PATHWAYS TO ALIGN CAREER AND EDUCATIONAL CHOICES FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Achieving the Dream ™

PREFACE

Now, more than ever, more adults must earn college credentials in order to earn family sustaining wages and to help fuel and sustain a robust national economy. That means that institutions of higher education must do all they can to help adult students enroll in college and complete a postsecondary credential. Achieving the Dream emphasizes a student-centered approach, which calls for ensuring that the burden of accessing supports within the college is not on the student and that colleges intentionally design a college experience that increases success for adult students.

Achieving the Dream undertook an exploratory study to better understand challenges that adult learners face and to identify potential solutions. The study, supported by Lumina Foundation, focused on three types of strategies that are critical for encouraging adult learners to engage and ultimately succeed in postsecondary education: prior learning assessment, supports tailored to adult learners, and clarifying program pathways that guide adult students to academic and career success.

The study scanned more than 200 colleges to gauge how they were enhancing non-credit-to-credit pathways, and providing other supports for adult learners. Many common themes emerged. Distilling what we learned, Achieving the Dream identified three guiding principles:

1. **Easy student navigation.** Technology tools, including college websites, that are designed to help adult learners navigate their educational journey must be clearly and logically designed.

2. **Connection by design.** Students appreciate knowing the steps they need to take to succeed. It is therefore essential that career and guided pathways as well as wraparound student services all share the same underlying design principle of seamless connectivity.

3. **Institutional champions** and the college culture. Highly motivated individuals or small groups are often at the heart of successful initiatives to serve adult learners. Institutions that excel in this work often exhibit a defining set of hallmarks and an institutional culture dedicated to helping adults succeed.

Among further findings, the report reveals the vital importance of credit for prior learning, enabling students to demonstrate and receive college credit for prior college-level learning. Noting that from the student's perspective, there is no true distinction between a "career pathway" and a "guided pathway," the report underscores the importance of ensuring pathways which align career and educational choices. These insights are consistent with our experience. In Achieving the Dream's work with the seven colleges in the Northeast Resiliency Consortium, we found that when colleges connect noncredit and credit programs, these pathways can smooth the way for students to work toward a college degree even if they begin their studies in a non-degree program.

This report looks at the three areas we defined as particularly relevant to helping adult students and the steps we took to identify the guiding principles. Summaries highlight this work in practice at several institutions: Milwaukee Area Technical College (WI), Cleveland State Community College (TN), Northcentral Technical College (WI), Mountwest Community and Technical College (WV), Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas, Blue Mountain Community College (OR), Southwest Wisconsin Technical College, Spokane Falls Community College (WA), Anoka-Ramsey Community College (MN), Community College of Rhode Island, and Lakeshore Technical College (WI). At the end of the report we include an inventory of college practices currently in use to attract and retain adult learners. These practices are divided into three tiers and allow readers to consider how they might adopt and adapt these practices for use at their own institutions.

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Achieving the Dream

INTRODUCTION

Going back to college as an adult can be daunting, but for many adults that step is essential. More than ever before, more jobs today require at least some college-level education, and that demand is expected to increase. Employment requiring a high school diploma only is rapidly disappearing; such jobs, for example, comprised some 80 percent of the more than 7 million jobs that were lost during the Great Recession. In contrast, 99 percent of jobs created during the recovery from that downturn require at least some college-level training.[1] Given these trends, it is clear that ensuring that an ample supply of individuals are able to earn college credentials is an imperative for a prosperous economy and society.

The Lumina Foundation's Goal 2025—to ensure that 60 percent of adults are college educated—translates into a need for about 11 million college degrees by 2025.[2,3] A fundamental challenge in that regard is that there aren't enough traditional-aged college students to realize that goal.[4] A critical implication, therefore, is that higher education must do all it can to entice more adults to complete a college credential. Adult learners have maintained a steady 40 percent share of the postsecondary student population in degree-granting institutions since the 1990s, but the good news in this case is that projections suggest they are the now fastest growing student population (Figure 1).

Adult learners in higher education (often categorized as "nontraditional students," or more recently, as "post-traditional learners") typically face one or more common barriers to success[5] see Box 1 and Box 2). To help them overcome those barriers and reach their educational goals, nontraditional students require nontraditional approaches. Unfortunately, the needs of adult learners are not being fully addressed by the outdated policies, programming, and culture that still dominate most institutions of higher learning. For the most part, those practices were developed decades ago and are targeted to high school graduates attending four-year institutions as full-time students.[6] The rise of post-traditional learners and the need to meet their particular needs is one of the single most significant driving factors in the transformation that is under way today in higher education.[7]

FIGURE 1: RATE OF ADULT LEARNER ENROLLMENTS WILL OUTPACE TRADITIONAL STUDENTS
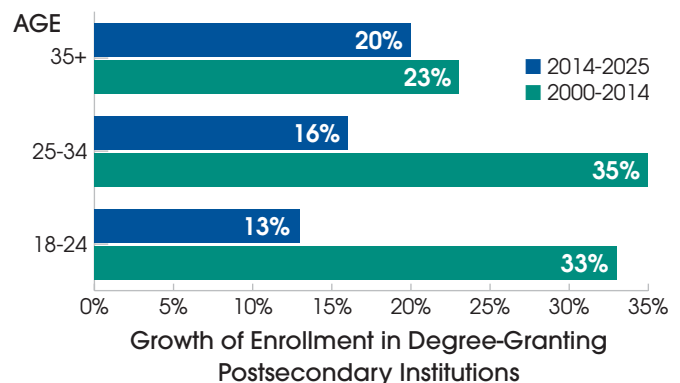
Source: Hussar, W.J., and Bailey, T.M. (2017). Projections of Education Statistics to 2025 (NCES 2017-019). U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

While many adults have never attended college and are significantly under-prepared for the rigors of postsecondary coursework, many potential adult learners signal that they are prepared for higher learning by virtue of having either successfully completed some college courses or obtained a professional certification or license—or both (Table 1). The study also shows that certificates have become a stepping stone to college degrees. Twenty percent of certificate holders go on to get two year degrees and an additional 13 percent ultimately get Bachelor's degrees.[8]

TABLE 1: Holding a Non-credit Certification or License Correlates With Higher Education Levels		
Academic Attainment	Total Employed (thousands, 2016 data)	Hold Certification or License
Total, 25 years and over	132,444	27.1%
Less than a high school diploma	9,884	8.3%
High school graduates, no college	33,801	15.9%
Some college, no degree	21,668	22.6%
Associate degree	14,718	35.0%
Bachelor's degree and higher	52,374	37.4%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016. (www.bls.gov/cps/certifications-and-licenses.htm#data)

Given the critical role that adult students can play in fulfilling Goal 2025 and other national and state initiatives to boost college completion, postsecondary institutions should continue to make significant structural changes that are firmly aligned with the needs of these students.

Much progress has been made toward understanding what these students need, though much work remains to be done. The need to focus on building capacity to link non-credit and credit programming was emphasized in the work of the Trade Adjustment Act Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program, while the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and proposed Perkins grant reauthorization stress a need for career pathways tied to the demands of regional labor markets. Other programs that have sought to advance similar goals include the National Science Foundation's Advanced Technical Education (ATE), PELL demonstration pilots, and the increased drive to create apprenticeships for students.

Given the range in challenges and obstacles that adult learners face, no "one size fits all" approach can meet all their diverse needs. That is reflected in the notable range of policies, practices, outreach, and initiatives at the nation's community colleges that are focused on adult learners. Across this diversity, however, certain trends are evident.

BOX 1: ADULT LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS

Adult learners are students over the age of 25 who may have some of the following characteristics:

- Delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finishes high school)

- Attends college part-time for at least part of the academic year;

- Works full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled in college

- Is considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid

- Has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others)

- Is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents)

- Does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school)

AREAS OF FOCUS

This exploratory study focuses on three areas critical to encouraging adult learners to engage and ultimately succeed in postsecondary education: prior learning assessment, resources specific to adult learner needs, and the pathway approach.

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT. PLA (or Credit for Prior Learning) is the recognition of learning that occurs outside of the traditional, credit-based college classroom setting. PLA's motivation is to avoid forcing students to take unnecessary coursework to master material that they have already learned. When colleges provide adult learners with academic credit that can be applied toward a college credential, students are more likely to persist from term to term and year to year. In addition, costs are lowered because students are taking fewer unnecessary courses. With fewer courses to take, a student's time to complete a credential is also reduced.

PLA can provide credit for a wide range of nontraditional learning, from employment and military service or training to an individual's personal educational experiences through their own extracurricular activities, such as travel, hobbies, civic activities, or volunteer services. In addition, students enrolled in non-credit training programs that align with traditional credit programs (such as in healthcare, information technology, or engineering technology) may be provided with academic credit upon successful completion. Students may also hold licensures and certifications garnered through rigorous training programs outside of traditional academic structures. Awarding credit for this type of programming is typically accomplished through non-credit-to-credit articulation crosswalks. A crosswalk is a matrix that aligns college courses, and their associated credits, to a non-credit experience. An example crosswalk would be a table that shows College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams, passing scores, and the respective institutional course and number of credits that are transcripted by the college when a student earns a successful score on the CLEP exam.

PLA has been found to be most effective when it is utilized in multiple ways. In addition to meeting program requirements, PLA can be leveraged to provide students with advanced standing within a program. It can also serve as a waiver for course prerequisites.

ADULT LEARNER RESOURCES. Many college initiatives are designed specifically with the adult learner in mind. These students have different needs than those of traditional college students, including balancing family and career responsibilities. One of the clearest means of supporting adult learners is to offer innovative academic programming and worker-friendly scheduling that may include a cohort model of enrollment. Innovative financial support is another key support; increasing both the quantity and variety of financial aid is essential to engage adult learners. Adult learners also benefit from a variety of support services, such as child care and transportation assistance. These can take the form of subsidies, guidance, or free services. Also helpful are faculty, advisors, counselors, and administrators who have been specifically trained to address adult students' distinct needs and are available at times that adult students are on campus. In addition, campus engagement initiatives that focus specifically on adult students have also been shown to improve persistence and completion.

PATHWAYS. Students are more likely to succeed in their coursework, persist, and complete a credential in a timely manner when they choose their program and develop a plan that specifies required coursework and milestones early on in their academic journey. The use of pathways represents an intentional shift from the traditional structure of academic offerings which students are expected to navigate on their own toward a more prescriptive and cohesive strategy.

Curricular maps, together with critical support services such as regular, meaningful touchpoints with advisors (referred to as proactive advising), are a common feature of pathways.

In higher education, there are commonly two types of defined pathways: guided pathways and career pathways. The distinctions between these two pathways can be subtle and difficult to discern. The development of career pathways has often been driven by a combination of federal government (WIOA), state governments, and employers, as well as community college and public workforce systems.

Guided pathways is an integrated, institution-wide approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent and structured academic experiences, informed by available evidence, that guide each student effectively and efficiently from her/his point of entry through to attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials and careers with value in the labor market. This definition of guided pathways was developed Achieving the Dream and other organizational partners in the AACC Pathways Project.

Career pathways are like guided pathways in that they are also designed in a prescriptive manner that accelerates persistence and completion and include wraparound support services. Career pathways differ from guided pathways in that they are often seen as a workforce development strategy. A hallmark of career pathways is that they include stackable credentials that make it possible for students to advance over time to successively higher levels of employment.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

To better understand some of these issues, challenges, and opportunities, we undertook a comprehensive survey of websites at the nation's community colleges. IPEDs data was obtained through the federal reporting website collegereportcard. ed.gov/data.[9] We focused on two-year public institutions that predominantly grant associate degrees. In all, over 900 institutions were assessed. Given this large number, a customized data tool was developed to screen the sites for specific key words and phrases.[10] Institutions were then scored based on the presence of specific keywords and phrases.[11] To further winnow this group of institutions, schools classified as 4-year institutions in two or more IPEDs classifications were removed from the sample set.

An assessment rubric was then developed and applied to more than 200 of the highest-scoring institutions, as determined through the screen.[12] Considerable work went into development of the rubric. After the rubric was finalized and approved, a standardized approach was applied to each college. Findings were collected in a large table in Excel.

High scoring colleges were treated in the following manner:

- The institution's website was navigated from the perspective of a new user. Emphasis was placed on locating information relevant for adult learners, prior learning assessment, and pathways (both guided and career). Notes were recorded in a session log and rubric database.

- Once initial research was completed, searching was performed on the institution's website for keywords related to the categories above. Additional notes were taken, and rubric scoring was performed for several areas.

- During the web session, relevant institutional artifacts were downloaded or otherwise recorded for preservation (e.g., via screenshots), and catalogued in an institutional artifact database organized by state and institution. A wide range of artifacts were collected, including student PLA guides/handbooks and forms, pathway visualizations, institutional policies and procedures, PLA request forms, presentations describing pathway implementation strategies, student success stories, career pathway application forms, information about meta-majors, crosswalk tables, fee schedules, portfolio processes, course competency check sheets, strategic plans, and guides for faculty. (This list is not exhaustive.)

- A short summary was noted for each session and recorded.

- A qualitative score was assigned based on the research to allow for rapid sorting of colleges at a later date.

- If innovative or outstanding work/information was identified, this was added to the file as appropriate.

Low scoring colleges were screened via a less-intensive web session. Schools that showed positive results upon manual searching were then given a more extensive web session.

Institutions with a 0 score were treated in an expedited fashion:

- A final iteration of scanning was performed on the set of URLs (revealing no new information).

- Each school was manually examined in an expedited fashion, limited to simple keyword searching and rubric completion.

- Any schools that were found to have substantive information were given a more in-depth web session and that information was recorded.

Ultimately, institutions were given a final scoring between 1 and 6, based on criteria delineated in Table 2.

While many community colleges have begun to invest in resources and initiatives for adult learners, many institutions have not yet prioritized this emerging cohort

TABLE 2: Scoring Rubric and Results			
Rating	Description	n	%
1	No indication of study-related initiatives or practices	57	28%
2	Identifiable minor to moderate interest worth looking into	48	24%
3	Identifiable artifacts for resource set	53	26%
4	Candidate with study-related initiatives likely in development	16	8%
5	Candidate in at least one of three study-related areas	25	12%
6	Candidate in each of the three study-related areas	3	1%

in ways that fully encourages them to attend college or that are intentionally designed to help them succeed in college once they enroll. We found that only four percent of public two-year institutions include mention of adult learners or prior learning on their main web pages, only six percent mention career pathways, and just two percent included references to guided pathways (Table 3).[13] In all, eight percent of institutions had at least one mention of any screened keyword, and less than one percent had two; none had more than two. (It should be noted that in some cases keywords on our list might be mentioned on a given website but might not get captured by our screening technique due to webpage coding design or the location of the information.)

The decision was made to focus on schools that ranked 5 and 6 on our scoring rubric.

From this initial work, a set of 17 schools that appeared to prioritize and implement promising practices were selected for further investigation. Criteria for identification of these institutions included the following: assuring that the onus for finding information about promising practices is placed as much on the institution as possible, and not the student; that promising practices are prominent in the institution's information and communication; that promising practices are clearly defined and articulated to students; and, most critical of all, that the institution's culture embraces, fosters, and financially supports these new approaches. A more comprehensive assessment of each of these institutions was conducted using publicly available information.

We reached out to those schools with a request for an in-depth conversation about their institution through a telephone interview. The nine interviewed schools are the subjects of the summaries found below. The individuals interviewed at the nine schools represented a variety of campus roles, including such titles as vice

TABLE 3: Prominence of Selected Keywords on Community College Websites		
Keywords	# total	% total
Adult Learner	36	4%
Prior Learning	53	4%
Career Pathway	57	6%
Guided Pathway	15	2%
No Keywords	826	91%
At least one keyword	77	8%
Two Keywords	6	<1%

chancellor and vice president for instruction and learning, vice president for academic affairs and student services, associate provost, dean of business, director of curriculum, college preparation, and career pathways, coordinator of credit for prior learning, director of training, and prior learning specialist. Interviewees were asked the same set of questions, which covered three broad areas: prior learning assessment, adult learners, and pathways. Specific questions explored the depth of the institution's activities in each area.

Based on the telephone interviews and further discussions, four institutions were selected for follow-up site visits. (One site visit was conducted virtually due to time constraints.) The protocol of questions that guided the site visits included inquiries about the extent and depth of the institution's work around prior learning assessment, adult learners, and pathways. Site visits included extensive conversations with key stakeholders, process mapping, artifact acquisition, and discussions about relevant data. For the five schools that received telephone interviews but not site visits, summaries were developed using publicly available information accessible via the institution's main website and links from that site.

SUMMARIES

Over 200 institutions were investigated during this project; presented below are a sampling of the specific examples of institutional practices identified. Details were garnered from a combination of publicly available information, phone interviews, and site visits.

Milwaukee Area Technical College

Wisconsin has prioritized adult learners through significant investments in career pathways over the last decade. The state has made significant investments in developing adult learner resources; for example, the state now includes credit for prior learning within its outcome-based funding model, which drives financial disbursement to its 16 technical colleges.

Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), the largest two-year college in the state, has distinguished itself through a culture of student success, open communication, and early adoption of new practices. In addition to having well-developed prior learning assessment practices, for example, MATC has invested significant resources to support and bolster the state's career pathways initiatives. Further, MATC embraces a "right to succeed" culture, as demonstrated by its adult learner scholarship initiative.

Strategies for Prior Learning Assessment

The student PLA experience. A student who comes to MATC with a high school degree, work experience, and perhaps some college credit might have an experience like the following. Walking in off the street, the student might first speak with a frontline staff member at the MATC Welcome Center, where they would be directed to complete a college application. Students interested in prior learning credit would be directed to the web inquiry form, meet directly with a credit-for-prior-learning (CPL) specialist, or a military advisor. (A military advisor is specifically hired and trained to handle veteran and active military

students.) They might also be directed to speak with an advisor/counselor who is assigned to specific career clusters and can also guide students through the application process.

Students entering through a traditional admissions/college application process can indicate an interest in prior learning assessment while completing the application (which includes directed PLA questions). MATC admissions can then alert MATC's CPL specialist to reach out to the student with further guidance.

Wisconsin developed a web-based PLA inquiry form for students to complete and has mandated that all PLA credits transfer seamlessly across each of the state's technical colleges. (Discussions are under way to provide the same universal transfer opportunities with the state's public and private 4-year institutions). This guided form asks students to select from one or more areas in which they feel they may be able to earn prior learning credits. These areas include military service?, apprenticeships?, volunteer work?, certifications?, work experience?, general

education?, extensive self-learning?, and professional development (e.g., seminars, workshops, conferences, and specialized training) ?. The form also asks which programs students are considering, although they can select "unknown."

Once that input is completed, a student profile is created in the state's database, which is accessible by all participating institutions. An email is automatically generated and pushed out to the institution. An administrator reviews the information and then, depending on what areas the student selected, alerts the appropriate department to reach out to the student. After students self-identify the kind of work/life experience they are interested in, a form email is sent to the student. That email outlines next steps in the process and includes information about placement testing, submitting prior transcripts, and the kinds of artifacts students would need to justify their prior learning experience. Students who are interested in experiential learning, which would require the completion of a portfolio process, are funneled to the CPL specialist, who connects them with the appropriate faculty member. The email also includes information about financial aid. All the information provided in the email is also found on the CPL website. The student's application process can also be supported by a campus visit.

Students may have a conversation with a member of the advising or admissions staff about prior learning, after which they might be directed to the website to complete an inquiry form. The college also offers in-person events, called Quick Starts and Smart Starts, which provide students a one-stop experience for application and registration. Students might be informed ahead of time about what documentation for CPL they might need, which can help finalize the process.

Automatic equating of PLA credits. Some prior learning can be equated automatically based on existing crosswalk information.14 CPL specialists are also empowered to manually equate items that have not been previously added to the auto-equate information. There is a grant initiative focused on student retention, which includes working with faculty

to increase the defined PLA offerings that can be used in this auto-equate process.

CPL specialists are also able to access military transcripts and can help equate this information based on military certification crosswalks that MATC has established (see www.usmc-mccs.org/articles/how-to-pull-your-joint-services-transcript-jst/). Students interested in taking external challenge exams (such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests) are directed back to the MATC admissions office, which houses the testing center.
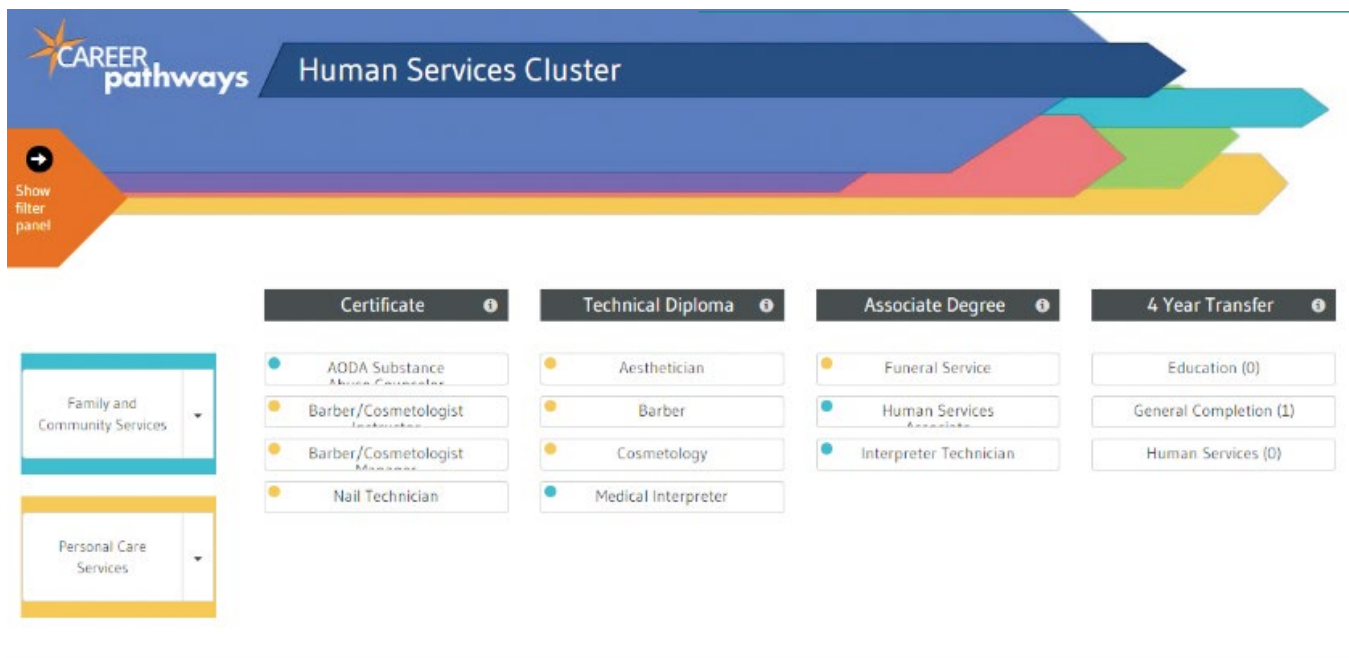
Once a student completes an application, a "starting package" of their prior learning is assembled from a combination of their transcripts and an evaluation by a CPL specialists (which may include crosswalks, external testing, or portfolio assessment). This information helps inform the juncture from which the student will embark on a designated academic pathway.

A comprehensive CPL manual, developed by the registrar's office and intended for administrators, faculty, and staff, is accessible behind a password-protected firewall on the college's portal, where users can also find a formal CPL request form and spreadsheets with auto-equate crosswalks for various disciplines.

MATC has tracked steady growth in inquiries about credit for prior learning experience (CPLE), which has also led students to enroll in increasing numbers. Between 2014 and 2017, for example, the number of online inquiries about CPLE jumped from 197 to 642. The number of students who then enrolled during or after the term in which they inquired about CPLE rose from 45 to 221 in the same period.

Strategies for Student Supports

Commit to Complete. MATC's student population includes 56 percent adult learners (defined by MATC as a financially independent student over the age of 25). Adult learners have access to several need-based grant programs. A standout initiative is "Commit to Complete," which is fully funded by the college's foundation through contributions from MATC

CAREER pathways — Human Services Cluster

Show filter panel

Certificate ⓘ	Technical Diploma ⓘ	Associate Degree ⓘ	4 Year Transfer ⓘ
AODA Substance Abuse Counselor	Aesthetician	Funeral Service	Education (0)
Barber/Cosmetologist Instructor	Barber	Human Services Associate	General Completion (1)
Barber/Cosmetologist Manager	Cosmetology	Interpreter Technician	Human Services (0)
Nail Technician	Medical Interpreter		

Family and Community Services

Personal Care Services

employees and the surrounding community. That program follows a model similar to one for high school students (MATC Promise). Commit to Complete is set to soft-launch in spring 2018 with an initial cohort. The initial adult learner cohort will be drawn from the most impoverished zip code in MATC's service area, which is also the most impoverished zip code in the state.

Students selected for the program will be required to have previously earned 24 institutional credits (of which six can be earned through CPL), to not have attended college for several years, and to have an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of $5,200-5,300 (equivalent to full Pell eligibility). Once accepted, students must enroll for at least six credits per semester. They must remain enrolled continuously to maintain their standing in the program. Continuous enrollment is limited to fall and spring semesters only (students are not penalized for not enrolling in winter or summer term coursework, although they are eligible to do so at their discretion). The program is designed so that students will have full tuition covered up through conferral of an associate degree.

As a point of comparison, the high school version of this program now has three rolling cohorts. Each iteration of the program is adjusted based on the

year prior's experience. For example, EFC was increased from $3,000-4,500 to the full eligibility of Pell ($5,200-5,300).

Commit to Complete also provides students with the full battery of MATC's academic and social-psychology support systems as well as proactive advising and closely monitored tutoring. While none of this is mandatory with the soft launch (to ensure maximum accessibility at first), criteria for participation may be adjusted for the second-year cohort based on the first year's outcomes. MATC plans to continue providing this level of support under the institution's consigned model of pathway implementation; delivery modalities may be adjusted to be less traditional—for example, encompassing year-round scheduling.

Strategies for Clarifying Program Paths

Career pathways. Wisconsin implemented career pathways at the state level several years ago. Each of the state's 16 career and technical colleges (CTCs) was given resources for pathway implementation. State approval is required to implement a given career pathway, and pathways must lead to specific jobs, but implementation is independent for each

college. (Career pathways developed at the institution are sent to the state for approval. Career pathways have to meet the state's criteria, the most critical being that the careers at the end of the pathway are high priority occupations (HPOs).

While all 16 CTCs are implementing career pathways, MATC was an early adopter, and has committed significant resources to this initiative. Early adoption stemmed from the work of the provost (now president) of the institution. Early development included a significant number of college-wide discussions that led to a 3-year action plan. Programs were assessed for potential pathways, Deans and associate deans were consulted to get an understanding of what needed to be done. Associate deans, working closely with the faculty, were tasked with completing the work.

This initiative has helped transform MATC's culture. Discussions about programs now focus on pathways rather than individual credentials. The hierarchal structure of pathways is also very clear, starting with career clusters that each contain several pathways that in turn lead to specific credentials. All credits earned toward a certificate program must be stackable directly into associate degrees. These requirements led to curricular changes in many areas. Curricular revisions entailed splitting and joining courses and shifting their order, all to ensure that credits were 100 percent stackable and that students did not take courses that were not essential to their pathways.

There are two versions of career pathways, each designed for a different audience: interactive, web-based pathways, and downloadable, static PDF pathways. The interactive versions are designed to be used by students for career exploration and decision-making, while the PDF files are used internally by faculty, advisors, and counselors. As of the summer of 2017, there were 94 completed pathways overall (pathways are defined and counted based on

the terminal credential received by the student). Both the web-based and PDF plans are updated by information sent through the MATC marketing department, which in turn updates the website. Career data are updated once a year.

Visual pathway maps, called Pathway Plans (see graphic), include information on both career options and transferring to 4-year colleges. In addition to graphics that visualize the pathways, an internal website houses a variety of related resources for faculty and counselors. These include advising documents that drill down to the course level and include the various beginning entry points that are available to students based on results from placement testing.

Now that career pathways are firmly established at MATC and have taken root in the institution's culture, phase two of the implementation has begun. Nine pathways that were unable to be implemented during the first phase (due to the need for additional curricular revisions) will now be implemented. (For example, a degree in aviation was delayed due to the revision of the FAA flight manual.)

Pathways. Now that career pathways have helped redefine the academic "roadmap" for MATC students, the institution is looking ahead to the implementation of guided pathways, which includes wraparound services for the student's educational plan. MATC has been accepted into the second cohort of AACC's Guided Pathways 2.0 initiative. The underlying premise is to make college use of pathways more prescriptive in order to help students be more likely to persist and complete. MATC will focus on providing services, support, and promotion for its strong curricular model to ensure students are served in a more comprehensive way. This ten-year project requires a three-year commitment from participating institutions.

Cleveland State Community College

Cleveland State Community College (CSCC), located in southeastern Tennessee, is a medium-sized urban institution that prioritizes adult learners through various initiatives. This work is in part driven by "Drive to 55," Governor Bill Haslem's variant of Lumina's goal for college completion, which seeks to ensure that 55 percent of state residents have a college degree or certificate by 2025.

Strategies for Prior Learning Assessment

PLA taskforce. CSCC first convened a task force focused on prior learning assessment in 2012. Prior to that work, students coming into the college with prior learning were treated on a case-by-case basis, with no standardized systems in place. Students were enrolled in coursework before learning about PLA opportunities, as opposed to the ideal of learning of these prior to enrollment. Charged with overhauling the institution's decentralized and ad hoc approach to PLA, the taskforce drove cultural change within the institution, providing a unique opportunity for the non-credit and academic areas to come together and align their work. Once recommendations were implemented in 2014, the institution applied for and was awarded a Veteran's Reconnect grant through the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. The primary focus of this initiative is to develop crosswalks between occupational areas as defined by the military and academic programming. The initiative is also designed to create structures for enhanced prior learning assessment for adult learners. Its secondary goal was to leverage these resources, once developed, to a broader adult learner population.

PLA specialists. As part of the grant initiative, a PLA Specialist position was created (the person hired had completed the PLA process at CSCC in 2006). The PLA Specialist is also responsible for streamlining and standardizing non-credit-to-credit processes overall, and for determining ways for these credits to be applied as program-specific credits rather than toward general education electives.

The PLA Specialist's responsibilities include developing non-credit-to-credit crosswalks for common military

specialties. Students typically learn about these opportunities through the Office of Veterans Affairs or through the counselor/coordinator of Adult Student Services. Military transcripts are ordered and assessed for possible PLA opportunities. Non-credit-to-credit is handled on a case-by-case basis at the individual level. Because this process can take a few weeks, outreach is done in advance of classes to ensure it is completed prior to the start of a semester.

In addition to the work focused on veterans, non-credit-to-credit crosswalk tables are available for students in the business department. These include information technology and advanced technology.

Articulation to credit was developed in partnership with regional companies. (Meetings were held with companies where the college catalog was reviewed to see which courses, based on their descriptions and syllabi, would earn credit for students based on the company's training program or job descriptions.) The companies took the initiative to create a draft crosswalk and worked with college personnel to flesh out details.

Strategies for Student Supports

Adult Promise scholarship. Perhaps the most significant initiative focusing on adult learners is the Adult Promise scholarship, which is fully funded by the institution's foundation. Related to the Tennessee Promise initiative ("free community college for all"), the scholarship was created some two years ago at the suggestion of the institution's president. This "last-dollar" scholarship covers costs of tuition and fees not already provided by federal or state financial aid.

Tennessee Reconnect program. Between spring 2015 and fall 2015, the state offered block grants under a program called Tennessee Reconnect, which is designed to help adult students engage in higher education. The money was distributed to institutions based on student count. Guidelines permitted these funds to be used as last-dollar scholarships for adult students, but the requirements and conditions set by the state turned out to be too restrictive. These included the need for students to

have completed 30 credits within a program and to have been out of school for a certain amount of time. Of the $57,000 provided to CSCC, less than $2,000 was utilized. After the state revised the program the following year, students were no longer required to have completed 30 credits hours, nor did they need to enter back into the academic program they left. In addition, academic progress issues were able to be initially overlooked (however, students might still be denied federal financial aid due to lack of progress).

Childcare assistance. Students at CSCC can also receive support through a childcare assistance program. That program is relatively small (15 students in the first year, 2016-2017). Data show that 13 of the 15 students (87percent) were still enrolled or had completed a program after the first year. An additional student entered the program in year two, which is currently under way. This program is funded through a gift from CSCC's foundation.

Ready to Reconnect grants. With adult learner enrollment falling, the college sought a one-year Ready to Reconnect grant, beginning in August 2015, through the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC). To apply for funding, the institution was required to complete an Adult Learning Focused Institution assessment through CAEL, which informed the proposal's content and goals (this self-assessment is a Noel-Levitz instrument specific to adult learners). A report outlining strengths and weaknesses showed that one weakness was a need for the college to shift resources to a dedicated counselor serving adult learners. A counselor position was restructured. All adult learner services were placed under this position. The grant also provided funding for financial and basic computer skills, funding to begin the Adult Student Organization (see below), and the means to purchase scheduling software.

Office of Adult Services. Based on information from the assessment, CSCC created an Office of Adult Services, housed in the Academic Counseling Office. The Office of Adult Services has a single, dedicated adult learner counselor,

a position funded by the previously mentioned Ready to Reconnect grant. The goals is that from the moment an adult learner contacts the school, they are engaged by the counselor, who stays connected with them throughout their academic career. This office serves as a funnel point for all adult learner resources and houses the previously mentioned childcare initiative and various retention initiatives. These initiatives include regular outreach and meaningful connection to students during their enrollment ("proactive advising"). For example, students are reminded when it is time to complete their FAFSA or see an advisor, or can receive information about scholarships. This approach provides a more personalized, hands-on experience for adult learners, helping them feel more connected to the campus.

The Office of Adult Services also houses an Adult Student Organization. While serving a relatively small group of students, the Adult Student Organization serves a deep need and helps adult students develop and sustain a sense of belonging and connection to the campus, the initiative also shows that the institution makes the specific needs and goals of adult students a priority.

First-year initiative. The college piloted a first-year initiative in 2012-2013 (with 231 students), and positive results led to full-scale implementation in 2014-2015 (with 649 students). This three-credit course is required for graduation and combines orientation with life planning, academic planning, resource review, time management, study skills, and financial literacy (through access to an online tool). Because it added credits to programs, it required (and received) approval from the state. Fall-to-fall retention rates for 2014-2015 were 74 percent overall; retention was 70 percent for students who did not take the first-year course, and 80 percent for those who did.

Other administrative supports include the transfer of the Veterans Affairs counselor from the office of the registrar to the Counseling and Career Services Office, as well as hiring a part-time counselor to work with Hispanic and Latino students.

Lastly, the institution has enhanced the way it communicates with adult students. As one example, CSCC has added demographic questions about age to new and existing surveys as a means to better understand the needs of adult student population

Strategies for Clarifying Program Paths

Guided Pathways. CSCC is a member of the AACC Pathways Project, and Guided Pathways have been brought to scale at the institution. Academic divisions are referred to as Career Communities. As part of this initiative, first-semester student learning communities for adult learners have been established in each of CSCC's seven career communities. According to a CSCC press release, these learning communities were designed to address the challenge of engaging students in a content-specific manner within their associated pathways. Curricular material will be added within the college success course, a general education course, and a course specific to the particular pathway. In addition, the college will embed success coaches, tutors, advisors, and supplemental instructors within these courses to ensure the support of student success. About 65 students enroll per year, with 20 students per cohort. The institution anticipates that with the changes to the schedule (see below) and the popularity of the program spreading word-of-mouth, there will be an influx of additional students in the fall of 2018.

Northcentral Technical College

With six campuses in and around Wausau, Wisconsin, Northcentral Technical College (NTC) has placed adult learners at the forefront of its work. While many schools have crosswalks that articulate non-credit-to-credit for many courses, NTC completed a comprehensive assessment of every one of its 500+ technical courses with the goal of providing students with as many opportunities as possible to demonstrate prior learning (as of spring 2018, there are 465 total PLA opportunities on file). All PLA is overseen by a 'one stop shop' CPL Coordinator, which has been standardized and embraced across the college. NTC is also recognized nationally for its virtual campus and for having transitioned almost all online courses into an asynchronous "Anytime Start" model. To further prioritize adult learners, a dedicated Adult Recruiter position was established. Implementation of guided pathways is also under development, with the institution having completed a self-assessment through a state grant. The school is in the process of redesigning its student catalog from the ground up, moving toward an approach that includes all programs laid out in a way that provides students with a clear, coherent roadmap to completion.

Strategies for Prior Learning Assessment

Comprehensive course-level PLA curriculum mapping. Beginning in 2016, each of NTC's 500+ technical courses was assigned a dedicated faculty contact. (As part of a comprehensive course assessment, each course was assigned a specific faculty member who is responsible for identifying PLA opportunities. That faculty member serves as the subject matter expert in that area for developing specific PLA methods, such as a challenge exam, skill demonstration rubric, and portfolio assessment.) Through the work of a dedicated PLA committee, each course was assessed for prior learning opportunities. Over 218 challenge exams, 54 skill demonstrations, 81 combination exam/demonstrations, 59 industry credentials, and 140 portfolio assessments were identified and catalogued. For each course, the associated assessment was entered into a master table within

the college's PeopleSoft ERP. By capturing this information in the ERP, information was centralized and could be leveraged for automated website updates. Web pages for every academic program include direct links to PLA opportunities for students. PLA is also considered at the inception of all new curriculum development. Instructional designers, using standardized rubrics, ensure that faculty are provided with guidance on PLA possibilities as they develop their courses.

Centralized workflows. All PLA workflows are centralized through a CPL Coordinator position within the Office of Student Records. A single point of contact assists students from the point of inquiry to paying associated fees and received transcripted credits. The CPL Coordinator also has access to the comprehensive PLA data and can rapidly respond to student inquires and resolve any issues. In addition, all course assessments are tracked within a dedicated Canvas course (Canvas is NTC's learning management system), which allows for standardized processes regardless of the course, program, or assessment type.

Strategies for Student Supports

Anytime Start courses. Most online courses offered by colleges mirror traditional classroom approaches to teaching; students are provided with a schedule of work and assignments and provided with tests and quizzes that are administered on given dates, etc. NTC's nationally-recognized Virtual College has moved away from this approach with "Anytime Start" courses. These self-paced courses give adult learners the advantage of deciding when to register (they can do so up to six weeks prior to the end of the semester), and how quickly they move through the course's material). Work is self-paced, and students have until the end of the semester to complete the curriculum. "Anytime Start" courses have no assignment due dates, and faculty are directly involved with student progress every day by providing feedback and additional resources to struggling students, including online tutoring. Students are provided specific advisors within the Virtual College.

This advising is proactive and includes an early alert system. These courses have been part of the Virtual College since its inception some seven years ago. Data about student academic performance is collected regularly from students, who are monitored closely to ensure success. Student success rates in these courses are consistently within a few percentage points of other standard online students, and the institution indicates these students also have strong graduation rates. Based on feedback from advisory committees, employers are unable to tell the difference between whether students haven taken "Anytime Start" courses or a more traditional class.

Adult recruiter position. To increase student awareness of the various adult learner resources, an Adult Recruiter position was established through grant funding. This recruiter focuses on students who have completed some credits but have not yet completed a degree. The recruiter works directly with both the credit and non-credit areas of the college as well as with local businesses and industries. The recruiter is also the main contact point for non-credit students interested in attending college (about 1-2 students a day make walk-in inquiries). Conversations include a discussion of prior learning assessment, and students are often directed to the CPL specialist.

Scholarships and giving. The institutional culture at NTC is one of significant giving. Staff from each campus have collaborated to create their own scholarship funds; in all, there are two regional scholarship funds across five campuses. As an example, the Dream Keeper scholarship, funded through the college's foundation, provides funding related to barriers typically faced by adult learners, such as child care, auto repair and fuel, and food. The institution also provides students with hundreds of laptops per year as faculty and staff computers are replaced as part of the business cycle. In all, almost a half-million dollars in funding is given to students each year.

Proactive advising. All students have a dedicated advisor who practices proactive advising, with weekly touch points that highlight all the resources available to students. Students can indicate the level of support they will need at the time they register for courses. Students enrolled in active programs have dedicated resources and academic advisors. Students that focus on individual courses have a faculty member designated as an advisor.

Strategies for Clarifying Program Paths

Career pathways. A Department of Labor TAACCCT round 4 grant provided the framework and resources necessary for the development and implementation of career pathways. This included support for the critical coordination between internal departments and external educational, workforce, and business partners necessary to develop quality curriculum aligned with industry needs. Pathways begin in the K-12 system and are defined as any method of career progression (educationally or through promotion). PLA is embedded within all career pathways. The institution has about 50 embedded technical diplomas that are stackable in associate degree programs. Technical diplomas allow students to test the waters of an occupation with a minor degree before committing to a full two years. The institution has hundreds of transfer articulation agreements with 4-year partners; transfer is part of some career pathways. The pathway initiative also includes various support services.

Pathway navigator. A staff position, Navigator, was created to work with students who need testing or general college courses before they fully enroll in program courses. This staff person also assists students in completing college applications and works with job centers to assist students in moving forward in their careers. The Navigator is a critical link for potential students; as one example, the Navigator met with one student in the college parking lot because the student was too intimidated to even enter the building.

Mountwest Community and Technical College

While Mountwest Community and Technical College (MCTC) is small, with only 1,700 undergraduates, is dedicated to prioritizing adult learners in its region in and around Huntington, West Virginia. With limited resources, the institution has done an excellent job leveraging resources from the state to bolster its prior learning assessment capacity and designing an efficient and centralized administrative structure. An engaging, well-designed website entices adult learners to learn more.

Strategies for Prior Learning Assessment

Significant investment was given to PLA, which was provided with a dedicated microsite written in inviting language (students are encouraged to "Provide It," "Pass It," and "Prove It" for college credits). A combination of adult-learner initiatives highlights a college culture that embraces and prioritizes adult students.

Life experience inventory. Through a U.S.Department of Labor consortium grant, a statewide system called Step Up was developed to provide individuals with a venue to pursue prior learning assessment statewide. The core component of this work is the Life Experience Inventory (LEI). The LEI is a web-based form that students complete to detail their various skills and prior work experience.

The simplicity of the form belies the complex logic behind the LEI. A student's experience is customized based on their responses to a simple series of questions. Students are first asked about broad areas in which they may have five or more years of experience (they are limited to two selections). Based on their responses, checklists of skills and knowledge are then completed. This series of questions is repeated but for specific career experiences. Once prior learning experiences are captured, students are then provided with a clear list of certificate and degree programs offered by the nearest of the nine community and technical colleges, based on their zip code. Once a student selects one or more programs and submits the form, the system creates an automated email directed to the appropriate institution. If such an email is

received at MCTC, it is processed by a dedicated PLA Specialist who assesses the student's profile and responses to determine the most appropriate course of action. The goal of this initial outreach is to secure a meeting with the student, and from there guide them through the relevant processes. The LEI system includes a section in which both applicants and the PLA Specialist can communicate and keep track of progress.

What makes the system particularly valuable is the amount of work that went into developing the underlying job, skill, and knowledge data. This was built through a detailed analysis of each institution's programming, together with state level job data.

The system also includes a robust administrative interface where institutions can access data about students who have completed the LEI. This allows each of the nine institutions to track the number of students that have been referred there through the system. It also allows full access to each LEI that has been completed. It is through this interface that PLA specialists can determine the individual needs and opportunities of students prior to outreach.

The system rolled out in the summer of 2017. Faculty also played a key role in the initiative's success; several faculty were trained in portfolio assessment, and many contributed to the development of

challenge exams. As of fall 2017, MCTC had received 17 LEIs profiles, of which two students were highlighted: one was able to quickly receive 12 credits through a combination of professional certifications and a challenge exam. Another student secured 27 credits towards a degree, which prompted him to decline an out-of-state job to stay and complete his degree. He now plans to remain in West Virginia and secure a higher paying job.

Strategies for Student Supports

EZ Start program. The EZ Start program is designed for adult learners who have a genuine desire to attend college but are unfamiliar with where to begin and how to be successful. These are students who may have never completed a college application or FAFSA before, who may be intimidated by the notion of placement testing, or who lack the essential skills necessary to succeed in college (e.g., time management and note taking). Originally designed by the college's president, this three-credit seminar course is free for qualifying adult learners. The cost of running the program is absorbed by the institution, and has the full commitment of academic affairs, the president, and board of trustees.

While EZ Start was originally scheduled as a single course section per year, there are now three sections running per semester, with a capacity of about 55 students per semester. The first off-campus course section was provided for the first time in fall 2017. The course runs in a slightly accelerated format (about 13 weeks) and provides students with a highly supportive environment to prepare to succeed in college-level coursework. The first four weeks of the course focus on completing the college's application and FAFSA and preparation and completion of placement testing, as well as understanding how to utilize resources such as career services and library resources. Students also learn how to use MCTC's learning management system (Blackboard), and how to set up and use their email account. The remaining duration of the course focuses on teaching students about learning styles, reading skills (utilizing the "SQ4R"

method[15]), note taking, and time management. The course provides students with a clear understanding of the difference between a successful college student and a struggling one. During the semester, students also hear from guest lecturers who help them learn basic math skills and review placement exams to increase their comfort levels. They are also introduced to counselors and faculty members. By the time students complete the course, their financial aid has been secured, they are ready to register for college courses, and they have learned the skills they need to be successful.

In a recent partnership with a West Virginia workforce agency, the college leveraged EZ Start for those impacted by the closing of two very large employers in the area, providing individuals who had lost their job the opportunity to return to school to acquire new skills for future employment.

Beacon grants. This initiative provided funding to begin shifting the institution's culture from a philosophy focused on "right to fail" to one focused on "right to succeed." The initiative focused on a triad of student support, including caseload counselors, peer coaches, and faculty mentorship (mentees transition to getting guidance from program faculty once a student successfully begins a program). CAEL provides adult learner advising training to college counselors. This work highlighted the typical challenges faced by adult learners, including transportation concerns, child care issues, and a general lack of knowledge about available resources.

Attendance Pays. This federal grant initiative, which provides supports to help students attend college regularly and persist from semester to semester, provided funding for a mental health counselor position. A food pantry was established by this individual, as well as agreements with Goodwill and Dress for Success. Students who secured job interviews were provided with several outfits at no cost to them. Other work funded through this grant included bus pass discounts for students, a career services professional, and a feasibility study to determine the extent of the need and the college's ability to implement

a childcare facility on campus. That study was completed in June 2016 and concluded that sufficient need exists for an on-campus childcare center. The report said such a center might also serve as practicum site for the institution's early child education program. The most significant barriers for implementation of the center include space considerations and the need for an initial, substantially large capital investment.

Developmental education. An initiative impacting the success of adult learners is the shift of developmental education courses from prerequisites to required co-requisites of college-level courses in mathematics and English. This initiative started as a pilot approximately four years ago within the English and math departments, with math going full-scale as of spring 2017. Student success data is reported as very promising, with success rates in mathematics at approximately 70 percent and 65 percent for English; data is currently circulating among faculty for analysis. There is a cited need to provide more robust professional development to adjunct faculty

to further improve success rates. Some courses are designed as separate co-requisites (English), others as an integrated five-credit course with an additional weekly mandatory one-hour supplemental instruction period (math).

Strategies for Clarifying Program Paths

The overarching goal of the state's StepUp initiative includes prioritizing career pathways in several sectors (e.g., energy, manufacturing, and information technology). MCTC has identified 12 programs for which it is building guided pathways. Pathways in two program have already been implemented through a Bridging the Gap initiative. The "IT Fast Track" program allows students to receive both an associate degree and all respective certifications within a short timeframe. The Engineering Design Technology program includes a laboratory that is available for students to use throughout the day, where they can work at their own pace.

Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas

Most students attending Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas (PCCUA) are under-resourced, underprepared, and underrepresented. Overall, the institution's success initiatives have been built around understanding poverty and helping those affected to move beyond it.

Strategies for Student Supports

Mathways program. This acceleration initiative provides students with the ability to attend developmental math courses on a daily basis. Similar work is being implemented within English and reading; instructional labs have been added and attached to certain courses. Anecdotal reports suggest that success has been found to be associated with student tenacity, particularly in the lowest-level courses. Writing has been integrated more into other curricula, providing a cross-discipline approach in which some of the general education faculty take over the responsibility of helping students develop writing skills.

PCCUA Career Clusters

There are several career clusters at PCCUA. These career clusters represent occupational areas. Click on the following career clusters to see which areas of study tied to occupations might be of interest to you.

Choose Your Path to a Better Future

Not sure where your interest lies? Try taking this short career interest survey.

Faculty inquiry groups work together to assess student data in math, English, and writing. Faculty analyze pre- and post- test scoring. Faculty-collected data are more granular, complementing the outcome-based data garnered for the Mathways initiative, which is submitted to Achieving the Dream each year. Student challenges that are not necessarily exposed by the higher level Mathways data may come to light during assessment of faculty-collected data. Once triangulated, these data, collected through multiple sources, provide a much more comprehensive view of student success. For example, faculty data examine trends for completion and retention, while Mathways data provide a broader view of math progression, and also provide insights for faculty development. Mathways data also provide PCCUA with the benefit of an external perspective about

its courses and programs, ensuring that best practices that internal stakeholders might not otherwise be aware of are identified and assessed for implementation.

Today, academic advisors are provided with a level of professional development not previously seen by the institution. The gap between advising and academics has been greatly reduced and there is now strong alignment between instruction/curriculum and advisors. Each academic program has a designated advisor in addition to more general "professional advisors" assigned to each specific campus. Students with a program clearly in mind are formally assigned to a program advisor, while students who are still unclear about their academic goals are assigned to a campus-designated professional advisor. Program advisors can be deans or faculty, who are provided release time to advise students (this release time is

independent of other more traditional faculty roles such as providing support for academic scheduling and hiring part-time faculty). PCCUA also employs career coaches who provide courses in student success along with career and financial coaching.

Yellow cards. Students are all required to meet with their advisors, a requirement that has been linked to the disbursement of financial aid via Pell grants. After three meetings, advisors provide students with a signed yellow card which is required for them to receive their checks. This technique has significantly increased the frequency of advisor meetings. The yellow card requirements are extended to any kind of financial aid or scholarship. Students assigned to formal career pathways meet with advisors more frequently.

Strategies for Clarifying Program Paths

PCCUA offers two pathway-oriented initiatives: career clusters and career pathways. Career clusters are designed as a workflow for students to explore offered programming, while Career Pathways in this case is a specific state-funded initiative for low-income adults.

Career clusters are presented as an interactive graphic on the PCCUA website, with each area leading to a specific landing page for that cluster. Information accessed there includes data on common occupations and a list of associated academic programs. Each program is presented as a downloadable pre-populated worksheet that includes a curriculum appropriate for that program. Some clusters also include introductory program videos.

The career clusters page provides a link to a career interest survey. The results of this survey provide students with a list of the 20 jobs that best match their interests and an assessment of their best "RAISEC" interests (Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C)), which is a standard profiling system provided by the O*Net's Interest Profiler.

Career Pathways offers support services, financial support, and a variety of services. In the program, each student enters one of five pathways at a juncture appropriate to their background and experience and completes a specific educational or employment goal. The program is funded by the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative, which supports low-income Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

(TANF)-eligible adults. Intensive student services are included. Relationships between students, community organizations, state agencies, and employers are also fostered through the program.

Guided Pathways. The institution received funding to formally adopt a guided pathways approach. Articulation agreements and program "check-off" sheets were developed through this initiative. Guided Pathways were implemented over a four-year period. Individual Career Plans (ICPs), a student career survey, and career coaching are now fully implemented, along with faculty inquiry groups and Mathways. In addition, the institution is part of the Working Students Success Network initiative. Financial literacy training is embedded in the curriculum of all programs, making that training essentially mandatory for all students.

Individual career plans. All academic departments now have ICPs for all students, and all students college-wide now complete these forms. ICPs capture a broad array of granular data on students. Filled out during mandatory orientations, the ICP provides data that enable faculty, administrators, and advisors to access critical information quickly when working with students. Together with an enterprise level student management system (by Zogotech), which allows the capture of notes, academic history, schedules, Pell eligibility, etc., staff are empowered with up-to-date, quality data that helps inform potential interventions, advice, and academic planning.

In addition to Career Pathways, the institution also has a TRIO program and an array of institutional scholarships, including some that are specific to students returning after a prolonged leave of absence.

Career coaching has also played an important role in guiding students toward programs that are an appropriate fit for their academic aptitudes and personal interests. (Some 90 percent of students arrive at the college with a general plan to become a nurse. Career coaching helps to refine these goals.) Career coaches also provide a student success class, which helps students understand the impact of college on their future and identify a suitable career path, and provides skills, knowledge, and resources to facilitate their entry into that career. Coaching in part leverages a career interest survey initially developed by the University of Minnesota.

Blue Mountain Community College

Strategies for Student Supports

At Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC), in Pendleton, Oregon, Jump Start is a process within the math department for students who place into college math courses below the transfer level. The first two weeks is an intensive review process, after which the student can retake the placement test. In a pilot of the program, about a third of students were able to jump to a higher level; when the program was implemented at scale, about a quarter of students were able to make the jump.

All students have a success coach who meets with them, learns about the barriers they face, and refers them to resources that may help them succeed. These resources include a few items of note, including a list of childcare providers. Also, when a success coach identifies a gap in a student's needs, the college's foundation may assist by providing emergency money for vehicles, food, and security. Gas cards are also sometimes provided. The foundation includes supporters who will help students pay for fees and tuition, and sometimes will pay GED testing fees. There is also a public transportation company that provides access to vouchers for students. These assistances are not meant to be long-term, but rather to serve as a bridge to help students stay on their educational journey.

Strategies for Clarfiying Program Paths

BMCC is currently working to identify student transfer pathways. Faculty members who are familiar with these pathways work with the Student Success Center's success coaches and advisors. The institution has also taken a more holistic approach to placement, using multiple measures beyond placement testing. CTE programs such as nursing have well-defined pathways.

Because the institution is relatively small (8,000 FTEs per year), not every course can be offered every term, so pathways are critical for planning. The institution acknowledges that it needs to be more active in tracking students who have fallen off their plan. There is also a lack of an intentional ways to work with students who are undecided (e.g., no

meta-majors have been implemented), but that need has come up frequently in college-wide discussions and the college is gearing up to address it.

Through programming in basic skills, students take Career & College Awareness, a five-week class that takes them through a series of interest and skill inventories that lets them focus in on a career area if not a specific career.
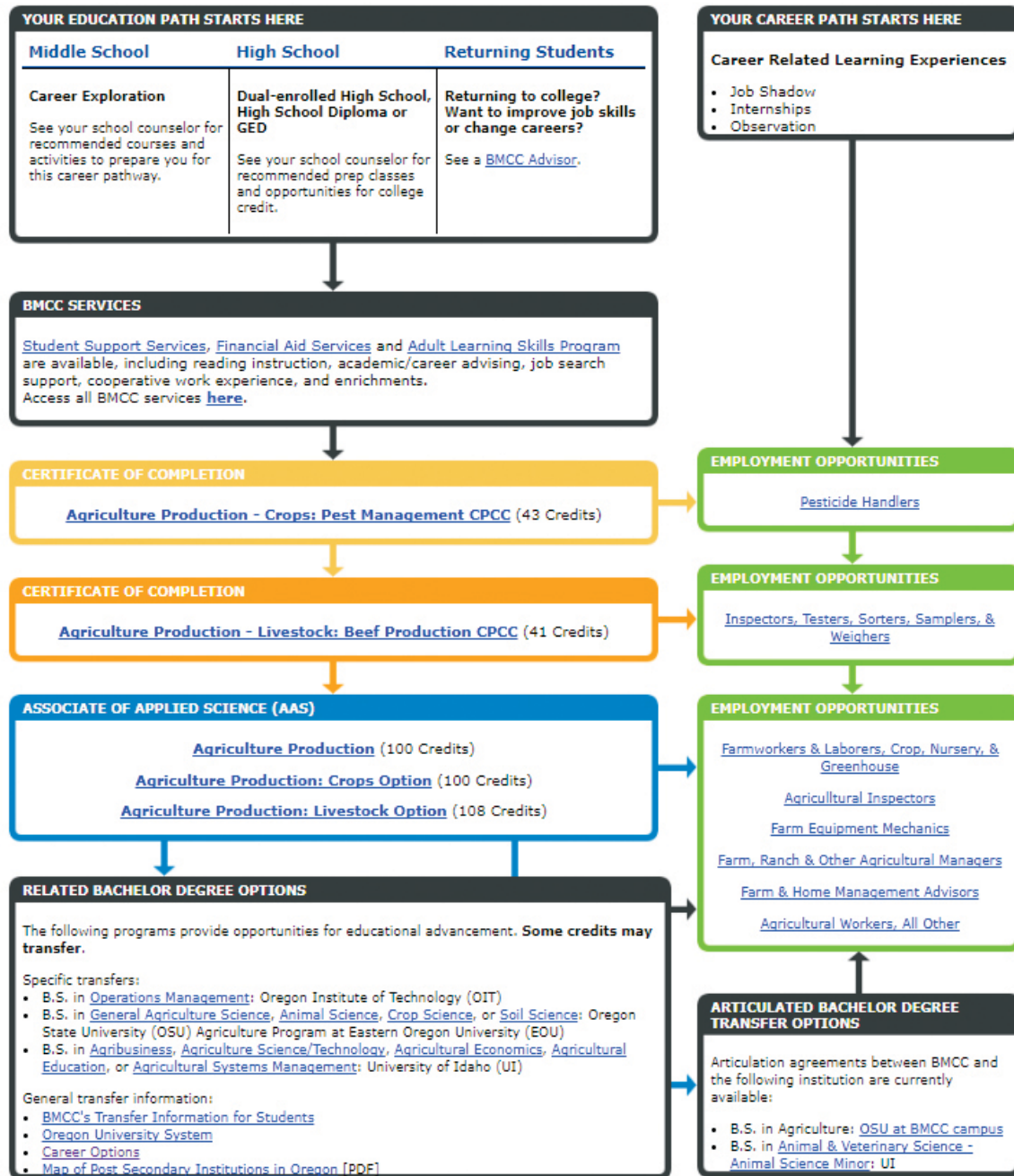
BMCC's implementation of career pathways is linked to the Oregon State Career Pathways Initiative, which provides curricula for jobs that require some college education but less than a four-year degree. Certificates can be earned within pathways of 12 to 44 credits that include both coursework and competencies for entry-level work, and can stack into an associate degree program.

Career pathways are visualized in the form of roadmaps and include both adult basic skills career pathways and high school career pathways. There are six career pathway areas, each containing two or more academic programs. On the BMCC website, only about a dozen of some 85 programs currently contain hyperlinks to roadmaps. However, the existing pathways are robust and comprehensive. They are visually simplistic, and rich with hyperlinked information. These roadmaps tie together links to curricula, services, and data. There are links to advising, student support and financial aid services, and state-hosted career data pages. Articulation partners are listed and hyperlinked as well. Overall, these pathways represent a best practice in integrating career, academic, and student support services.

BMCC received funding and state resources to provide these web pages. This work is also aligned with Perkins grant funding. There are three Perkins-approved programs. These pathways are designed for two predominant audiences; while the primary audience for pathways are high school students, the pathways can also be leveraged by adult learners, particularly those who may already have a bachelor's degree and are interested in retooling their careers. Pathways lets students understand what

BMCC CAREERPATHWAYS Agriculture Production

Oregon Skill Set: Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources

YOUR EDUCATION PATH STARTS HERE

Middle School	High School	Returning Students
Career Exploration See your school counselor for recommended courses and activities to prepare you for this career pathway.	**Dual-enrolled High School, High School Diploma or GED** See your school counselor for recommended prep classes and opportunities for college credit.	**Returning to college? Want to improve job skills or change careers?** See a BMCC Advisor.

YOUR CAREER PATH STARTS HERE

Career Related Learning Experiences

- Job Shadow
- Internships
- Observation

BMCC SERVICES

Student Support Services, Financial Aid Services and Adult Learning Skills Program are available, including reading instruction, academic/career advising, job search support, cooperative work experience, and enrichments. Access all BMCC services here.

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

Agriculture Production - Crops: Pest Management CPCC (43 Credits)

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Pesticide Handlers

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

Agriculture Production - Livestock: Beef Production CPCC (41 Credits)

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, & Weighers

ASSOCIATE OF APPLIED SCIENCE (AAS)

Agriculture Production (100 Credits)

Agriculture Production: Crops Option (100 Credits)

Agriculture Production: Livestock Option (108 Credits)

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Farmworkers & Laborers, Crop, Nursery, & Greenhouse

Agricultural Inspectors

Farm Equipment Mechanics

Farm, Ranch & Other Agricultural Managers

Farm & Home Management Advisors

Agricultural Workers, All Other

RELATED BACHELOR DEGREE OPTIONS

The following programs provide opportunities for educational advancement. **Some credits may transfer.**

Specific transfers:
- B.S. in Operations Management: Oregon Institute of Technology (OIT)
- B.S. in General Agriculture Science, Animal Science, Crop Science, or Soil Science: Oregon State University (OSU) Agriculture Program at Eastern Oregon University (EOU)
- B.S. in Agribusiness, Agriculture Science/Technology, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Education, or Agricultural Systems Management: University of Idaho (UI)

General transfer information:
- BMCC's Transfer Information for Students
- Oregon University System
- Career Options
- Map of Post Secondary Institutions in Oregon [PDF]

ARTICULATED BACHELOR DEGREE TRANSFER OPTIONS

Articulation agreements between BMCC and the following institution are currently available:

- B.S. in Agriculture: OSU at BMCC campus
- B.S. in Animal & Veterinary Science - Animal Science Minor: UI

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kind of jobs are available. For example, a previous computer coder may be interested in the Data Center Technician program. There are also students who are looking for a GED or equivalent and want to transition into a pathway. GED students initially pursue short-term credentials. These programs each include a stackable Career Pathway Certificate.

There is also a Rapid Response Team, which is an interdisciplinary group that responds when an employer eliminates a group of jobs. A recent example includes Hermiston Foods, a company that recently closed. The company surveyed its employees to see where they have skillsets that could be leveraged in career pathways at the college.

Southwest Wisconsin Technical College

Strategies for Student Supports

At Southwest Wisconsin Technical College (Southwest Tech), in Fennimore, Wisconsin, the largest success by far has been the curriculum restructuring of the Leadership Development and Supply Chain Management programs. Both programs are now offered in the form of one-credit courses that run every four weeks, which provides multiple, continuous entry points for students. Courses are also offered 100 percent online. These changes were implemented through faculty leadership. Enrollments are growing rapidly.

These changes were originally implemented during the TAACCCT phase III grant work. Southwest Tech noted that when the Supply Chain Management program made the switch, enrollment jumped significantly. It was also noted that prior learning credit rewards also increased since it is easier to grant credits in one-credit units. The Welding program was also modified into one-credit chunks, but these courses run the full length of the semester. The Precision Machining program was later converted to a model like the Welding program, though it is unclear if this was as successful. The next phase of this development is to begin substitutions of the one-credit Leadership Development course into other programs, such as the Administration Professional program.

Spokane Falls Community College

Strategies for Prior Learning Assessment

In addition to a PLA microsite, the web catalog at Spokane Falls Community College (SFCC), one of two accredited institutions of Community Colleges of Spokane, also offers extensive information on PLA. Some program web pages (e.g., the Business Technology Degrees and Services page) also include pointers about getting prior learning credit. Information in the college's catalog is more detailed and includes resources such as an application for PLA (see below).

The school is building a crosswalk database of all prior learning assessments by gathering information from students through one-on-one advising interviews.

Strategies for Clarifying Program Paths

The school is currently implementing a pathways initiative that involves meta-majors, guides, an annualized schedule, a student success course, and a revised advising model. SFCC's president requested that the institution pursue the guided pathways approach; those efforts began to roll out in the fall of 2017. The goal is to have all students find a program to enroll in during their first or second term at the school. SFCC is implementing the Holland test, providing students with a career assessment, and ensuring that they get their English, writing, and math courses out of the way early on, even if they are otherwise undecided about a program.

# Anoka-Ramsey Community College

Strategies for Clarifying Program Paths

At Anoka-Ramsey Community College (ARCC), which has campuses in Cambridge and Coon Rapids, Minnesota, career pathways are represented on the college website as eight "Career Interest Areas," accessible from the main Academics tab. Once students select an area, the landing page includes a listing of each associated program in a given career area, and a toggle button enables users to switch between degrees and certificates. Programs are presented as cards that summarize the number of credits in the program, with a pulldown of transfer opportunities (which in turn link to various articulation agreements) and a button linking to the program's detailed landing page. At the bottom of each pathway page, there is a link to a PDF file that shows how certificates, two-year programs, and four-year programs link together.

It was noted that the relatively low turnover rate from non-credit to credit programming is due in part to the local economic landscape. Students who initially have relatively low-paying jobs can place into higher-paying positions after training. Given that significant increase in economic mobility, these students have relatively low incentive (at least initially) to continue their education.

Healthcare pathways. Through the Anoka County Workforce Center, cohorts of about 20 unemployed/underemployed/dislocated workers who are living at 200 percent below the poverty level are
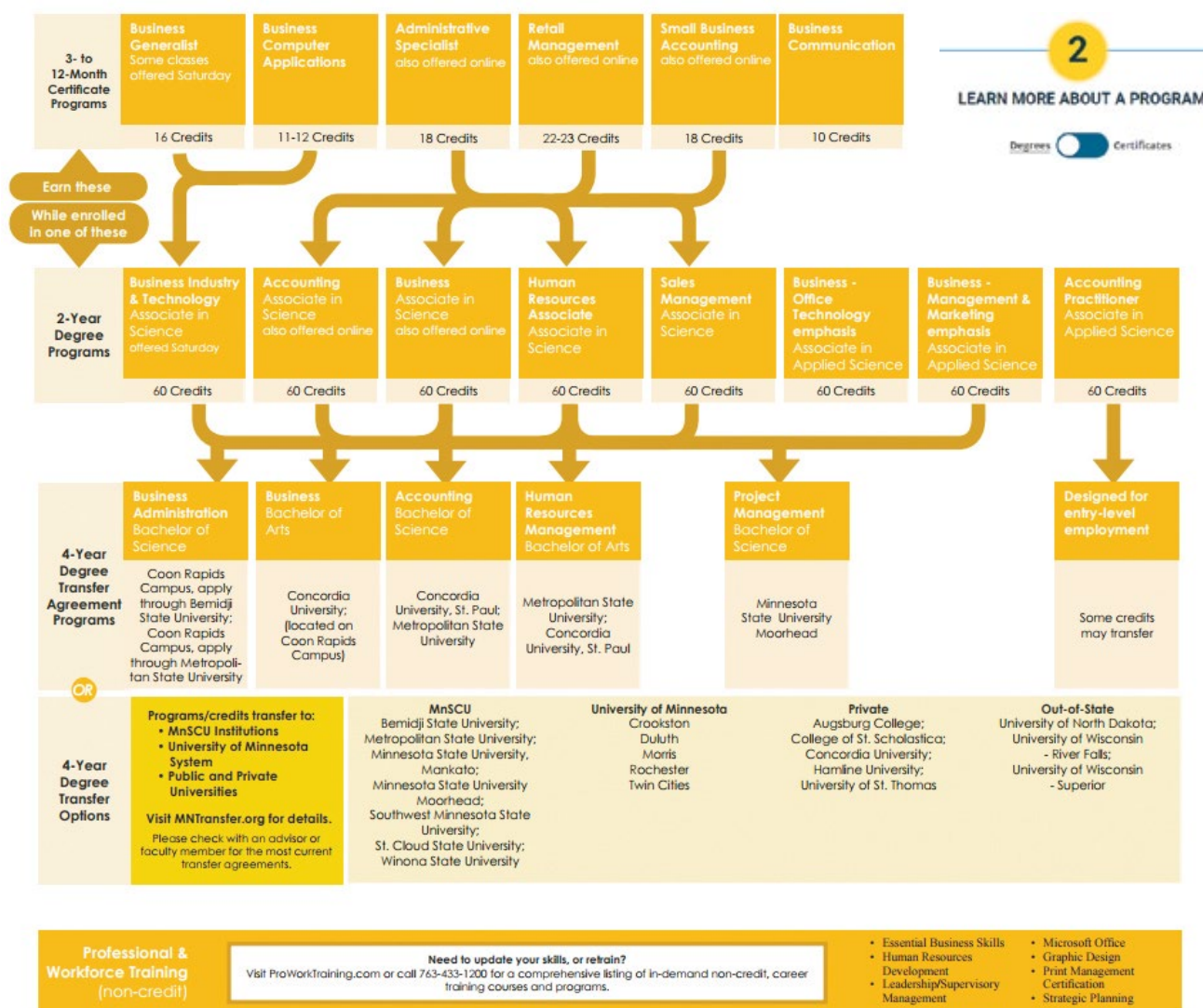
offered an opportunity to take a certified nursing assistant (CNA) course at ARCC. The students are provided with the same level of placement testing used for academic placement; those who test as underprepared are provided with an 80-hour Adult Basic Education program that prepares them for the college classroom. Students who complete the CNA program earn five academic credits that can be applied toward a Licensed Practitioner Nursing (LPN) associate degree program.[16] To improve the chances of success, the center provides an "academic navigator" — an individual with a bachelor's degree who attends the course along with the students, providing support as needed. This individual also builds strong relationships with the students. In addition, because most faculty teaching these courses also have daytime employment, navigators provide students with a source of feedback throughout the days, evenings, and weekends.

Precision Sheet Metal program. Regional companies hire one to two sheet metal workers per year, a figure too low to warrant development of a full-fledged academic program for workers from just one company. However, relationships have been developed with approximately 50 employers in the region that each hire up to two sheet metal workers, or a total of 100 workers, per annum. To serve these students, ARCC develop a non-credit sheet metal program that is like the CNA program in terms of support it gets from the Anoka County Workforce Center, including placement of a navigator in classes. Students in the sheet metal program mingle with credit-based students in ARCC's Manufacturing programs, thus gaining exposure to college-level work and the college culture. Students in both programs use the same expensive training machines (the machines were donated by one of ARCC's key partner companies). Faculty help students gain prior learning credits that can be applied toward certificates and associate degree programs in ARCC's manufacturing department.

Community College of Rhode Island

Strategies for Prior Learning Assessment

The website at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) stood out as particularly robust, with strong offerings for prior learning assessment. The entire PLA process is designed to be student centered. The PLA landing page is designed as a workflow; students first complete a questionnaire (or "Prior Learning Accelerator"), which includes submitting contact information. Once a student completes that document, an advisor reaches out to the individual to discuss opportunities. Students are also directed to explore their options using the listings within the sidebar.

Each PLA option has its own landing page that is presented in the form of a FAQ and includes intuitively linked information. Overall, each option is treated with a great deal of attention and detail.
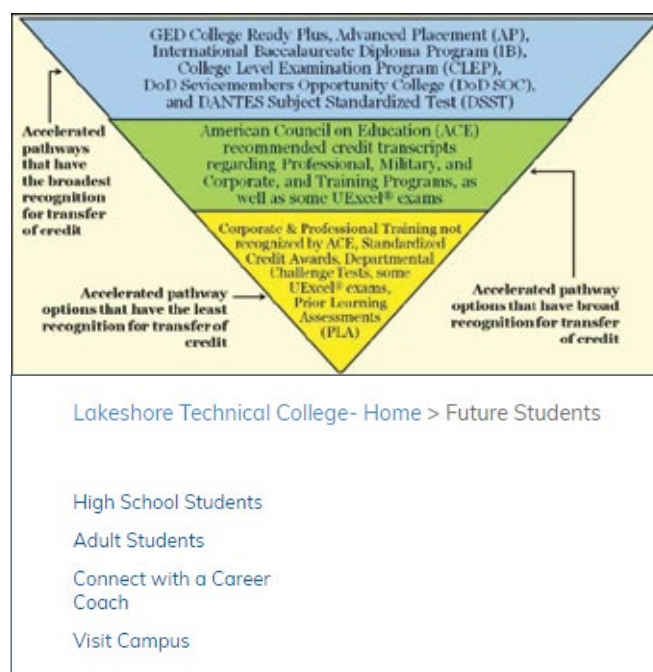
Lakeshore Technical College

Strategies for Student Supports

Lakeshore Technical College (LTC), in Cleveland, Wisconsin, is a good example of an institution that features a feature-rich microsite dedicated to the adult learner. The microsite offers significant resources for adult learners from a wide range of backgrounds, including working adults, veterans, dislocated workers, and single parents. It includes a marketing video directed at these students. A prominently featured link takes users to the Credit for Prior Learning page. There is information on flexible learning options, career exploration, and student support services.

In addition, some academic programming (and associated scheduling) is tailored to adult learners. LTC offers evening programs, "FullFOCUS" programs, 100-percent online programs, Quick Start programs, and an entire section on career pathways (see below).

- The school offers 15 fully online programs, including nine associate degree and six certificates, and one Quick Start program, which is designed to prepare students for entry-level employment in four months.

- **FullFOCUS** programs are designed for students seeking to gain the skills needed to enter the workforce in a relatively short timeframe. Students attend classes full-time, four or five days a week. These hands-on degree programs offer a pathway to high-demand careers. There are currently six programs of this nature, including two in healthcare and four in manufacturing technology.

Strategies for Clarifying Program Paths

Career pathways are a prominent feature on the website, under the umbrella of "academic programs," and are organized as an additional option to other alternative degree programming (e.g.. evening programs and FullFOCUS). Pathways are designed to build stackable short-term credentials that include conferral of recognized industry credentials. On the website, each pathway is presented as a PDF document that includes a linear progression of coursework and a visual aid of progressive credentials. There is also career information and salary ranges.

Academic curricula are grouped on the website in several ways, including career fields. Users have the option to explore those pathways via various views, including alphabetically, by credential type, or by initiative type (e.g., career pathways, evening programs, etc.). Each program's dedicated page is integrated with admissions information and flexible learning options. If the program is part of a career pathway, links are included to that information. There are also PDF files that include specific scheduling pathways for students interested in attending full-time, part-time in the evening, or part-time online. Individual courses are linked directly from within the curricula pages, with information on the semester when they are next offered, which is hyperlinked to the registration information. Students can access career coaches, which are separate from advisors or counselors.

REFLECTIONS ON INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES TO ALIGN CAREER AND EDUCATIONAL CHOICES FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Guiding Principles

After assessing more than 200 colleges for their work in enhancing non-credit-to-credit pathways and providing support for the adult learner, many common themes emerge. Three guiding principles distill many of these themes.

Easy student navigation. Given the increasingly limited resources that community colleges have, student self-service has increasingly become a web-design principle. Standout web page navigation is clear, simple, and logical. On standout sites, resources that students tend to look for most often are prominently featured in headings, not buried in a jumble of sub-headings and text. Search functionality is easy to use and consistently provides relevant results. Students appreciate not having to spend time searching websites for forms and contact information. If a student is required to contact a specific individual about a given question or program, that information is prominent and includes the names of specific individuals, their office location, phone numbers, and photographs. Rather than mentioning a form, well-designed pages include direct hyperlinks so users can download that form or even complete it online. Because no two students think alike—and thus navigate websites differently—resources can be linked to multiple access points. (For example, a resource page on prior learning assessment might include information on the testing center, while a page describing the testing center may include information about prior learning assessment, with each page linking to the other.) The best pages also provide information about scheduling, course offerings, financial aid programs, and supports for adult learners.

Connection by design. Regardless of their motivations for attending a community college—whether it is to earn a short-term credential, pursue an associate degree with the intent to transfer to a baccalaureate program, or to pursue training to help a move directly into a career—students appreciate knowing what steps they need to take and when in order to succeed. The growth of career pathways, guided pathways, and student support services all share the same underlying design principle of seamless connectivity.

Institutional champions and the college culture. At the heart of successful initiatives is an institutional champion, a highly motivated individual (or small group) who takes charge of the initiative with the full backing of the administration. While initial funding may come from a grant or one-time endowment, successful initiatives eventually become an integral part of the institutional culture, with the means to continue sustaining the work after initial funding is expended.

As institutions are shift to the "right to succeed" model, a defining set of hallmarks are seen among most institutions. These include centralized administrative structures designed to remove burdens and barriers from students; prioritizing long-term ROI and funding "cost center" initiatives that benefit adult learners; dedicated staff appointed to serve adult learners, including helping them understand prior learning assessment and pathways; proactive student interventions and reducing the gap between advising and academics; a culture of data-based decision-making by faculty and administrators; and early entry into program-specific coursework that increases engagement and retention (e.g., pre-requisites shifting to co-requisites). Research has found that the earlier a student is exposed to program-specific curriculum (e.g., a class that includes biology curricula for a biology major), the more likely it is that they will remain engaged and persist from semester to semester.

PLA Portfolio Assessment

Portfolios are critical for situations in which there are no alternative venues for a student to demonstrate prior learning. Procedures vary widely but looking across dozens of institutions has uncovered two general strategies: streamlined portfolio assessment and comprehensive portfolio assessment. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, but generally a streamlined approach seems to be favored, as less is required by the student. Streamlined portfolio assessment does not require students to register for a course and can generally be completed within a few weeks. The benefit of the streamlined process is that it saves the student both money and time. Concerns about the rigor of this process can easily be addressed by ensuring a standardized assessment process that includes professional development by those examining portfolios.

Comprehensive portfolio assessment includes a course that students must register for and requires students to complete a longer, more involved assessment process. The benefit to the student is a rigorous introspection of their learning and knowledge, which can benefit the learner in ways a more cursory examination might not.

Regardless of how portfolios are submitted, they are reviewed by subject matter experts, whether a single designated faculty member or a committee. All portfolio assessments should include a clear-cut manner for students to appeal any decisions made that are not in their favor.

Strategies for Clarifying Program Paths

National pathway initiatives focused on the fundamental restructuring of community college academic and support services have drawn on the strong support community and technical colleges historically have provided to students in their programs. Institutions interested in pursuing this work can access a good deal of publicly available resources, or simply follow the overall guiding principles and tailor their own program pathways. Iterative work can be quickly started by any institution regardless of their starting point. Career pathways have been embraced by many states, and there is already a significant body of literature devoted to this topic.

Standout academic programming includes clearly defined academic courses and sequences that may align with career or transfer pathways. Such strategies help ensure that students see the value in each program as well as how to successfully complete it and move on to the next level. Standout pathways include clear crosswalks with professional certifications and embedded prior learning assessment opportunities. They also include stackable academic certifications and articulation agreements with partner colleges. Pathways include relevant job data, obtained via O*NET, EMSI, or similar resources (there are many open source, freely available databases for these purposes) to match local labor market needs and focus career guidance provided to students on jobs that provide economic mobility. Pathways are accompanied by engaging and interactive visual diagrams that link to relevant resources. Support structures wrap around these pathways, such that the overall system provides each student, regardless of their academic goals, with the best chances of success.

Challenges, Advice for Institutions, and Next Steps

Institutions involved in this exploratory study offered advice to address challenges community colleges face when designing pathways to align career and educational choices for adult learners. This advice includes ensuring:

- Cross-institutional collaboration and buy-in.
- Commitment by college leadership.
- Designation of cross-functional champions to lead the work and clear understanding of how different divisions support the enrollment, retention, and success of adult students.
- Designation of specific personnel to coordinate college PLA activities.
- Designation specific personnel to develop academic plans with students and help students overcome barriers in their college experience.
- Links between the institution's strategic goals and student supports for adults.

- Development and implementation of plans to sustain supports for adult students and plans to grow these supports.

- Equity must be considered in the development of pathways alignment. Colleges can be intentional in designing pathways and linkages around equity.

Achieving the Dream has learned that improving student success on a substantial scale requires colleges to engage in bold, holistic, sustainable institutional change. **Achieving the Dream's Institutional Capacity Framework** is a comprehensive approach to addressing the emerging needs of the field to improve success results for all students, especially low-income students and students of color.

The framework has seven essential capacities that must be in place for colleges to create the student-focused culture that promotes student success. Colleges must be strong in each capacity area in order to take on any large-scale interventions such as guided pathways, the Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success in Higher Education (iPass) or the Working Students Success Network.

Next Steps

Achieving the Dream's commitment to continuing this work to support colleges in aligning career and educational choices for adult learners. Through our extensive work with colleges through the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training funding and initiatives such as Middle-Skill STEM and Advanced Manufacturing, Achieving the Dream has developed a number of resources available to institutions. These resources mirror Achieving the Dream's focus on linking noncredit and credit programs; providing holistic student supports for students; building strong and strategic partnerships with employers; and collecting, analyzing, and using data to improve student success strategies. Here is a list of some of these resources.

ACHIEVING THE DREAM'S INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FRAMEWORK
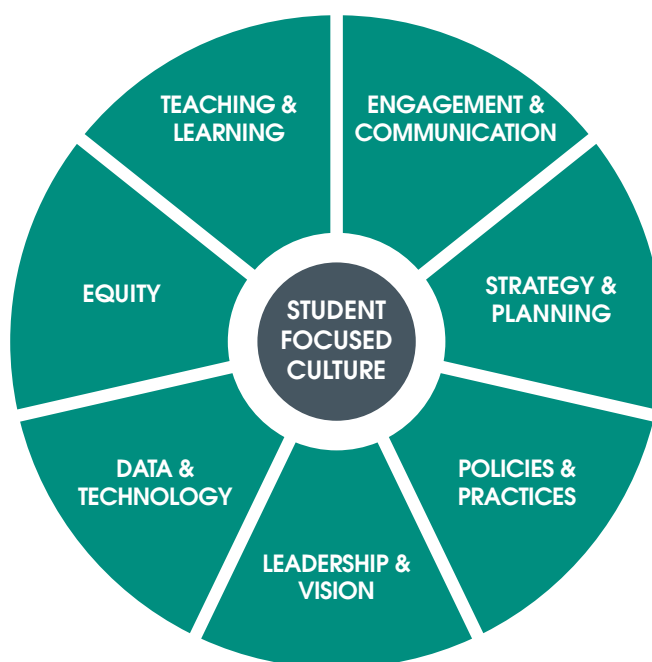
- Building Sustainable and Strategic Partnerships with Business and Industry: A Step-by-Step Guide for Community Colleges

- Career Pathways in Advanced Manufacturing

- Funding Guide for Advanced Manufacturing Career Pathways

- Integrated Student Support Redesign Toolkit

- Creating Opportunity for All: Building Pathways from Continuing Education to Credit Programs

In addition, Achieving the Dream has developed a self-assessment tool that helps colleges identify their progress in these six key areas: employer engagement, work-based learning, non-credit to credit linkages, career advising, focus on adults, and data collection. Using our experience and expertise, Achieving the Dream can help institutions design efforts to address challenges in these areas.

TIERED INVENTORY OF COLLEGE PRACTICES TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN ADULT LEARNERS

Through this study, we identified three levels of practices colleges are implementing to meet adult students' needs:

- **Tier 1:** The first level practices are often the first steps colleges take and require less investment of resources.

- **Tier 2:** The second level represents actions institutions can take to establish new structures specific to adult learners or increase the quality of existing structures.

- **Tier 3:** The third level practices are intended to fosters shifts in institutional culture and values, budget allocations, and administrative structures towards prioritizing adult learners.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive but rather is a reflection of the methodology of the study. Resources available to students were identified using a web-based search, in that this is how students would likely identify resources, and may not reflect promising practices colleges have in place but do not identify on websites that students can access. Achieving the Dream encourages colleges to provide clear information to students about what resources are available to them.

Based on our learning and experience, Achieving the Dream encourages institutions to consider how to implement these practices at scale; so they serve all targeted students; and to collect, analyze, and use data to understand the efficacy of these practices on improving student academic and career outcomes.

The chart below reports in depth on activities in each tier.

Tier 1 practices are actions institutions can take without significant risk or investment that can also serve as a first step in more ambitious strategic planning.

STRATEGIES FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Develop and publish a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) inventory of currently available opportunities	Developing a webpage that centralizes all existing PLA resources can draw greater attention to available resources not widely known about and used.	• Increase awareness and utilization of PLA • Basis to begin standardizing practices across different departments, and a starting point for developing more extensive PLA initiatives.	Milwaukee Area Technical College Northcentral Technical College Mountwest Community and Technical College Cleveland State Community College

STRATEGIES FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Complete a PLA SWOT analysis	A common business practice when starting new initiatives is a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. The SWOT analysis enables institutions to assess current practices and understand ways they can be improved. Content of a SWOT analysis for PLA would include the following questions: 1. How is PLA currently branded or labeled at the institution? Is it consistent? 2. How are options presented to students? Are they centralized or distributed across different areas? Is the PLA process too complicated, making it a barrier to student success? 3. How do students learn about PLA opportunities? At what time in their academic journey do they learn about them? 4. What are the current PLA opportunities offered to students? 5. Which department oversees the administration of PLA? 6. How are college personnel, including faculty, administrators, advisors, and staff, professionally developed or trained in PLA opportunities? What roll do they play in communicating these opportunities to students?	• Increase awareness and utilization of PLA • Ensure PLA academic quality and integrity • Increase process quality and efficiency	Northcentral Technical College
Ensure all PLA contact information is listed clearly	Provide clear PLA contact information to students, including name and job title, email, phone, office location and hours, and photographs. Prominent, clear contact information prevents confusion, wasted time, and lost opportunities for students.	• Increase the number of students utilizing PLA • Increase efficiency	Mid-State Technical College Milwaukee Area Technical College Northcentral Technical College Mountwest Community and Technical College Cleveland State Community College
Assess institutional web pages for cross-connectivity to PLA resources	Ensure that relevant pages on the public website include direct links to a dedicated PLA page or microsite. Content that should link to PLA includes: • Academic program and certificate pages • Student pages: transfer, future/potential students, adult learner/non-traditional, military/veterans • Placement Testing or Testing Center pages • Admissions and Advising pages	• Drive traffic to PLA for increased utilization	Milwaukee Area Technical College

STRATEGIES FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Establish a clear PLA fee schedule and compare with the traditional costs	Listing direct costs provides transparency to students. By listing fees together with the costs associated with obtaining credits the traditional way, students may be more likely to see the value proposition of PLA opportunities and take advantage of them more frequently. Note: While fees are generally associated with many activities, institutions should avoid looking at PLA opportunities for students for potential revenue and instead consider the return on investment from the perspective of recruitment and retention of students. Several reports describe appropriate PLA fee structures, including the PLA Handbook of the Northeast Resiliency Consortium	• Increase transparency • Increase utilization of PLA	Northeast Resiliency Consortium's Prior Learning Assessment Handbook
CAEL's PLA is Your Business	Extend academic program reviews to include review of PLA opportunities Existing academic program review processes can serve as an excellent opportunity to also review all associated prior learning assessment opportunities within the program. Institutions with dedicated PLA personnel generally include this individual as a member of the curriculum committee that oversees this process.	• Ensure PLA academic quality and integrity • Increase PLA opportunities for students	Northcentral Technical College
Extend curricula development processes to include consideration of PLA opportunities	Prior learning assessment opportunities can be considered during the development of new curricula; instructional designers or dedicated PLA individuals can work with faculty to explore all opportunities. A standardized rubric could be developed to ensure all new curricula are assessed in the same way; Northcentral Technical College has an excellent example of this process.	• Increase awareness and utilization of PLA • Increase student persistence and completion	Northcentral Technical College
Develop an exit survey as part of the PLA request process	Like other initiatives, PLA processes should be regularly reviewed. By requiring students who have earned PLA credits to complete a feedback survey, institutions can understand how to improve or revise the processes from the student perspective. Northcentral Technical College has a good example of a PLA feedback survey.	• Increase process quality and efficiency • Enhance and extend PLA opportunities for students	Northcentral Technical College

STRATEGIES FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Action	Description	Value	Exemplar/Resource

Bolster existing PLA information to include student competencies and expectations	To help students better understand prior learning assessment, it can be useful to include a list of characteristics typical of students who request PLA. These characteristics might include the following:
	
	• PLA students possess …
	  • Strong writing and communication skills
	  • Enhanced placement test scores
	• PLA students may have …
	  • Earned certificates or have taken non-credit courses
	  • Military service experience
	  • Significant work experience
	  • Earned some college credit already
		• Increase success rate of PLA requests
		• Increase transparency
		• Increase awareness and utilization of PLA
			Cleveland State Community College

Assess external PLA resources for extending and enhancing PLA opportunities	Scan for state, peer institution, and external organization resources; many states have invested significantly in prior learning assessment, though institutions vary significantly in their prioritization and implementation of these initiatives. Now that many of these processes have matured, it may be beneficial for institutions with smaller budgets and/or fewer administrators/staff members to look to the other schools in their state with an eye for reviewing their own processes.	• Increase PLA capacity • Increase process quality and efficiency	**States with PLA Policies** Montana Ohio Oregon Tennessee Texas West Virginia

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUPPORTS

Action	Description	Value	Exemplar/Resource
Feature adult learners on the institution's public web pages	Adult learners may be more enticed to enroll if they see an institution makes them a priority; prominently featuring adult learners on the public website can be an easy way to improve engagement. Many institutions now feature a "Future Students" area with a sub-page or section devoted to adult learners. The simplest form of this engagement can be a small section or landing page (possibly within the admissions section) that speaks to the institution's prioritization of these specific students. Other institutions include headings that link directly to a well-developed adult learner microsite (see Tier 2). An example of simple content that can be added to the institutional web page includes demographic data on adult learners. This can help establish shared purpose and experience. (Example: "43% of our students are 25 years and older of our students are 35 and older; 58% of our part-time students are 25 and older; 17% of our full-time students are 25 and older.")	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase enrollment of adult learners	Three Rivers Community College

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUPPORTS			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Engage with adult learners through social media	Many colleges are actively engaged with their students through social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Establishing dedicated groups for adult learners can serve as another engagement tool and as a strong networking opportunity for both students and employers.	• Increase student engagement	Three Rivers Community College
Offer open houses for adult learners	Offering open houses that are specific to adult learners can provide an opportunity to engage them in a setting that is more comfortable and tailored to their unique needs. Information on prior learning assessment, specific resources, and adult learner-friendly scheduling can be featured.	• Increase engagement with adult learners	Windward Community College
Develop and publish an inventory of all existing adult learner resources	Many institutions have high quality resources and initiatives specific to adult learners that may not be widely known. Creating a simple inventory of all adult learner-specific resources and hosting it on the web can increase utilization. Centralizing those resources in a single location can be the first stage in a more ambitious plan that includes developing a microsite and corresponding array of resources for advisors, faculty, and students. This can also be a focal point for marketing and recruitment.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase enrollment of adult learners • Increase persistence and completion	Marshalltown Community College
Assess external resources for extending and enhancing adult learner resources	Several high-quality resources pool information about grant programs and initiatives that can provide insight and inspiration during strategic planning development.	• The Lumina Foundation grant database includes a curated listing of Adult Degree Completion Strategies. • The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) includes a library of adult learner publications • Build and enhance institutional capacity and culture focused on adult learners	Lumina's Adult Degree Completion Strategies CAEL's Adult Learning Publications
Explore the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's Adult College Completion Network Project Warehouse	The Adult College Completion Network, hosted by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), includes a well-developed project warehouse to help disseminate lessons learned, new results, and promising practices that warrant more study, all aimed at increasing adult learner college completion. The Adult College Completion (ACC) Network focuses specifically on adults with prior college credits but no degree. It links organizations in a collaborative learning network. The network assists members in expanding their knowledge, engaging with one another, and exploring new ideas and promising practices to better serve this population. The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) facilitates the work of the Network with funding from Lumina Foundation.	• Build and enhance institutional capacity and culture focused on adult learners	Adult College Completion Project Warehouse

STRATEGIES FOR CLARFIYING PROGRAM PATHS			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Provide a list of resources for students to use during self-service when deciding their academic goals.	Easy-to-implement strategies include program check-off sheets; assigning dedicated faculty as program advisors (as distinguished by their more traditional role in course scheduling); enhancing websites to include transfer and career information in conjunction with curricula; and mapping out sample schedules for full- and part-time students that include granular scheduling details.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase awareness and utilization of resources	Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas
Enhance existing academic program web pages with basic pathway design principles	Program web pages can be enhanced in several ways with minimal effort. For example, prior learning assessment can be directly integrated into academic programming web pages by including links to forms and other resources and contact information. Career exploration tools can be added easily. If there are stackable credentials associated with a degree program, these can also be clearly featured on that program's page. Lastly, data specific to relevant careers can be presented, with links to relevant sites such as national organizations, regional companies, job boards, or the college's career services center.	• Increase persistence and completion	Wytheville Community College
Develop and implement student career plans	New students can be required to complete an individual career plan, which can be built out within the institution's learning management system or using career exploration and planning technology. Students who are unsure can be required to complete surveys to help them develop their education goals. Institutions can develop their own student career surveys or leverage a resource like the Holland Code (RIASEC) Career Test. Career plans are not limited to students seeking immediate employment; the plan can be designed to take into account plans to transfer to another institution and even students who intend to pursue a bachelor's degree, seek professional certifications or licenses, or attend graduate school.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase persistence and completion	Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas Spokane Falls Community College

STRATEGIES FOR CLARFIYING PROGRAM PATHS			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Redesign the college catalog from a program-centered focus to a "roadmap" design	Most college catalogs are designed around a listing of individual academic programs within individual departments. Reframe programs around a "roadmap" model and group programs and certificates into broader career-centered categories. The catalog could include summary information and visuals and point users to web pages for more detailed (and up-to-date) information.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase persistence and completion	Northcentral Technical College
Assess external resources for extending and enhancing career pathways	States that have invested in the career pathway model have resources that can be directly leveraged by institutions that are developing their pathway capacities. Oregon, for example, has a pathway-building tool called Web Forms that facilitates the rapid development of customized pathway visualizations based on a school's distinct curricula.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase persistence and completion	**Oregon** • Career Pathways Web Resources • Career Pathways **California** • Career Pathways Design resources **Maine** • Pathway Resources **Minnesota** • Occupations in Demand Data Tool • Career Interest Assessment • CAREERwise Education **Wisconsin** • Career Pathways **Washington** • Career Pathways **Federal Resources** • O*NET Online • Bureau of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook **Public Resources** • Career Onestop

Tier 2 are actions institutions can take to establish new structures specific to adult learners or increase the quality of existing structures.

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Develop web-based PLA forms	Web-based forms are easy to use and streamline administrative processes and data collection. Inquiry forms can be used to quickly connect students to resources and reduce turnaround time from inquire to completion. They also allow an easy way for institutions to track and assess PLA utilization. Inquiry forms should include some version of a checklist students can walk through to learn about possible PLA opportunities. A single, universal PLA request form can simplify administrative processes and makes it more feasible to centralize this work under a single office or person. Some schools make this form available as a PDF; depending on the resources and available systems, this might be a good alternative. The form should be part of an overall centralized PLA strategy.	• Increase awareness and utilization of PLA • increase efficiency of PLA processes • Facilitate centralization of PLA processes	**Inquiry** • West Virginia's Life Experience Inventory as used by Mountwest Community and Technical College • Milwaukee Area Technical College's web-based form **Request Form** • Many of the institutions assessed during this study, such as Cleveland State Community College, have excellent examples of PLA applications.
Develop a PLA student appeal process	While many institutions have PLA opportunities that require high-level decision-making by subject matter experts, not all institutions have a clearly defined process for students to appeal decisions that they may question. To ensure integrity, the appeal process should be clearly described and easily understandable. This is particularly important during portfolio assessment, an activity into which students may apply a significant amount of work.	• Ensure student equity and institutional transparency	Many PLA guidelines include a section on how students can appeal decisions.
Develop standardized PLA guidelines and assessment rubrics	The development of PLA opportunities by subject matter experts should adhere to a universal set of guidelines and should be assessed using a standard rubric during the approval process. Guidelines and assessment rubrics can be developed in partnership with instructional designers and provide a means to engage faculty and expand PLA opportunities for students across all departments.	• Ensure PLA academic integrity • Ensure student equity and institutional transparency • Increase PLA opportunities	Northcentral Technical College's "Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Guidelines" Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)'s Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, & Procedures (3rd Edition)

STRATEGIES FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Develop and implement a PLA data model	As more students receive credit for prior learning, institutions must consider the underlying data model within the institution's enterprise resource planning system and how these credits are transcripted. Many institutions do not distinguish between transfer credits and other nontraditional credits. Some institutions, however, provide a granular level of coding; this provides a stronger reporting and assessment framework.	• Increase efficiency of PLA processes • Enhance data informed decision making • Bolster PLA credit transfer opportunities	Milwaukee Area Technical College's PLA Data Model
Offer PLA professional development to faculty, administrators, and advisors	Several national organizations, including the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), provide professional development opportunities for institutions. This includes advisor training for portfolio assessment, PLA marketing, and several publicly available e-books. The American Council on Education (ACE) also provides some resources for PLA professional development. Achieving the Dream offers a PLA professional development online, self-paced course. Institutions can also dedicate professional development days to these topics and offer peer training through existing faculty assessment work. If an institution offers career coaching, those coaches should be familiar with any PLA opportunities that the institution provides, and should communicate that information to the students they counsel.	• Increase awareness and utilization of PLA • Increase efficiency of PLA processes	Northcentral Technical College CAEL ACE Achieving the Dream
Develop and institute a formal institutional PLA policy	Many institutions offer some PLA but do not have a formal PLA policy. Development and institution of a PLA policy can serve as a rallying point to engage key stakeholders in focusing on and bolstering additional PLA capacity. This would be particularly relevant at institutions in states where there are no current statewide PLA initiatives.	• Increase efficiency of PLA processes • Ensure PLA academic integrity • Ensure institutional transparency • Increase awareness and utilization of PLA	Milwaukee Area Technical College Northcentral Technical College Mountwest Community and Technical College Cleveland State Community College
Proactive advising that leverages PLA	If the institution uses proactive advising practices, outreach before the semester begins and during the first few weeks of the semester should include information on prior learning assessment opportunities. This process should be aligned with the institution's PLA policy as it relates to students already registered for classes that they also seek prior learning credits for. (Some policies preclude PLA credits for courses students have already taken or are currently enrolled in. Such policies can obviously be a barrier for students who are made aware of PLA opportunities after they have enrolled in a course.)	• Increase awareness and utilization of PLA • Increase efficiency of PLA processes	Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas Milwaukee Area Technical College Cleveland State Community College Northcentral Technical College

STRATEGIES FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Develop a PLA Guide for faculty, advisors, and administrators	A comprehensive guide about all of an institution's PLA processes can bring more attention to PLA within the college culture, serve as a starting point for discussions, and help to standardize processes across different academic departments. The goal of this crosswalk table can be developed by the person the institution puts in charge of PLA. Many examples of PLA guides and manuals are available through resources listed elsewhere in this report.	• Increase awareness and utilization of PLA • Increase efficiency of PLA processes	Milwaukee Area Technical College Northcentral Technical College Mountwest Community and Technical College Cleveland State Community College
Develop PLA marketing	Branding of the institution's PLA opportunities. The goal of this crosswalk table can be to provide a focal point for marketing and communication to prospective and current students. Colorful iconography and quality designs can bolster interest in PLA. Marketing materials can be developed that include flyers for regional businesses and HR departments, and included within customized material for corporate training development, if the institution offers such training. PLA can be featured at open houses (with a dedicated space or table) and advisory committee meetings, where feedback can also be provided by community partners. For institutions with the appropriate capacity and interest, developing a full-fledged marketing plan for PLA can drive significant student interest and utilization.	• Increase awareness and utilization of PLA	Mountwest Community and Technical College

STRATEGIES FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/ Resource**
Develop PLA non-credit-to-credit crosswalks	The most valuable PLA opportunity an institution can implement is a crosswalk table that aligns all non-credit educational experiences to credit-based equivalencies. These crosswalks provide students with the easiest and most accessible form of PLA credits. The goal of this crosswalk table would be to facilitate automatic equating within the system between non-credit and credit. Once students submit their evidence of PLA (e.g., copies of certificates), there is nothing further for them to do, as the credit is added to their record automatically. Building out a crosswalk database of all prior learning assessments can also serve as a good starting point for developing an institution's PLA capacity. Internal challenge exams, external standardized exams, corporate trainings, and professional certifications and licenses can all be maintained within a centralized PLA repository for easy access by both staff and students. (A good example are the Standardized Credit Awards at the Community College of Rhode Island.) Professional licensures and certifications can include many commonly-offered IT certificates (e.g., CISCO, Microsoft), as well as real estate and police academy licensures. Because these offerings vary widely across the country, a good starting point to locate relevant credentials within an institution's service area would be the local workforce investment board (WIB), the state's department of labor, or the regional chamber of commerce. Military service and training is also a high-value articulation opportunity. ACE provides credit recommendation services, and military service schools can provide transcripts directly. Lastly, apprenticeships are becoming more common, and can be articulated for credit as well. Identifying and building out a comprehensive listing of all nationally-recognized external examinations can provide an immediate boost to PLA inquiries and serve as a starting point for discussions. The listing should include all courses for which credit can be awarded upon successful completion (examples include the ACT, SAT, CLEP, AP, DANTES/DSST, NOCTI (National Occupational Competency Testing Institute), CPS/CAP, GED, UExcel, and Excelsior College Exams). The major categories that should be incorporated in the table include the following: • Transfer credit • Portfolio assessment (developed in-house or leveraging third-party processes) • Challenge exams (internally developed) • National standardized tests (externally developed, e.g. CLEP, AP) • Apprenticeships • Non-credit-to-credit articulations with partner schools • Military experience and training • Professional licensure and certification crosswalks to credit	• Decrease burden on the student • Increase efficiency of PLA processes • Ensure PLA academic integrity • Ensure student equity and institutional transparency	Milwaukee Area Technical College Northcentral Technical College Mountwest Community and Technical College Cleveland State Community College

STRATEGIES FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Action	Description	Value	Exemplar/Resource
Develop PLA portfolio assessment	Portfolios are critical for situations in which there are no alternative venues for a student to demonstrate prior learning. To inform decision-making in developing this capacity, institutions should first scan candidate departments for appropriate opportunities. If sufficient capacity exists but is not being leveraged, then it may make sense to move forward to develop this process. Two strategies are commonly employed by institutions that offer portfolio assessments. Each has its own strength and weaknesses. **Streamlined portfolio** processes do not require students to register for courses and can generally be completed within a few weeks. The benefit of the streamlined process is in cost and time savings to students. There may be some concerns about the rigor of this process. Such concerns can be addressed by ensuring a standardized assessment process that includes professional development for those examining portfolios. **Comprehensive portfolio assessment** includes a course that students must register for and includes an in-depth, longer, and more rigorous process to complete. The benefit to the student in this case is a rigorous introspective look at their learning and knowledge, which can benefit the student in ways a more cursory examination might not. Regardless of how portfolios are submitted, they are reviewed by subject matter experts, either a single designated faculty member or a committee. All portfolio assessments should include a clear-cut manner for students to appeal any decisions made that are not in their favor.	• Ensure PLA academic integrity • Increase PLA opportunities	**Streamlined Portfolio Process** • Cleveland State Community College • Milwaukee Area Technical College • Northcentral Technical College **Comprehensive Portfolio Process** • Mountwest Community and Technical College • ARCC • Three Rivers Community College

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUPPORTS			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Develop a dedicated adult learner microsite	Developing a microsite for adult learners is an excellent engagement opportunity and can serve as a first phase of a more ambitious engagement plan. A well-developed microsite can house a variety of resources that specifically target adult learners, including information on prior learning assessment, scholarship opportunities, counseling services, childcare resources, targeted academic programs such as evening and accelerated options, as well as marketing videos that feature video spotlights or testimonials of individual students.	• Increase engagement with adult learners	**Marketing videos** Lakeshore Technical College SUNY Broome Community College
Provide scholarships specific to adult learners	Scholarships aimed at the adult learner can be funded through special grants available in some states, but institutions can also develop their own internal scholarships specific to adult learners. The most common type of scholarships identified are "last dollar," which provides funding that is not already covered by other sources, such as state and federal aid. Models can also be developed based on The Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) College Promise initiative; institutions can also apply for special grants such as Goldman Sachs Gives scholarship money for adult learners.	• Increase persistence and completion	Gateway Tech (Goldman Sachs Gives) Cleveland State Community College's Adult Promise and Adult Reconnect initiatives Milwaukee Area Technical College's Promise Scholarships and their Commit to Complete initiative. Three Rivers Community College adult learner scholarships
Establish an emergency fund dedicated to adult learners	For many adult learners, basic living essentials such as food, clothing, and transportation can be a challenge. Many schools provide emergency funding for short-term assistance to students. Agreements with transportation companies to provide vouchers is also a possibility. Some schools have agreements with local second-hand organizations and provide students with outfits for job interviews at no cost.	• Increase persistence and completion	Blue Mountain Community College Northcentral Technical College
Establish an adult student organization on campus and engage national organizations	It has been shown that adult learners frequently feel disconnected from the college culture; one way to engage this group of students is to develop an Adult Student Organization; there are also national organizations dedicated to adult learners, including the Association for Nontraditional Students in Higher Education, and Alpha Sigma Lambda, the non-traditional student honor society.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase persistence and completion	Cleveland State Community College

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUPPORTS			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Provide counseling services for adult learners	Mental health advising that is specific to adult learners can be incorporated into existing counseling and advising services.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase persistence and completion	Cleveland State Community College Mountwest Community and Technical College
Extend capacity for childcare services	Childcare assistance is a critical challenge for many adult learners. Despite this universal need, the range of available resources across the country is highly variable. While some schools offer full-service, on-site daycare services (some with funding available as well), this is not typical. Feasibility studies generally show that a barrier to offering such services is the substantive up-front cost associated with such initiatives, particularly when capital investment is required. A good starting point is to collate all available local childcare resources and perhaps even vetting these services, providing students with at least a strong starting point for finding daycare resources. Schools with the ability to invest a modest amount might provide vouchers for daycare to eligible students.	• Increase persistence and completion	Cleveland State Community College Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas
Develop a rapid-response team and strategy for large-scale regional business closures	Recruiting adult learners from regional businesses undergoing significant layoffs can be efficiently handled through a proactively developed rapid-response strategy. Ad hoc teams of administrators, staff, and faculty can be assembled based on the needs of the specific business. Presentations can be developed for providing an overview of educational opportunities and available resources; prospective students can also be provided with detailed plans for completion by incorporating career or guided pathway models.	• Increase engagement with adult learners	Northcentral Technical College Cleveland State Community College
Develop self-paced online courses	Self-paced online courses can provide adult learners with even more flexible learning option. By not requiring adult learners to adhere to a set schedule of assignment due-dates and tests, work and childcare schedules are potentially removed as barriers. To ensure success, students can work closely with faculty mentors and advisors.	• Increase persistence and completion	Northcentral Technical College's Anytime Start courses
Develop accelerated evening programming	Evening programs designed around a cohort model with pre-mapped schedules can dramatically reduce time to completion, while dedicated faculty that also serve as mentors can ensure strong persistence. Advance Programs at Cleveland State Community College, for example, include associate degrees in business, medical informatics, medical assisting, early childhood education, electrical maintenance, and mechanical maintenance. Certificates are available in early childhood education, customer service, process control, electrical maintenance, and mechanical maintenance.	• Increase persistence and completion	Cleveland State Community College

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUPPORTS

Action	Description	Value	Exemplar/Resource
Develop one-credit curriculum modules	By starting with credit-based programming, one-credit courses can be developed around associated student learning outcomes. In this way, courses can run every four weeks, and can provide multiple, continuous entry points for students. It also allows for greater prior learning assessment opportunities, as it is easier to grant in a one-credit format.	• Increase persistence and completion • Increase PLA utilization	Southwest Wisconsin Technical College
Develop full immersion developmental courses	Five-days-a-week, full-immersion courses in developmental education can accelerate the time it takes for adult learners to become college-ready.	• Increase persistence and completion	Lakeshore Technical College's FullFOCUS programming Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas Math Pathways
Provide professional development opportunities for faculty, advisors, and administrators	Professional development specific to the understanding and needs of adult learners is available for faculty, advisors, and administrators from a variety of sources. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) provides training for staff such as front-line admissions and advisors on accelerated credentials through promotion of PLA and Credit by Exam. Training includes topics such as "Advising of Adult Learners." CAEL also has a PLA Accelerator Tool. Apart from CAEL's training opportunities, a significant body of literature and web resources (e.g., adultstudent.com/educator/) is also available.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase awareness and utilization of resources	Milwaukee Area Technical College Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas Mountwest Community and Technical College

STRATEGIES FOR CLARIFYING PROGRAM PATHS

Action	Description	Value	Exemplar/Resource
Develop graphical visualizations of pathways	Navigation of academic curricula can be streamlined with appealing visualizations. These can be static depictions useful for quick reference or marketing purposes, or dynamic and interactive web-based designs that can be used for decision-making and advising. These visualizations can also serve to help develop the alignment between academic programs and career clusters, providing a good basis for fine-tuning career or guided pathways.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase awareness and utilization of resources	Milwaukee Area Technical College Anoka Technical College Community College of Rhode Island
Develop pathway branding and iconography	Distinct branding and iconography can be an entry point to redesigning the academic portfolio.	• Increase engagement with adult learners	McLennan Community College

Tier 3 practices are intended to foster shifts in institutional culture and values, budget allocations, and administrative structures towards prioritizing adult learners.

STRATGIES FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Complete a comprehensive assessment of PLA opportunities for all courses	Many courses can be tested through standardized tests developed either externally or internally. Many institutions handle this on a case-by-case basis, or may provide students with a listing of available tests. Some institutions, however, have completed a comprehensive assessment of all available courses (with technical courses as the primary focus) and provide students with detailed PLA opportunities threaded throughout all program curricula. If not already developed (see Tier 1), standardized PLA guidelines and assessment rubrics can be developed and used to streamline the process. Together with an associated data model, these different forms of PLA are added to the course master table within the institution's ERP system. Together with a crosswalk table and portfolio process and leveraging, these form the basis of a very solid PLA system.	• Increase efficiency of PLA processes • Increase awareness and utilization of PLA	Northcentral Technical College
Establish a PLA Specialist position	Consideration can be given to creating a new position (or restructuring a current one) dedicated to prior learning assessment. This individual could reside either in the registrar's office, student records, or the advising/counseling area. As a one-stop shop for all PLA processes, this individual would be responsible for centralizing all PLA processes, working directly with students, faculty, the testing center, registrar, bursar, etc. Many examples of this position are provided in the case studies above, and job descriptions are provided within the associated resources provided in this report.	• Increase efficiency of PLA processes • Increase awareness and utilization of PLA	Mountwest Community and Technical College

STRATGIES FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Develop a PLA microsite	Another resource, a prior learning assessment microsite, should include pages for each form of prior learning available as well as detailed contact information for students. Costs should be stated clearly. Limitations should be clearly explained as well, including the maximum amount of credits that are possible to earn, transfer restrictions, conditions for conferral, etc. Processes should be clearly developed and articulated. Any references to personnel, policies, etc., should include as much information and direct links as possible. A web form or guided wizard should be developed to help students explore and understand their options and submit requests for additional information or meet with an advisor/coordinator. Letting students know what their PLA options are is as critical as developing robust processes. There should be a landing page or microsite dedicated to prior learning, and it should be clearly accessible from the main website's menus. Publicly accessible pages should include marketing material for prospective adult learners and feature a high-level summary of available options; details can be placed within sub-pages or, if the site is dynamically designed, within collapsible sections. For web pages that provide information on specific processes – such as requesting challenge exams, submitting a certificate for credit awards, or applying for a portfolio assessment—the design of the page can reflect the overall workflow of the process, from inquiry to credit award. The Community College of Rhode Island's PLA page is a good example.	• Increase efficiency of PLA processes • Increase awareness and utilization of PLA	Milwaukee Area Technical College Lakeshore Technical College Western Technical College Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College Ivy Tech Community College Waukesha County Technical College Mountwest Community and Technical College Northcentral Technical College Cleveland State Community College

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUPPORTS			
Action	**Description**	**Value**	**Exemplar/Resource**
Establish an Adult Learner Recruiter position	An Adult Recruiter focuses on students who have completed some credits but have not yet completed a degree. They work directly with both credit and non-credit areas of the college as well as local business and industry. They are also the main contact point for non-credit students interested in attending college.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase awareness and utilization of resources • Increase persistence and completion	Northcentral Technical College
Establish an office dedicated to adult learners	Some institutions have successfully centralized all their adult learner resources under a single Office of Adult Learners. A dedicated advisor provides direct support to adult learners; is knowledgeable about the institution's PLA opportunities, as well as scholarships and other financial support opportunities; and is familiar with the academic portfolio (both credit and non-credit).	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase awareness and utilization of resources • Increase persistence and completion	Cleveland State Community College
Develop and implement a first-year experience tailored to adult learners	A common trend among the colleges we interviewed is a successfully-implemented first-year experience. Some schools offer adult learners special courses at no charge; others developed a course that is required for all degree programs (a model like that seen at traditional colleges). Other institutions incorporated this information in mandatory orientations (held online to accommodate the needs of busy students. Common themes covered in these initiatives include college-specific information such as navigating the learning management system; providing a survey of all available resources, such as the library and tutoring centers; providing guidance for the college application, FAFSA, and placement testing; and general areas critical for student success, such as study readiness and time management. Milwaukee Area Technical College, Northcentral Technical College, Mountwest Community and Technical College, and Cleveland State Community College each have good examples of this initiative.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase awareness and utilization of resources • Increase persistence and completion	Mountwest Community and Technical College

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUPPORTS

Action	Description	Value	Exemplar/Resource
Develop wraparound service and meaningful personal connections in place of student self-service	Wraparound services such as those used in the Working Student Success Network include providing a holistic suite of support services for the adult learner's specific needs at every point in their academic experience (including completing a college application and FAFSA, placement testing, advising, course registration, tuition and fee payment, books and other class materials, regular touchpoints throughout the semester (proactive advising), tutoring, and milestones such as when to begin thinking about transfer or job applications. These services can be provided by a network of staff working in a cross-functional team or by a dedicated adult learner advisor or administrator. The driving principle is the development of a personal relationship with the student and engaging with them every step of the way. Several examples include: • Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas uses "yellow cards," which students earn only after meeting with their advisor to encourage meaningful advisor interactions. This card is required for the student to receive their financial aid checks. • Northcentral Technical College has an Adult Learner Recruiter who is dedicated to working one-on-one with adult learners. • Northcentral Technical College has a Navigator position, which helps students before they fully enroll in program courses. This individual assists students with completing job applications, works with job centers, and serves as a touchpoint for students as they move through their academic pathway and begin applying to jobs. • Cleveland State Community College has a dedicated advisor who has undergone professional development training in working with adult learners. That position is housed with the Office of Adult Learners, which is overseen by the registrar. • Blue Mountain Community College has Success Coaches, which are distinct from advisors and counselors. They meet with students to discern specific barriers and challenges they are dealing with and then connect them to relevant resources. This can include funding related to academic needs, such as testing fees, books, or tuition, and nonacademic challenges, such as childcare needs or emergency funds for vehicles, food, and security. These individuals may also provide both career and financial coaching.	• Increase engagement with adult learners • Increase awareness and utilization of resources • Increase persistence and completion	Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas Northcentral Technical College Cleveland State Community College Blue Mountain Community College

ENDNOTES

1 Carnevale et al. *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots.* 2016.

2 *A Stronger Nation: Postsecondary Learning Builds the Talent that Helps Us Rise.* April 2016.

3 Lumina Foundation Strategic Plan for 2017 to 2020.

4 *A Stronger Nation: Postsecondary Learning Builds the Talent that Helps Us Rise.* April 2016.

5 Adult learners are simply those students over 25 years old engaged in postsecondary education. In contrast, there is no formal definition of "nontraditional student"; rather, students are placed along a continuum based on the number of distinct characteristics they possess. Almost three quarters of all undergraduates in 1999-2000 had one or more of these characteristics.

6 Findings from the *Condition of Education: Nontraditional Undergraduates.* NCES. 2002.

7 Fain, P. Transformation from Within. *Inside Higher Ed.* January 2013.

8 Carnevale et al. *Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees.* June 2012.

9 IPEDS AY 2014-15 provisional data was used for all work.

10 Tools were developed in VBA within Microsoft Excel.

11 Screening keyword List: Adult, Prior, Experiential, Pathway, Portfolio, Cluster, Life Experience, Guide (subsequent queries used "Adult Learner" and "Prior Learning" to reduce false positives; Guided Pathways was later added as well).

12 It should be noted that community and technical colleges within several states were provided further consideration due to substantive resources invested into these areas. These included the states of Indiana, Wisconsin, Florida, Ohio, Kentucky, Oregon, and Hawaii.

13 A final scan was performed on 909 valid URLs at the completion of the study to assess the most current trends in mentions of the most common keywords.

14 "Equate" in this context means two educational experiences are equivalent to each other in the institution's database. For example, a certain score on a placement exam might provide a student with success in a developmental course. Or a professional certification in IT might be equivalent to a set of three academic courses. Equates are built into the system by administrators. Once in the system, they can readily be reused to provide students credit.

15 http://brazosport.edu/programs/academics/Learning-Frameworks/SQ4R/index

16 The state of Minnesota permits institutions to provide college credits to students for 'contract classes'.

ABOUT ACHIEVING THE DREAM

Achieving the Dream (ATD) leads a growing network of more than 220 community colleges committed to helping their students, particularly low-income students and students of color, achieve their goals for academic success, personal growth, and economic opportunity. ATD is making progress in closing academic achievement gaps and accelerating student success through a unique change process that builds each college's institutional capacities in seven essential areas. ATD, along with more than 100 experienced coaches and advisors, works closely with Network colleges in 40 states and the District of Columbia to reach more than 4 million community college students.

Achieving the Dream received support from Lumina Foundation to undertake and document the results of this exploratory study focusing on strategies that are critical for encouraging adult learners to engage and ultimately succeed in postsecondary education.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ACHIEVING THE DREAM:
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