

MassBay Community College

INCREASING FAFSA COMPLETION

MassBay Community College is one of 15 publicly funded community colleges in Massachusetts. The college enrolls approximately 6,000 students annually, 1,000 of which register in the first two weeks around the start of the school year.



Lisa Slavin

AVP, Enrollment
Management

“We had a goal of increasing enrollment,” says Lisa Slavin, associate vice president for enrollment management at MassBay, “and at the same time, a third of our enrollment happens mere weeks before classes start, but we were unable to sit down with every student to help them complete a FAFSA. I realized MassBay needed a new strategy. I have always thought of uAspire as the ‘FAFSA expert’ so I reached out to explore if we could create a similar model of student support at MassBay.”

Partnering for Student Success

Starting in the academic year 2021-22, uAspire began a program that includes a “walk-through” or webinar on the financial aid process for students coupled with a virtual help desk—students reach out by text and get their questions answered by a uAspire advisor over text, phone, or video call. Lisa says the program has been a great success: as of October 2022, 353 students sent over 4,900 texts, and 106 students report that they submitted the FAFSA.

“This is huge,” says Lisa. “These are FAFSAs that would never have been completed without uAspire’s support. The number of completed forms is likely even higher, as our only tracking mechanism is student reporting. We are on a positive trajectory.”

“It is remarkable that in such a short time, students have come to trust uAspire—going directly to them with questions.”

“It was my vision from the beginning that uAspire would be an extension of our financial aid team,” says Lisa. “I wanted students to see my team’s work and that of uAspire’s as seamless.”

Customizing the Program

uAspire has designed the program, in collaboration with Lisa, to meet MassBay’s needs. The walk-throughs take place throughout the year, coinciding with the financial aid office’s campaigns to encourage students to enroll and renew. During high enrollment periods and when the financial aid office runs events, the uAspire team increases its availability to ensure that all students get the support that they need.

“This is a perfect match. My financial aid staff and uAspire’s team are working together fluidly, and we are seeing the results in completed FAFSAs.”

Deepening the Learning

Lisa says that she has been very impressed with the uAspire team’s knowledge and commitment to helping students learn the FAFSA process. “They are really good at breaking down the process in the walk-throughs, making it feel much less daunting,” says Lisa, “while at the same time answering students’ questions throughout the webinar.” uAspire follows up with students who raise more in-depth questions and with any student who registered but did not attend the webinar.

“The help desk is also remarkable. At this very moment, a student can text uAspire and get an immediate response from a counselor. This is unlike any other help center.”

Expanding Potential

“We know that financial barriers are one of the main reasons that students leave school. Helping students on the front end with financial resources could make all the difference,” says Lisa.

“If this program were implemented at all community colleges, I think it would have a significant impact on student success.”

Lisa sees uAspire as the ideal partner for this kind of engagement. “The uAspire counselors are really informed, receiving extensive training on an ongoing basis, and they are up to date on all of the federal rules and regulations. Having that in-depth training and knowledge is key to working with students as they complete their FAFSA and additional forms.”



“When I first filled out the FAFSA on my own, I was told that my income was too high and I didn’t qualify. I reached out to uAspire and the counselor recommended that I apply for a special circumstance because I lost my job during COVID. I had lots of questions about the form and they always responded quickly and were so patient. With their help, I was able to get support when I reapplied.” – Julieta Novar De Mota, MassBay student

Want to improve postsecondary outcomes for your students?
Contact Michelle Murphy at michellem@uaspire.org