

“ Someone was there in my corner, supporting my dreams in every way ”

## THE FUTURE CONNECT COLLEGE SUCCESS COACH MODEL

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A key component of the Future Connect program is that every participant has a college success coach. This brief presents a detailed description of the Future Connect coaching model and services, and in doing so, answers key questions from the Future Connect evaluation<sup>1</sup> about what the coaches do to help low-income and first-generation college students reach their goals. This brief is also intended to help staff members at other colleges as they develop or enhance coaching models for improving the persistence and completion of underrepresented college students.

This brief is based on data from individual interviews with Future Connect program staff members, as well as online survey responses from Future Connect participants and alumni.<sup>2</sup> One of the purposes of the interviews was to gather data on the specific services Future Connect coaches and program staff members provide and to understand the unique ways Future Connect supports students in the program. Participants and alumni also provided information via an online survey about how often they met with their coach and their perceived impact of Future Connect coaching services.

<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Future Connect evaluation, visit <http://educationnorthwest.org/resources/how-future-connect-improving-college-success-through-comprehensive-advising-and-financial>

<sup>2</sup> All quotes are from Future Connect program staff members (coaches, recruitment specialists, and the transfer support specialist) unless otherwise noted.

### The Future Connect Program

Future Connect is a comprehensive scholarship and support program at Portland Community College (PCC) that seeks to change the lives of first-generation and low-income students.

To apply for the program, students must have graduated from a high school or earned a GED in Multnomah County or from Hillsboro School District, Beaverton School District, or other regions in the PCC district. In addition, participants must be low-income (defined as eligible for the Pell Grant) and/or be a first-generation college student (that is, neither parent has a bachelor's degree).

The Future Connect scholarship is intended to cover the cost of tuition after applying other federal and state financial aid for up to three years at PCC. The minimum yearly scholarship is \$600, and the maximum is \$3,400. Undocumented students receive a \$1,500 scholarship.

Future Connect also provides participants with a college success coach; bus tickets and other financial assistance through an emergency fund; a summer workshop prior to their first year of college; two college and career success courses in their first year at PCC; leadership opportunities, such as a leadership course and internships; and transfer support, including the chance to apply for scholarships at select universities.

For more information, visit <http://www.pcc.edu/future-connect/>.

# Overview of the Future Connect Coaching Model

Future Connect coaches provide many services (see Table 1) to help students reach their degree and career goals. Coaching services comprise early outreach in high school, summer workshops before college starts, course instruction in the first year of college, and individualized advising and support throughout students' time at PCC.

**Table 1. Future Connect coaching services**

KEY SERVICES	EXAMPLE OF HOW COACHES PROVIDE THIS SERVICE
Early outreach	Schedule and conduct presentations at high schools and community events
Summer workshops	Structure the workshop so that students participate in bonding activities with other program participants and coaches
Course instruction	Teach the required first-year PCC classes: College Survival and Success (CG100) and Today's Careers (CG130)
Individualized advising and support, which consist of:	
Connection to resources	Connect students to both on- and off-campus resources
Academic support	Build students' academic skills, such as time management and how to study
Social and emotional support	Encourage students and provide interpersonal support
Financial aid advising	Assist students with navigating the financial aid application process
Transfer support	Help students explore university options and understand how to transfer

**“** All the work that I do is focused on what the needs of the students are and what their goals are and understanding that those goals change in relation to the other things that are impacting their life.”

The Future Connect program staff consists of eight coaches who work with current participants, two recruitment specialists who work with high school students, and a transfer support specialist who works with participants interested in transferring to a four-year university. The recruitment and transfer support specialists are fairly new positions, and before they were established, the coaches were responsible for high school outreach and transfer support.

The Future Connect coaching model is **relationship-based, student-centered, and holistic**. Coaches reported working with about 70 to 120 students across all cohorts (new and returning students), with a targeted number of 50 new students per cohort per year. Newer coaches reported smaller caseloads. Recruitment specialists reported meeting with “thousands of high school students.” The transfer support specialist had a caseload of around 300 students, all of whom have at least 50 credits.

Coaches emphasized the importance of establishing and cultivating a personal connection with each student in their caseload. One coach described how this **relationship-based model** of advising differs from the more conventional model:

*“ In traditional advising, it’s very procedural. You see a student once, and you might not ever see them again. And it’s just this kind of transaction that’s happening. You aren’t really allowed the time to get to know somebody, which I think helps to have more honest and open questions about their education.”*

By developing relationships with students, Future Connect coaches are able to gain a more complete understanding of each participant’s unique situation, cultural background, and needs. They can then provide **student-centered** supports by modifying service delivery according to students’ strengths and challenges and where they are in their college career.

Finally, Future Connect coaches provide **holistic** support that emphasizes the overall well-being of each student. Coaches described encouraging and offering social, emotional, and interpersonal support to Future Connect participants in tandem with helping them navigate the academic and procedural aspects of college (for example, the financial aid and transfer process).

*“ For me, a big part of [being a coach] is knowing that I’m going to be basically the face of PCC until they start their classes; I’m going to represent PCC to them. And so I want to make sure that I am going out of my way to just be warm and welcoming and friendly and encouraging.”*

*“ We spend more time talking about, ‘Well, what does this mean for you? What are the things that are getting in your way? How can we help you remove those barriers or at least push them down, push them further away?’ And I think because we build relationships with our students and they trust us, they’re more willing to share what those barriers are. Because I have that access to them here, all the time—as opposed to maybe they’ll see an academic advisor once a quarter or once every few weeks—I can see that change, and I can address that change.”*

# Coaching Services

## EARLY OUTREACH

Most Future Connect high school outreach services are coordinated through two recruitment specialists, one that works with students at high schools in Multnomah County and that works with students at high schools in Washington County. The recruitment specialists help high school students learn about Future Connect, and they serve as a connection between students and their coach once they are admitted into the program. The recruitment specialists' key roles are to identify staff contacts at each high school (for example, the college counselor); schedule and conduct presentations at high schools and community events; support a college-going culture at local high schools; work with students to submit their Future Connect and PCC applications, as well as their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Oregon Student Aid Application (ORSAA); provide coaches with and monitor the lists of admitted and waitlisted Future Connect participants; and facilitate introductions between coaches and students.

*“ We provide information about Future Connect, and the goal is really to help students see themselves as potential Future Connect students and apply for Future Connect. But ... the secondary message is creating college-going cultures and helping students understand that what they perceive as these barriers that are un-overcome-able are actually things that, with the right supports and the right kind of pieces in place, can be overcome.”*

Coaches also support early outreach by helping facilitate the transition to college once students are admitted to or waitlisted for Future Connect. Specifically, coaches meet with high school students assigned to their caseload once or twice before college begins to help them plan their schedule, ensure they have completed the FAFSA, and prepare them for PCC's expectations. Additionally, coaches give students their cellphone number, and they contact high school counselors and/or instructors to learn more about each student. In response to the survey, a little over half of Future Connect participants and alumni (56 percent) reported meeting with their coach when they were in high school.

*“ I think the most important thing about going into the high schools is letting them know who I am and having a face to connect to. That anxiety about coming on campus the first time is really hard for a lot of students, and having someone they know already seems to make that a lot easier.”*

## SUMMER WORKSHOPS

Future Connect participants are required to attend a summer workshop before starting their first year of college. At least one workshop is offered at each PCC campus, and both students and families are invited. At the workshop, students receive information about Future Connect, financial aid, and the campus. They participate in bonding activities with the other students, meet the coaches, go on campus tours, and interact with past and present Future Connect participants (who are available to answer questions). Coaches are responsible for planning and facilitating the summer workshops held at their respective campuses. They are also responsible for sending reminders to students to encourage attendance.

## COURSE INSTRUCTION

Coaches teach College Survival and Success (CG100), Today's Careers (CG130), and Intercultural Leadership (CG190). Both CG100 and CG130 (referred to as "college success courses" for the remainder of this brief) are required courses for students during their first year at PCC. All coaches teach the college success courses. Intercultural Leadership is an optional class for which students are nominated, and only some coaches teach it. Future Connect students take the college success courses as a cohort, and in doing so, one of the goals is that they will all bond and establish personal connections.

Coaches have some autonomy and flexibility about the exact material they cover in the courses, but they generally focus on the same content, which is laid out by PCC's Course Content and Outline Guides (CCOG). College Survival and Success focuses on the importance of building a relationship with the coach, as well as time management, personal responsibility, self-awareness, and a growth mindset. Today's Careers focuses on helping students explore their motivation for being in college; connecting them to potential careers; and teaching them career skills, such as resume writing, interviewing, public speaking, and professionalism. Coaches also respond to student questions about degree and certificate programs and related careers, and students have the opportunity to interview people who have a career in which they are interested. In Intercultural Leadership, students learn about leadership skills and how they can develop as leaders. They also conduct a service learning project to help make the connection between what they are learning in the classroom with the community.

“ [The summer workshop] has been our qualitative approach in welcoming students onto campus. PCC, in general, doesn't have an all-day workshop; it's more of a quick orientation online. This unites the students with others, and it also gives them face time with other coaches.”

“ I think [the college success courses] are a vital part of this program. That's such an important piece of this—that we're their first instructors. They become familiar with us; we get to know them academically, not just as their coach.”

## INDIVIDUALIZED ADVISING AND SUPPORT

As mentioned earlier, individualized advising and support consist of five elements: connection to resources, academic support, social and emotional support, financial aid advising, and transfer support. Coaches provide a great deal of individualized advising and support in one-on-one meetings with students, although they also communicate with students through emails and text messages.

Coaches said they tend to meet individually with students more frequently during their first year at PCC and that this contact usually tapers off each subsequent year. This was in line with what students reported (see Table 2). For example, about a third of survey respondents (34 percent) said they met with their coach at least once a week during their first year at PCC, whereas only 16 percent reported doing so in their second year and 10 percent in their third year.

**Table 2. Proportion of Future Connect participants and alumni who reported meeting with their college success coach during their first, second, and third year at Portland Community College**

	First year	Second year	Third year
More than once a week	10%	4%	2%
Weekly	24%	12%	8%
Monthly	23%	23%	21%
Every other month to once per term	35%	43%	39%
Once during the school year	6%	11%	13%
I did not meet with a coach	2%	8%	17%

Source: Future Connect participant and alumni survey. For details, visit [\[online link here\]](#).

Note: The sample for the second and third years includes only students who indicated they were at PCC for two or three years. Sample sizes are 695 respondents for the first year, 426 respondents for the second year, and 250 respondents for the third year.

This pattern of frequency is partly due to the fact that students participate in the required college success courses with their coach during their first year at PCC. It is also largely intentional; coaches offer students more support during their first year and intentionally scaffold and teach students self-sufficiency to reduce their needs each subsequent year.

“ [Frequency] can be based on where they are in their college career and also just them personally. I have students who really need weekly 30-minute appointments or weekly hourlong appointments.”

Coaches also base the frequency and duration of these meetings on individual students' needs. For example, if students are having academic difficulties, they meet more often and for longer periods of time with their coach. Additionally, coaches often meet with more students during registration and enrollment periods. About three-quarters of survey respondents (76 percent) said the amount of time they met with their coach was just right.

## CONNECTION TO RESOURCES

Coaches help connect students to both on- and off-campus resources. Examples of the former include the financial aid office, child care, counselors, the Career Exploration Center, the Multicultural Center, the Women's Resource Center, Associated Students of Portland Community College, and Disability Services. Off-campus resources include housing, health, and foster care services. Coaches said they take a more direct role in connecting students to resources during their first year at PCC; for instance, they might walk students to the financial aid office and meet with a financial aid officer together. Over time, coaches encourage students to take on more responsibility; for example, they might tell students the steps they should take to access a resource and then check in with them to see whether they took those steps.

Coaches also use innovative strategies to connect students to resources, such as leading campus tours, holding social events on campus, and building a resource scavenger hunt into the College Survival and Success curriculum so that students "are actually stepping into all those resources" through that process. In addition, coaches said they used one another as sources of information regarding available resources to which they could refer students.

*“ I have a student who previously had an IEP [individualized education program] in high school that had not yet connected to disability services, and he was really nervous. So I went to the disability services orientation with him. It was good for me, too, because then I got to see what the process looked like for my students, so I could walk them through that. I'm about to do that with another student.”*

*“ There is kind of this tier of super high need. It's almost student development theory. They're starting to gain confidence, and they become more autonomous. And then by the end of the process, they're so self-directed—they know what they are doing. And then we start to do the transition stuff, and it goes right back to the beginning, where they don't know what they're doing, and they need a lot of help.”*

## ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Coaches provide academic support in three main ways. First, they provide academic advising (for example, they help students plan their class schedules, explain placement testing and what students' scores mean, describe degree and certificate programs at PCC, and discuss transfer options). Second, coaches work with students to develop nonacademic skills that will help them in their courses, such as time management, study skills, how to communicate with professors both in person and by email, and how to optimize school-life balance. Third, coaches tutor students and connect them with on-campus tutors. (Future Connect also has volunteers who provide additional tutoring.)

## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Coaches encourage students, listen to their needs (and adapt services based on those needs), provide emotional support, and help students develop skills like stress reduction. Coaches also help students feel connected to college in many ways: promoting and fostering peer connectedness, being welcoming and warm, and helping students get connected to the campus by introducing them to resources and events.

## FINANCIAL AID ADVISING

Coaches help students navigate the financial aid system. Specifically, they walk students through the process of applying for financial aid and help them solve financial aid-related challenges that arise. Coaches also help students manage their finances, helping them set up budgets and discussing affordability related to working full time versus part time while attending college.

“*Students have all these red flags, which are basically documents they have to turn in to PCC to support their FAFSA evaluation before they can actually get an award. So particularly the first year, I'm walking them through that process but then also the process of being able to keep financial aid—because ... they think it's just something you get, but you have to meet certain academic requirements to keep that aid. And also something that our students are bumping into more now is running out of financial aid. There is a cap for how many credits you can take, and students can easily bump into that, especially if they're changing their mind about what they want to do or if they've needed a lot of developmental coursework or something like that. It's something we're definitely having to navigate more now than ... in the past, so I'm helping them with that process, as well.*”

“*Part of the academic support is teaching them how to study, how to get to class every time, how to schedule your life so that happens, and what to do if you start to struggle because there is such a different expectation in college for students seeking out support versus in high school, where the support kind of comes to you.*”

“*A lot of our students do not necessarily feel they belong in college. There are a lot of institutional/social/cultural barriers that they have to face. There's a lot of messaging that I think is sent out to students that excludes them, so I feel a big part of my job is to try to include them. A sense of belonging ... is probably the most important thing that the students need to experience early on, or we're going to lose them really quickly.*”



## TRANSFER SUPPORT

Coaches provide support and encouragement to students as they transition from PCC to a four-year university, and the program has established scholarships for Future Connect students at specific schools, including Lewis & Clark, Pacific University, and Portland State University. As mentioned earlier, a transfer support specialist was recently hired to support Future Connect students as they prepare to transfer. On an as-needed basis, the transfer support specialist meets with students who have at least 50 credits to help them apply for scholarships and financial aid, explore four-year college options and understand expectations, and review classes and credits and match them with universities' requirements. Transfer support information and resources are available on the Future Connect website including a packet full of transfer related resources. Additionally, the transfer support specialist supports and encourages students throughout the transfer process and connects them with universities and colleges (for example, by scheduling workshops and helping students contact colleges and universities with questions about housing, financial aid, etc.).

“When students hit the 50-credit mark, I try to connect with them, and we start talking about their hopes for when they are finishing their degree here at PCC. I look for resources, referrals, and then I connect them with a university that might hold the degree they are interested in.”

## Conclusion

Coaches offer **relationship-based, student-centered, holistic** support to first-generation and low-income college students in the Future Connect program. This coaching model emphasizes building personal relationships with students that develop over time, allowing coaches to provide personalized supports unique to each student's needs, helping students become self-sufficient, and attending to students' overall well-being. Coaches begin with early outreach in high school and a summer workshop before college begins. After that, they work with students in college success courses during their first year at PCC. Coaches also offer individualized advising and support—specifically, connection to resources; financial aid and transfer advising; and academic, social, and emotional support—throughout students' time at PCC. Future Connect participants and alumni described overwhelmingly positive experiences with their coaches:

“*Every aspect of the Future Connect program helped me succeed from the very first moments—the daily support from my success coach to the connections and referrals to other community programs. To know someone was there in my corner, supporting my dreams in every way, from financial to emotional, was very meaningful. I couldn't have found a more helpful program to be in.*” –Future Connect participant

“*I'm very grateful for Future Connect, as it helped me lessen my fear of college and made me feel like I belong there. I was scared and nervous to start college, as I was the first person in my family to ever attend, so this was a big step for me. To have someone mentor me ... was very helpful.*” –Future Connect participant