

PROPOSAL FOR AN OFF-CAMPUS CENTER WITH A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Institution: Southeast Community College

Facility: **Learning Center at Nebraska City**
1406 Central Avenue
Nebraska City, NE 68410

Date: **March 8, 2021**

Nebraska City Public Schools has offered to sell the Pioneer Academy building, which previously housed its dual-credit academy, to SCC. The SCC Board of Governors voted to purchase the building for \$950,000 on March 4, 2021, as a new facility for its Nebraska City Learning Center. Since this purchase constitutes a long-term commitment SCC is seeking approval by the Coordination Commission for Postsecondary Education.

SCC initially rented space for all six Learning Centers. As the centers have become established in the communities, and as appropriate spaces have been found, the college has been investing in more permanent facilities and currently owns its Learning Center facilities in Falls City and Hebron. This additional long-term investment in Nebraska City will allow for expanded credit and non-credit programming, greater workforce development, more integration of the Learning Centers with dual-credit pathways offered through the local high schools, and a strengthening of the relationship between SCC and the many communities it serves.

History

Under its 2015-2019 Strategic Plan Southeast Community College (SCC) prioritized the goal of closing the educational gap that existed in the 12 counties in its service area that do not have a campus location. Between 2016 and 2019 SCC opened six new learning centers in Falls City, Hebron, Nebraska City, Plattsmouth, Wahoo, and York. The Nebraska City Learning Center opened in Fall 2016.

All six Learning Centers have been approved by the Higher Learning Commission as an additional location, which allows students to complete a degree through the Nebraska City Learning Center even if the student takes less than 50 percent of the courses that lead to a degree program at the learning center. This is important as SCC serves many students who have had their college journey interrupted for various reasons and come to the Learning Centers with prior college credits.

A. Demonstrated Need and Demand for the Facility

In 2015 an in-depth study was conducted by the Office of Institutional Research to assess the need for additional locations (see Appendix). After careful study of demographic and population statistics, it was determined that Learning Centers should be located to ensure SCC meets the needs of as many individuals as possible within its 15-county service area; that those service areas should be within or near the largest cities, excluding the cities where SCC already has a campus; that the location of Learning Centers should be geographically distributed across the service area to maximize the number of individuals living within a 35-mile radius from the center; and that programming offered at each center depend on local industry and community needs.

In early 2016, Coordinators were hired and local advisory committees were established to help the college identify educational and training needs, as well as prioritize areas that may have the greatest impact on the region. The Learning Center advisory committees have broad-based representation (industry, education, and local government officials) with a strong desire for programming to meet regional needs. During the Nebraska City Advisory Committee’s initial exploration of opportunities in 2016, trades/industry, business, general education, and health care were identified as the top needs. SCC has developed a process for how to systematically use this information and has identified smaller task forces within the Advisory Committee to determine ongoing needs. The Learning Center Coordinator and Dean of Extended Learning use the information generated by the task forces to identify skills gap(s), compare task force findings with the college’s Institutional Research data, determine whether credit/non-credit offerings meet community needs, and share findings/recommendations with the task force.

The Nebraska City Learning Center opened in Fall 2016 in rented space downtown. As shown in Figure 1, the Nebraska City Learning Center experienced small but growing numbers of credit enrollments through 2019-2020, the last full year of data. Continuing Education enrollments were strong and growing until the COVID-19 pandemic drastically reduced them after March 2020.

Figure 2 shows a similar pattern for the number of course sections offered at the Learning Center.

Figure 1

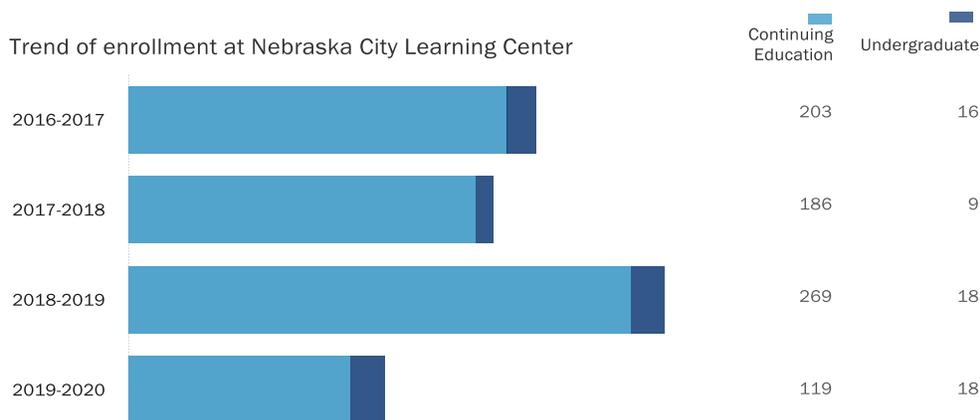
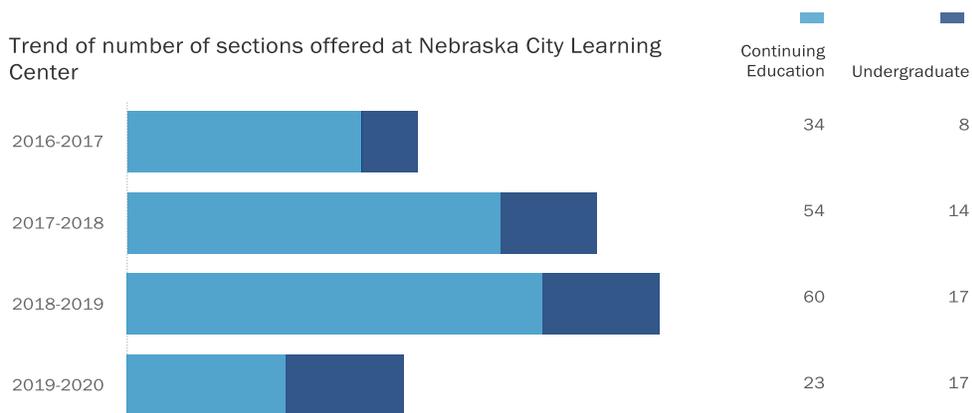


Figure 2



Enrollments are rising again as in-person education has slowly resumed and more people become comfortable with online education. Workforce training through the Learning Center has been strong so far in 2021—the most recent offerings for EMT, Nursing Assistant, and Electrical Fundamentals were filled to capacity.

In addition to the credit and non-credit courses offered, the Learning Center plays a vital role in assisting area students who are enrolled through the main campuses, proctoring placement and other exams, providing information to prospective SCC students, and connecting the community to workforce development opportunities. From July 1, 2020 through January 2021, the Nebraska City Coordinator tracked all her contacts and logged the following:

- 67 proctored exams, including placement
- 278 contacts with credit students
- 563 total visits to the Learning Center

The existing rented location, at only 2,500 square feet (with 972 sq. ft. of classroom space), is too small for the college's current needs and has outdated infrastructure in need of improvement. Additional challenges of the space are:

- No appropriate health science spaces for CNA courses
- No space for larger classes
- No student study spaces
- Limited spaces for student affairs services
- No dedicated testing space
- No dedicated parking

These issues are limiting the college from offering additional educational opportunities in the community. Acquiring the larger facility would allow SCC to:

- Offer CNA and other health sciences programming (EMT) in at the Learning Center rather than in external locations in the community
- Expand its ESL course offerings in the community
- Offer Human Service courses for mental health and substance abuse treatment
- Expand dual-credit partnership with local high schools, especially in construction-related courses
- Expand non-credit construction courses
- Offer culinary courses
- Offer additional leisure learning classes

B. Avoidance of Unnecessary Duplication

The purpose of establishing the Learning Center at Nebraska City was to provide access to underserved communities in our service area. Nebraska City is located 47 miles from the nearest SCC campus location in Lincoln and 73 miles from the Beatrice campus. As part of its 2015-2019 Strategic Plan, SCC determined that learning centers should be located within a 35-mile radius of all residents of its 15-county service area. Through a data-driven process (see Appendix), SCC determined that Nebraska City was the best choice to serve the east-central portion of the service area. Additionally, the vast majority of the credit courses offered through the Nebraska City location involve students connecting through distance learning technologies to courses taught on one of the three campuses. This expands access to already occurring courses rather than duplicating services.

C. Adequacy of Resources for Instruction

Physical Facilities and Instructional Equipment

The Nebraska City Learning Center will be located in the former Nebraska City Public Schools (NCPS) career academy building. This building is centrally located and highly visible in the community. The building has 12,500 total square feet, 9,000 of which were remodeled in 2017. The remodeled space includes three classrooms and a construction/woodworking lab. The construction lab will continue to be used for dual-credit classes with NCPS students during the school day and can be used for non-credit construction or related trades classes during evenings, weekends, and summers.

The building was previously used Nebraska City Public Schools as a dual-credit career academy, and the seller has agreed to sell the vast majority of classroom furnishings and equipment with the building, including the Construction program lab equipment. SCC's current Learning Center in Nebraska City is fully equipped with distance learning technology, computers and other educational technology that will be transferred to the new facility. Additional educational technology will be added by the college as needed to accommodate the larger space.

The remainder of the building (3,500 square feet) is shell space that will be developed into health sciences class labs in the future. This will allow SCC to centralize all of its health sciences and other learning center programming in one space, rather than using external locations for CNA, EMT, and other classes.

In addition to the class space, the building has office space for the Coordinator and administrative assistant, dedicated testing space, study spaces for students, and additional flexible office space that can be used by the area SENCAP Coordinator or visiting student affairs staff as needed. The property includes a dedicated parking lot, which increases safety and accessibility for the students. This facility meets the current needs of SCC's Learning Center and will allow for the expansion of offerings in the future.

Library, Information Resources, Student Support Services

The full-time Learning Center coordinator serves as a direct link to the campuses by providing phone or video technology to facilitate meetings with academic and student affairs representatives housed on the campuses. Coordinators are trained to assess student needs and connect students with the appropriate college services (admissions, advising, testing, financial aid, registration, disability services, student success, and tutoring).

The Library Resource Center (LRC) provides more than 35 periodical and other digital databases that are accessible online, as well as many e-books. Students, faculty, and staff use the college's online portal to access the LRC page and then select the databases they want to use. The periodical databases include full-text articles. In addition to the databases students use for research, the LRC's Library Hub page provides links to streaming videos, which instructors use at different locations. The Library page includes a "Contact Us" link which allows students and faculty to contact library staff, to request help with research, or to report problems with the databases. The Library page also provides contact numbers for each LRC for assistance by phone.

Basic computer lab and computer assistance are available at the Learning Centers from the staff. Additional computer assistance is available through the HelpDesk via The Hub (college portal) or on the SCC website (<http://helpdesk.southeast.edu/>). Answers and videos for frequently asked questions, along with live chat, email, and phone support, are available to all staff, faculty, and students. Learning Center staff are available to help connect students to these resources.

SCC uses an online college-wide portal called The Hub (thehub.southeast.edu) that provides students access to: Admissions, Registrar, Emergency Messaging, Financial Aid, IT Help Desk, Library Resource Center (LRC) and online databases, Career Services, TIPS reporting for safety and security issues,

textbook ordering from the bookstore, and other support Services. These services are available via the internet to all students, including those at the Learning Center locations. All students, regardless of location, also have access to free online tutoring through Smarthinking.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all SCC student affairs services are available face-to-face, online and/or via teleconference for all students. This includes academic/student success advising, new student enrollment processes, and mental health counseling, which were not fully available remotely prior to the pandemic.

Faculty and Staff

Southeast Community College has a full-time Learning Center Coordinator to coordinate courses, connect students to student services on the campuses, proctor exams, and assist students with enrollment, technology, and other issues. SCC also employs a part-time administrative assistant at the center. Beatrice Campus provides campus operational oversight to the Nebraska City Learning Center through student affairs, technology and technological support, safety and security, and custodial and maintenance support. All SCC Learning Center staff are supervised by the Associate Dean and Dean of Extended Learning.

The majority of credits offered through the Learning Center at Nebraska City are delivered via distance learning technologies from one of SCC's three campuses. Students are able to connect from the Learning Center to on-campus courses using Lifesize, Zoom, or iPad-based robots. Adjunct instructors are hired as needed if there is sufficient on-site enrollment demand.

D. Consistency of proposal with the *Comprehensive Statewide Plan*

Southeast Community College's proposal to establish a long-term commitment through the purchase of the Learning Center at Nebraska City is consistent with Nebraska's Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education. Nebraska's community colleges are by statute open access and have the lowest tuition rates among public postsecondary institutions. Ensuring affordable postsecondary education is available within a 35-mile radius of every resident in its 15-county service area is a crucial part of SCC's Strategic Plan.

One of the major statewide goals of the Comprehensive Statewide Plan is "to increase participation and success in higher education and to ensure that access to higher education institutions' programs and services is not restricted by factors such as geographic location, economic status, age, culture, disability, color, national origin, or gender" (pg. 2-1). SCC's long-term commitment to the Nebraska City Learning Center aims to ensure local access to postsecondary educational opportunities to a part of its service area that is situated nearly 50 miles from the closest SCC campus.

Appendix: Learning Centers Initiative

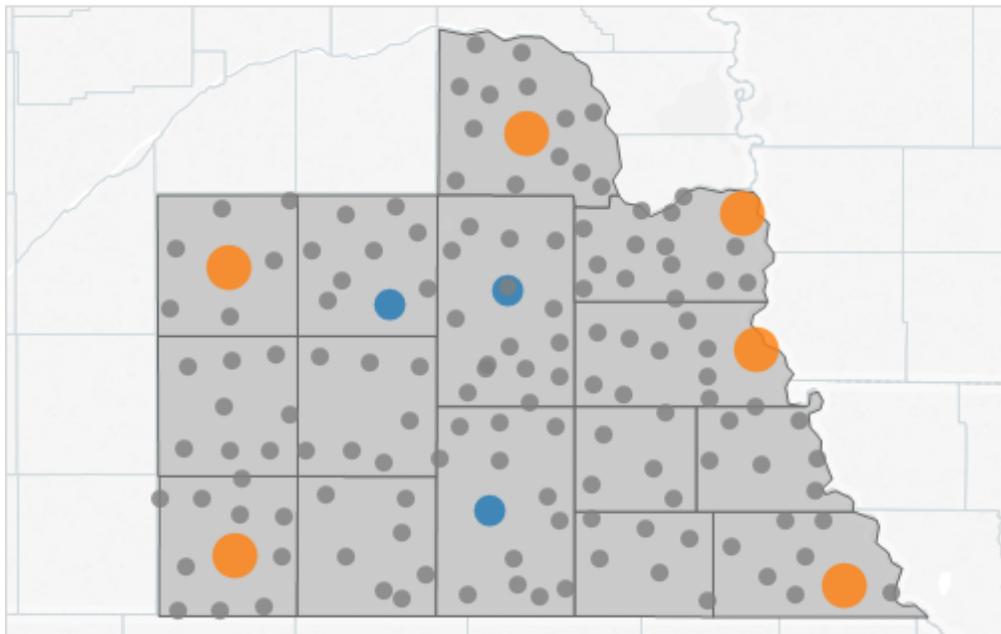
As part of its 2015-2019 Strategic Plan, SCC determined that learning centers should be developed to ensure SCC meets the needs of as many individuals as possible within its 15-county service area. Since 2016, SCC has established six learning centers in Falls City, Hebron, Nebraska City, Plattsmouth, Wahoo, and York.

The following assumptions were used in identifying potential locations for these centers:

1. Learning centers should be located to ensure SCC meets the needs of as many individuals as possible within its 15-county service area.
2. Service areas should be within or near the largest cities excluding the cities where SCC already has a campus.
3. The location of learning centers should be geographically distributed across the service area to maximize the number of individuals living within a 30 mile radius from the center.
4. The programming offered at each center will depend on industry and community needs. Programming decisions will be made in collaboration with local communities and employers based on their educational/training needs.

Figure 3: Blue dots indicate SCC campuses and orange dots indicate learning centers.

SCC Service Area | With campus and city locations



The following was the rationale for the six proposed learning centers:

1. The most populated cities in the service area without an SCC presence are York, Nebraska City, Crete, Plattsmouth, Falls City, Wahoo, and Fairbury. Using population as the first criterion, these were the first locations considered.

Considered: York, Nebraska City, Crete, Plattsmouth, Falls City, Wahoo, and Fairbury.

2. Crete was removed from consideration because it is near the current SCC campus in Milford and it is home to Doane College. The other cities being considered as possible locations for learning centers were distributed across the service area and at least 20 miles away from a current SCC campus.

Considered: York, Nebraska City, Plattsmouth, Falls City, Wahoo, and Fairbury.

3. Though Fairbury has more population on its own, nearby Hebron would be more easily accessible to other locations via the Highway 81 corridor.

Proposed: York, Nebraska City, Plattsmouth, Falls City, Wahoo, and Hebron.

Figure 3 above shows the location of SCC's primary campuses and learning centers. The figures below show the populations encompassed by drawing a 35-mile radius around all campuses and learning centers (Figure 4); the top cities by population in SCC's 15-county service district that are not located in the same county as a campus (Figure 5); and the communities within a 35-mile radius of Nebraska City (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 4 Locations within 35 miles of SCC campuses and learning centers. Blue dots represent campuses and orange dots represent learning centers.

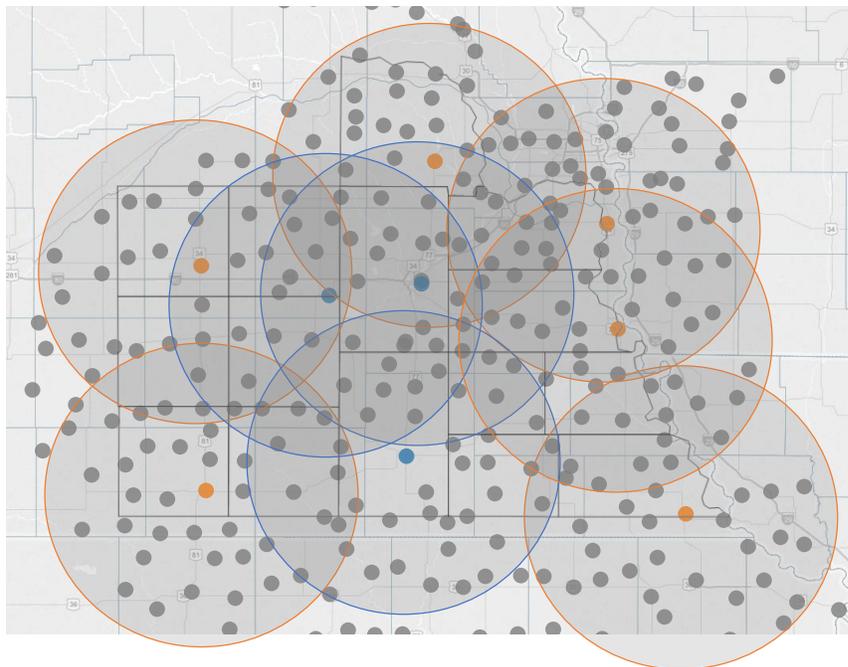


Figure 5: The largest cities in SCC's service area that not located in the same county as an SCC campus.

Top cities in counties without SCC campus

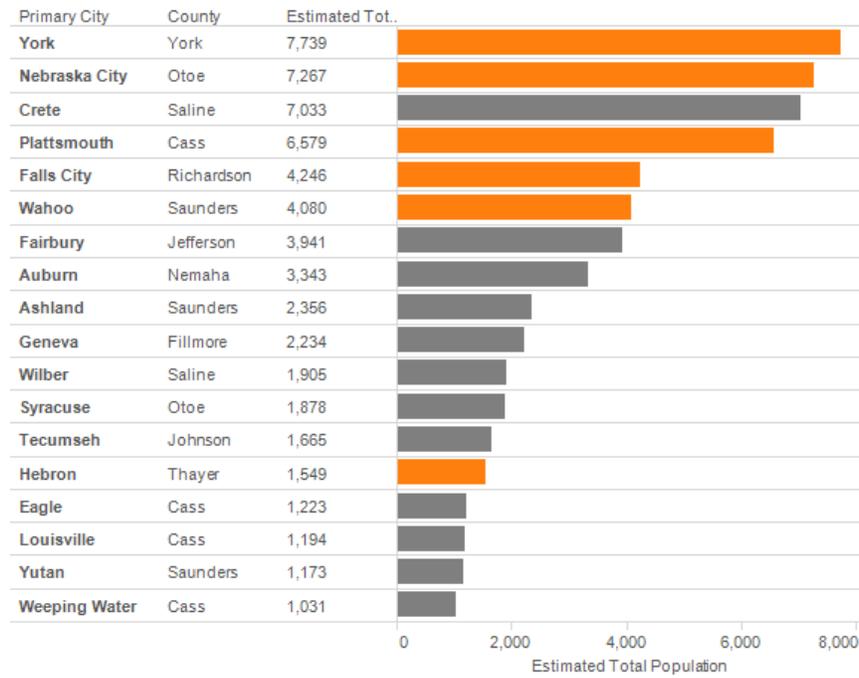


Figure 6: The population within 35 miles of Nebraska City is approximately 180,000.

