Summer 2021 Progress Report

North Carolina Community College System: Finish First NC	
Project start date	December 17, 2018
Project end date	February 28, 2023
Period covered by this report	February 2021 – August 2021
Upcoming report deadlines	**August 31, 2021 (Progress Report)** February 28, 2022 (Progress Report)
Additional materials requested	

Is your grant on track to meet its goals?
Yes. An update of the performance measures is below:

1. **Increase four-year completion rates by 5% (updated from six-year completion rates):**
   Completion rates for schools in the pilot group of colleges that adopted FFNC (including Wake Tech) increased from an average of 22.2% to an average of 29.7% from the Fall 2012 student cohort to the Fall 2016 student cohort, a 7.5 percentage point increase. Attachment A contains more information about this data.

   Completion rates for schools that adopted FFNC in the Fall 2019 semester increased from an average of 24.4% to an average of 31.1%, a 6.7 percentage point increase.

   Completion rates for all colleges in the NC Community College System (NCCCS) increased from an average of 23.2% to an average of 29.7%, a 6.5 percentage point increase

   Of the 10 colleges that have seen the highest increase in four-year completion rates, six of them adopted Finish First NC either as a pilot college, or in the following Fall 2019 group. Of the 20 colleges that have seen the highest increase in four-year completion rates, 10 of them adopted Finish First NC either as a pilot college, or in the following Fall 2019 group.

2. **Increase the number of credentials awarded to curriculum students by 10%:**
   Based on dashboard data from the NCCCS, the number of credentials awarded at all colleges in the NCCCS, has increased from 61,170 credentials awarded in the 2016-17 academic year to 67,956 credentials awarded in the 2020-21 year, an increase of 11.1%.

   For the 50 partner colleges that have adopted Finish First NC to-date (excluding one college that opted-out of using FFNC), the number of credentials awarded has increased from 56,780 credentials awarded in the 2016-17 academic year to 63,421 credentials awarded in the 2020-21 year, an increase of 11.7%.

   The number of credentials awarded for the 15 pilot colleges and Wake Tech increased from 26,111 to 30,361 (4,250 credentials), and by an average of 18.1% from the 2016-17 academic year to the 2020-21 year. For colleges that adopted FFNC in the Fall 2019 semester, the number of credentials awarded increased from 7,681 to 8,292 (611 credentials), and by an average of 14.1%.

   In some cases, the number of credentials increased immediately after FFNC implementation before decreasing in the 2020-2021 year. This may have occurred in cases where a college awarded a backlog of new completion credentials immediately upon adopting the tool, since ongoing use of the tool is more advantageous for future (near completion) credentials than for unclaimed completed (new completion) credentials.

Have you hit any unexpected barriers or challenges?
The FFNC team has encountered the following challenges:

1. **Challenge for the FFNC Team: Reaching the Remaining Community Colleges**
   The project team has shared the Finish First NC data tool with 51 of North Carolina's 58 community colleges. Reaching the final seven community colleges has been a challenge. The team has sent several outreach correspondences to the colleges, including recent messages in mid-July and early-August, largely with no

response from the schools. However, the persistent outreach may be making a difference: A staff member from one of the unreached colleges has recently requested further information from the FFNC team. The team will make a final attempt to share the data tool with the remaining colleges later in the Fall 2021 semester.

2. **Challenge for FFNC Colleges: Personnel Turnover and Limited Resources**
   a) Personnel turnover is often a challenge for a college's ability to keep momentum with FFNC use/implementation. "Turnover" usually means personnel leaving the college altogether, though points of contact changing positions within the college can also be disruptive. The following recent correspondences with colleges are examples of this:
      • After a recent webinar, a user from a partner college reached out to the FFNC team to ask for ideas about how to foster buy-in among personnel. He shared that of the three contacts the FFNC team had on its contact list, two of them had left the college. The team shared ideas with him and will be following up.
      • The team attempted to schedule a test run with a college whose main point of contact left to work at a different NCCCS school. (The college has since not assigned a new point of contact.) Since the FFNC team urges colleges to have at least two individuals participate in test runs for the sake of sustainability, the contact person informed the team that "the second individual for this test run has not yet been hired. The position is currently unfilled." While the team recommended continuing with the test run to maintain momentum with the school, the contact thought it would be best to wait a few weeks until the new person was hired. The team continues to follow-up to ensure momentum is not lost.

   b) The FFNC team asked colleges to respond to the question, "What would enhance your institution's ability to use FFNC more effectively?" Some responses included needing more time/personnel devoted to FFNC and getting faculty and other departments invested in FFNC. Users from some smaller colleges in particular have vocalized this concern. Wake Tech has found that colleges tend to find more success with implementation when multiple stakeholders from different areas of a school are engaged with the process. In institutions where this is not as feasible, implementation seems to take longer. Notwithstanding, there are many smaller colleges that continue to communicate with the FFNC team when possible in an attempt to maximize use of the tool. The team also continues to host partner support webinars that showcase colleges of varying sizes that share how they use the FFNC tool. Participants typically share that these sessions are helpful.

Have you had any changes in key staff or funding?
Wake Tech has not had any changes in FFNC staffing or funding. In July 2021, the Belk Endowment approved Wake Tech's request to roll over funds from the FFNC Expansion Project (which supported the efforts of the consulting group Student-Ready Strategies to conduct the review of Finish First NC and development plans for growth) into this Finish First NC project.

Has there been any variance greater than 10% in your spending as compared to your grant budget? If you have had a budget variance greater than 10%, what was the change?
There have been no major changes to the grant budget since the last reporting period. Wake Tech does not have a variance in spending greater than 10%.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with us? Do you have any feedback for our team?
As of June 24, 2021, nearly 90% of community colleges in North Carolina are now able to use FFNC to rapidly identify students within a semester of completing a credential and students who have unclaimed completed credentials.

The project team released Version 3.0 of the software in the Spring of 2021. This version integrates student contact information directly into the FFNC output files, reducing the time required for FFNC users to obtain contact information for each student, and freeing them up to focus more immediately on reaching identified students to encourage completions. Currently 70% of partner colleges have this version and Wake Tech is working diligently to update all FFNC colleges.

In the Fall 2020 semester data collection effort, colleges shared information about their institutional processes for using FFNC. Feedback indicated that partner colleges are (1) continuing to refine their FFNC processes to be suitable for their institutions, (2) coordinating communication to students and collaboration between college departments to be more effective in their use of the data tool, and (3) pursuing policy changes that remove barriers to completion, such as moving away from graduation applications in favor of doing administrative graduations and eliminating graduation fees. Researchers at the Belk Center at North Carolina State University worked with the project team to develop a document listing how institutional policies may impact implementation of FFNC and vice versa. This document was shared with partner colleges and is included as Attachment D.

At webinars, users at partner colleges have shared how they engage with the FFNC tool, their best practices and lessons learned. The playlist for the webinars and snippets of two sessions are listed below:

- Playlist of All College Spotlights (Catawba Valley, Durham Tech, Rockingham, Central Carolina, Stanly): https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFEELPe2vsMpYtZ_32Oa4KTSdZFcvtsna
- Snippet of Central Carolina Spotlight (4:02 minutes): https://youtu.be/nY54XW2hlZg
- Snippet of Durham Tech Spotlight (6:13 minutes): https://youtu.be/T3iFmQlxtzI

Number of Identified Credentials:

Semester Data Reported from Colleges (2020SP, 2020SU, 2020FA, 2021SP)
The FFNC team requested semester data from colleges using the data tool for the Spring 2020, Summer 2020, Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters (data collection for the Spring 2021 semester is still in progress). Participating colleges reported that for the four semesters, FFNC has identified a total of 67,968 unawarded completed credentials, and 235,441 credentials for which students are within one semester of completing the requisite credits. These figures are not comprehensive of all FFNC partner colleges. Attachment B contains more information about this data.

Cumulative Count from Test Runs
The FFNC team has recorded the number of cumulative credentials identified by FFNC since Wake Tech began disseminating the data tool, gathered from software test-run meetings with new partner colleges and with colleges receiving software updates. From these meetings, FFNC has identified a total of 86,295 unawarded completed credentials, and 314,283 credentials that students are able to complete within one semester.

In working with colleges, receiving their self-reported completions, and monitoring system-wide data sources, the FFNC team has observed that there is a difference between the number of credentials identified by FFNC and the number of those credentials awarded by colleges. In both sets of data above, the Associate in General Education and General Occupational Technology degrees are included in some cases, which some colleges choose to not award to students. Both sets also include credentials that were accurately identified by FFNC that may be ineligible to be awarded due to institutional policy reasons. The difference in the number of identified and the number of awarded credentials are reviewed by the FFNC team in order to better calibrate its outputs. Perhaps more importantly, these differences are also reviewed by FFNC colleges to explore how policies, practices, human resources, data quality and other factors impact student credential attainment. Additionally, with software updates to FFNC Version 3.0, the project team has been working with colleges to prevent credentials that would not be awarded from being evaluated, to increase efficacy of results and decrease the amount of time users spend on output data validation.

Pilot Colleges and Wake Tech

College	Fall 2012 Cohort	Fall 2013 Cohort	Fall 2014 Cohort	Fall 2015 Cohort	Fall 2016 Cohort	Percentage Point Change Fall 2012 to Fall 2016
Blue Ridge CC	26%	29%	27%	30%	32%	6.0
Caldwell CC&TI	19%	21%	22%	17%	21%	2.0
Cape Fear CC	24%	23%	28%	31%	30%	6.0
Carteret CC	23%	30%	33%	32%	26%	3.0
Catawba Valley CC	29%	33%	36%	38%	38%	9.0
Central Carolina CC	29%	26%	33%	29%	29%	0.0
Davidson-Davie CC	39%	37%	35%	43%	43%	4.0
Durham Tech CC	15%	16%	20%	22%	26%	11.0
Edgecombe CC	12%	23%	27%	31%	33%	21.0
Fayetteville Tech CC	17%	22%	22%	26%	27%	10.0
Forsyth Tech CC	20%	22%	27%	29%	33%	13.0
Johnston CC	27%	31%	25%	27%	27%	0.0
Lenoir CC	20%	20%	24%	29%	31%	11.0
Pitt CC	20%	18%	26%	23%	22%	2.0
Roanoke-Chowan CC	14%	15%	26%	32%	26%	12.0
Wake Tech CC	21%	24%	27%	30%	31%	10.0
Average Percentage	**22.2%**	**24.4%**	**27.4%**	**29.3%**	**29.7%**	**7.5**

Fall 2019 Colleges

College	Fall 2012 Cohort	Fall 2013 Cohort	Fall 2014 Cohort	Fall 2015 Cohort	Fall 2016 Cohort	Percentage Point Change Fall 2012 to Fall 2016
AB Tech CC	20%	22%	21%	20%	19%	-1.0
Brunswick CC	36%	35%	39%	29%	38%	2.0
Coastal Carolina CC	27%	28%	28%	34%	33%	6.0
James Sprunt CC	22%	23%	27%	30%	38%	16.0
Martin CC	19%	25%	26%	29%	27%	8.0
Rowan-Cabarrus CC	23%	23%	29%	33%	35%	12.0
Sandhills CC	23%	28%	24%	26%	28%	5.0
Stanly CC	24%	27%	31%	37%	39%	15.0
Surry CC	26%	27%	23%	26%	23%	-3.0
Average Percentage	**24.4%**	**26.4%**	**27.6%**	**29.3%**	**31.1%**	**6.7**

Attachment B
Unique Credentials Identified and Awarded
Data for Students Enrolled in 2020SP, 2020SU, 2020FA and 2021SP Semesters

New Completion Credentials (Unclaimed Completed Credentials)				
Term	# Participating Colleges	New Completions Identified	New Completions Awarded	Percentage Awarded
2020SP	26	19,965	4,161	20.84%
2020SU	23	8,971	1,313	14.64%
2020FA	32	16,885	4,839	28.66%
2021SP**	29	22,147	9,498	42.89%
Total	110	67,968	19,811	29.15%

Near Completion Credentials (Can be Completed Within One Semester)				
Term	# Participating Colleges	Near Completions Identified	Near Completions (from previous semester) Awarded*	Percentage Awarded*
2020SP	26	67,322	2,445	N/A
2020SU	23	26,138	1,342	1.99%
2020FA	32	56,563	668	2.56%
2021SP**	29	85,418	4,556	8.05%
Total	110	235,441	9,011	4.38%

The Near Completion credentials identified for an indicated semester cannot be awarded until at least one semester later. Near Completion credentials that were awarded were identified for students active in the semesters prior to the indicated semester.
*** Data collection for the 2021SP semester is still in progress. Data that has been submitted to-date is included.*

The Finish First NC team regards the above semester data as highly understated. There are a few limitations of the data that should be taken into account:

- The data is dependent upon colleges maintaining documentation of and running their input files with accurate timeframes to support data reporting requests. Not all colleges maintained such documentation, and therefore had to run the FFNC program during times at which some of the completions that were actually identified during the reporting periods and awarded quickly may not have been accounted for in the reporting. To remedy this, the newest update of the program—FFNC Version 3.0—automates some aspects of the data collection request that would otherwise be tedious, time-consuming, and prone to user error.
- The FFNC project team requested that colleges report on identified credentials regardless of how or if the colleges had acted on the identified credentials. Timing is likely to have impacted the data reported, since a college's procedure for when to run FFNC and award credentials and/or advise students may not have necessarily coincided with the timing of our data collection request. In other cases, several colleges mentioned they had planned to award identified credentials, but at the time of the data pull had not yet done so. Any credentials that were identified but awarded after the data request were not accounted for.
- Capturing the number of near completion credentials that FFNC identified in previous semesters which were later awarded to students in subsequent semesters is a challenge. If colleges did not maintain records and if the staff member conducting the data pull (who may or may not be an FFNC user) does not ensure the data request was accurately fulfilled, the data may go unaccounted for.
- In feedback from the 2020FA semester data collection, 78% of colleges reported that they use the FFNC data tool for identifying anticipated completions—that is, users run the FFNC tool at the beginning of the semester to identify students who will complete by the end of the semester. Credentials that are identified by FFNC and then awarded within the same semester are not included in the number of awarded credentials.
- As some colleges did not share semester data, the project team is unable to fully document awarded FFNC credentials from all colleges using the Finish First NC data tool.
- Data collection for the Spring 2021 semester is still underway. Data that has been submitted to-date is included.

Attachment C
Unique Students Identified
Data for Students Enrolled in 2020SP, 2020SU, 2020FA and 2021SP Semesters

Unique Students Identified												
Demographic Indicator	**New Completers**						**Near Completers***					
	2020SP	**2020SU**	**2020FA**	**2021SP****	**Total**	**Percentage**	**2020SP**	**2020SU**	**2020FA**	**2021SP****	**Total**	**Percentage**
Total Unique Student Identified by FFNC	10,964	4,988	10,850	14,261	**41,063**	N/A	25,170	11,016	26,470	37,648	**100,304**	N/A
Gender												
Male	4,491	1,880	4,138	6,133	**16,642**	**40.5%**	10,273	3,644	10,769	15,233	**39,919**	**39.8%**
Female	6,408	3,108	6,673	8,108	**24,297**	**59.2%**	14,893	7,032	15,411	22,365	**59,701**	**59.5%**
Unknown/Not Disclosed	65	0	39	20	**124**	**0.3%**	4	340	290	50	**684**	**0.7%**
Race & Ethnicity												
International (FOR)	88	49	164	164	**465**	**1.1%**	147	72	306	408	**933**	**0.9%**
Hispanic (HIS)	1,295	580	1,314	1,667	**4,856**	**11.8%**	2,683	1,325	3,094	4,310	**11,412**	**11.4%**
American Indian/Alaska Native (AN)	147	75	236	286	**744**	**1.8%**	334	170	585	706	**1,795**	**1.8%**
Asian or Pacific Islander (AS)	249	93	186	373	**901**	**2.2%**	597	251	532	1,071	**2,451**	**2.4%**
Black or African American/non-Hispanic (BL)	2,040	1,015	2,309	2,682	**8,046**	**19.6%**	4,981	2,394	5,525	7,642	**20,542**	**20.5%**
Multiple Races (MULTI)	942	160	265	372	**1,739**	**4.2%**	2,107	352	685	1,026	**4,170**	**4.2%**
White/non-Hispanic (WH)	5,837	2,829	5,965	8,343	**22,974**	**55.9%**	13,604	6,133	14,592	21,415	**55,744**	**55.6%**
Unknown/Not Disclosed (UNK or blank)	366	187	411	374	**1,338**	**3.3%**	717	319	1,151	1,070	**3,257**	**3.2%**
Age Group												
Students 25 years or older	4,587	2,535	5,169	6,818	**19,109**	**46.5%**	11,060	5,890	12,504	18,005	**47,459**	**47.3%**
Students younger than 25	6,377	2,453	5,681	7,443	**21,954**	**53.5%**	14,110	5,126	13,966	19,643	**52,845**	**52.7%**
Residency in your College Service Area												
Residents of the service area	7,542	3,558	7,456	10,116	**28,672**	**69.8%**	16,745	8,127	18,053	25,585	**68,510**	**68.3%**
Non-residents of the service area	3,422	1,430	3,394	4,145	**12,391**	**30.2%**	8,425	2,889	8,417	12,063	**31,794**	**31.7%**
Pell Eligibility & Pell Recipients												
# of Pell ELIGIBLE students	4,061	1,967	5,031	5,467	**16,526**	**40.2%**	8,840	3,806	11,602	14,774	**39,022**	**38.9%**
# of Pell recipients	4,152	1,881	4,505	5,710	**16,248**	**39.6%**	8,728	3,615	9,482	13,974	**35,799**	**35.7%**
Number of Colleges Reporting:	26	23	32	29	**110**	N/A	26	23	32	29	**110**	N/A

* The Near Completion credentials identified for an indicated semester cannot be awarded until at least one semester later.

** Data collection for the 2021SP semester is still in progress. Data that has been submitted to-date is included.

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Belk Center for Community College
Leadership and Research

Finish First NC Related Policies

Below are the policy areas that FFNC partner college tool users discussed during focus groups that the Belk Center conducted in June of 2020. In many cases, these policy areas were identified when evaluators asked about barriers or challenges to implementation. Additionally, in November 2020, colleges were asked to share information with the FFNC team about policy changes they had made or had planned to make due to implementing FFNC. This feedback is also included.

Admissions/Advising

- FFNC near completer information can facilitate accurate and proactive alerts to students regarding courses remaining to fulfill program requirements and credential opportunities. Colleges must decide if/how advisors are to incorporate information about degree progress for current students, and whether to use such data to assist previously enrolled students who have not completed their credentials.
- FFNC information can be used for both currently enrolled as well as previously enrolled students. Colleges can decide whether to allot admissions staff time to re-engaging previously enrolled students in an effort to re-enroll them so that they can finish their degree.

Credentials/Programs of Study

- Some colleges are examining program design to better facilitate the implementation/inclusion of stackable credentials within the same program of study. For programs of study designed to enable students to earn stackable credentials, colleges must decide if policies would include the front-end enrollment in certificate programs and stackable credentials. That is, upon declaration of a program of study, will a student be enrolled in all related stackable credentials that may exist?
- Some considerations for colleges:
  - Colleges must decide whether or not to award an earned stackable credential in which the student is enrolled. Options include: (1) Automatically awarding the credential; (2) Giving students the option to opt out of an earned stackable credential; (3) Requiring students to opt in when they are notified of the stackable credential.
  - Will a stackable credential be awarded to a student who has already been awarded an associate degree in the program of study?

Graduation

- In light of FFNC, many colleges have re-considered policies which require students to submit a graduation application to initiate the graduation process.
  - Some institutions have eliminated the application and have implemented an "opt-out" policy wherein a student will be automatically graduated unless they contact the college and indicate otherwise.
- Many colleges run the FFNC tool near the end of the semester, which is often close to graduation application deadlines. Colleges implementing FFNC should consider whether the

graduation process should be amended or extended to include the processing of FFNC identified new completers?

● Several partner colleges are examining/have examined whether a graduation fee is a hindrance to graduation. While some charge a required fee to graduate (charged at time of application to graduate) others implemented or under considering changes which include:
  ○ Student success fee is charged in smaller increments each semester of attendance rather than at the point of graduation.
  ○ No fee. The credential is added to the student record and transcript.
● When it is determined that a student has earned a credential for a program in which they are not enrolled, colleges must make decisions about the conditions under which the credential will be awarded. Options include:
  ○ Automatically awarding the credential
  ○ Giving students the option to opt out of an earned credential
  ○ Requiring students to opt in when they are notified of the credential
  ○ Not awarding the credential.
● FFNC has the unique ability to identify credential(s) earned in the past but were not awarded to students who are no longer enrolled. Colleges should consider whether credentials should be awarded to previously enrolled students.
● Partner colleges have indicated that the program catalog used to run FFNC may differ from the catalog that was in place when the student first enrolled. Colleges should establish a standard practice for when students who entered under a previous program catalog year are eligible to earn a credential under the current catalog year. Specifically, colleges should consider under what conditions may the catalog year be updated.