

ATTAINMENT FOR ALL: POSTSECONDARY PATHWAYS

*Centering Equity in
Wraparound Student Services*



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INTRODUCTION

From Fall 2019 through Spring 2020, The Hunt Institute released a series of policy briefs, [Attainment for All: Postsecondary Pathways](#), that highlighted scalable state-level strategies to boost postsecondary attainment rates among specific student subpopulations including high school graduates, first-generation students, and adult learners. Building upon the momentum of this series, the higher education team at The Hunt Institute has created a follow-up series of briefs that further explore the intersection between equity and efforts to raise postsecondary attainment rates.

This brief is the second of the three-part **Attainment for All: Equity in Postsecondary Pathways** series. The [first brief](#) explored the idea of embedding equity in postsecondary attainment, identified barriers to achieving equity, and included examples of states’ work to ensure equity in all aspects of postsecondary attainment. This second brief will examine the importance of wraparound services that provide equitable support to students. The series will conclude with a third brief examining the use of disaggregated data to narrow equity gaps in postsecondary education.

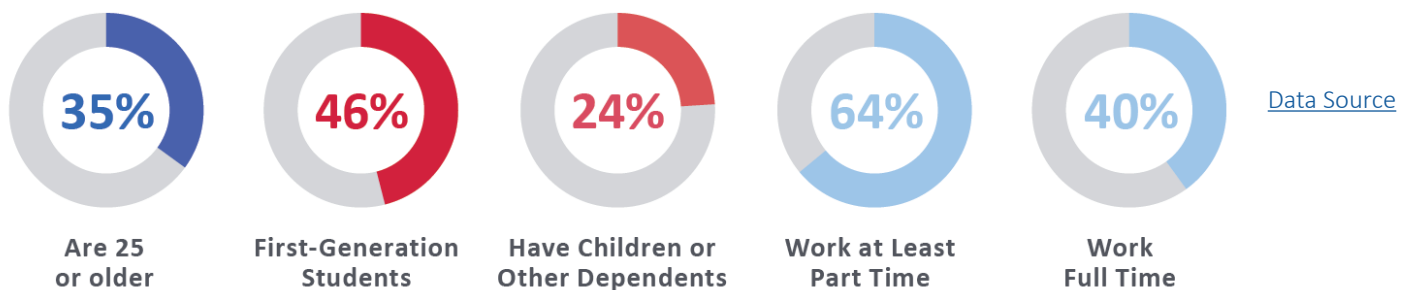
Note: throughout this issue brief, various terms are used to refer to different racial and ethnic groups. The use of different terms is intended to accurately reflect the framing used in the methodologies of the various underlying studies cited.

TODAY’S HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

As higher education leaders think about more effective strategies to raise postsecondary attainment rates, it is vital that efforts and policies to support student completion address the unique needs of today’s students. While postsecondary students have historically been recent high school graduates from middle-to-upper class families, student demographics have become more diverse over time (Figure 1). Additionally, racial demographics have shifted over the past two decades, with nearly [45 percent](#) of undergraduate students and nearly a third of graduate student being people of color.

FIGURE 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF TODAY’S HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT POPULATION

The average college student is 26 years old.



WHY DO WE NEED WRAPAROUND SERVICES?

As the first [Attainment for All: Equity in Postsecondary Pathways](#) brief discusses, low-income, first-generation, non-traditional, and students of color are often less likely to access higher education and attain postsecondary credentials due to systemic barriers across the education landscape. In fact, over [80 percent](#) of high-income students enroll in comparison to 68 percent of low-income students. Across all students enrolled, nearly one-third of undergraduates across the nation [do not remain enrolled](#) after their first year, and many require six years to complete their degrees.



Students who do not complete their degrees on-time are more likely to accumulate [student loan debt](#) and are not able to realize the earnings benefits that come with a postsecondary degree. Further, [persistence and retention rates](#) are linked to racial and ethnic gaps across the nation, with Black and Latinx students persisting and retaining at lower levels than their white counterparts. Wraparound services are critical to increasing the retention and persistence rates of students.

WHAT ARE WRAPAROUND SERVICES?

Wraparound services were founded on the medical practice of [systems of care](#), in which medical providers such as doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, and social workers coordinate their practices to support the patient in a holistic manner. Similarly, [wraparound services](#) in higher education refers to holistic support to ensure a student's full range of needs are addressed. This can include academic, health, socioemotional, familial, financial, and logistical support. The [CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs](#) is one example of a wraparound service program.

The CUNY ASAP Model

One of the pioneering examples of a comprehensive wraparound student services model is the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) initiative, which was started in 2007 at the City University of New York (CUNY). The ASAP model is notable for the comprehensive suite of financial, academic, and personal supports it provides to participating students – including:

- Scholarship funds to cover tuition and fees (provided in a last-dollar model);
- A dedicated advisor to guide students' progress through completion;
- Funding to pay for textbooks;
- Transportation assistance in the form of a free, unlimited MetroCard;
- Special registration options that offer greater flexibility;
- Networking opportunities with other ASAP students; and
- Access to career development counseling services.

The ASAP model has been proven effective by a robust body of research led by [MDRC](#), which called the effects of the ASAP model “by far the largest effects MDRC has found for a community college intervention.” Studies have shown that ASAP nearly doubled graduation rates for participants after three years; after six years, ASAP participants continued to have higher completion rates and lower time-to-degree.

The MDRC research has also shown that the success of the ASAP model makes the initiative [cost effective](#). The ASAP program generally resulted in cost increases of 60 percent compared to regular services, and the largest component of that funding goes toward hiring the administrators and student affairs professionals who are needed to administer the wraparound services. Despite the increased cost per student, the ASAP model raises completion rates so significantly that the cost CUNY pays per graduate is lower for ASAP participants when compared to the general student population. One study found that CUNY saved approximately [\\$6,500 per graduate](#) through the ASAP model.



THE IMPORTANCE OF WRAPAROUND SERVICES

The availability of wraparound services can be the determining factor in whether a student accesses higher education and/or persists toward their degree or credential. Many students, such as first-generation and/or adult learners, experience barriers to higher education that wraparound services can help to address. One [study](#) by the University of Chicago Poverty Lab found that offering such services to community college students increased full-time enrollment by 13 percent and increased retention from one term to the next by 11 to 16 percent. Below are some of the major trends in higher education that wraparound services aim to address:

Navigating Higher Education



Administrative Process of Higher Education

► **Challenge:** Navigating higher education can be difficult as many of the practices are complex and require students to visit multiple offices to get support. First-generation students may [experience difficulty](#) in navigating academic bureaucracy, as they are often unable to utilize parents or family members to navigate the system.

► **Innovative Practices:**

- **Institutional** | The [Educational Opportunity Program \(EOP\)](#) at California State University provides a holistic set of counseling and support services for low-income and traditionally underserved students who attend a school in the CSU system. While the specific services vary by campus, EOP generally provides participants with ongoing advising, tutoring, mentoring, and workshops designed to increase student retention and persistence rates.
- **State** | The Arkansas Department of Education (ADOE) put together a list of wraparound services Arkansas residents can access to find resources that meet their needs. The ADOE collaborated with the Department of Health and the Division of Children and Family services to pull resources together on their [newly-developed statewide community portal](#). In the portal, users can search for data on resources by filtering by region and category. For example, users who select the Southeast Region and Food Pantries as a category will be referred to six locations in the region that provide meal assistance.



Lack of Flexibility in Financial Aid

► **Challenge:** In order for students to gain access to state and federal financial aid, they are required to fill out the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#). However, FAFSA can be [intimidating](#) as students are required to submit information on their familial income and employment status.

► **Innovative Practices:**

- **Institutional** | [College Advising Corps \(CAC\)](#) utilizes near-peer advisors to help students navigate the college and FAFSA application processes. Advisors can be tied to a specific secondary or postsecondary institution to improve access to higher education.
- **State** | The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education administers a first-dollar scholarship program known as [Oklahoma's Promise](#). This program allows high school students from families with an annual income of \$60,000 or less to earn a college tuition scholarship.



Financial Burdens



Experiencing Housing Insecurity

- ▶ **Challenge:** In 2021, nearly [50 percent](#) of students experienced housing insecurity and 14 percent experienced homelessness. Students experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness are [less likely](#) to attain their degree or credential.
- ▶ **Innovative Practices:**
 - ▶ **Institutional** | Durham Technical Community College launched an [affordable housing initiative](#) to address a report that found that over 350 students had experienced some form of housing insecurity over the past year. Given the rising costs of housing in Durham, the Durham Tech Foundation established a subsidiary to lead the affordable housing development near its campus.
 - ▶ **State** | In 2021, the Illinois General Assembly passed [House Bill 374](#) to authorize community college boards of trustees and local housing authorities to develop affordable housing for community college students. This legislation helps to address the issue of community colleges not having the right to own student housing, a longstanding barrier to affordable housing for students in the state.



Transportation Challenges

- ▶ **Challenge:** Community college students spend [nearly an average of \\$2,000](#) on transportation in an academic year. For students outside of urban areas, transportation may be even more difficult [as public transit options may be limited](#), meaning students will require their own car to attend classes.
- ▶ **Innovative Practices:**
 - ▶ **Institutional** | Rio Hondo College partnered with their local transportation agency to discount transit passes to a [\\$7 fee per semester](#). Students are able to utilize their pass to get to campus but are also able to use it around the local region (e.g., to get groceries and transport their children to and from school). This collaboration saved approximately \$2,000 per student and was found to improve attainment by [17 percent for credentials](#) and 27 percent for associate degrees.
 - ▶ **Federal** | The bipartisan [PATH to College Act](#), introduced into the U.S. Congress in November 2021, seeks to make public transportation more accessible for students enrolled in community colleges, minority-serving institutions, and institutions with a large number of Pell-eligible students. The legislation would establish a pilot grant program for public transit providers in collaboration with eligible institutions of higher education.



Unexpected Financial Burdens

- ▶ **Challenge:** One of the biggest factors in a student's decision to stop-out of postsecondary education is unanticipated financial hardships, such as health care bills or car repairs. In fact, over [40 percent](#) of students cited financial reasons for leaving their education.
- ▶ **Innovative Practices:**
 - ▶ **Institutional** | Georgia State University implemented a number of complementary completion initiatives for students, including the [Panther Retention Grants](#) program, which provides small amounts of aid for students who experience some sort of financial emergency that may prevent them from completing their studies.
 - ▶ **State** | In 2018, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper established the [Finish Line Grants](#). The purpose of these grants is to provide students with financial assistance when the student experiences hardship, for example health care, childcare, housing, or other financial emergencies that may keep a student from completing their education. These grants act as a partnership between the community college and the Workforce Development Board to establish funds and a process to disseminate funds to students. Students who have completed over half of their degree or credential are eligible to apply.



Competing Priorities



Balancing Work and Academic Workloads

■ **Challenge:** As of 2018, [27 percent](#) of full-time enrolled undergraduate students were working more than 24 hours per week. For part-time enrolled undergraduate students, these numbers are even greater, with over [70 percent](#) working more than 24 hours per week. Students who work more than 15 hours per week have less time to dedicate to their academic success, making them [less likely](#) to persist toward attainment.

■ Innovative Practices:

- ▶ **Institutional** | [The Dallas Community College District](#) and Houston County Community College System have collaborated to create a virtual platform for education. The project aims to develop models of several replicable pathways to Texas colleges by combining industry-recognized non-credit certifications with Career and Technical Education programs in high-need areas such as automotive and information technologies.
- ▶ **State** | [Tennessee Reconnect](#) is an initiative to help more adults return to higher education to gain new skills, advance in the workplace, and fulfill lifelong dreams of completing a degree or credential.



Increasing Child Care Costs

■ **Challenge:** More than [one fifth](#) of all postsecondary students are parents. As quality child care costs hit an [all-time high](#), many adult learners are required to [choose between](#) their child and pursuing a degree or credential.

■ Innovative Practices:

- ▶ **Institutional** | The University of Rhode Island offers [financial assistance](#) to eligible undergraduate student parents in recognition of the unique challenges that often exist for these students.
- ▶ **State** | [The North Carolina Community College Child Care Grant Program](#) provides up to \$24 per day to assist student-parents with child care expenses while they pursue their degree or credential.

Socioemotional Health



Accessing Mental Health Services

■ **Challenge:** In 2020, more than [40 percent](#) of postsecondary students experienced depression and nearly one in three reported experiencing anxiety. Many institutions of higher education have limits to the number of sessions or [have long wait times](#) to see a therapist, due to the [increase in demand](#) for their services.

■ Innovative Practices:

- ▶ **Institutional** | [Belmont University](#) purchased Therapy Assistance Online, which provides faculty, staff, and students access to self-guided tools and modules to support their mental health. When the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated mental health needs, Belmont was able to add-on the TimelyCare feature, which allowed virtual physical and mental health support 24/7.
- ▶ **State** | The State of California has provided [funding to support student mental health services](#) to the University of California, California State University, and California Community College systems since academic year 2017-18. Although most of this funding was initially provided on a one-time basis, the state has since established an ongoing general fund to provide for mental health services across the systems.



Experiencing Food Insecurity

■ **Challenge:** In 2021, [39 percent](#) of students at two-year institutions and 29 percent of students at four-year institutions experienced food insecurity. Students who experience food insecurity are [40 percent](#) less likely to graduate from college; this statistic is even more grim for first-generation students experiencing food insecurity.

■ **Innovative Practices:**

- ▶ **Institutional |** North Carolina State University has created a [robust network of resources](#) for students to address food insecurity. In addition to an institutional food pantry, there are meal share options, scholarships to access a meal plan, and resources to ensure students are accessing local and federal efforts. Additionally, by creating a dedicated webpage with resources, students are able to efficiently gain access to support.
- ▶ **State |** In 2017, California Governor Jerry Brown and the state legislature allocated funding to [address food insecurity](#) for postsecondary students in the state. This funding created a program to allow students to donate meal swipes from their meal plans, required dedicated staff to address basic needs insecurity, and established campus food pantries.



Lacking a Sense of Belonging on Campus

■ **Challenge:** Racial-ethnic minority and first-generation students are [less inclined to have a sense of belonging](#) than their white and continuing-generation peers. A student's [sense of belonging](#) is defined as a student's perception of support on campus, connection to others, feeling cared about, and being respected or valued by others at the institution. Having a strong sense of belonging has been linked to higher rates of persistence, postsecondary attainment, engagement in the campus community, and health outcomes.

■ **Innovative Practices:**

- ▶ **Institutional |** The [Diverse Male Student Initiative](#) is an experiential two-year program offered at Prince George's Community College (PGCC) to help male students gain access to additional resources and focus their energies on self-improvement and community involvement. Participating students gain skills to enhance their abilities to procure leadership roles by developing a network, participating in career and personal development training, workforce experiences, and more. The program has boosted persistence and retention rates at PGCC and is highlighted in [this video](#).
- ▶ **State |** Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a federal-funded grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. New Jersey GEAR UP services include a 6-week summer bridge program on a college campus designed to provide students a sense of belonging and fit on a college campus.



ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR EMBEDDING EQUITY

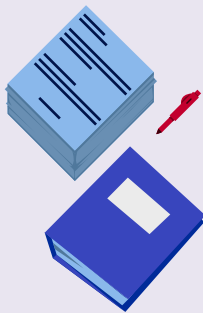
As state policymakers and institution leaders think about how to deliver wraparound student services in an equitable way, they should consider the logistics involved with each step of the process required to receive support. By conducting an audit that examines the various ways that explicit and implicit bias can affect the processes involved with delivering wraparound services, institution leaders can understand how to adjust policies and practices to ensure that supports are delivered in ways that ultimately lessen equity gaps.



Eligibility

The first area of wraparound services delivery that could be affected by bias is the process of determining eligibility requirements for which students can access the services. Here are some examples of common features in eligibility requirement policies that can exacerbate equity gaps:

- Requiring students to have no outstanding financial balance with the institution;
- Requiring students to be full-time;
- Requiring students to meet strict academic performance benchmarks; or
- Requiring students to provide documentation of specific financial need.



Application Process

Equity gaps can also become more pronounced because of the application processes required to receive wraparound services – such as:

- Requiring students to submit numerous forms – including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
- Requiring students to include information about their family’s financial situation (which may involve getting information from parents); or
- Making applications available online and in a mobile-friendly format.



Support for Advisors

Most importantly, the administrative staff as well as academic and student affairs professionals who are charged with helping students receive wraparound services could benefit from supportive policies to ensure that they are working to lessen equity gaps in higher education through strategies such as:

- Providing cultural competency training;
- Recruiting and retaining a student affairs workforce that more accurately reflects the demographics of today’s higher education students;
- Conducting training to address implicit bias in decision making and student interaction; and
- Identifying and eliminating explicit bias in counseling or advising policies.



GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

As state policymakers consider what actions they could take to drive progress on policies related to wraparound student services, they should consider:

- Why are wraparound services important? How do wraparound services advance postsecondary attainment?
- What student subpopulations are not attaining postsecondary degrees or credentials in your region or state? Would wraparound services address the barriers they experience?
- What wraparound services are currently available in your region or state? Do they touch on the varying barriers discussed in this brief?
- What incentives exist for institutions of higher education to embed wraparound services? What incentive opportunities are available?
- Are there existing funding streams available for institution leaders to use for wraparound student services?
- How can policymakers create urgency and funding to support the implementation of more encompassing wraparound student services?

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