HIGHER ED INSIGHT

From Contact to Completion:

Supporting Returning Adult Students in Obtaining a College Credential

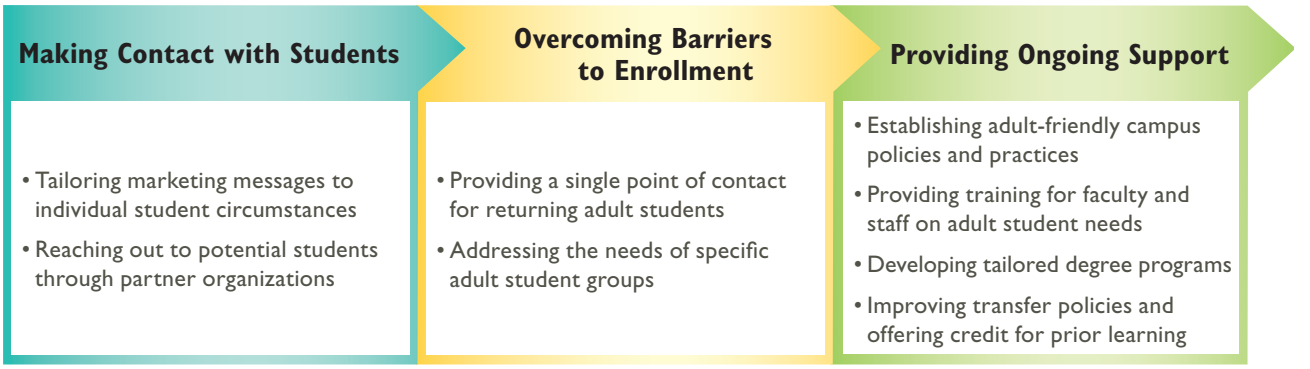
Lumina Foundation is determined to reach its "Big Goal" of ensuring that 60 percent of Americans have obtained a postsecondary credential by 2025. Lumina recognizes that this goal is only attainable if higher education access efforts expand their focus beyond traditional-age students who enter college directly from high school to promoting higher education opportunities for older students.

Within this population of potential students are many who already have some college experience. As of 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that more than one-fifth of Americans age 25 and older—around 43.5 million people—have some postsecondary education but no degree. While some of these adults are currently enrolled in college, many more are not and therefore represent a very promising target for programs that promote college access and success. Previous work with this group of potential students, including the Lumina-funded Non-traditional No More project, has identified a number of promising practices aimed at helping these adults return to and complete college (Lane, Michelau, and Palmer 2012).

In an effort to expand the reach of these promising practices and identify ways to replicate and scale up programs that serve returning adult students, Lumina in 2010 funded 10 large-scale projects aimed at serving adult students with some college but no degree. Together with several related Lumina-funded projects, these grantees were provided financial support and the opportunity to form the core of a new Adult College Completion Network, funded by Lumina and managed by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education *(see the end of this report for brief descriptions of the Credentialparticipating projects)*. To evaluate the effectiveness of its overall adult college completion initiative, Lumina contracted with HigherEd Insight to identify lessons that can be learned across all the funded projects based on data collected through site visits, interviews, and surveys of grantees.

This brief presents findings from the first two years of HigherEd Insight's evaluation of Lumina's adult college completion effort. The focus of the brief is on early lessons learned about the services and supports adults with some college credit need if they are to return to college and successfully complete a degree or credential. While Lumina grantees have identified a number of important supports and services that can benefit returning adult students, a key finding from the evaluation is that addressing the complex circumstances and barriers these students face requires attention to the entire pipeline from making contact with prospective students to overcoming barriers to re-enrollment and ultimately to supporting them in completing a college credential. Tackling only one part of the pipeline depicted in Figure 1 below is unlikely to result in increased degree completion for adult students.

FIGURE 1: Stages in Assisting Returning Adults Complete a College Credential



Making Contact with Students

Outreach to adult students with some college credit is a key component of any effort to persuade these students to return to college and figures prominently in most of the Lumina-funded projects. When asked about various strategies related to serving returning adult students, 83 percent of grantee staff members surveyed identified outreach to potential adult students as a very important strategy, the highest percentage for any of the strategies addressed in the survey. Outreach efforts are often undertaken as part of a larger effort to raise public awareness about the value of returning to college, a strategy considered very important by 64 percent of grantee staff members. Despite the importance placed by grantees on outreach to adult students with some college credit, however, there does not yet seem to be evidence that these outreach efforts are resulting in large numbers of students returning to college.

One of the biggest challenges to any outreach effort focused on returning adult students is the fact that these students are not a unified group. They come from widely varied life circumstances and face a range of barriers in trying to complete college credentials. For example, adults who are unemployed and wish to return to college to train for a new career experience different challenges than those who are currently employed and are seeking a postsecondary credential in order to be promoted at work. Some adults have families; others do not. Some have only a few college credits while others are very close to completing a degree or credential. This variety in background and circumstances suggests a need for outreach strategies that can be adapted to appeal to prospective students whose motivations for returning to college are not uniform.

Tailoring marketing messages to individual student circumstances

One strategy adopted by some Lumina grantees has been to conduct direct outreach campaigns targeted at adults who have left a particular state postsecondary system without completing a degree. These campaigns use email, postal mail, and/or telephone to contact former students and encourage them to return to college. The materials used in these outreach campaigns are typically tailored to the individual student and may include information such as the number of credits that student needs to complete a credential. The materials also provide information to students about how to get more assistance with re-enrolling, either by visiting a website or contacting an on-campus or call-center advisor.

Lumina grantees have identified a number of challenges associated with conducting this sort of direct outreach campaign, and these challenges mirror those noted by the states involved in the Non-traditional No More project (Lane, Michelau, and Palmer 2012). Developing a list of potential contacts requires committing substantial resources to data-mining and may require several attempts to identify the right cohort of students. For instance, **Ivy Tech Community College,** in their first wave of outreach, focused on students with at least 45 credits who had left Ivy Tech at least a year earlier. When responses from this group of students were lower than anticipated, Ivy Tech changed their strategy to focus on students with at least 15 credits who had not

enrolled during the semester in which the outreach was conducted and found that this group responded at rates nearly double those of the earlier group.

Early data-mining efforts by some Lumina grantees turned up large numbers of former students who had transferred to another postsecondary institution and in some cases had already completed a degree, suggesting a need to match potential contacts against state postsecondary data systems or the National Student Clearinghouse. Grantees have also found it challenging to obtain valid contact information for former students, particularly those who left college some time ago. In addition, for state postsecondary systems, identifying students who have moved out of state and would be unlikely to re-enroll within the system is an important factor. The **West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission**, for example, was able to work with the state Department of Motor Vehicles to determine which former students on their list still resided in state and obtain addresses for them but was not allowed to share those addresses with individual campuses due to privacy concerns.

Even with these highly targeted approaches, moreover, Lumina grantees who undertook direct outreach campaigns have so far only seen 9 to 17 percent of the former students contacted return to college. While these early numbers represent several thousand adults who are one step closer to completing a college credential, the relatively low percentages also suggest that outreach efforts will have to cast their nets broadly if they are to re-enroll substantial numbers of adult students.

Reaching out to potential students through partner organizations

While the direct outreach campaigns described above have the advantage of being able to tap into existing databases of adult students with some college credit, they also have two crucial limitations: they can only target adults who were previously enrolled in a specific postsecondary system and they are not able to easily identify which of these adults are most primed for returning to college. An alternative approach adopted by several Lumina grantees is to make contact with potential students through organizations that can more readily target adults who are motivated to return to college, in most cases because of their employment situation.

Unemployed adults with some college credit are a natural audience for outreach. These adults may be more likely than those who are currently employed to have sufficient time to commit to returning to school, and they are likely to be highly motivated to upgrade their skills and find new careers. On the other hand, they are also likely to have limited financial resources, meaning that any outreach effort has to address ways through which these adults can fund continued education. A collaboration between the **Rutgers Center for Women and Work and the National Association of Workforce Boards** is exploring ways to use the workforce development system as a source of funds for unemployed students who need 12 credits or less to complete a degree. Pilot projects in Mississippi and Pennsylvania have demonstrated the feasibility of this approach but have also shown that taking this work to scale will require significant policy and practice changes in both the state workforce and higher education systems.

Community-based organizations are also a potential partner for outreach to adults for whom completing a postsecondary credential could be a path to a better life. In many cases, the adults who seek assistance from these organizations are looking to make a change in their lives and may well be open to returning to college. **Graduate! Philadelphia**, a college access program that serves "come-backers," as the program calls adults with some college credit, has found collaboration with community-based organizations such as Catholic Social Services to be an effective, grassroots means of identifying potential students. **Goodwill Industries International**, through its **Community College/Career Collaboration** effort, has taken this sort of collaboration a step further by partnering with community colleges to offer classes for adult students at local Goodwill facilities. One advantage of these partnerships is that the community-based organizations are often able to provide wrap-around services that can help address the many non-academic barriers adult students face when trying to return to college.

While the partnerships described above focus primarily on unemployed or low-wage adults, these groups are not the only market for outreach efforts. Adults with some college credit who are currently employed can also benefit from completing a degree or credential and may even be able to tap into tuition assistance or other forms of support provided by their employers. One way to reach these potential students is through employers

themselves. **Degrees at Work**, a project coordinated by **Greater Louisville Inc.**, works with local businesses to identify employees with some college credit and offer support—ranging from tuition assistance to an on-site study room—as those employees return to college. Degrees at Work has had considerable success engaging local employers in this work but has also found it important to work with local colleges and universities so that campus representatives can offer assistance to the returning adult students as they move through the process of re-enrolling in college.

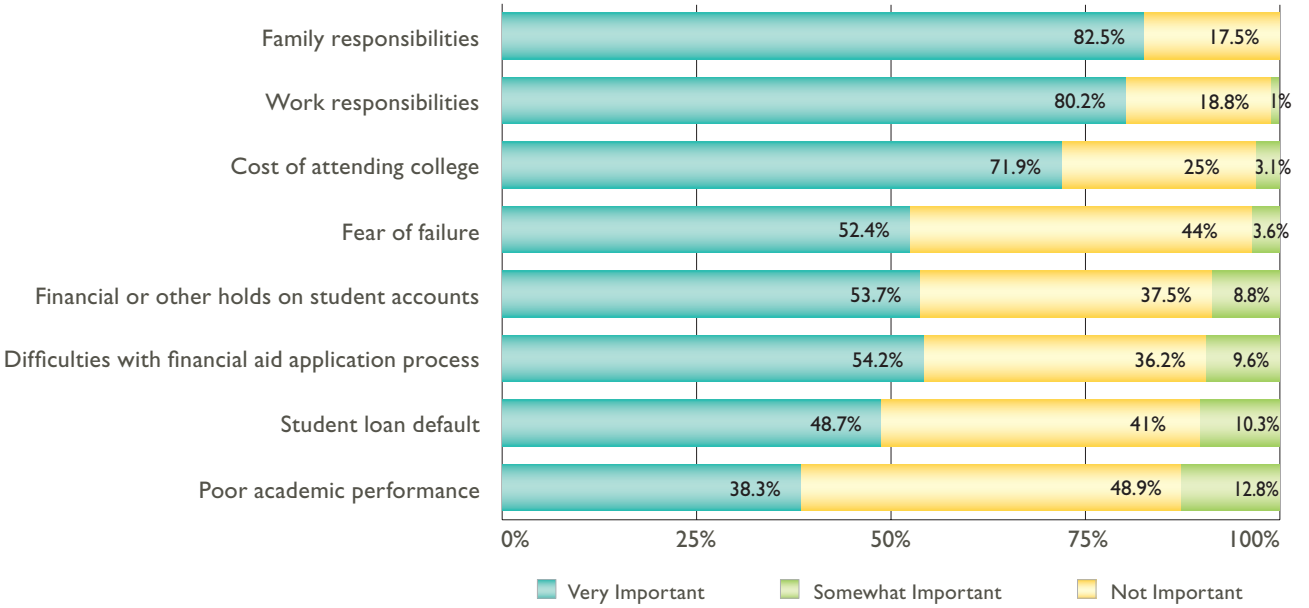
The projects described above offer intriguing prospects both for identifying adults with some college credit who may wish to return to college and for providing them with needed supports to help ensure their success in completing a degree or credential. A crucial point, nonetheless, is that none of these projects could work without the engagement of the colleges and universities in which these adults will enroll. The work of Lumina grantees in this area clearly shows the necessity of close partnerships between higher education and the network of businesses, community-based organizations, and government agencies with which adults with some college credit are likely to come into contact.

Overcoming Barriers to Enrollment

Identifying adults with some college credit and persuading them to return to college is only the first step in a complex process. Most returning adult students face a range of barriers that must be overcome before they can re-enroll in college. In interviews and surveys, Lumina grantees consistently identified the following barriers for returning adult students (Figure 2).

- **Personal Barriers:** Adult students lead complicated lives, often including work and family responsibilities, and grantees view those competing priorities as the most important barriers for returning adults because they place significant limits on when and where adults are able to attend school. As one person put it, "Life gets in the way." In a survey, nearly all grantee staff members identified family and work obligations as important barriers for adult students. Grantees also mentioned health concerns, transportation challenges, and childcare as barriers.
- **Financial Barriers:** The cost of college was another barrier identified by most grantees surveyed, with 97 percent indicating that it is an important barrier for adult students. In addition to cost, grantees mentioned other financial factors such as lack of eligibility for federal financial aid, difficulties completing financial aid applications, and previous student loan default.
- **Psychological Barriers:** More than half of survey respondents identified fear of failure as a very important barrier for adult students, and nearly all agreed that it is an important barrier. Grantees also spoke of a variety of psychological barriers adult students face in returning to college, including having to attend class with much younger students, learning to use computers and other forms of unfamiliar technology, re-learning the study skills needed to succeed in college, and simply figuring out the many bureaucratic complexities of the higher education system and the local college campus.
- **Bureaucratic Barriers:** Many grantees noted that returning adult students face a host of bureaucratic barriers that can impede their ability to re-enroll in college. The example most often mentioned was holds placed on student accounts because of money owed to the institution or other requirements not met during the students' previous enrollment—considered a very important barrier by more than half of survey respondents. Other bureaucratic barriers include difficulties in locating transcriptsand having them analyzed for transfer credit, obtaining academic forgiveness for instances where the student left school without withdrawing from classes, and even receiving conflictinginformation from different offices on campus. While most of these barriers can be overcome through negotiation, doing so takes time and energy, and an adult who faces too many bureaucraticobstacles may find it easier to opt out of re-enrolling.
- **Academic Barriers:** Only 38 percent of grantees saw poor academic performance as a very important barrier for adult students, and 13 percent thought it was not a significant barrier. Those grantees who did identify academic barriers for returningadults often indicated that these barriers were related to difficulties in completing a particular required class such as college-level math or English composition.

CHART 2: Grantees' Perceptions of Barriers that Prevent Adult Students from Completing Credentials



Overcoming the barriers described above is not an easy process. It may involve counseling students on issues related to balancing school and other obligations, advising them on course selection or financial aid options, connecting them to academic or social services, directing them to the right office to address a bureaucratic obstacle, and/or offering them a supportive ear as they work through their fears and concerns. Meeting all these needs has been a key concern for Lumina grantees in their efforts to assist adult students return to and succeed in college.

Providing a single point of contact for returning adult students

One strategy adopted by a number of Lumina grantees is to designate a single point of contact with whom returning adults can work as they go through the process of re-enrolling in college. This approach, which was identified as an effective practice by participants in the Non-traditional No More project (Lane, Michelau, and Palmer 2012), provides students with an advocate who can help them negotiate a challenging process as well as offer emotional support and encouragement. While the contact person may not be able to directly solve all of the problems a student faces, he or she can direct that student to available resources and help keep them from becoming discouraged.

Lumina grantees have approached the idea of a single point of contact in a variety of ways. One model provides an advisor who is not located at a specific college or university and can provide assistance to students regardless of where they plan to enroll. The **Minnesota State Colleges and Universities**, for example, has a centralized call center that responds to students with questions about enrollment. As part of its adult college completion work, the postsecondary system conducted an outreach campaign that directed former students to the call center where they could be advised by a counselor with expertise in the issues returning adults face. Louisville's **Degrees at Work** program, on the other hand, identifies a college advocate for each participating employer, usually a person from human resources, and provides training and support so that the advocate can become a first point of contact for employees interested in returning to college. **Graduate! Philadelphia** has what may be the most fully developed example of this model. This program employs several full-time advisors who work with "come-backers" in-person as well as by phone and email to assist them throughout the process of re-enrolling in college.

An advantage to this model is that it is not institution-specific so advisers are able to help returning adults identify the institution and degree program most appropriate for them. However, because the advisors in this model are not directly connected with a college or university, they are not always able to help students with barriers related to that institution's policies and procedures. As a result, all of the projects using this approach have found it important to develop close relationships with the postsecondary institutions returning adults are likely to attend in their service area. In the best case scenario, there will also be a single point of contact at each partner institution to whom the returning adult can be directed when ready to enroll.

An alternative model places the single point of contact at a specific college or university. The Kentucky Community and Technical College System, as part of its work with **Jobs for the Future's Adult Completion Policy Project**, has placed a workforce transitions coordinator at each of the system's colleges. These coordinators are responsible for contacting former participants in for-credit workforce training programs and assisting them in returning to the college to complete a credential. **Ivy Tech Community College** has taken a similar approach in its outreach work. Former students who respond to an outreach attempt are directed to one of 14 regional adult degree completion advisers who can assist them in overcoming any barriers to re-enrollment at the college.

A particular challenge for all of the Lumina grantees that are using the single point of contact approach is how to sustain and even scale this model. Working one-on-one with returning adult students is a time-intensive process and requires funding for staff positions dedicated to this role. All too often, grantees report that the person assigned to assist returning adults may also be forced to wear other hats, limiting their ability to pay close attention to the needs of these students. Even programs that have full-time advisors for returning adults struggle with this issue. **Graduate! Philadelphia**, for example, has been working on a way to more quickly identify the amount of help a returning adult will need and direct those who need less assistance to online and other self-help resources, preserving advisor time for those who need the most support.

Addressing the needs of specific adult student groups

While adults with some college credit are not, as noted above, a single unified group, there are some recognizable sub-groups within this population who may need additional support in overcoming barriers and returning to college to complete a credential. One approach taken by some Lumina grantees has been to direct resources to those groups of students.

The **Plus 50 Completion** project, coordinated by the **American Association of Community Colleges**, has as its focus adults who are age 50 and older. Activities undertaken by many of the participating community colleges include outreach efforts aimed at this target group, tailored courses such as math or English refresher courses and computer courses, support services such as career development workshops, career fairs, or tutoring, and training for faculty members on strategies for teaching older learners. Many of the participating colleges also designate a Plus 50 Advisor as a single point of contact for these students and organize Plus 50 support groups for students.

Veterans are another group of adult students who may require additional services, and many veterans arrive on campus with college credits earned during their military service. **Minnesota State Colleges and Universities**, which has seen a 57 percent increase in veteran and active military enrolling at its campuses, has included veterans as one of the targets for its **Graduate Minnesota** outreach program. The system also offers a Veterans Re-Entry Education Program designed to assist these students. Services offered include trained advisors at the system's centralized call center and a standardized system for awarding college credit for military training.

Providing Ongoing Support

A major challenge noted by Lumina grantees, both within and outside of higher education, is the extent to which colleges and universities are not currently oriented toward meeting the needs of returning adult students. Grantees are coming to recognize that, no matter how well they do assisting adult students with re-enrolling in college, significant changes within higher education are needed if these students are to be able to successfully complete a credential. In addition, grantees note that these changes are similar to those needed to improve

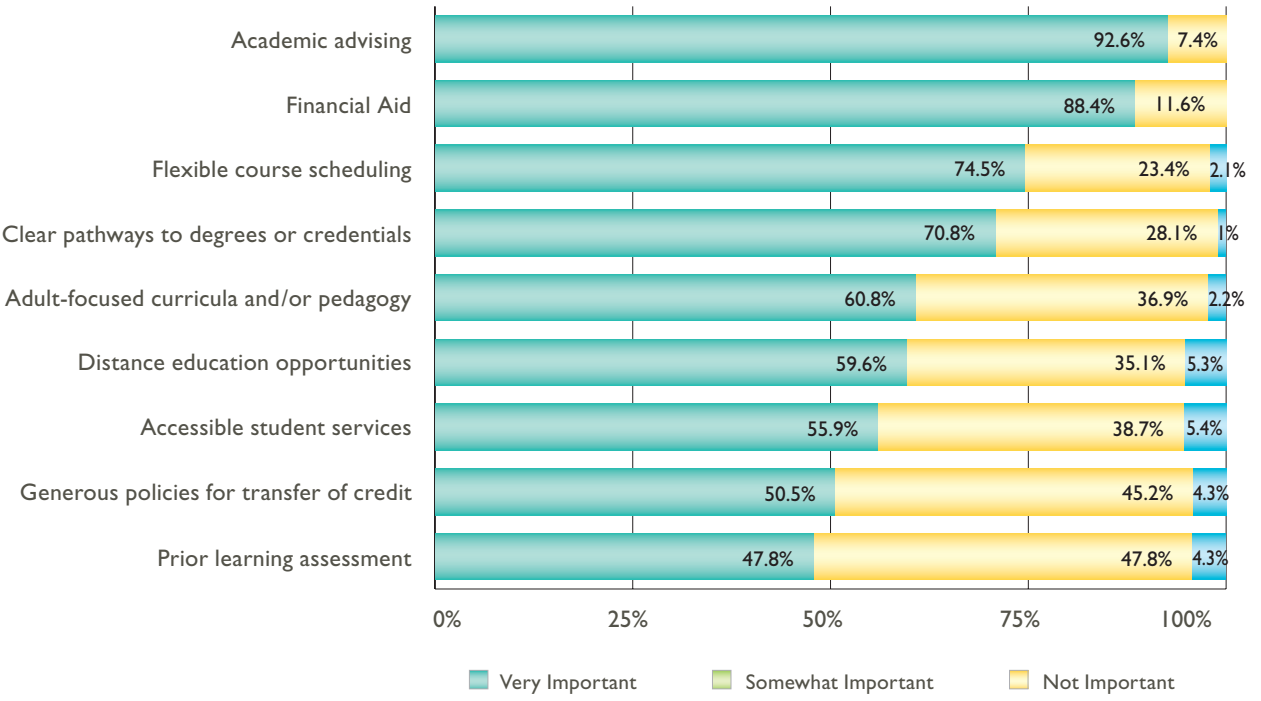
retention for adult students enrolling in college for the first time, thus potentially providing a significant boost to college completion for adult students generally.

Despite the recognition by many grantees that colleges and universities need to change in order to better accommodate adult students, few of the funded projects are conducting audits to assess the impact of campus policies on returning adults. This situation may be due, in part, to the fact that many of the Lumina projects are coordinated by a postsecondary system office while policy audits tend to be campus-specific. However, only 40 percent of campus-based grantee staff members indicated on a survey that they consider policy audits an important strategy for their project. On the other hand, several survey respondents from postsecondary institutions indicated that they see conducting a policy audit as an important next step in their work with returning adults. These findings are important because grantee staff members who work directly with returning adult students consistently reported that existing campus policies hinder adult students' efforts to re-enroll in college and complete a credential.

Establishing adult-friendly campus policies and practices

Grantees frequently mentioned the importance of creating an academic environment that meets the needs of adult students (Figure 3). In response to a survey, 93 percent of grantee staff members indicated that academic advising is a very important service needed by adult students, and none viewed advising as unimportant. Other key supports in this area include establishing clear pathways to degrees and credentials and offering adult-focused curriculum and teaching, with attention both to the learning styles of adult students and the need to connect material taught in class with real-world applications related to careers. A number of grantees noted the importance of this connection between academics and careers because they believe that the potential for a new job or career advancement is what motivates many adults to return to college and that seeing real-world value is what keeps them engaged in their academic coursework once they are there. Alternative approaches to developmental education were also often cited by grantees as a way to better address the academic needs of returning adults.

CHART 3: Grantees' Perceptions of Supports or Services that Help Adult Students Complete Credential



Grantees emphasized that higher education must do a better job of helping adult students overcome the many barriers they face. There is a need for campus-based financial aid programs that can accommodate adults who may wish to enroll in only a few classes, who have used up their federal aid eligibility, or who earn too much to be eligible for federal aid but are still unable to pay for college given their other financial obligations. Grantees also noted that, because of work schedules and family obligations, returning adults are often not able to attend classes or visit campus offices during regular weekday business hours. They suggested that flexible scheduling of courses and extended hours for student service offices are important supports for adult students. Many grantees also noted the value of distance education and online services for adult students, but others pointed out that some returning adults may not be able to take full advantage of these options if they do not have the necessary computer equipment or are uncomfortable working with computer technology.

Providing training for faculty and staff on adult student needs

If colleges and universities are to better support returning adult students, a key factor will be making sure that faculty and staff members understand the barriers these students face and the services and supports they may need to complete a degree or credential. More than half of the grantee staff members surveyed thought that providing training for faculty and staff in these areas is very important. Several Lumina grantees are developing training programs to address these issues. For instance, the **West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission**, in collaboration with NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, is using a train-the-trainer model, in which student services staff members attend an intensive workshop to learn about how best to support adult learners. These newly-minted trainers then conduct shorter workshops in their regions or on their campuses to share the information they have learned with others. New workshops are also being developed in West Virginia, in collaboration with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, to provide similar training for academic advisors and faculty members.

Developing tailored degree programs

Lumina grantees report a need for colleges and universities to offer degree programs tailored to the circumstances of returning adult students. For some such students, what is most needed is a general studies degree program that allows them to use many of the credits they may have previously earned, even if those credits come from a range of different majors or from technical programs. West Virginia's Board of Governors Associate in Applied Science and Regents Bachelor of Arts degrees and the articulated general studies associate's and bachelor's degrees offered by Ivy Tech Community College and Indiana University are examples of these sorts of degree programs.

For other returning adults, however, completing a general studies degree may not provide the career-specific skills and credentials needed to improve their employment situation. For these students, career-focused degree programs centered around the needs of high-demand industries may be a better path to future employment. For example, in its Lumina-funded work, the **Manufacturing Institute** is working with 13 states to implement a set of stackable, industry-recognized certifications that, when integrated into postsecondary degree programs, can help students train for careers in advanced manufacturing. In addition, many of the community colleges that are partnering with different Lumina adult college completion projects are actively engaged in developing certificates and degrees targeted at the skills needed by employers in their service area. These credentials are likely to prove of particular value for returning adult students who need to train for a new career because of job loss.

Improving transfer policies and offering credit for prior learning

Another area in which grantees see a need for change in higher education lies in the way postsecondary institutions handle transfer credit and credit for prior learning. These areas are of particular importance to adult students because many of them have credits from multiple colleges or universities as well as training and/or work experience that has provided them with college-level learning in a particular field. While only about half of grantee staff members thought that prior learning assessment and the evaluation of transfer credits are very important services to assist returning adults in completing a college credential (Figure 3), both of these topics were raised as key themes during the last meeting of the Adult College Completion Network (Lane 2012).

While some adults return to college at the institution in which they were previously enrolled, many choose to attend a different college or university and must transfer credits from their previous institution(s). Lumina grantees who work with returning adults report that this process is often a significant barrier for these students. In many cases, students are unable to get an assessment of whether and how their credits will transfer until after they have enrolled at a college, rather than being able to compare different institutions based on how the credits would be applied to a degree program. Encouraging colleges and universities to be both more flexible and more transparent in their transfer policies would be of considerable benefit to returning adult students.

Credit for prior learning has also emerged as an important strategy for promoting adult college completion. Most of the core Lumina grantees, particularly those that represent state postsecondary systems, are considering how prior learning assessment can fit into their projects. Some grantees are also collaborating with the **Council for Adult and Experiential Learning**, a Lumina grantee whose website **LearningCounts.org** offers options for students to create a portfolio demonstrating college-level learning which can then be assessed by faculty members and awarded a credit recommendation that will be accepted by some colleges and universities.

For two Lumina grantees, the issues of transfer of credit and credit for prior learning are central to the nature of their projects. In their work with **Jobs for the Future's Adult Completion Policy Project**, the North Carolina Community College System is beginning a pilot project to expand both credit for prior learning and articulation between non-credit and credit courses. The community college system expects the result of this pilot to inform policy and practice in these areas throughout the system. For the **University of Wisconsin System**, the focus of their adult college completion work has been on expanding prior learning assessment for returning adult students. The initial work of a system-wide committee determined that transfer of credits awarded for prior learning among system institutions will be a crucial area in which to formulate policy. In this case, it is not only important how an individual college or university handles awarding credit for prior learning but also what happens to that credit if the students transfers within the system. The work of both North Carolina and Wisconsin on transfer credit and credit for prior learning, while still in relatively early stages, point to the complexity of these issues and suggest a significant need for attention to policies in these areas at any institution that serves returning adult students

Conclusion

Two years into the adult college completion initiative, Lumina grantees have learned many valuable lessons about how to support adults with some college credit as they return to and complete college, but most are still struggling to turn that learning into substantial increases in the number of adults returning to and completing college. As this brief suggests, the reasons for this situation lie squarely in the complexity of the problems these projects are confronting. In many cases, the lessons being learned are not new. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning has been promoting its Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners for over a decade, and many of these principles are closely connected to overcoming the challenges Lumina grantees are finding in their work with returning adults (Flint, 1999). However, for their work in this initiative, Lumina grantees are being challenged to take these lessons and apply them across postsecondary institutions and systems and even outside of the higher education world, a situation of even greater complexity than trying to promote change at a single college or university.

As these Lumina-funded adult college completion projects move forward, the findings of this evaluation suggest three important factors to consider. The first is the focus of this brief—the need for a systemic approach that focuses on the entire adult college completion pipeline from initial contact to degree completion. The second is a close attention to policies and practices within higher education that may impede adult students from successfully completing a college credential. The third is a greater investment in partnerships with stakeholders outside of higher education that have a vested interest in helping adults increase their educational attainment. The evidence thus far indicates that all three of these factors are important. In particular, higher education institutions must make some crucial changes if they are to become truly adult-friendly. Nonetheless, they should not have to do this work alone. If increased adult degree completion is not an end in itself but rather a means to increased employment and a more skilled workforce, success in this area will

require collaboration among higher education, industries and employers, government agencies that promote workforce development and provide social services, and community-based organizations. Only through such collaborations are there likely to develop substantial and sustainable efforts to expand the numbers of American adults who complete a college credential.

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Higher Ed Insight is an evaluation and consulting firm based in Washington DC with a mission to improve college access and success. For more information please visit our website at www.higheredinsight.com.

Lumina-Funded Adult College Completion Projects

Adult College Completion Network (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education): Provides Lumina-funded adult college completion projects and other interested organizations with access to the latest research and expertise and opportunities to share challenges and effective strategies for serving the target population. http://www.adultcollegecompletion.org

Core Projects

Adult College Completion Project (Rutgers Center for Women and Work and National Association of Workforce Boards): Seeks to institutionalize adult degree completion as an option through the workforce development system in four states, including Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Oklahoma.

Adult Completion Policy Project (Jobs for the Future): Works to advance a supportive state policy framework in Michigan, North Carolina, and Kentucky in order to increase adult completion rates in occupational-technical credential programs.

Adult Degree Completion Project (Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana): Seeks to re-engage adults who have left Ivy Tech Community College without completing a degree by employing a targeted marketing approach and advising by specially trained staff to assist these students.

DegreeNow (West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission): Creates an integrated statewide adult degree completion program, including improved recruitment of adult students and enhanced academic affairs and student services capacity to serve adult learners at state colleges and universities.

Degrees at Work (Greater Louisville Inc.): Assists Louisville employers in identifying and supporting employees with some college credit who could benefit from completing a degree and promotes the adoption of education-friendly programs, policies, and practices among Louisville employers.

Graduate Minnesota (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities): Conducts a statewide outreach campaign to encourage students who have earned some college credits to complete their associate or bachelor's degrees and tries to expand postsecondary institutions' capacity to offer prior learning assessments and academic programs appropriate to returning students.

Graduate! Philadelphia: Works to increase the number of adults with college degrees in Greater Philadelphia through free advising, guidance, coaching and supports to adults who seek to return to college. Through **The Graduate! Network**, seeks to expand the Graduate! approach to additional metropolitan areas, including Connecticut, Chicago, and Memphis.

Plus 50 Completion Strategy (American Association of Community Colleges): Works with community colleges to develop programs that help workers over age 50 who are still struggling to recover from the economic recession complete degrees, certificates, or not-for-credit credentials in high-value occupations.

Prior Learning Assessment Expansion Initiative (University of Wisconsin System): Aims to expand the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) opportunities available to returning non-traditional adult students by establishing policies that support system-wide PLA implementation at UW System institutions.

TheAdultLearner.org (Southern Regional Education Board): Establishes an online portal, designed to be a gateway to a variety of online and blended learning degree completion programs and services designed for adults who started, but never completed, their degree programs.

Affiliated Projects

Community College/Career Collaboration (Goodwill Industries International): Increases college and career success for low-income individuals lacking a college or career credential by teaming educational and workforce systems to provide easy access to education, job-specific training and support services.

Deployment of the NAM-Endorsed Manufacturing Skills Certification System (Manufacturing Institute): Supports efforts in 13 states to align stackable industry-recognized skills certifications in Advanced

Manufacturing with educational degree pathways that span high school to community colleges to four-year institutions.

LearningCounts.org (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning): Provides advising, assesses learning from life experience, determines whether it is college-level, and makes credit recommendations and serves as a comprehensive PLA resource for individual learners, postsecondaryinstitutions, employers, and workforce systems.

Municipal Leadership for Postsecondary Success (National League of Cities): Engages with municipal leaders and stimulates and strengthens local collaborations to increase the rate and shorten the time within which residents finish higher education with a degree, certificate, or other credential.

Project Win-Win (Institute for Higher Education Policy): Works with colleges and universities to identify former students whose records qualify them for a degree and award those degrees retroactively as well as to identify former students who are short of a degree by no more than nine to 12 credits, find them, and seek to bring them back to complete the degree.

SUNY Works (The State University of New York): Implements a model of cooperative and experiential education across SUNY colleges and universities in collaboration with business/industry and regional economic councils.

Talent Dividend Prize and Network (CEOs for Cities): Offers a $1 million prize to be awarded to the city that exhibits the greatest increase in the number of postsecondary degrees granted over a three-year period. Brings together cross-sector teams from participating cities for peer-to-peer conversations on strategies, successes, and challenges in increasing college attainment rates.