



Robert Morris University

College Affordability Academy®

User Guide

Executive Summary

Robert Morris University is pleased to share with you the College Affordability Academy® (CAA). This is a training initiative for admissions counselors, financial aid officers, faculty mentors and student support staff to make the college financing system as transparent as possible for prospective students.

The outcome of the College Affordability Academy® is for anyone involved in the recruitment and enrollment process to be able to provide prospective and current students and their families with unbiased information about all sorts of money questions, including:

- Student debt and college financing options;
- Students' expected earnings upon graduation;
- How to find third-party ratings and evaluations of colleges and universities and
- How campus employment, study abroad, and internships contribute to lifetime employability.

At Robert Morris University, the College Affordability Academy® has changed how we serve prospective students and their families, but has also impacted our staff across campus. From admissions counselors to student affairs advisors and financial aid professionals, we serve students with an emphasis on how to make their college experience not only transformative, but affordable.

The College Affordability Academy® goes beyond information sharing to application of the knowledge and tools taught in the modules. As the modules are completed, we recommend that participants work in interdisciplinary groups to develop capstone projects that help translate what is learned in the Academy to prospective students and their families. At Robert Morris, capstone projects were reviewed by a panel of outside experts from organizations including the College Board, PNC, Henderson Brothers and Ruffalo Noel-Levitz. Previously completed capstone projects may be viewed by accessing rmu.edu/affordability.

We ask that you survey your participants before and after they complete the program to measure their understanding and the impact of the modules and to share this feedback with Robert Morris University. Over time, results will help us understand the CAA beyond our own experience. The findings will be shared in total and will not identify your institution. Comments and suggestions will be used for program improvement.

Throughout this User Guide you will find context for presenting the modules and recommendations on presenting them. It also provides copies of the pre and post module surveys for participants.

As we continue our mission of making the cost of college more transparent, we are pleased to partner and collaborate with organizations like yours.

Implementation Guide

Pre-Event Promotion and Logistics

1. Identify key stakeholders on campus that will benefit from participating in the CAA. We recommend admissions, financial aid, student support center, career center, and alumni. This may vary by institution.
2. Reach out to counterparts that oversee stakeholder areas to educate them about the CAA opportunity for their staff members.
3. Post a story/ad in internal HR/Staff/Faculty publications to promote the CAA program. Include information such as frequency of sessions, how many total there will be, time commitment for each session/out of session work. Set expectation from the start.
4. Gather interest from around campus and then book meeting dates, keeping in mind peak work times of the year for some of the larger, more affected groups (admissions travel season, financial aid packaging season, billing week etc.). Know that not everyone can come on the same dates. Be prepared to schedule makeup sessions for those who may miss one or more session.
5. Plan for sessions to be no longer than 90 minutes. Each session will include presentation of the PowerPoint slides, a short video embedded into the presentation, topical article listed in the presentation or one chosen by the presenter, and a group discussion. Some sessions may not run the entire time.
6. Select a space that is large enough to spread out and work in teams (tables are ideal). The space will also need adequate technology for the PowerPoint and internet access and sound for the modules. This may need to be done after you have an idea of the number of interested/required staff and faculty.
7. Once dates are scheduled, communicate those dates to all who have expressed interest in attending. Sending a calendar invite is best. Those who cannot attend can decline.
8. Prepare to provide an article to be read about five days prior to each upcoming session. Samples are provided at the end of each PowerPoint presentation.
9. Order snacks, drinks etc. Whatever will help motivate your group!
10. Communicate to those who plan to join that their attendance is required and participation is essential. (At RMU, members had to complete at least 7 of 8 modules to graduate and receive certificate and swag.)
11. Establish budget needs for food, swag, materials, printing, etc. This will vary depending on size of group and scope of items selected.
12. Prior to beginning the first module, have each participant complete the Pre-Training Survey for Participants by sending them this link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CAAPRE>

Materials Needed

1. Selected articles that are emailed ahead of time (#8 above).
2. Order a binder for each attendee with pre-printed tabs for each module to keep notes and handouts organized (brand the binders with your logo, mascot, etc.).
3. Prepare a sign in sheet for attendees for each session.
4. Consider recording each session to be used later for reference or for a makeup session if you wish to share some of the group discussion.
5. Certificates of completion for each CAA graduate.
6. Swag reward for attendees (optional but highly recommended!) Ideas include jackets, hoodies, drink tumbler, water bottles, etc.
7. Thank you gifts for panelists (school gear, memento of recognition—no gift cards or honorarium).
8. Print name tags and table cards for the capstone panelists and for the groups and presenters for the capstone day.
9. In addition to the surveys RMU provides, prepare a survey of additional questions that you would like to ask the group to complete before and at the conclusion of the CAA program.
10. Prepare module one pager summaries. Examples are provided in the Google Drive. These are great to keep as desk references in the CAA binder. This also provides a great project for a creative, less seasoned staff member as a development opportunity. RMU distributed these at the capstone meeting.
11. Prepare an agenda for the capstone event. Include team members' names, titles, departments, and a summary of their project. Also include panelist names, positions, organizations, and contact information with their consent.

During CAA Training

1. Follow up with those who missed sessions to arrange for them to attend the makeup session.
2. Look ahead to the capstone week (approximately two weeks after the conclusion of the final session). Select a date for the capstone presentations and luncheon and begin contacting potential panelists. Provide the date to panelists and CAA members well in advance.
3. Track all attendance from each event and keep on a master spreadsheet.
4. Plan to order a nice sit down luncheon for the CAA capstone session. Allow approximately 2 hours for lunch, presentations and discussion.

Post CAA Training

1. After having completed the capstone project and presentation, have each participant complete the Post-Training Survey for Participants by sending them this link:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/POSTCAA>
2. Schedule time for a discussion about how to implement new practices that will utilize skills acquired in the CAA. How will you plan to measure if CAA has an impact on your campus/enrollment?

Presenter Recommendations

Access to all presentations is granted through Google Drive. Presentations 1 and 3-8 are ready to present as they are. However, *Module 2: How We Measure Up* requires the presenter to add institution-specific information. It is recommended that this presentation be downloaded as a PowerPoint and updated by the presenter. The speaker notes section will direct you to the resources and websites used by RMU and the types of comparisons used at RMU that were appropriate for our audience. These may differ from institution to institution and the presenter is encouraged to use the resources and comparisons appropriate for their audience. While this is only necessary for Module 2, the presenter is encouraged to reference institution-specific information throughout all the Modules.

1. Familiarize yourself with the material in advance.
2. Determine how the information relates to your institution.
3. Using the sources provided, research and input institution-specific data wherever you see red font.
4. Look for tips and guidance in the notes section of the PowerPoint.
5. Add unique institutional initiatives and programs that relate to the module topic.
6. Encourage as much discussion as possible among participants.
7. Tie presented material to potential discussions with families. Role play if time permits or if discussion is lacking.

Participant Surveys

Pre-Training Survey Form

Prior to beginning the first module, please have each participant complete this survey. The preferred method is through the link provided below. However, if needed, the survey may be completed on this form. Please return this form to Robert Morris University (schaffer@rmu.edu) if the survey is not completed online. (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CAAPRE>)

Please rank the following outcomes you hope to achieve in regard to college affordability at your institution with 1 being the highest priority. Please use each number only once.

- _____ Increase Retention
- _____ Increase Graduation Rate
- _____ Aid in Traditional Freshmen Recruitment
- _____ Lower Average Student Borrowing
- _____ Improve Financial Aid Counseling
- _____ Improve Institution-wide Understanding of College Affordability
- _____ Other: _____

To what extent is college affordability a priority at your institution?

- A. Highest Priority
- B. Somewhat a priority
- C. Average: at the same level as most topics
- D. Somewhat less of a priority than other topics
- E. Not at all a priority
- F. Unknown

To what extent is college affordability a priority in your financial aid office?

- A. Highest Priority
- B. Somewhat a priority
- C. Average: at the same level as most topics
- D. Somewhat less of a priority than other topics
- E. Not at all a priority
- F. Unknown

How would you rank your understanding of college affordability with 1 being an expert?

- A. Expert
- B. Intermediate
- C. Novice

Post Training Survey Form - Participants

After having completed the capstone project and presentation, please have each participant complete this survey. The preferred method is through the link provided below. However, if needed, the survey may be completed on this form. Please return this form to Robert Morris University (schaffer@rmu.edu) if the survey is not completed online. (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/POSTCAA>)

For which department do you work?

Would you recommend this program to a colleague in your department?

- A. Definitely Yes
- B. Probably Yes
- C. Probably No
- D. Definitely No
- E. I Don't Know

Would you recommend this program to colleagues in other departments?

- A. Definitely Yes
- B. Probably Yes
- C. Probably No
- D. Definitely No
- E. I Don't Know

Did this improve your understanding of college affordability?

- A. Definitely Yes
- B. Probably Yes
- C. Probably No
- D. Definitely No
- E. I Don't Know

Do you feel that this program prepared you to speak to students regarding college affordability?

- A. Definitely Yes
- B. Probably Yes
- C. Probably No
- D. Definitely No
- E. I Don't Know

Do you feel that this program prepared you to speak to parents regarding college affordability?

- A. Definitely Yes
- B. Probably Yes
- C. Probably No
- D. Definitely No
- E. I Don't Know

Do you feel that this program prepared you to speak to colleagues regarding college affordability?

- A. Definitely Yes
- B. Probably Yes
- C. Probably No
- D. Definitely No
- E. I Don't Know

Do you feel that this program improved your own personal financial decision making?

- A. Definitely Yes
- B. Probably Yes
- C. Probably No
- D. Definitely No
- E. I Don't Know

How do you see what you have learned in CAA impacting and/or changing the way you work with students?