

# Concord University Title III

CU Forward- Creating  
Opportunities for  
Students

Shawn M. Bergman, PhD,  
Todd Nolt M.Ed. MBA,  
& Jennifer Wilson-Kearse M.Ed.



**Vela Institute**  
Illuminating Education



## About Vela Institute

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Vela Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing access to evaluation, analytics, and data tracking to education partners to improve student and community outcomes. Established in 2017, Vela Institute accomplishes its mission through applied research, data analytics, and the use of evidence-based practices.

## Contact

Vela Institute, INC.  
237 Chestnut Hill Dr.  
Boone, NC 28607  
(828) 719 - 7116  
[info@velainstitute.org](mailto:info@velainstitute.org)  
[www.velainstitute.org](http://www.velainstitute.org)

## Authors

Shawn M. Bergman, Ph.D.  
Todd Nolt, M.Ed., MBA  
Jennifer Wilson-Kearse M.Ed.

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# Introduction

## Concord University

Concord University is a public, career-focused liberal arts institution located in rural southern West Virginia. Since 1872, Concord has offered quality educational programs to one of the poorest regions of the country. With an enrollment of approximately 1,700 undergraduates and 310 graduate students, Concord has experienced an enrollment decline over the past five years due in part to decline in the high school population, college-going rate, and a decrease in state funding for higher education.

The region and state face dire economics due largely to the demise of coal production and its ancillary industries, such as the railroad. Yet the need for postsecondary education has never been greater if West Virginia is to transition from a coal economy to ensure a sustainable future.

## Title III Program

The Title III program helps eligible IHEs to become self-sufficient and expand their capacity to serve low-income students by providing funds to improve and strengthen the academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability of eligible institutions. Funds may be used for planning, faculty development, and establishing endowment funds. Administrative management, and the development and improvement of academic programs are also supported.

Other projects include joint use of instructional facilities, construction and maintenance, and student service programs designed to improve academic success, including innovative, customized instruction courses designed to help retain students and move the students rapidly into core courses and through program completion, which may include remedial education and English language instruction.

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<sup>1</sup> See WVHEPC, Higher Education Report Card, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> WV Center for Budget & Policy, 2017. Funding for higher ed decreased by \$130 million since 2008.

# Evaluation and Professional Development

## Evaluation Approach

Vela Institute's approach to evaluation reflects our non-profit mission and the experience of our team to design evaluations that are actionable and useful for intended users. Vela Institute uses the Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) framework from the Center for Evidence-Based Management to evaluate programs and improve community and student outcomes.

This framework asserts that outcomes are enhanced by expanding from where information and sources are gathered and then assessing that information to utilize the most trustworthy and relevant evidence available.

### ASK

Translating the practical issue into an answerable question.

### AQUIRE

Systematically searching for and retrieving evidence from all sources.

### APPRAISE

Critically judging the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence collected.

### AGGREGATE

Weighing and combining evidence from each source.

### APPLY

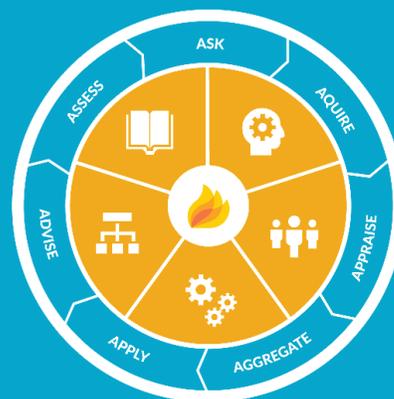
Incorporating the evidence into the decision-making process and conversation.

### ADVISE

Communicating ongoing feedback.

### ASSESS

Evaluating the outcome of the decision that was made.



#### PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE

What does your professional expertise tell you is happening?



#### ORGANIZATIONAL INFO

What does our internal data tell us?



#### STAKEHOLDERS

What are the stakeholder perspectives, values, or concerns?



#### SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

What research has been published to support or guide the development of the study?



#### TECHNOLOGY

What can we learn from technology and how can we leverage it to communicate?

## Year 1 Evaluation of Concord University Title III

To improve retention and graduation rates and thereby strengthen enrollment and fiscal viability, Concord included a suite of innovations that aligns with the mission of Concord University.



First, CU Forward will provide affordable and flexible education through online courses and degree programs.

With its mountainous terrain and difficult topography, broadband and internet access have been slow to arrive in the region due to the unprofitability for service providers. Thus, access to online education has been limited until recently.

Forward provides the needed structure to increase and modernize online courses to three populations of students:

- High school students to increase college readiness.
- Typical college students to increase online degree programs.
- Adult learners who may have some college but have not completed a degree.

Online education is especially critical to increasing higher education access to rural students in Central Appalachia, who are often bound by place and constrained by work and home responsibilities.



Second, CU Forward will create a pipeline for students to engage in high-impact practices including research and internships.

These practices will keep students engaged earlier and throughout their time at Concord to increase retention and completion and ultimately move directly into a career.



Finally, CU Forward will develop an Office of Institutional Research.

The Office of Institutional Research will allow the university to continue reporting to students, the community, faculty, and staff the efforts of the University in a transparent way.

Year 1 of the implementation and evaluation was marked by the unprecedented world-wide pandemic making hiring, data collection, and overall implementation very difficult. The year 1 evaluation thus was spent defining each objective, identifying data sources to measure these objectives and providing a descriptive review of baseline data collected.

# Objectives

 Goal 1: Increase affordable access to education through online courses		Baseline	Year 1	Goal
1.2 A.	Sixty percent of all faculty teaching online will participate in professional development beyond initial QM training and 90% will report an increased competency for incorporating online coursework.	Collect Baseline	Baseline: 60 % (78 Faculty)	90% (25% Annual Increase)
1.3 C.	Increase retention of students served by Center to 70%.	Collect Baseline	Baseline: 57 %	70% (25% Annual Increase)
 Goal 2: Student engagement through research and internships		Baseline	Year 1	Goal
2.2 A.	Increase number of alumni partnerships to 150.	0	24	150 (20% Annual Increase)
2.3 A.	Increase percentage of students participating in internships to 60%.	49%	Measured by Y2 Spring Survey via Handshake (2022)	60%
2.3 B.	Increase percentage of students participating in under-graduate research to 40%.	25%	Measured by Y2 Spring NSSE Survey (2022)	40%
 Goal 3: A robust and transparent office of Internal Research		Baseline	Year 1	Goal
3.1 A.	Increase stakeholder views and usage of data dashboards as reported through a survey by 10% annually.	Use Survey for Baseline	Survey Built in Y1, Will be Applied in Y2 (2022)	10% Annual Increase
3.1 B.	Increase stakeholder use of data for evidence-based decision making as reported through a survey 10% annually.	Use Survey for Baseline	Survey Built in Y1, Will be Applied in Y2 (2022)	10% Annual Increase

## Office of Institutional Research

Vela Institute, through the use of the Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) framework, is facilitating the creation of the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) with a critical group of university stakeholders (including faculty and administration). The kickoff was held in August and work began to define, with stakeholders, what the OIR primary functions are specific to the needs of Concord University.

The grant had challenges from the onset due to the COVID-19 pandemic but the challenges were exacerbated by the difficulty of hiring a director that ultimately was not driving the agenda of the awarded Title III grant forward on the Concord Campus.

Concord administration included Vela in the early discussions of how to proceed after the director left the position. A recommendation was made to split out the roles of director of Title III and director of the OIR which Vela supported given the complexities involved in the OIR with regard to data, data collection, and research.

Given the nature of an Office of Institutional Research and the knowledge needed of a particular institution, it is advised that the candidate have knowledge of West Virginia, Concord University specifically, and the data sets, including IPEDS, that will be necessary for successful implementation of the role. An additional recommendation would be to include experience with data visualizations so the position can provide oversight to the university-wide data dashboards.

Moving forward, Vela will continue to work with Concord University stakeholders to co-create the roles and responsibilities for the OIR with an aggressive timeline over the 2021-2022 academic year.

# Next Steps Grant Year 2

## Objectives

Grant year 2 will be the first time to collect measurable data as a comparison with the baseline. Objectives will be identified that are specific to grant year 2, develop a plan for data collection as well as the sources where data will come from.

## Surveys

As a result of COVID, survey distribution was difficult to both faculty and staff as well as students. Therefore, the plan for grant year 2 includes:

- Implementation of the NSSE in spring of 2022
- Full implementation of survey for PD related to online courses
- Survey for faculty and administration related to analytics and data culture
- Inclusion of questions related to online course satisfaction in the NSSE

## OIR

A short survey will be developed to assess the faculty's and administration's comfort using analytics and their expectations for what the OIR functions should include. As a result of this survey, the newly formed OIR may engage in a communication campaign across campus to educate faculty and administration regarding the actual functions of the office.

## Data Dashboards

Vela Institute will continue to work collaboratively with the OIR to create data visualizations that represent institution data. The Tableau dashboards will allow visitors to the Concord University website to view enrollment data by a variety of characteristics including race/ethnicity, in state residence, adult learner, and enrollment type.

During grant year 2, Vela will work with OIR to establish a list of primary data sets to publish both internally to faculty and staff as well as external to the community, students and their families.