Project Win-Win: Increasing Degree Attainment and Removing Barriers

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About the Institute for Higher Education Policy

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is an independent, nonprofit organization that is dedicated to access and success in postsecondary education around the world. Based in Washington, D.C., IHEP uses unique research and innovative programs to inform key decision makers who shape public policy and support economic and social development.
Institute for Higher Education Policy Programs

• The IHEP Summer Academy is an annual five-day retreat for college and university teams to help identify measures to improve access and success for students of color and other historically underserved populations. With the aid of expert consultants and a rich array of working sessions, teams create comprehensive action plans for institutional change.
  – July 19–23, 2010 - Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort near Albuquerque, NM

• IHEP Symposium on Financial Literacy and College Success at Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) brings together college and university senior leadership to promote discourse and present concrete ideas that build upon and complement institutional change.

• Walmart Minority Student Success Initiative and Lumina MSI-Models of Success Program — IHEP provides technical assistance to over 45 MSIs and organizations working to improve student success.

For more information, visit www.ihep.org
National Articulation and Transfer Network (NATN)

NATN furthers IHEP’s mission by seeking to increase the number of transfer students, particularly historically underserved student populations such as students of color, who graduate with baccalaureate degrees.

NATN is focusing on associate's degree completion, as a step towards baccalaureate degree completion through Project Win-Win, an Education Trust supported project. Win-Win seeks to recognize eligible students for an associate’s degree who have stopped out and are no longer enrolled at an institution.
Why Project Win-Win?

• National completion goals set by the President, Lumina and Gates Foundations, and states.

• Community Colleges are at the center for achieving these goals.

• Everyone is looking for new ways to increase graduation rates.

• This is a way to capture the large number of people with “some” college and no degree.
Everybody “Wins”

Institutions “win”
– Increases graduation rates
– Increases alumni ranks
– Improves workforce numbers

Students “win”
– earn a degree
– validate college achievement
– attract a higher salary or a better job
– encourages them to continue their studies towards the baccalaureate

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Project Win-Win: a Search for Unrecognized Attainments

- A pilot with 7 community colleges in 4 states (LA, MD, NY, and OH). Support from The Education Trust’s Access to Success initiative and state higher education systems.

- Also 3 four-year colleges in Louisiana that award Associate’s degrees.

- Led by Dr. Cliff Adelman, IHEP senior associate, with over 30 years experience working with national institutional data.

- 7 months to scan the records, sift out ineligibles, run degree audits, and establish final bins of “associate’s eligibles” and “associate’s potentials.” One state added a third bin for within-state vertical transfers without degrees.

It’s not as easy a task as it sounds.
1) DEFINE POOL OF STUDENTS
   - 60+ credits
   - No longer enrolled
   - No degree or certificate
   - Minimum GPA
   - Required courses

2) CROSS CHECK WITH OTHER DATA SYSTEMS
   - State data system
   - National Student Clearinghouse

3) DEGREE AUDIT
   Review degree requirements
   Course substitutions

BIN 1: DEGREE ELIGIBLE STUDENTS

BIN 2: DEGREE POTENTIAL STUDENTS
(Those needing no more than 9 credits/3 courses to graduate)

REMOVE:
Students who transferred/enrolled at other institutions

REMOVE:
Students short of degree by more than 9 credits/3 courses

Project Win-Win
Data sort process
Initial sort criteria

- Not enrolled in 2009/2010
- Initial enrollment at any time after 2001 (2003 in some states)
- Initial enrollment can be transfer-in
- Credit threshold (60-64)
- GPA threshold: whatever is required for graduation
- No Associate’s earned from institution; no certificates, either.
Problems/observations in the initial sort bin

- Changes in computer systems and software during the period covered (which raises questions about what is known about student academic histories).

- In-state institutions agreed on the credit threshold, but the actual range of credits earned was considerably higher.

- Credits do not automatically mean degree eligibility.

- One institution set a higher GPA threshold, 2.5, and wound up with a lot fewer students.

- This should be a 2-day task. In some places, it took 2 months. “It’s not active work; it’s wait times for responses.”
2nd sort: who left and subsequently enrolled elsewhere?

- These students are provisionally moved out of the pool.
- First match set goes to the central state data system. (One state kept vertical transfers without degrees in consideration.)
- Residuals (after state match) go to the National Student Clearinghouse.
- After both matches, residuals are in the pool for close examination.
Problems/ observations on the second sort

- Some institutions skipped the state match and went directly to National Student Clearinghouse (NSC).

- Some institutions used the project as an excuse to join NSC.

- NSC, we know, cannot produce enrollment answers for everybody; but turns up current enrollments for students thought to be gone, i.e. validates stop-out phenomena.

- In one case, state IT versus local IR as to who “owned” the information.

- FERPA issues raised in one state; resolved with creation of a completely new set of IDs.

- All this takes a lot more time than originally anticipated; everyone has to have a say.
Institutional participants by role

- Institutional Research
- Information Technology
- Registrar
- Enrollment management (where a separate office exists)
- Student affairs
- Chief Academic Officer

The intensity of their roles changes as a project such as this moves forward.
How far did this get us?

- Community colleges (7): 9.5k made the first sort; 48% stayed after the 2nd sort.

- 4-year colleges (3): 3300 made the first sort; 56% stayed after the 2nd sort.

We’re obviously not done, but those rough numbers tell you that this is not a trivial matter.

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3rd Sort: the Degree Audit

• Despite credits, GPA, etc., did they really qualify?
• Some institutions have developed software with degree templates; most do not have such aids.
• All institutions resorted to hand-and-eye readings of transcripts. These average about 10-15 minutes per case. The range is 5 - 25 minutes.
• Hand-and-eye review needed even after an automated audit - the software does not pick up nuance.
• The reading is based on the student’s declared major.
• In general, the degree requirements are those in effect in the year of entry.
You begin to see the problems that can turn up.
The Associate’s Degree, II; Field distribution in the community college

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of Degree</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Studies</td>
<td>211.2</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/Acc’t</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied Health</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Tech</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What happens in the degree audit?

• The student may qualify for an AA/AS, but was seeking an A.A.S. in a specific field and could not pass the audit on the degree sought.

• Auditors find courses that don’t exist anymore.

• One finds students with >100 credits who don’t pass audit.

• The AA/AS student may qualify by virtue of credits, but not specific courses required. Degree requirements may have changed over a period of as much as 8 years, and the audit software is not set to requirements in force at the time of entry.

• In all these cases, the students are “academically short,” removed from the “Associate’s eligible” bin and placed in the “Associate’s potential” bin, unless . . .

• The number of credits/courses they are short exceeds what the institution determines is a reasonable ceiling for completion in a timely return-period, e.g. 9 credits / 3 courses. These students are moved out of the universe of consideration.
The residual “eligibles”: why were they not awarded degrees?

- Financial “holds,” i.e. money owed for a variety of reasons (see next slide).
- Did not file papers / pay fees for the degree award.
- Did not know they were eligible.
- Had transferred and did not care about the Associate’s.
- Had not completed a non-academic requirement, e.g. physical education, swimming test, orientation course.
- Missing transcripts from other institutions they had attended.
- Residency issues, both threshold and last 25 percent of credits.

Half of these are procedural issues, and largely within the control of community colleges.
Financial “holds”

- State laws / regulations apply, even for $15 in parking fines.
- Tuition versus fees.
- Institutional / state loan issues.
- Outstanding library, equipment, parking, etc. obligations.
- Transcripts from other institutions are on financial holds.

There is very little one can do about most of these without setting an uncomfortable precedent.
What can you do?

• Green light eligibility notification, including currently enrolled students. Orange flashing lights should start at around 55 credits; one of our community colleges starts at 50.

• Waive the degree fees, or build them into general student services fees, hence precluding a separate bill.

• Waive non-academic requirements.

• For those with “holds,” recognize completers on your books, and notify the students that neither the degree nor the institutional transcript will be released until the conditions of the “hold” are met.

• Notify students that they qualify for the degree, and ask if they want the diploma. If no response, then the story ends there. If response negative, award the degree on your books and tell the student they can request a diploma later.
Why would eligible students decline degrees?

• The default degree offered, AA/AS or AGS, is not the one they want.
• If their intention is a particular AAS, they think they will lose financial aid eligibility when a default degree is accepted (not always true, as financial aid officers have leeway to award beyond the 150% of credits line).
• Don’t see any value in the AA/AS or AGS---another variation in the differential attainment map.
Procedural and regulatory questions

• Can the institution award a degree without the student’s consent? Can the institution apply for the degree on behalf of the student?

• Can an institution force others to provide missing transcripts?

• Can alumni raise funds to reduce or eliminate any of the financial “holds”?
Suggestions from pilot participants

• Do this every 3 or 4 years. Stop-outs do return. Annual exercise is not necessary. But some argue for doing it annually, especially by going back just a few years and finding a manageable number.

• One of our institutions does it annually, and awarded 300 Associate’s degrees under these procedures in 2008.

• Empower the state higher education authority to grant degrees, particularly in the cases of nomads with no distinct cognizant institution.

• In degree audits, incorporate acceptable course substitutions into existing automated systems.
Some very hard-headed lessons

• There are community colleges out there without the data capacity or discipline to do any of this.

• You can’t pass on instructions by cell-phone: the parties responsible for executing must have written documents in hand and in a timely manner.

• Institutions need to adopt explicit and public decision-rules in degree audits, e.g. that the audit is against degree requirements in force at the time of initial enrollment. Notify students of these policies.

• To take this effort to scale would require special grants to community colleges to develop/refine degree audit systems.
Next Steps for Project Win-Win

• In participating institutions, grant the final “eligibles” Associate’s degrees in fall 2010.

• In participating institutions, find the “potentials,” send them templates for completing degrees, and get them started by Winter/Spring term of 2011.

• Possibly expand to additional community colleges in each participating state, with 2 years to get through the entire process pioneered by the pilot group.

• Provide support for establishing/ upgrading degree audit systems.
How to Learn more about Project Win-Win

• Report with implementation guidance from IHEP and the Education Trust coming later in 2010.

• Future conference presentations.

For more information, contact sgoldhawk@ihep.org
Reflection and Discussion

• What would it take for you to start this process on your campus?

• What information systems are in place on your campus to follow students after they leave your institution? Is this information used to reach out to them to complete their degree?

• Are there other institutional, system, or state policy barriers that would impact your campus’s ability to do this work? How might you work around these to increase associate degree completion rates for this student group?