

Evidence-Based College Completion Programs at Four-Year Postsecondary Institutions

While most of the focus on evidence-based college completion programs has been conducted on programs that operate primarily at two-year public institutions, there is growing evidence that these types of programs can also be implemented successfully at four-year institutions for students from low-income families. Programs aimed at increasing college persistence and completion are important to expand to public four-year institutions because [less than half](#) of first-time, full-time Pell recipients earn a bachelor's degree within six years, and [outcomes](#) for many students of color - and Black and Latino/a students in particular - are much worse than they are for their peers.

Any federal investment in college completion, such as the \$62 billion College Completion Fund proposed by President Biden in the [American Families Plan](#), should include resources for completion programs at public four-year postsecondary institutions. By increasing the four-year college graduation rate, the College Completion Fund will help to close racial equity gaps and vault students into higher wage jobs, growing the national, state and local economies.

Here are some examples of evidence-based college completion programs that are having a impact in public four-year settings:

- » [CUNY ACE \(Accelerate, Complete, and Engage\)](#) – Launched in 2015 by the City University of New York (CUNY), Accelerate, Complete, and Engage (ACE) is the baccalaureate adaptation of the nationally acclaimed Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). CUNY ACE aims to double four-year graduation rates for first-time freshman and two-year graduation rates for associate degree-holding transfer students by providing a range of financial, academic, and personal support, including intensive academic advisement and career counseling, tuition scholarships, and textbook and transportation subsidies. Currently offered at two CUNY senior colleges (John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Lehman College) and poised to expand to additional CUNY colleges through funding from the City of New York, the first CUNY ACE cohort realized a 4-year graduation rate of 58.4%, nearly 16 percentage points higher than the comparison group. Early [ACE results](#) are unprecedented and preliminary analysis suggests the program may also narrow achievement gaps by race and ethnicity.
- » [Georgia State University](#) – Georgia State University (GSU) implemented a strategic proactive advising approach that relies on analytic data to flag concerns early and help get students back on track. The system analyses 800 analytics for 30,000 students every day, identifying issues quickly and facilitating meetings with advisors to help students receive the support they need to get back on track and graduate on time. Since its introduction at GSU in 2012, the university has improved overall graduation rates by 9 percentage points and eliminated all gaps in graduation rates based on race, ethnicity and income level. When implemented at 11 large public universities (including GSU), the program was evaluated through a [large-scale rigorous study](#) called MAAPS. Exploratory [findings](#) (given the sample size) on the impacts at GSU were promising and a further [recent interim report](#) found that after 4 years, GSU's approach improved graduation rates, college persistence and GPAs among Black students by 8 percentage points, 12 percentage points, and .22 points, respectively. In comparison, some of other implementing colleges struggled to implement the program with fidelity. Additional funding for research from the College Completion Fund could help identify the conditions that may have led to greater success at GSU.
- » [InsideTrack](#) – InsideTrack provides proactive coaching, primarily by phone and text, to students, who are largely nontraditional, to help them persist and complete college and achieve career success. InsideTrack is directly operating or has been replicated in 17 public four-year institutions throughout the country. A [randomized control study](#) found that participating students were more likely to still be enrolled one year after enrolling than those in the control group.
- » [Project QUEST](#) – Project QUEST was founded in San Antonio, Texas in 1992 to fulfill the growing need for job training for adults seeking to move from manufacturing jobs, which were declining in scale, to higher paying jobs in in-demand fields. Since its inception, the program has been replicated across the state of Texas serving over 7,700 people. Project Quest serves those that have interests in careers in health care, manufacturing and trades, information technology, and/ or an associate degree but are not currently attending college. Centered around an intensive case management approach, Project Quest helps students access financial assistance, academic enhancement, and more career counseling, work readiness, as well as support services such as childcare and transportation. A [randomized control trial](#) over nine years found that Project QUEST's substantially increased student earnings, moving participants out of poverty and into the middle class. Project QUEST has expanded to partner with UT Health San Antonio to serve 161 students over the last three years.
- » [Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement \(VIDA\)](#) – Based in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas and founded in 1995, VIDA provides non-traditional students from low-income households with training and support in high wage fields. The program pairs students with a case manager/career counselor who meet with students weekly to help address the barriers students face to attaining a postsecondary degree through wrap around services, financial support, and counseling. The program also provides students with financial support, basic academic skills training, and requires full-time enrollment. A rigorous [early impact evaluation](#) found that the program significantly increased college persistence and completion.