

# Supporting Postsecondary Student Success

NOVEMBER 2014

In an effort to support community-based collaborations among key sectors—education, business, policy, and nonprofit and community organizations—the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is providing a series of primers that will help communities increase their postsecondary attainment. This primer explores the importance of raising the rates of persistence and completion among students who enter postsecondary programs, especially from underserved populations, by providing them with strong institutional and community supports. Each primer in the series will be followed by a tactical guidebook that provides further detail.

## The Completion Culture Challenge



**PRIORITIZE STUDENT SUCCESS** by creating a completion culture in postsecondary institutions with clear goals; a sense of shared responsibility for student success with faculty and staff; and the commitment to remove structural barriers related to course availability, registration deadlines and financial aid application or disbursement.



**ELIMINATE GAPS** in student retention and success across population groups by providing targeted academic supports to improve remediation, early warning systems for advising needs, and increased student engagement with faculty and staff.



**COORDINATE SUPPORT SYSTEMS** across campus and the community, taking stock of existing services to identify overlaps and gaps and maximize the effective use of limited resources. Target students who most need services and provide timely, continuous support from entry through graduation.



**USE DATA**—disaggregated by student populations—to drive completion and improvement efforts and to advance equity, identifying at-risk students' specific loss points along the degree pathway and effective intervention programs.

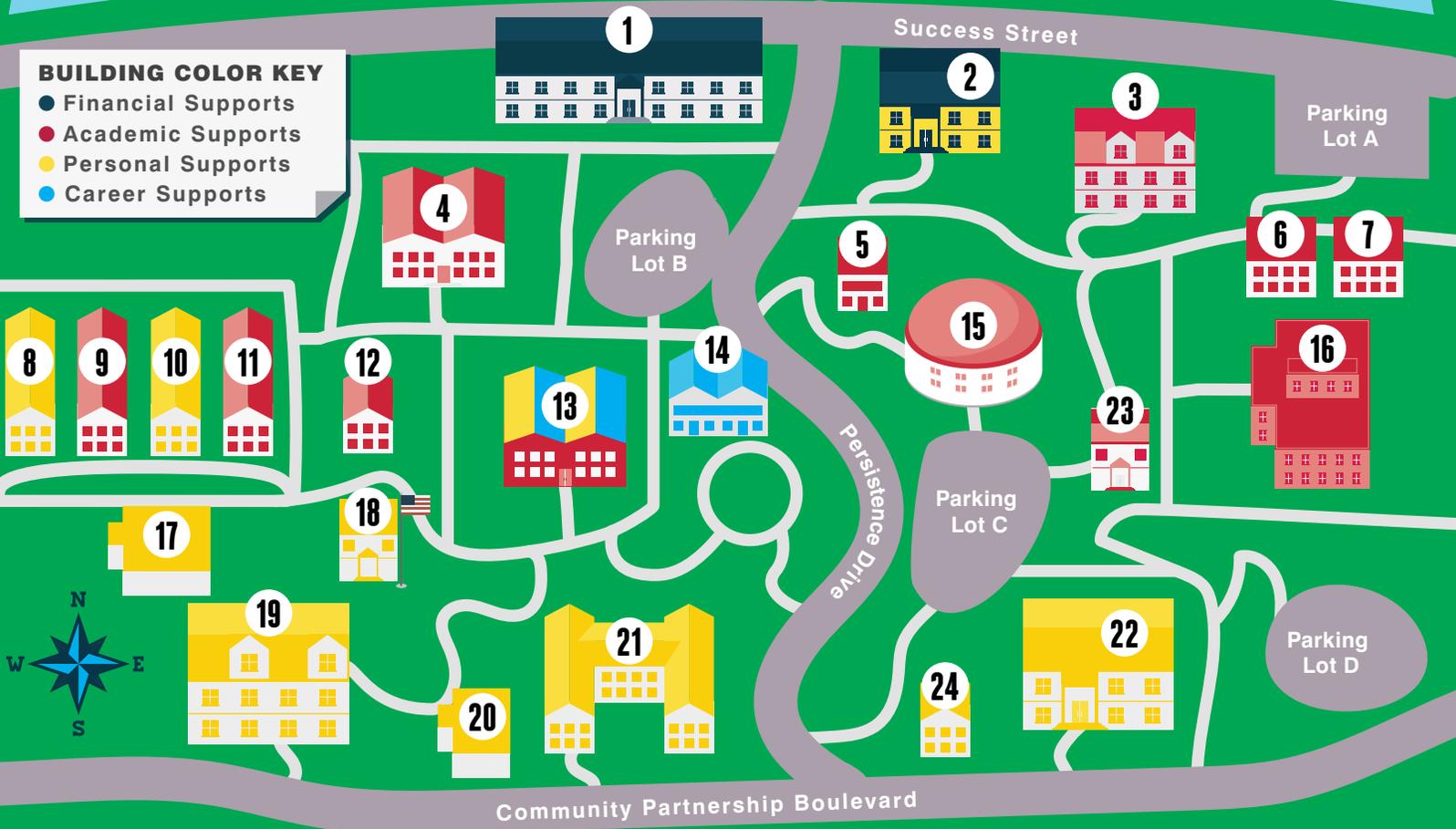


The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to promoting access to and success in higher education for all students. Based in Washington, D.C., IHEP develops innovative policy- and practice-oriented research to guide policymakers and education leaders, who develop high-impact policies that will address our nation's most pressing education challenges.

# THE POSTSECONDARY STUDENT SUPPORTS MAP

## BUILDING COLOR KEY

- Financial Supports
- Academic Supports
- Personal Supports
- Career Supports



BUILDING NUMBER	SERVICE PROVIDER	STUDENT SUPPORTS
1	● Financial Aid Office	Financial Aid Counseling and Literacy
2	●● Community-Based Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Aid Counseling and Literacy</li> <li>• Parental Engagement</li> </ul>
3	● Academic Departments	Degree Mapping Advising
4	● Math and English Departments	Remedial Advising and Tutors
5	● Online and Technology Services	Technology Supports
6	● Writing Center	Writing Tutors
7	● Math Center	Math Tutors
8	● Student Affairs Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Year Experience</li> <li>• Family Engagement</li> </ul>
9	● Academic Advising Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Warning Systems</li> <li>• Intrusive Advising</li> </ul>
10	● Residence Halls	First Year Experience
11	● Registrar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible Scheduling</li> <li>• Transfer Advising</li> </ul>

BUILDING NUMBER	SERVICE PROVIDER	STUDENT SUPPORTS
12	● Testing Office	Prior Learning Assessments
13	●● Business Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible Scheduling</li> <li>• Work Experience</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> </ul>
14	● Career Center	Career Counseling
15	● Executive Office	Articulation Agreements
16	● High Schools	Remedial Advising and Tutors
17	● Diversity Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Communities/Cohorts</li> <li>• First Year Experience</li> </ul>
18	● Office For Military Students	Support for Military Students
19	● Counseling Center	Personal Counseling
20	● Childcare Center	Childcare
21	● Faculty Offices	Mentoring
22	● Student Organizations	Mentoring
23	● Institutional Research Offices	Early Warning Systems
24	● English Language Learning Center	Language Supports

# Resources: Supporting Underserved Students

## **Adult Students**

*Going the Distance in Adult College Completion: Lessons from the Non-traditional No More Project* (2010: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education)

This report identifies lessons for eliminating barriers to college completion for adults with prior credit. It describes the need for data quality, data-driven programming, and integrative communication and planning between state and institutional leaders. Promising practices include providing returning adults with timely information on degree completion, strengthening pathways, and increasing flexibility to meet these students' unique needs and obligations.

## **Disconnected Youth**

*Reconnecting Opportunity Youth: Education Pathways* (2012: Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University)

This brief describes several cross-sector programs to help disconnected youth progress to and through postsecondary programs. Supports include transitional services, career pathways, and paid internships. One program, Gateway to College, uses dual enrollment to enable cadres of students who dropped out of high school to enroll in community colleges, earning a high school diploma and college credit while receiving wraparound services for social and emotional needs.

## **English Language Learners and Immigrant Students**

*Dreaming Big: What Community Colleges Can Do to Help Undocumented Immigrant Youth Achieve Their Potential* (2012: Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education)

This organization advises community colleges on what they can do to improve undocumented students' access to and success in college. Exemplary practices and policies from various institutions are highlighted, including: resource centers for immigrant students, designated staff advisors, ABE-ESL bridge courses and career pathways, campus safe zones, transfer facilitation, and support services that connect departmental silos and community organizations.

## **Latino Students**

*Roadmap for Ensuring America's Future by Increasing Latino College Completion* (2011: Excelencia in Education)

This report provides a profile of Latino students and describes actions needed by institutions, community leaders, and policymakers to increase college access, persistence, and degree attainment among both traditional-aged and older students. Topics include data disaggregation, need-based financial aid, and supports for working students. For more on how colleges can support Latino students, see *Advancing to Completion: Increasing*

*Degree Attainment by Improving Graduation Rates and Closing Gaps for Hispanic Students* by The Education Trust (2012).

## **Low-Income and First-Generation Students**

*Supporting First-Generation College Students through Classroom-Based Practices* (2012: Institute for Higher Education Policy)

This brief takes a close look at first-generation college students nationally and reviews key policies and practices that contribute to their success within Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Four major themes are discussed: faculty as key change agents; curricular redesign for more effective classroom environments; evidence-based solutions to promote an institutional culture of ongoing inquiry and innovation; and partnerships with allies in the greater community. Specific strategic approaches and examples from MSIs are included. See also *Demography is Not Destiny: Increasing the Graduation Rates of Low-Income College Students at Large Public Universities* by The Pell Institute (2008).

## **Students of Color**

*Aspirations to Achievement: Men of Color and Community Colleges* (2014: Center for Community College Student Engagement)

This report details approaches for colleges to use in supporting black and Latino male students. It highlights the need for strong, personal mentoring relationships between students and culturally competent advisors and instructors, along with high expectations for student achievement. Profiles of successful programs are included. In addition, *Advancing to Completion: Increasing Degree Attainment by Improving Graduation Rates and Closing Gaps for African-American Students* by The Education Trust (2012) describes how colleges can support black male and female students.

## **Transfer Students**

*Challenged from the Start: Stories of Student Perseverance and Determination in California's Community Colleges* (2012: The Campaign for College Opportunity)

These profiles of ten transfer students navigating California's community colleges offer insight into students' struggles to overcome structural barriers to transfer and graduation. The consequences of inadequate advising, complex credit transfer policies, and limited seating in required courses are detailed as students describe stress, crowded schedules, limited resources, slow progress through college, and concurrent enrollment at multiple institutions. Each student's story features a "student success indicator" for postsecondary institutions to track for improving outcomes for transfer students. See also *The Role of Institutional Agents in Promoting Transfer Access* by the Center for Urban Education (2013).

# Leading Practices

## Cincinnati, Ohio

In this metro area, all two-year and four-year colleges have made intrusive intake advising for new students a priority. At the University of Cincinnati (UC) and Northern Kentucky University (NKU), first-year students receive orientation, placement testing, and academic advising. The Pathfinders program at NKU also provides mandatory study tables and workshops for students admitted with academic deficiencies. These and other retention strategies contribute to UC and NKU's *increased six-year graduation rates* among local students.

## Nashville, Tennessee

Austin Peay State University has *eliminated developmental math courses* and mainstreams students into college-level, credit-bearing courses. Based on assessments of their specific skill gaps, students who need remediation attend workshops focusing on their weak areas. More remedial students pass their first college-level math courses, and students are *more likely to persist* to the second semester compared to remedial students prior to redesign.

## Houston, Texas

The "My Degree Counts" initiative in Houston targets the local Latino population and aims to increase college success among part-time and adult students, using flexible course scheduling, financial aid, free or low-cost childcare, and early and regular advising to help students stay on track. In the first two years, overall *degree completion increased by 16%*.

## Greensboro, North Carolina

Through the *North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* (CAA), eligible students from any in-state community college who complete two-year degree programs may transfer all program credits to any University of North Carolina institution and enroll at junior status. Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) uses the CAA along with other articulation agreements with private, liberal arts colleges. For example, *Guilford College* guarantees admission for GTCC students in 14 areas of study, waives the application fee, and accepts up to 64 credits.

## Put Academic Learning at the Center of Success Efforts

Far too many students who begin their college careers in a remedial course stop out before receiving their degrees. Colleges must ensure that students complete required remediation as soon as possible and offer proven remediation practices such as those pioneered by the National Center for Academic Transformation, including module-based, embedded, or accelerated options, to create academic momentum. Meanwhile, it is equally important to challenge all students to engage in a set of *high-impact learning practices* such as undergraduate research, internships, and intercultural/global study, which result in higher gains for underserved populations.

## Ease Transfer and Articulation for Today's Mobile Students

When students lose credits after transferring to another college, it wastes valuable time, money, and energy and hurts completion rates. Institutions, states, and regions that cross state borders can work together to reduce these inefficiencies. Promising practices include common general education courses, common course numbering, block credit transfer, and transfer associate's degrees. Prior learning assessment also helps adult students who have stopped out of one college, obtained valuable knowledge and skills from work, and returned to a new college. Transfer students need early

and continuous advising from their initial institution as well as retention and completion supports from their "receiving" college; formal partnerships such as co-enrollment or guaranteed admission between local community colleges and four-year institutions can benefit students as well.

## Provide Comprehensive Supports All Along the Pathway to a Degree

Given that about one-third of students leave college after their *first year*, transition services—such as bridge programs, orientation seminars, and learning communities—are clearly important. However, students need continuous support throughout college to progress to graduation, especially underserved populations. Degree maps, early alert systems, intrusive advising, and e-advising systems can help faculty and staff identify and intervene when students need help getting back on track. Beyond academics, students need to feel engaged on campus and in the community through mentoring, coaching, or service learning. Colleges and community-based organizations should provide additional targeted supports for underserved groups. For instance, students who are parents or working full-time benefit from free or low-cost childcare and flexible course scheduling, while military students need specialized personal and financial services.