

CASE STUDY

# Milwaukee Area Technical College Closes Equity Gaps With Retention Grants and Process Innovations

Milwaukee Area Technical College, Milwaukee, WI

**About:** Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) is a public two-year vocational-technical college serving 25,000+ students. Their Fall 2021 fall-to-spring persistence rate for first-time degree-seeking students is 65%, and 55% of all enrollees during AY21 self-identified as students of color.

**Challenge:** In Fall 2021, MATC found that registration holds and small account balances were creating persistence barriers for thousands of students. These barriers disproportionately impacted first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented minority students. MATC partnered with EAB’s Moon Shot for Equity initiative to eliminate equity gaps in retention and ultimately graduate more students.

**Solution:** In Fall 2021, MATC activated a cross-departmental Retention Grants Team to develop and deploy a program that would incentivize students close to graduation to register for the following term. A Hold Reform team also worked to improve persistence outcomes by eliminating the deregistration process, removing a registration hold based on low account balance, and providing one free transcript despite an unpaid account balance.

**Impact:** 1,586 students were awarded micro-grants. The recipients persisted at a 10% higher rate than the general student population from Fall 2021 to Spring 2022. Further, an additional 467 students were able to register when MATC eliminated the registration hold.

**Impact Highlights**

**10 percentage points**  
Higher persistence rate for grant recipients compared to the general student population

**\$1M**  
Dollars originally committed to providing micro-grants to all eligible students in year one during the pandemic; \$150k raised so far to sustain the program in the future

## Building the Retention Grant Program

*Proactive Retention Initiatives Take a Campus-Wide Approach*



15-stakeholder Retention Grants Team formed, with **faculty, staff, students, and alumni** represented



Developed **criteria:** students who demonstrated **“momentum to graduate”** and were **in good standing**



Awarded grants to **1,586** students identified as eligible



Team **trained on Navigate** platform



**Committed \$1M** in seed funding to offer \$300 grants to **all eligible students**



**1,039**


Students pre-registered for the Spring 2022 semester after receiving a grant

# Align Retention Grant Programs with Proactive Hold Resolution Initiatives


## Reducing Barriers Through Process Innovation

Through their Moon Shot partnership with EAB, MATC identified other opportunities to address equity gaps, including several innovative hold resolution initiatives. In 2021, they performed a hold audit and discovered that 12,551 students registered at the last minute—within one week of classes beginning and up to two weeks after the semester began. This information was used to establish a correlation between late registration, course success, and academic suspension. In addition, 7,696 students were identified as having a hold on their accounts for tuition and/or fees. For those students with a balance of less than \$200, the hold was removed, allowing them to register.


### 1 Eliminated Deregistration List

 Implemented payment plan options for currently enrolled students with a balance


### 2 Increased Bursar Threshold

 Raised the account threshold from a balance greater than \$0 to balance greater than \$200

### 3 Restructured Academic Suspension Hold

 Created cross-divisional work team to address this hold and ensure students were receiving academic support rather than penalization

### 4 Discontinued Transcript Holds

 Provided one free transcript to all students that completed regardless of outstanding balance

467


Additional students able to register for classes when one hold was eliminated from their account

## Improved Transfer Pathways Through MOU Partnerships


In addition to the micro-grant and registration hold initiatives, MATC deepened their Transfer Pathways partnership with University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). With guidance and support from the Moon Shot team, MATC and UWM addressed 1) confusing program information, 2) lack of formal data sharing, 3) unclear credit articulation, and 4) excess credits due to curricular variance.




### Transfer Pathways Improvement Goals


 Eliminate credit loss and excess credits through **curriculum realignment**

 Develop **co-branded marketing** materials to promote the program

 Perform **website audits** to ensure program information is accurate

 Enable **data-sharing between advisors** through a Memorandum of Understanding

 Restructure **academic pathways** based on student interest

 Increase number of **underrepresented students transferring** from MATC to UWM



**Breaking down barriers to help students persist**—and ultimately graduate or transfer—is central to our mission of transforming lives and the community we serve. We are pleased by these initial results and look forward to continued work to eliminate equity gaps by 2030.”

*Dr. Mohammad Dakwar, Vice President, Learning, Milwaukee Area Technical College*