OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Equity in Education & Job Connection Grant Program

ANNUAL REPORT

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About the Minnesota Office of Higher Education

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to postsecondary education. The agency also serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis on postsecondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

The Minnesota State Grant Program is the largest financial aid program administered by the Office of Higher Education, awarding more than $198 million in need-based grants to Minnesota residents attending accredited institutions in Minnesota. The agency oversees tuition reciprocity programs, a student loan program, Minnesota's 529 College Savings Plan, licensing and early college awareness programs for youth.

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Introduction

Minnesota's citizens are among the most educated in the country. Minnesota ranks second nationally in the number of adults, ages 25 - 64, with an associate degree or higher. The state's overall high educational attainment ranking, however, masks severe disparities between whites and people of color. Projections show that Minnesota's minority population will grow from 14 percent to 25 percent of the total population by 2035, and within postsecondary education, students of color are becoming a larger share of undergraduate enrollment. Estimates released by OHE and the Minnesota State Demographic Center show the disparities by race in educational attainment (Figure 1). Inattention to existing attainment disparities threatens the state's economic future.

In 2015, the Minnesota Legislature set the postsecondary educational goal of 70 percent for Minnesota adults, age 25 - 44, to have attained a postsecondary certificate or degree by 2025, both for the general population and for each racial/ethnic group in the state.

Minnesota has well-documented inequities in credential and degree attainment by racial/ethnic group. In 2016, the Legislature created the Equity in Education and Job Connection Grant Program (Equity Grant) to assist selected colleges, universities, and organizations in providing evidence-based best practices to increase retention, completion, and employment outcomes for historically underrepresented students (2015-2016 Minnesota Laws Chapter 189).

On August 1, 2016, OHE released a Request for Proposals to all interested parties. Sixteen two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions (all within the Minnesota State system) indicated an intent to submit a proposal for the grant. Seven Minnesota State institutions ultimately submitted completed applications. OHE selected three Minnesota State institutions to receive grant funds totaling $480,000:

- Saint Paul College (two-year college) $163,825

- Riverland Community College (two-year college) $190,602

- Minnesota State University, Mankato (four-year university) $125,573

OHE awarded grants for the 2017-2018 academic year to three Minnesota State institutions for the purposes of improving attendance, retention, completion, and employment outcomes for targeted student groups. To make the aforementioned improvements, institutions and organizations had the choice to provide a service under (but not limited to) one of the following categories:

- Social and Campus Integration

- Services that Promote Long-Term Academic Success

- Appropriately-Structured Developmental Education

- Expanding Paid Internships that Directly Relate to Degree Programs

All three institutions are using grant (and matching) funds to support expansion of proactive advising services. As a condition of receiving the Equity Grant, each institution's administrative leadership committed to create a student-centered culture of retention and completion on their campuses. This effort requires not only that of administrators, but faculty and staff as well. As such, this report provides an update on each institution's overall goal, project objectives, and program outcomes.
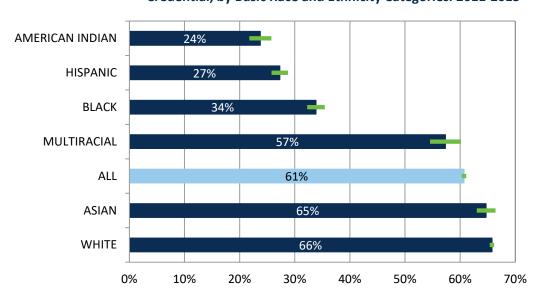
Figure 1. Minnesota's Estimated Population Ages 25 to 44 with a Certificate or Higher Credential, by Basic Race and Ethnicity Categories. 2011-2015[1]

Source: Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Categories For Improvement

Under the Equity Grant, the selected grantees had the choice to provide a research-based, best practice service under one of the following categories:

- Social and Campus Integration

- Services that Promote Long-Term Academic Success

- Appropriately Structured Developmental Education

- Expanding Paid Internships that Directly Relate to Degree Programs

Social and Campus Integration

Successful social integration into a college environment is necessary for students to be able to complete their postsecondary education. Social integration requires a sense of belonging on campus. The informal connections created with peers and faculty both inside and outside of the classroom foster social integration.

For first-generation college students (disproportionately students of color) these initial informal connections are harder to establish, placing them in a disadvantageous position to surmount their lack of knowledge about postsecondary processes and decreases their likelihood of persisting and completing their degree. Strategies that address social and campus integration include:

First-year programs and seminars: First-year programs and seminars bring small groups of first-year students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on developing skills that lead to success in college, such as critical analysis, intensive writing, information literacy, and collaborative learning.

Summer bridge programs: Students who are first-generation, low-income, or in need of developmental education can enhance their college going knowledge and skills by participating in a summer bridge program at their institution. Summer bridge programs help ease the transition from high school to postsecondary education. While various bridge programs at institutions serve a wide array of students (international, underrepresented students, disabled students, and students in specific fields of study), the focus is to provide support for underprepared students.

Services that Promote Long-Term Academic Success

Previous and continued academic success is one of the strongest factors in predicting whether a student will complete their postsecondary education. Grade point average (GPA), in high school and during college, is an indicator of academic success. Research suggests, however, that retention programs that focus primarily on

helping students to master course content alone only address immediate, rather than longer-term deficiencies. Students who master course content, but fail to develop adequate academic self-confidence, academic goals, institutional commitment, achievement motivation, social support, and involvement are still at risk of dropping out.

Upon enrolling in college, colleges provide students with an extensive list of courses and choices of majors that may hinder their understanding of how to fulfill degree requirements. Students may not know how term-by-term course choices align or fail to align with requirements not only to complete a certificate or degree, but how those choices affect their chosen major/program. A related issue is the number of credits students accumulate upon graduation. Students do not always understand how their program/major choice, or lack thereof, or changing of majors adds to the number of "unnecessary" extra credits they might accumulate. While some states and postsecondary institutions are beginning to limit expansion of the number of credits required for a degree, many students still graduate with more than 60 credits for an associate degree or 120 credits for a bachelor's degree. One example of a research-based, best practice that facilitates long-term academic success is proactive advising.

> *Proactive Advising*: Proactive (or intrusive) advising is a form of academic advising that involves a professional advisor regularly reaching out to the student, as opposed to leaving the student to take the initiative themselves. Colleges assign each student a professional advisor to assist with degree program modifications, financial aid issues, and classroom-based issues. During advising sessions, the advisor helps develop the student's problem solving and decision-making skills by working through problems together. In this centralized advising structure, full-time professional advisors can focus solely on assisting students with their academic, career, and life goals, as well as provide for degree mapping resources for students

Program planning lays out the required sequence of classes a student needs to obtain a given certificate or degree. It provides students with a pathway from entry to completion by detailing classes required for each semester for all students enrolled in a specified program. Based on the selected degree plan, a student can see how many semesters it will take and how much tuition it will cost to complete a degree based on future course offerings. If a student withdraws/fails a course or decides to switch degree programs, the college's information system automatically updates the student's degree plan, including updated tuition costs of program completion. Students can also see how their degree plan changes before they make any permanent changes, allowing them to play with hypothetical scenarios in the system.

Many proactive advising programs incorporates an "early alert system" that allows advisors to identify and assist students who are at risk or failing particular courses or withdrawing from the college. An early alert system tracks students' id cards when attend their classes and use on-campus resources (e.g. tutoring centers and the fitness center). If a student is perceived to be at-risk, their advisor proactively contacts them to assist with any barriers that may have emerged.

Appropriately Structured Developmental Education

According to the Office of Higher Education's 2016 Getting Prepared report, 26 percent of 2013 public high school graduates in Minnesota enrolled in one or more developmental courses within two years of graduating high

school. These students are disproportionately students of color and low-income students. Studies have shown that the added time to completion and developmental education requirements negatively affects the likelihood of degree completion, in part because students may run out of financial aid before they complete their certificate or degree. The alternative models of structuring developmental education include:

Paired courses: In the paired course model, institutions connect a developmental course to a college-level course in the same subject area. Students learn content in the college-level course (literature, for example), while developing basic skills in the developmental course (writing). This method of instruction allows students to receive college credit while still getting extra support from a non-credit course.

Mainstreaming with support: This model allows developmental students to enroll in gateway college-level courses immediately. Supplemental support can come in the form of mandatory lab sessions, integrated tutorial support, and additional class sessions. This addresses time concerns and the stigma of students taking developmental courses.

Compressed Courses: This is a model of acceleration that requires students to take fewer developmental courses overall. This can involve collapsing multiple developmental courses into a one-semester course that has more content or hours than one of the courses that it replaced, or developing a single remediation course for a specific academic program.[2]

Expanding Paid Internships that Directly Relate to Degree Programs

Completing an internship within the field of study prior to graduation has proven beneficial to a student's ability to find career-oriented employment after school. This occurs because of the job experience gained and professional network developed before graduation. Additionally, paid internships facilitate academic success because they provide "relevancy" to students' program of study. Increasing the availability of paid internships for college students is also an equity issue. Students, who cannot afford to spend the summer or academic term at an internship related to their study, rather than working for pay, are at a disadvantage in the job market after degree completion.

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[2] U.S. Department of Education. (2017). Developmental Education: Challenges and Strategies for Reform.

Payment Schedule

OHE established a schedule of payments to help facilitate accountability and monitor progress of funded projects. Upon final execution of the grant award, grantees receive a quarter of the grant amount. Grantees receive an additional 20 percent after submission and approval of an annual narrative report. Grantees receive two additional payments of 20 percent each after submissions of subsequent interim and annual narrative reports. Grantees receive the balance of grant expenditures after project completion and approval of the final financial and narrative reports.

Next Report

The Minnesota Legislature should expect the next report on the Equity Grants on January 15, 2019. The report will include another update on each institution's delivery of services, along with expanded data on student outcomes. Outcomes data will include (but not be limited to) information on:

- The number of students served by each service;

- Courses taken, along with the GPA of students served by each service;

- Persistence/retention rates of students participating in each service;

- Postsecondary graduation rates of students participating in each service; and

- The number of students who require postsecondary academic remediation and the number of remedial courses taken.

For comparison, colleges must report the above information for students not served by the service. The reports must break down all outcomes by race and ethnicity.

Awarded Institutions

1. Guided Pathways Advising at Saint Paul College

Saint Paul College proposed to develop a proactive advising system for students of color that are enrolled in one or more developmental education class.

Students enrolled in developmental courses are most at risk of not persisting and graduating. Through the Guided Pathways Advising program, Saint Paul College hopes to:

- Increase the fall-to-fall retention rate of developmental education students from 44 percent to 64 percent by end of the 2018-19 academic year.

- Increase the three-year graduation rate of students of color in developmental classes from 47 percent to 58 percent by end of 2018-19.

- Increase the percentage of graduated developmental education students of color who find employment to 85 percent.

WORK TO DATE

In spring 2017, advisors began to provide proactive advising to 40 percent of developmental education students of color (365 out of 890 students). Saint Paul College broadened project staffing to implement effectively project activities. This included the hiring of Wendy Roberson as the new Chief Diversity Officer during the spring 2017 semester. The college also sought to increase the cultural competency of their advisors by launching the Being an Ally Equity Training Workshop series. The series consisted of seven workshops that explored what it means to be an ally in equity at Saint Paul College, why equity and inclusion is important, and how inclusive excellence can positively affect Saint Paul College students.

SUSTAINABILITY

Saint Paul College seeks to make the Guided Pathways Advising program fully sustainable by its fifth year. To achieve this, Saint Paul College will contribute 69 percent of project costs, alongside private investment in second and third years. During the fourth and fifth years (the first two years after the grant period has ended), increased retention and completion rates will lead to revenue increases from tuition. This sustainability model is very workable, given the gradualism over time of diversifying sources of funding.

2. Closing the Achievement Gap by Improving Retention and Completion at Riverland College

Riverlamd College proposed a retention and completion program for students of color based on a proactive advising model. The first students impacted by the program enrolled during the fall 2017 semester.

Currently, Riverland's students of color are not as successful as their white peers. The College's goals are to reduce current achievement gap by:

- Increasing the graduation rate of students of color by 25 percent.
- Increasing the transfer rate of students of color by 15 percent.
- Increasing the fall-to-fall retention rate of students of color by 10 percent.

WORK TO DATE

Since receiving the Equity Grant, Riverland College has initiated several efforts aimed to change the campus' institutional culture. First, in spring 2017, the college created the position of Director of Advising to produce positive results in retention and completion during the grant period. During the same semester, all Riverland employees attended a training session on cultural communication presented by Austin Public Schools. The Dean of Students arranged for the Student Affairs division to receive cultural diversity training at the spring 2017 Retreat Day.

Sovatha Oun, a leadership and equity trainer, conducted an equity walk assessing the types of art being displayed using a diversity lens. Afterward, the Vice President made recommendations to replace some of the art and to move some to other locations within the campus. Oun also led an implicit bias training session for all supervisors and administrators at the college.

Riverland College has also developed visuals designed to welcome students. The college created new banners to designate the Multicultural Center and Student Commons. Both banners use the phrase "everyone welcome" and a tree image with different colored hands depicting the leaves of the tree. In addition, the college created entrance door signage using the word "welcome" in multiple languages. The college distributed signage to staff who would want to display them on their office or department doors.

SUSTAINABILITY

Riverland College's sustainability plan has a clearly defined goal, but can benefit by including interim goals. The College plans to comprise four percent of overall Minnesota State system enrollment by 2020 by increasing retention and graduation rates. These increases will result in an overall increase in enrollment, which drives revenue from tuition and the funding that Riverland receives through the Minnesota State allocation formula. In addition, Riverland submitted a funding request to the Otto Bremer Trust to pay for an integration counselor at 0.5 FTE for two years.

3. Guiding Pathways to Success (GPS) for Underrepresented Students at Minnesota State University, Mankato

Minnesota State University, Mankato's GPS program provides underrepresented first-year students with proactive advising and improves social and campus integration by increasing knowledge/awareness of campus-based resources. All GPS students meet with their advisor once a week for the school year and have the

opportunity to attend study sessions/tutor tables for additional help, if needed. In addition, students also have access to priority registration. The program has also spawned a first-year experience course designed for first-year GPS students.

Minnesota State University, Mankato seeks to improve social and campus integration by increasing knowledge and awareness of campus-based resources.

WORK TO DATE

The University trained ten upperclassmen in August 2017 to take on the mentoring role in the upcoming school year. Mentors then had their first interactions with first-year GPS students during the Summer Bridge program (August 15-17, 2017). The Summer Bridge Program gives first-year GPS students the chance to move-in early in preparation for college life.

The University has also sought to increase awareness of the GPS program by:

- Printing GPS recruitment information disseminated to prospective students.

- Developing the GPS webpage.

- Sending targeted mailings to prospective GPS students.

- Recruiting and providing information regarding GPS at local high schools and through community connections.

- Recruiting and providing GPS information to prospective GPS participants at admission events.

- Recruiting and providing GPS information to prospective students at summer orientations.

- Personal peer to student/family phone calls regarding benefits and incentives for participating in GPS.

SUSTAINABILITY

Program staff have taken steps to build institutional buy-in for the program. However, there is no defined plan for financial sustainability beyond the initial grant period. Since the GPS program's creation, an institution-wide stakeholder group consisting of staff from Academic Affairs, Institutional Diversity, and Student Affairs have regularly met. The stakeholder group discusses the initial implementation of this program and the program's impact on the University's five-year strategic goals.

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