

J.A. AND KATHRYN
ALBERTSON
F O U N D A T I O N



GUIDED PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

**A REPORT ON THE IDAHO CONTINUOUS
ENROLLMENT INITIATIVE PILOT 2011-2013**



INTRODUCTION

“Nontraditional” students—older, working, married or maybe still living at home—now constitute a large and growing percentage of those attending college in the United States according to a recent Complete College America alliance report. In fact, they are fast becoming the new traditional.

Idaho’s non-traditional students include unemployed and underemployed laborers, alternative high school students, young single parents and dropouts who face work schedule conflicts, family obligations and geographic and financial barriers when it comes to accessing higher education.

Unfortunately, non-traditional students enrolled in higher education in Idaho don’t succeed. More than half of students who enter a two-year certificate or degree program in Idaho will drop out in the second year without a degree or certificate, debt ridden and without a pathway to success.

Meanwhile jobs in Idaho, that lead to successful careers and prosperity, go unfilled.

The shifting nature of the student population and the failure rate of nontraditional students require that we do things differently if we expect Idaho to meet the 60% goal and have the workforce we need.

Idaho’s community and technical colleges play a critical role in filling the skills gap in Idaho’s workforce and they provide the perfect on-ramp for non-traditional students.

The Continuous Enrollment Initiative was designed to be a game changer that helps Idaho’s community and technical colleges retool their practices to attract and retain non-traditional students and help fuel Idaho’s economy.

Given a support structure, nontraditional students can drive Idaho’s economic engine and live out their dreams.

IDAHO SKILLS GAP DATA

Idaho’s workforce development trends reflect an exponentially widening skills gap between what employers need — highly trained workers and a supply of graduates from two-year Idaho institutions — and the state’s current rate of degree attainment. To meet the need, Idaho’s higher education institutions need to double the rate of credential attainment by 2020 because:

- By 2018, Idaho will be third in the nation for the number of jobs requiring some post-secondary education. ¹
- Between 2015-2020, 86% of all new job openings in Idaho will be filled by workers with a college credential. ²
- Almost half of these jobs will go to people with an associate degree or training certificate. ³
- At the current rate of credential attainment, 46% of these jobs will lack trained Idaho workers.



PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

FIVE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN IDAHO

The J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation in 2010 invited six higher education institutions in Idaho to submit proposals to participate in the Continuous Enrollment pilot program. Five proposals were funded in 2011:

- College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls
- Eastern Idaho Technical College, Idaho Falls
- Idaho State University, College of Technology, Pocatello
- Lewis-Clark State College, Lewiston
- North Idaho College, Coeur d' Alene

Each institution was required to assemble a cross-disciplinary team including representatives from adult basic education, institutional research, student services, financial aid and administration. They were tasked to develop a student retention plan for nontraditional students. The plan was aimed at earning a certificate or degree without incurring overwhelming debt.

The teams were also required to select from a set of proven practices based on national best practices designed to lower barriers and develop resilience. Their plans focused on practices that:

- Deliver intrusive academic advising
- Teach college navigation skills
- Match student participants with trained student mentors
- Group students into cohorts
- Monitor student progress and accountability
- Provide accelerated remediation

THE STUDENTS

Nearly five hundred students, described as “educationally disadvantaged learners”, participated. The average age of participants was 28. Upon entering the program,

- 80% had a General Educational Development (GED) background
- 73% required remedial coursework
- 90% tested below college level in their academic skills
- 22% identified as Non-white (almost twice the number for 2010 census)
- 44% enrolled full-time
- 33% enrolled part-time
- 22% mix-enrolled (combination of full-time/part-time enrollment during six semesters)
- 32% of students dropped out, almost half of the rate of a typical Idaho student

All Continuous Enrollment students received some type of scholarship or financial assistance as part of the project. Ninety percent of the participants were eligible for FAFSA with Pell Grant assistance. The remaining 10% were awarded scholarships to fill other financial gaps.



RETENTION AND COMPLETION STRATEGIES AT WORK

The use of data was a foundational component of analyzing the project's success from day one. CE projects were required to report on-going and in-depth student progress data and make improvements to their plan based on that data.

The qualitative and quantitative data research methods employed by this initiative helped identify six practices that measurably increased student retention-to-completion rates:

1. **Intrusive, just-in-time advising** provided participants with a clear roadmap of semester-by-semester courses leading to their credential goal. Those with specific and targeted credential goals and clear course milestones had an overall retention rate of 78%. Students lacking a clearly articulated credential goal had an overall retention rate of 56%. Staff ensured students did not fall through the cracks by closely monitoring class attendance and through regular face-to-face meetings.
2. **College skills and success courses** provided participants with a cohesive set of navigational tools and skills designed to promote a successful transition into the college culture including financial and career planning, computer competency, note-taking, study and test preparation, time management and self organization. Eighty-seven percent of the student participants completed this accredited course during their initial entry into the project. The courses were for elective credit, ranging in one to three credits.
3. **Pre-COMPASS* training** provided participants with a structured review of key math and English concepts prior to taking placement tests that determined the need for remediation. Participants completing pre-COMPASS training produced math and writing scores that were 10-12% higher on the COMPASS entrance test when compared to other GED entry-level students. Retention rates for participants in pre-COMPASS training were 80% versus 69% for other pilot project participants who did not complete pre-COMPASS training.
4. **Student cohort groups** provided participants with a built-in academic and social learning community. This practice provides vital student-to-student support and a strong sense of connection to the institution and faculty. Participants with similar placement test results were grouped in an academic cohort for required courses. Every student participant not placed in an academic or social cohort group dropped out.
5. **Peer Mentorship** provided participants with weekly student-to-student sessions with trained student mentors. Student mentors were selected through a rigorous interview process focused on academic proficiencies, communication skills and community service motivation. Mentors received 10-15 hours of training. Survey results from two pilot projects indicated that more than 87% of mentored participants rated mentorship as a positive retention factor.
6. **Accelerated remediation programs** were designed to quickly move participants through required remedial coursework. Two pilot projects developed accelerated remediation programs with instructor-led math and writing workshops in addition to the regular class schedule. Participants had a course completion rate (C grade or better) of 81% compared to 54% for cohort peers taking the same course without an accelerated learning component.



RESULTS

Based on almost three years of student progress data at the five participating institutions, student achievement benchmarks were measured and analyzed, including the percentage of credits earned, grade point average, credential goal completion and retention rates.

Although grantees used of retention and completion practices that fit best for their institution, key findings emerged:

- **Participants' average Grade Point Average was 2.79**
 - ✓ *Compared to 2.57 GPA for the general Idaho freshman student population and 1.89 GPA for students entering with a GED*
- **Almost 70% of participants were retained in programs after the first year**
 - ✓ *Almost 500% increase over the national average ⁴*
- **74% of all credits attempted in the first year were completed**
 - ✓ *Compared to 59% credit completion rate for a traditional student at the end of their community college freshman year*
- **100% of students who did not participate in a designed student cohort dropped out**
- **86% of participants used accelerated remediation programs or tutorial programs**
- **Participants with a mixed enrollment status were more successful in completing credits, had a higher GPA and had higher second-year retention rates (92%)**
- **Participants who developed credential-related goals through intrusive academic advising had GPA's that were twice as high as those who did not develop credential goals (2.53 GPA vs. 1.16 GPA)**
- **17% of participants achieved a certificate or associate-level degree within two years**
 - ✓ *A North Virginia Community College study reported the graduation rates of all GED entry students at 4.6% over a five-year period and 11.8% over a seven-year period*



RECOMMENDATIONS

This pilot project provides proof that Idaho's community and technical colleges can transform their approach and employ proven strategies to ensure student retention and credential completion. It also provides evidence that these strategies need to be scaled so that all incoming students benefit. Due to the performance-based outcomes achieved by these projects the Foundation has rewarded these projects with Phase 2 funding to help begin the scaling process.

Scaling these strategies are both a societal and economic imperative and should not be left to the responsibility of the philanthropic community. The question the Foundation asks is: "Does Idaho's political and higher education leaders have the will to make these strategies a priority"? Money helps focus state efforts and it is needed, but it is only part of the solution.

In order to scale this to the level needed to meet the state's 60% goal and ensure prosperity for future generations, the Foundation recommends the following:

1. The State Board of Education should require all higher education institutions to commit to increasing the number of non-traditional students who enter and complete a credential or degree by **tying performance-based retention and completion outcomes to funding incentives**.
2. **Student debt** is a big issue — not just for those from lower socioeconomic strata. Leaders and professors in Idaho's higher education institutions must help ensure that students who start have every opportunity to complete their program as soon as possible and at the lowest cost possible.
3. Take inventory of current **student recruitment approaches** and whether they hinder access to under-served and non-traditional students.
4. Ensure these proven student **support practices are adopted and embedded** throughout Idaho's higher education system including the policies, practices and culture so that all students benefit.
5. Develop more **private-public sector partnerships** to provide student scholarships, expertise, entrepreneurial opportunities, internships, etc. because they are less encumbered by politics and help the business community to develop more.

¹ 2010, Georgetown University; Center on Education and the Workforce (data based on 2012 IPEDS)

² 2013, Complete College America, The Idaho Report, National Center for Statistics (data based on 2012 IPEDs)

³ 2013, Promising Practices: A Matter of Degrees Report, Center for Community College Engagement (CCCSE)

⁴ 2001, Research Report No 13-01, High School Graduates and GED Recipients, Northern Virginia Community College Office of Institutional Research

** ACT Compass is a computer-adaptive college placement test that Evaluates incoming students' skill levels in reading, writing, math and English as a second language and helps place students in appropriate courses and connect them to the resources they need to achieve academic success

