

PROMISING PRACTICES

Promising Practices is an initiative sponsored by the Postsecondary Education Research Center (PERC) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The series highlights evidence-based practices promoting student success inclusive of access, persistence, retention, and postgraduate success.

Navigating the Reconnect: How the Upper Cumberland Tennessee Reconnect Community Supports Adult Students – August 2018

In 2015, the Highlands Economic Partnership sponsored the Upper Cumberland Tennessee Reconnect Community (UCTRC) as a part of Tennessee's Drive to 55 Initiative. UCTRC provides free college and career advising and support services to adults across the Upper Cumberland region of Tennessee. As a neutral third-party, UCTRC serves adults with some college but no degree or those that have never enrolled before. Through these services, the UCTRC seeks to address the workforce preparedness of the regional adult population based on employer input and regional workforce data.

According to Cindy Taylor, Community Director of the UCTRC, "By going back, they are fulfilling a dream and bettering the future of themselves and their children." Many times, when life happens, students' lives change direction from their original goals. For adults returning to college after stopping out, who do not know where to start, the UCTRC steps in to help them return to school to obtain a degree or certification.

I wouldn't be in school if it wasn't for UCTRC. I felt like everyone on campus looked at my record and thought, "Well, you had a chance and you blew it." I knew UCTRC worked with people like me to give us a second chance. Without the encouragement and support I would have never gotten through the process of lining up financial aid, going through an appeals process, and getting back in school. I am so excited to be back at TTU. It is a dream come true. - Hayley



UPPER CUMBERLAND
Reconnect
COMMUNITY



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The UCTRC employs several college success advisors, or Navigators. Navigators provide students, or Reconnectors, with services more specific to their needs, including:

- Career advising that focuses on popular jobs and skills that employers are looking for in the region.
- A personalized path to and through college.
- A neutral third-party advocate in the college search process.
- An understanding of the unique experiences and needs of adult students.

UCTRC's Navigators work from home and often never meet their students in person. This program is intentionally shaped to best fit the individual needs of Reconnectors since many have families, full time jobs, and cannot meet during traditional business hours. Interactions through email, texting, and phone calls provides flexibility for these students.

I am so thankful that I have the opportunity to work with UC Reconnect as I continue my education. I know that if I have questions, they are just an email or phone call away. Without the opportunity they gave me to actually 'Reconnect' with TTU, I would never have been as confident and prepared as I was to begin college again. - Jennifer

When UCTRC began serving Reconnectors in April of 2016, 40 adults worked with Navigators to complete their degree or credential. Today, UCTRC serves over 1,319 Reconnectors. Two-hundred and eighty-two are enrolled in college, and there have been 32 college graduates affiliated with the program.

The number of Reconnectors continues to grow rapidly across the state with the launch of the Tennessee Reconnect program in Fall 2018. Taylor and her staff expect to stay busy, and she could not be happier. "Students ask 'what's next?', and we help with those small steps along the way. You really get to make dreams come true every day."

For more information about the Upper Cumberland Tennessee Reconnect Community please contact Cindy Taylor, Community Director, at ctaylor@ucconnect.com.

If you would like us to feature your institution or program as a promising practice, please contact PERC at PERC@utk.edu or (865) 974-3972.



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UCTRC works with people like me to give us a second chance. It is a dream come true. - Hayley F.



UCTRC helps adults overcome obstacles, navigate the higher education system, and ultimately achieve their higher education goals. - Cindy Taylor, Executive Director of UCTRC