

## **Get Set for success: IVCC's new readiness program delivers on college knowledge, confidence**

The biggest lesson that new college student Torri Atkinson learned from IVCC's Get Set program last spring came in a small package.

One of the college readiness program's student presenters was a single mom going to school – just like Atkinson, who had also recently enrolled in college for the first time. Atkinson said she was glad to see how someone like herself balanced family and college “and came out on top. It gives people hope that, OK, I can do that.”

Introduced last fall, Get Set delivers a short burst of college knowledge before a semester starts. Students practice test-taking, note-taking and time management strategies, make sense of textbooks, class formats, and college environment, and learn how to develop good habits and harness diverse learning styles to succeed academically and socially. To graduates' delight, they also get logged in and use campus technology platforms, such as the Brightspace teaching/learning hub and ECampus textbook, hub before most of their peers do.

The weeklong Get Set fall session starts July 31, and there's still time to enroll. The grant-funded course is free and open to newly minted high school grads or adults turning or returning to college. Enrollees earn a monetary incentive, but Coordinator Tina Hardy says the real pay-off is that graduates feel ready and confident to start the new semester.

College can seem alien, intimidating and overwhelming socially and academically to some students. Hardy designed the program to parachute them to a softer landing. “Expectations are different in college. Students are expected to be independent learners, manage their time, and initiate and complete tasks. The technology is different, and so is your support network. It's important to know what that looks like and how to access resources,” she said.

Students also practice skills so they become comfortable asking for help, making friends, or approaching instructors, Hardy says. “Get Set helps you build skills to do all that.”

Small class sizes permit one-on-one instruction and a pace attuned to individual learning styles. Last spring, materials went multi-lingual to accommodate English language learners who had enrolled. In all, 25 students from throughout the district have participated since the program began.

Students are introduced to adult staff members they’ll likely turn to when classes start -- librarians, tutors and other advisers -- but Hardy also recruits peer presenters who drive some of the curriculum. She says the presenters benefit by sharing their struggles and triumphs as much as their audience benefits by hearing about them.

Get Set graduates will become peer mentors this year, too, alongside college staff. Mentors sustain a hands-on personal relationship with Get Setters into the first semester. Hardy says peers introduce a new perspective and bond with people who share their backgrounds, interests, and classes.

Hardy said relationships are important because “people who feel connected to the place they attend stick with it and do better.” That concept is reflected in Get Set graduates’ satisfaction, academic stability, on-campus involvement, and their sustained attendance at IVCC the next semester.

Get Set stoked Drew Knipper’s confidence about getting active in student government, as a student ambassador and in clubs. Knipper, from Princeton, became a mentor this year because he wants to pay forward what he learned from his mentor. She didn’t merely follow his progress and keep him on track with college tasks, he says -- she really cared. Their meetings usually took them outside an office for a stroll on campus, and the two could relax in the informal setting.

Mentors can be one of students’ first friends on campus, and conversations can range widely over academic concerns or life in general, said Assessment Center Coordinator Sarah Trager, who’s mentored two graduates. Mentors tailor their approach to what a student needs, becoming sounding boards,

advisers, cheerleaders and a channel to resources on campus and off. “We’ll connect them to people they’ve already met, rather than them walking in at random for help,” she said.

Atkinson wishes she’d discovered Get Set before she struggled through her first semester alone. “I struggle with things that make schoolwork difficult. In Get Set, I learned how to manage stuff better to make it all work together.” She got help with time management and scheduling. She got better at talking to strangers, and made friends on campus. And she knows who to reach out to for support.

All that has her looking forward to a new semester. “I know I can competently do it because I have the tools to do it!” Atkinson says.

Get Set for college success runs July 31 – August 4 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Attendance is in-person and required at all five class sessions. Further information and a signup form are available at [ivcc.edu/readyssetgo](http://ivcc.edu/readyssetgo).