likelihood to continue courses to completion – will only support our new focus. Therefore, we fully expect that sustainment of this program and volunteer engagement will be incorporated into the normal operations of HCC.

III. *Project Budget*

Note: Selected colleges will have the opportunity to modify their budgets as needed.

Cost Category	Amount Budgeted	Amount Expended by June 30, 2013 (to be reported by July 30, 2013)
Personnel	\$20,000	
Fringe Benefits	\$0	
Travel*	\$20,500	
Supplies/Office	\$1,000	
Marketing	\$14,100	
Materials	\$9,000	
Gas/Mileage	\$400	
Other	\$0	
TOTAL	\$65,000	

*A more detailed budget narrative is available upon request.