
College Prep Academy



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Executive Summary

Capital IDEA and ACC jointly operate the College Prep Academy to provide an accelerated program to assist underprepared adult learners wishing to satisfy the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) requirements in order to enter college and earn a degree or certificate.

The Academy provides intensive instruction in reading, writing, basic math, and advanced math. Participants also learn critical thinking, study skills, and test taking. Classes are divided into two levels to differentiate math abilities: Level 1 offers basic math; Level 2 is for advanced math. Capital IDEA provides wraparound services such as peer mentoring sessions, one-on-one counseling, childcare, transportation, emergency financial assistance, and role models.

The College Prep Academy holds three sessions per year, starting in September, January, and May. It offers six hours of combined instruction and support Monday through Friday over 12 weeks. An additional 12 weeks of part-time instruction is available for participants needing further work in math. The academy has been in operation since spring 1999, and over 700 adult learners have participated in the program.

Among eligibility requirements, participants must: Have a desire to complete an ACC degree or certificate program; have a high school degree or GED; demonstrate skills below TSI requirements but above the fifth grade level; and demonstrate financial need.

The majority of academy participants are minority. Enrollment has been 56% Hispanic and 25% African-American. At the time of enrollment, all were living below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines.

An average of 84% of First-Time-in-College (FTIC) participants entering the College Prep Academy satisfy the TSI Obligation in math—the subject with the highest number of unprepared student learners statewide—within 2 years. By contrast, an average of only 27% of FTIC community college students statewide are able to satisfy the TSI Obligation in math within 2 years.

Following each academy, participants pursue the Associate degree or certification in a variety of educational tracks that have been identified as being in high-demand and that pay a living wage by Central Texas employers. Capital IDEA funds each participant's full academic expenses (tuition, fees, books), supplies financial support for childcare and transportation, and provides case management and career guidance while participants progress academically.

Introduction

Capital IDEA developed a successful partnership with Austin Community College to provide a unique opportunity for underprepared adult learners to fulfill Texas Success Initiative (TSI) reading, writing, and math requirements so they can go on to earn a college degree or certificate.

Capital IDEA and ACC jointly operate the College Preparation (Prep) Academy, an intensive program that connects remedial instruction with strong support services. ACC, through a grant from Capital IDEA, provides instructors, books, test fees, and facilities. Capital IDEA provides peer mentoring sessions, one-on-one counseling, childcare, transportation, emergency financial assistance, and role models. The academy has been in operation since spring 1999 and over 700 students have participated in the program.

The Academy offers 12-week sessions that feature full-time, five-day-a-week instruction in reading, writing, math, and study skills. An additional 12 weeks of part-time instruction is available for participants needing further work in math.

College Prep Academy participants see the Academy as a stepping stone out of poverty. They are goal-oriented; are able to see role models in other Capital IDEA/ACC participants in college and/or in high-paying careers; have the support of a counselor to work through academic and life challenges; and know that they will have financial support while they are in college.

About the Partners

Capital IDEA lifts working people out of poverty by sponsoring educational services that lead to life-long financial stability. Capital IDEA serves the community by acting as a bridge, connecting committed, yet underemployed people to employers in need of highly skilled workers. Created through the efforts of Austin Interfaith and the Central Texas business community, Capital IDEA funds qualified participants' tuition, books, and childcare and works with them to find employment with good salaries, benefits, and opportunity for career growth. Capital IDEA works with workforce partners to identify new career-driven curriculum needed to properly educate the next generation of workers.

Austin Community College is the primary gateway to higher education in Central Texas, serving more than 65,000 credit, continuing education, and adult education students each year. The college is a public community college offering associate degrees and certificates in more than 180 areas and providing a variety of instructional and support programs to help all adults fulfill their dreams of a college education. ACC is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097; Telephone number 404-679-4501) to award the associate degree.

Academy Overview

The College Prep Academy holds three sessions per year, starting in September, January, and May. It offers six hours of combined instruction and support Monday through Friday over 12 weeks. Overall, participants receive 360 hours of instruction.

Eligibility

To be eligible to participate in the College Prep Academy, applicants must:

- Have a desire to complete an ACC degree or certificate program;
- Have a high school degree or GED;
- Demonstrate skills below TSI requirements but above the fifth grade level;
- Demonstrate financial need;
- Enroll with Capital IDEA; and
- Agree to full participation in the program.

Assessments

The College Prep Academy uses three standardized assessments. The TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education) is administered during the application process to determine eligibility. The THEA (Texas Higher Education Assessment) and TCOM are administered at the end of the Academy to confirm successful comprehension of skills.

Instructional Framework

The academy teaches reading, writing, basic math, and advanced math. Participants also learn critical thinking, study skills, and test taking. Classes are divided into two levels to differentiate math abilities: Level 1 offers basic math; Level 2 is for advanced math.

The curriculum is structured around preparing participants to meet TSI requirements and uses the THEA test as a guideline. In addition:

- Participants scoring between 5 and 7.9 in math on the TABE attend Level 1 classes. Those scoring between 8 and 12.9 attend Level 2 classes.
- Homework is assigned each day, and all classes begin with a quiz over the homework from the previous night.
- Student attendance forms are completed by instructors and submitted monthly to the Capital IDEA career counselor.
- Participants take practice THEA tests.
- Participants attend weekly "VIP" (Vision, Initiative, Perseverance) peer support sessions.
- Capital IDEA will continue to pay for tuition, fees, and books and provide all support services once a participant satisfies TSI requirements and takes a full credit-bearing course load.

Participants completing Level 1 are expected to pass the reading and writing portions of the THEA test, then advance to Level 2 for advanced math instruction. Participants who do not pass one or more portions of the THEA test may repeat the program.

Sample Schedule

Below is a typical weekly schedule during College Prep Academy sessions.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-9:30	Math	Math	Math	Math	VIP: Life and study skills, job skills, financial management, etc.
9:30-9:45	Break	Break	Break	Break	
9:45-11:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	Reading Lab
11:00-12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:00-2:30	Reading	Writing	Reading	Writing	Vocabulary Class

Support Framework

College Prep Academy participants must enroll in Capital IDEA, which provides wraparound services during academy sessions in addition to the following long-term services:

- **Jobs-driven education and training.** Capital IDEA pays for tuition, fees, and books for all participants in training programs (primarily at ACC). It collaborates closely with employers and ACC to ensure education and training matches job availability. It develops part-time employment that allows participants to make school their first priority.
- **Support services.** Participants receive childcare, transportation, and emergency financial assistance so that they can focus on their education.
- **Case management and counseling.** Participants meet weekly throughout the program with a career counselor and with other participants in their occupational track in a one hour “Vision, Initiative, Perseverance” (VIP) peer support session guided by Capital IDEA staff. Counselors meet individually with participants on an ongoing basis. These meetings are primarily held at ACC.
- **Customized Training Strategy for each person.** Applicants are tested and evaluated by career counselors who partner with participants to develop a training strategy that best suits their needs. Capital IDEA begins training wherever a participant enters the process: GED Preparation, English as a Second Language classes, college entrance exam preparation, or college-ready.
- **Family wage jobs with benefits with a career path.** Capital IDEA’s goal is for participants to reach jobs that offer at least \$15.90/hr., benefits, and further career advancement. No participant enters a training or employment path unless it leads reliably to such a job.

- **Institution-based community commitment and accountability.** Participants make commitments back to the community by assisting future participants or completing other volunteer work.
- **Long-term training and post-employment support.** Leaders of neighborhood institutions and professional staff support participants for as long as three years as they proceed through the pipeline to community college-level training and career employment.

Participants Profile

Of the 729 participants who have enrolled in the College Prep Academy, 411 (or 56%) self-identify as Hispanic, and 183 (or 25%) identify themselves as African-American. At the time of enrollment, all participants were living below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Outcomes

An average of 84% of First-Time-in-College (FTIC) participants entering the College Prep Academy satisfy the TSI Obligation in math—the subject with the highest number of unprepared student learners statewide—within 2 years. By contrast, an average of only 27% of FTIC community college students statewide are able to satisfy the TSI Obligation in math within 2 years.

Benchmark

The College Prep Academy's innovative program does not lend itself easily to direct comparison, as there are no other programs that provide the kind of intensive instruction offered by the Academy, coupled with wraparound support services, in the immediate area. The academy's benchmark measures instead derive from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Developmental Education Accountability Measures. A description of the benchmarking methodology is available upon request.

Keys to success

The success of the College Prep Academy derives from the close partnership between Capital IDEA and ACC instructors, counselors, and administrators. This effort results in top-notch communication, smooth collaboration, and continuing improvement. Key components for participants include:

- ACC accredited instructors
- ACC curriculum
- Well-equipped classrooms
- Tutoring and library services
- Paid tuition, fees, and books
- Support services including childcare, transportation and emergency financial assistance
- Case management
- Reading, writing, and math screening

- Weekly peer support sessions (VIP meetings)
- Continued commitment of tuition, fees, books, and all support services once the participant satisfies TSI requirements and takes a full course load

Testimonials: Why It Works

From Faculty

"Because of the time we spend together, I find there is a better student-teacher relationship. It's [also] the way Capital IDEA supports its students that makes the big difference. Both the Capital IDEA counselor and the ACC liaison are on call for student needs. These two people also run weekly VIP meetings for the students, in which everything from career opportunities and study skills to general gripes are discussed.

"Finally, at least once a week Pat or Tracy drop in on my class. They keep me informed about student problems and find out if there are any student or teacher concerns. Once a month, [they] get together with faculty for a staff meeting to discuss everything from students to vacation.

"This collaboration between teacher, student, counselor, and administrator/liaison helps students help themselves. I think it's the reason CI has both a low dropout and a high graduation rate."

– Math instructor Ted Rachofsky

Results

College Prep Academy FTIC participants satisfying the Math portion of the TSI ¹		
	Percentage Passing THEA/TCOM within one year	Percentage Satisfying TSI Obligation within 2 years (Passing THEA/TCOM or allowed to enroll in college-level coursework)
Fall 2004	88%	100%
Spring 2005	73%	87%
Summer 2005	80%	80%
Fall 2005	85%	92%
Spring 2006	54%	75%
Summer 2006	74%	89%
Fall 2006	65%	73%
Spring 2007	50%	65%
Summer 2007	76%	91%
Weighted Average		84%

¹ Capital IDEA tracked the academic progress of 11 cohorts of First-Time-in-College (FTIC) participants enrolling in the College Prep Academy from 2004-2008. Participants were enrolled in the College Prep Academy based on academic testing at program enrollment indicating that they would not be able to satisfy the TSI Obligations without developmental education coursework. Using data collected by the Program Coordinator at Austin Community College (ACC) and supplemented with internal case notes, the percentage of FTIC participants satisfying the TSI obligation in math within 2 years was collected. (This measure is based on standardized measures used by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board—see below for comparative data.) Although the Coordinating Board tracks progress in math, reading and writing, time limitations precluded a full study. Math was chosen because the highest percentage of students statewide fell below state standards for math, and the average Capital IDEA participant enrolls with 7th grade math skills or less.

Underprepared Students Satisfying the Math portion of the TSI—Tracked for 2 years	College Prep Academy	Community Colleges Statewide
Fall 2004	100%	25%
Fall 2005	92%	28%
Fall 2006	73%	28%
Weighted Average	87%	27%

