

JUNE 2012

Adult College Completion through the Workforce Development System

*A Preliminary Report of the Center for Women and Work/National
Association of Workforce Boards Adult College Completion Project
Funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education*

A REPORT OF THE CENTER FOR WOMEN AND WORK

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ABOUT THE CENTER FOR WOMEN AND WORK

The Center for Women and Work (CWW) is an innovative leader in research and programs that promote gender equity, a high-skill economy, and reconciliation of work and well-being for all. CWW is located in the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

CWW is affiliated with the internationally-known Institute for Women's Leadership (IWL), an eight-unit consortium of research, instructional, and outreach units that also includes the Center for American Women and Politics, the Center for Women's Global Leadership, the Institute for Research on Women, the Women's & Gender Studies Department, Douglass College, the Institute for Women and Art, and the Office for the Promotion of Women in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the Lumina Foundation for its generous funding of this report and the project described herein, and to the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) for its partnership and support. We are indebted to Mike Lawrence for his invaluable contribution to the project, to Laura Barrett for her assistance with the project and the report and to Teresa Boyer for her comments on earlier drafts.

We would like to extend our special thanks to the staff of community colleges and the workforce development systems in Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and Colorado, whose dedication and time make this project possible.

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INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

There is broad recognition of the need to increase the number of workers with Associate and Bachelor's degrees, and of the importance of degrees for increasing wages. However, the U.S. workforce investment system, which provides education and training to workers, is not designed to help its clients acquire college credit. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 funds and structures most training and services the system provides and is oriented toward short-term training that will move clients quickly into work and prepare them for in-demand and growing occupations. Unfortunately, this traditional approach to training does not prepare all clients to successfully compete in the labor market, and it provides counselors seeking to help workers with limited tools. At the same time, higher education institutions are struggling to increase graduation rates, and over a fifth of adults have acquired some college but do not hold a degree.¹ This context points to the need for efforts that would help the higher education and workforce investment (or workforce development) systems to better achieve their goals while improving outcomes for the people they serve.

In 2010, the Lumina Foundation for Education funded the Rutgers Center for Women and Work (CWW) and the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce to examine the feasibility of offering adult college degree completion as an option through the workforce development system in four states. The Adult College Completion (ACC) project, now managed by Rutgers CWW and the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB), will last for four years.

As detailed in other reports,² while both higher education and workforce development systems have incentives to help adults with some college complete a degree, the goals of institutionalizing degree completion as an option in workforce development and improving the ability of higher education institutions to reengage students often require new ways of operating, and in some cases new policies. This project tests the novel idea of working through the workforce investment system to do this, and seeks to identify needed changes and institutionalize new approaches in both systems.

This report provides a preliminary overview of the first 15 months of this project, with particular emphasis on the first half of the project's second year. It describes the steps toward implementation and institutionalization in Mississippi, the site of the first pilot, and in Pennsylvania, which is in the formative stages of an approach centered on the workforce system. The project is also in the planning stages in Colorado, and a fourth state will soon join. A report on year 2 will be released in fall 2012.

Under WIA, each state has a number of workforce investment areas, in which Workforce Investment Boards work in partnership with their local elected officials to develop plans and implement services at the local level. In Mississippi the project currently partners with all four

¹ <http://www.luminafoundation.org/state>. Retrieved May 6, 2012. This statistic refers to Americans age 25-64.

² McKay, H.A. (Forthcoming). "Reimagining Skills Attainment in the Public Workforce System." Center for Women and Work.

of the state's workforce areas and three community colleges, which have begun to identify and enroll students. Eastern Mississippi Community College (EMCC) was the site of the first pilot project. The Adult College Completion project is currently partnering with two workforce areas and three colleges (one a four-year college) in Pennsylvania, which have developed implementation strategies and begun to recruit students. A third workforce area in the state has recently joined the effort as well (see Appendix I for a list of partners in both states). This report describes some of the interesting differences in both processes and outcomes that have emerged in the two states.

The project began with an extensive period of conceptualization, planning, and partnership development in Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and Colorado that resulted in a new framework for institutionalizing degree completion, new relationships and information sharing between local workforce areas and their corresponding higher education institutions, especially community colleges, and the acceptance of a new concept in these communities.

The project experienced serious setbacks, particularly with regard to funding. The most serious of these were the cuts by Congress to federal funds that made governor's Workforce Investment Act discretionary dollars unavailable. Before this, both the governors of Mississippi and Pennsylvania had committed a portion of their discretionary dollars to this college completion project. As a result, partners are working to identify alternative funding sources in both states. An unexpected positive outcome is that the scramble to find new ways of funding has forced the states and the local areas to consider ways to make the project financially stable and sustainable far earlier in the process than might have otherwise happened. This is likely to substantially benefit the project in the long run. In addition, these cuts have necessitated a great variety of experiences among states, with each now employing very different financing methods and funding streams. This allows the project to test the idea of adult degree completion well as local workforce systems take on the challenge of working through, and even revising, the rules and approaches of government programs.

To test these models and capture the entire experience of these states, a two-pronged evaluation is a major aspect of the project, one led by Rutgers CWW. It includes a process evaluation to map the project model, the steps taken to institutionalize the degree completion options, and varying practices across states and workforce areas. The process evaluation is documenting how policy and systems change and how recruitment, enrollment, and eventually graduation unfold, and analyzing the reasons for success or failure of different project strategies. To accomplish this, evaluators are employing methods including a system of records to capture project events and student enrollment, interviews with students and stakeholders, and online surveys of returning college students supported by the program. In addition, a survey of NAWB members regarding college completion activities and interest will provide a rich body of information about how to implement this approach in new areas. A second component, the outcome evaluation, will match employment records to students in the program to examine the employment outcomes of completing a degree and will compare outcomes for this group with those of workforce development clients who have engaged in more traditional forms of training.

Another component of the project contributes to the ability to support adults who have many other work and family obligations to complete college: the development of content on available workforce development resources for a portal operated by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). This will complement SREB's existing content for online learners. In addition CWW/NAWB is working with SREB to adapt this content to workforce development clients and make it available as an option for receiving credit, which ultimately will expand choices of schools for returning students. There has been a delay in the launch of this website, but once launched we expect it will be a great resource for the project.

Finally, a key project activity that will contribute to the sustainability and expansion of the possibilities for college completion through the workforce system is outreach. Outreach and networking serve to educate potential partners about disengaged students close to a degree and the possibility of better serving them. These activities provide an opportunity to create new partnerships and synergies through networking with groups and agencies that can take the project to a greater scale. For example, project staff presented at several conferences in the first year of the project. More recently, project staff led a session at the annual NAWB Forum in Washington, D.C. in March 2012 to promote the idea of college completion through workforce development and met afterwards with workforce area representatives interested in learning more about how to adopt the approach in their states. In the future, outreach efforts may include a NAWB webinar on Adult College Completion and additional presentations at conferences.

EXAMPLES OF STATE PROJECTS

Mississippi

Mississippi is an excellent location for the first pilot of the Adult Degree Completion Project for a number of reasons. The state has a great need for more degree holders, and the area where the pilot is taking place has seen an influx of new employers seeking employees with specific qualifications. Only 29% of the state's working-age adults hold a two-year degree or more (including 13.4% who have a Bachelor's and 9% an Associate degree), and about a quarter have some college.³

In many ways the project aligns nicely with existing state goals and systems. First, Mississippi has a dynamic higher education system: a strong Community College Board facilitated the project. Policy changes underway also are helpful for adult students in particular: two years ago the higher education system improved credit articulation across educational institutions, particularly the acceptance of Associate degrees at four-year colleges. A recent effort has begun to assess prior learning in order to help students gain college credit for work and life

³ http://www.luminafoundation.org/state_work/mississippi/

experiences (such as military experience). The Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) and its workforce investment system are also committed to the project and believe it will assist them in serving their clients and that it aligns with their overall goals.

East Mississippi Community College (EMCC) was a strong choice for the first higher education partner because it is an adult-friendly institution with online learning experience and close relationships with area employers. There is strong support from senior level administration, which is prioritizing increased degree completion.

The project has expanded beyond EMCC and the Mississippi Partnership and WIN Job Center, its corresponding workforce investment area, to include two additional community colleges and corresponding partners in three Workforce Investment Areas and their WIN Job Centers (Mississippi's One-Stop Centers). This will result in the project's reach to all four workforce regions (see Appendix I for a full list of partner agencies).

Project System and Institutionalization

Mississippi provides an example of how the project can create a template to implement sustainable college completion options, particularly an example of doing so from the perspective of higher education institutions, as detailed in this section and the lessons learned section of this report. This process involves assessing existing practices in higher education and workforce development systems related to adult students and clients with college; establishing relationships; identifying existing practices and policies that contribute to or facilitate completion; and identifying ways to fund completion. Another set of steps described in the next section relates to the process of bringing in students and moving them toward graduation.

New partnerships are both a necessary ingredient of the project and a valued result. Collaboration on this project has deepened relationships between workforce development and community college staff. On both sides partners are learning how procedures in the other system can be adapted to facilitate college completion. For example, the process for managing clients who receive Individual Training Account (ITA) funding can help higher education institutions to manage the flow of adult students returning to school under this project. An ITA is essentially a voucher given to customers at One-Stop Career Center (or in Mississippi, WIN Job Center) who need occupational skills training to become gainfully employed or re-employed. Title I of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 funds ITAs.

In terms of existing practices, higher education partners have identified resources that could be tailored to improve completion, such as a database that allows students to ascertain how many credits they need to graduate by themselves, and learned about existing data systems (see next section) and practices.

On the workforce side, the project has identified practices and policies that may hinder college completion but often could be easily changed. The system of taking new clients in at WIN Job Centers is the point at which information about workers' background is gathered. Here changes early in the intake process could help to identify disengaged students better, and it is clear that such changes will have to occur at the level of workforce areas rather than statewide. This requires exploring which intake steps can best capture detailed information about college experience.

The state's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) is another obstacle to implementing college completion as an option. Typically, a formal process, specific to each state, exists for identifying and listing training provider institutions approved to deliver training and education to workforce development system clients (and the courses they are allowed to take with funding provided through this system) on the ETPL. Mandated adherence to such a list can place limits on the ability of workforce development clients to complete college. In Mississippi, MDES is addressing this problem with the creation of a new code in the Workforce Investment Network Global Services (WINGS) system that will provide the opportunity to address this through the ETPL.

As noted earlier, the loss of state-level "discretionary dollars" has been a significant barrier to progress, and in Mississippi, identified funds are dwindling. Discussion with partners there suggests that there may be better ways to incorporate college completion efforts into ITA procedures of the workforce development system. If the same systems set up to track ITA clients can also be used to track and support returning college students, there is a possibility as well of enhancing options for completion if project partners identify additional funding. This may be a subject of ongoing discussion, and any progress here on system change with ITAs could be pivotal for other states that look to the Mississippi experience as a pilot.

Refining Processes of Student Recruitment, Assessment and Enrollment

The process of bringing in and graduating disengaged students requires definition and operationalization of modes of identifying and recruiting students, setting parameters for student eligibility, and assessing individuals who might enroll. Over time partners are also likely to formalize a process of support for enrolled students until they graduate.

The process of identifying students with the right qualifications and reaching them through email or on the phone was challenging, and staff refined it over time. EMCC found, by making hundreds of phone calls, that much of the contact information in its database about students was outdated. After this, EMCC worked with its partner WIN Job Center, which had more recent information about many in its own data system. EMCC staff also tried identifying potential students on Facebook.

Another creative strategy to identify students at EMCC was to enlist the assistance of Career and Technical Education (CTE) faculty, who are encouraged as part of their jobs to remain in touch with former students. Many know more about the situations of disengaged students and can refer them. However, the faculty is facing increasing work requirements, which can make it difficult to call on them on an ongoing basis.

As identification of students proceeded, it became clear both that data on remaining credits were not always accurate, and that the minimum criterion of 0-9 credits was in some cases too restrictive, or simply did not provide enough information about students. Staff conducted credit reviews and found that many who appeared to meet project criteria were ineligible because they had transferred or changed majors and so needed more credit hours than it appeared; others by changing their major could be eligible but did not appear so. After discussion and requests and input from the state, the project set up formal criteria for the Adult College Completion project for Mississippi (See Appendix II).

For transfer students other problems arose; for example, some credits might not appear on the first record, and staff needed to produce a second transcript in a two-step process. As the method of assessing and screening students on the community college side changed in this way, there was also the administrative hurdle of gaining approval to ask staff at the community college to do additional work.

The school also experimented with other creative approaches to recruitment. For example, seeking out students who had left EMCC to go to other institutions and have now transferred their credits back provided a field of potential clients. This may prove to be a valuable use of resources, as many students leave a community college and go to other colleges and universities but never earn a degree. Other potential recruits include students who dropped their majors and never completed their degree, but who discover on their return to school that their initial major's curriculum had changed in their favor, and that they may be closer to a degree than they once thought. Other reasons to become reengaged surfaced in the pilot. For example, some former Medical Office Technology students on their return found wisdom in finishing if they could pursue a Health-Care Data Technology degree.

Recruitment and funding possibilities are closely related. Many students can only participate if most of their educational costs are paid, but available funds to support students are used very carefully. To that end, project personnel and staff across the two systems check in with one another to refine the funding aspects of the program. For example, early in the recruitment and registration process in Mississippi (in November 2011), the project team discussed how the program should be structured to maintain this buy-in from students when the funding situation looked bleaker. For students who qualified for Pell grants and thus have tuition costs covered, project staff decided that students should buy their books (as well as parking decals and school supplies) as their investment.

Overall, in this process a workable initial division of labor emerged whereby EMCC staff take the lead on recruiting such students, and workforce development staff primarily assess potential project participants and determine their eligibility for available funding. Typically, EMCC identifies potential candidates, and then refers them to the WIN Job Center to gain approval for funding to cover tuition and registration fees. Funding streams used for students to date in Mississippi include primarily funds set aside by MDES for use by this project, Pell Grants, and ITAs.

For the pilot semester, nineteen students enrolled in spring 2012 at East Mississippi Community College, including three who graduated in May 2012 with an A.A. in Liberal Arts, and four who graduated with a technical degree. In addition, one student who had transferred out of the school to pursue a four-year degree and had not finished returned and was awarded the Associate degree he had earned but had never applied for.

Student Experiences with the Program

Informal assessments by the evaluators through conversations with staff and some students indicate that all students are quite pleased at the opportunity to return to school. Workforce development staff in Mississippi said some students report that they expect to receive a promotion upon completing their degrees. For example, one student reported in an interview that he would receive a raise from his employer. Furthermore, the project is assisting students who would not otherwise achieve a degree because they had become disengaged or disinterested, or for a host of reasons were unable to attend classes in person, or were students who could not afford tuition.

One spring 2012 graduate had been a Medical Office Technology student at EMCC but moved away in 2009 -- just one class short of her degree. A military spouse and new mother, she lived on an air force base in another state and was at home full-time. After reviewing her records, the staff of EMCC called her and assured her that she was a good candidate for college completion. She was put in touch with the local WIN job center, which approved her to receive an MDES grant. With help from EMCC staff, she was able to register, from out-of-state, for an online course in Communications Technology that she could take at home while caring for her baby. The instructor was informed of her unusual situation, and the two were put in touch.

As mentioned, another student was awarded an Associate degree in December 2011 for which he had met all the requirements some years earlier. The student had left EMCC to pursue a four-year degree and dropped out. Working at the post office, he was unaware that he was eligible for a degree without additional classes. Now, because of the recruitment effort of the project, he has paid his \$50 graduation fee and is receiving his degree. He reported that one reason he was pleased about the outcome was so that he could be an example for his children. Hopefully, having the degree will help also him with his job and career options in the future.

Pennsylvania

The project in Pennsylvania is located in two rural local workforce investment board areas with four primary college partners. Southern Alleghenies Workforce Investment area is partnering with four-year degree partner St. Francis University and two-year partner Penn Highlands Community College, and Westmoreland/Fayette Workforce Investment Board is partnering with Seton Hill University and Westmoreland County Community College on four and two-year degree completion respectively. A third workforce area has recently come on board as well (see Appendix I). DOL Rapid Response funds are supporting the effort to target the long-term unemployed.

Despite delays due to a change of government and consequent difficulties identifying funding, the workforce areas are engaged in the project and are quickly developing and refining processes to adjust their existing programs to match the needs of adult college completion. For example, in Southern Alleghenies the staff have modified their ITA procedure for this purpose. These workforce areas are also looking for other dollars to complement Rapid Response funds including utilizing H-1B monies and current WIA formula allocated funds. Uncertainty about future funding adds to the challenge of keeping partners engaged; however, Pennsylvania expects to maintain Rapid Response dollars for this project until at least June 2013.

The process of student recruitment has recently begun in Pennsylvania. One challenge is that student data are not as robust as in Mississippi or as easy to access. In fact, higher education partners and workforce partners have already searched their databases for college completion candidates and found that they do not have full information on whether students are eligible, or in other cases that students do not meet the eligibility criteria the project first set out, or disengaged students in higher education databases that appear to be eligible have not recently received career services and so may not have up-to-date contact information. One result is that the project is considering ways to be flexible with eligibility criteria; another is that the state will experiment with new ways to recruit, such as adding a recording publicizing the project to the automated response queue for new unemployment compensation recipients, recruiting students who attended the partner colleges through a postcard campaign, and providing brochures in all career links in the workforce areas. In addition, new rules requiring UC recipients to be in contact with a PA CareerLink® earlier in the period of coverage than before may present new options for recruitment such as adding information about college completion to the unemployment compensation initial trainings.

In other ways too, PA CareerLink® partners have raised questions about how to fit college completion into their usual framework for WIA activities as the Pennsylvania project has begun to take shape. For example, there was some question as to whether the usual requirement to focus on high-demand occupations applies to this project. Partners have gained a sense from working with employers that general degrees, rather than solely training related to occupations identified as high-demand, are valuable and are used as a means of assessing employees. This

project may bring about a slight shift in this regard so that policy regarding training can be more responsive to what PA CareerLink® staff have learned their clients need in practice.

Pennsylvania also may expand its higher education partners so that students have a larger number of online options for completing their degrees. Finally, staff are seeking to develop a special category for the state's eligible training provider list called "college completion" to make the program fit with procedures under which only approved providers and courses may be supported by funding. This will also help to track project participants. In this and other ways, the project is helping to build flexibility into existing procedures that can aid college completion through the workforce system over the long term.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Adult Degree Completion project, particularly in Mississippi, has already become a rich source of lessons learned as two formerly distinct institutional systems, higher education and workforce development, grapple with working in tandem to encourage adult learners with access to One-Stop centers to go for a college degree and/or an associate degree. This is not a simple task given that often the nation's public workforce system does not perceive a college degree as a short-term training option and has a framework for services geared toward short-term investment. These lessons learned will help other states as they try to institutionalize college completion as an option and as they refine the process of recruiting students.

Policy Lessons

Any change in public policy has to meet a need in order to be successful. When two institutional systems are involved, change has to meet the needs of both systems. Partners in Mississippi have received the idea of increasing degree attainment and embraced the project more easily than expected. One reason for this is that the project meets the needs of local systems of higher education and workforce development. Community colleges are under growing pressure to graduate students. The state's economic development strategy requires a workforce with more years of education, and in the difficult economy that continues to affect some areas, many workforce development offices have been struggling to provide assistance to clients that makes a difference in employment outcomes. The college completion approach provides them with another tool for assisting Mississippians.

However, the process is not without its difficulties. One factor that is clearly an obstacle to institutionalizing completion is the many varied and usually unstandardized approaches and policies of colleges to assessing prior learning. There are also problems with their ability to assess it effectively. Articulation agreements are an important tool.

Mississippi's policy to improve articulation among community colleges, high schools, and universities is proving to be valuable to efforts at EMCC. Also, as noted earlier, Mississippi is making great strides at the college and the state level on improving its prior learning assessment policies. In Colorado prior learning assessment (PLA) legislation has been considered by the state legislature. The smaller policy changes identified through this project, such as those mentioned in the previous section concerning the ETPL One-Stop intake procedures, ITAs, and funding, will complement these larger shifts in the higher education system as well as the general goals of the state.

Bringing Stakeholders into the Process

An important piece of any implementation is having the right stakeholders at the table, and developing key relationships. The project leaders have invested a great deal of time identifying and through many, many meetings, connecting with the appropriate people at different institutions. The matter of determining who the "right contacts" are can also be difficult.

In Mississippi, community colleges, and certainly those working with the ACC project, have traditionally had good relationships with their WIN Job Centers. For the most part, however, those relationships have been entirely restricted to the non-credit or technical education side of these colleges. With this project, the Mississippi workforce areas we observed were, for the first time, setting about to work closely with the for-credit education side of their local community colleges -- and enjoying it. Community colleges have been similarly enthusiastic about expanding to the credit side in their work with career centers -- although one staff member felt her college was already focusing on degree completion, and that the project was redundant.

The existence and involvement of a statewide Mississippi State Board for Community Colleges played a particularly important role in getting these new relationships off the ground by focusing more on face time and extensive in-person meetings between the two systems. On the workforce development side, it has been helpful to target and involve workforce staff responsible for career and technical education.

There is evidence that these new relationships are likely to sustain college completion efforts in Mississippi for a long time. One stakeholder indicated that the two systems are learning more and more about each other as they try to identify and enroll students and move them toward completion. She indicated that this was her first opportunity to sit down with her counterpart in the "other" system and discuss ways to strengthen collaboration. A state leader in Jackson also reported that this is his first time to collaborate on a project with the credit-based side of community colleges --aside from work on ITA programs supporting job-related credits.

Issues of Student Data: Recruitment, Assessment, & Enrollment

As noted earlier, recruitment has been more difficult than initially expected. Assessment and enrollment efforts faced a number of data problems, including inaccurate student records and out-of-date contact information. Indeed, this collaboration suggests that the local workforce development systems in Mississippi had more up-to-date contact information on near-completers than the college in many cases.

Across states in the Lumina ACC project there are great differences in the type of student data available which differentiate the “near complete” population from others far from degree completion. Good data on this are crucial if recruitment is going to be effective and efficient. These variations exist not just state-to-state but across colleges and workforce areas.

EMCC staff noted a number of surprises in their student records that were important for the project. For example, there were data indicating that some students had not finished when in fact they had already graduated, and that some students who had sufficient credits to qualify for the Lumina grant actually did not because they had changed their major. In addition, transcripts giving the full credit picture of students transferring courses into the school did not always appear. Moreover, some students showing up in the data as disengaged were actually still enrolled in the school and thus were ineligible to recruit.

Unexpected potential candidates turned up as well, such as students who had transferred out of EMCC but never finished at their new school; and therefore, if interested, could potentially transfer credits back to apply for an Associate degree. There were also students who lacked more than 12 credits for one degree but due to curricular changes might need less than 12 to obtain another kind of degree. There were also a handful of students who had completed all requirements for a degree but had not applied for the degree at all.

One student worker at EMCC gave credit to the process of developing a program evaluation for each student, or determining what courses the student had taken as compared to the requirements for her or his degree, as particularly helpful for successful recruitment.

Having good data with specific information was deemed very useful for recruitment calls. In engaging a candidate, the caller could be specific about what a student lacked to earn a degree. For example, “Did you know you only lack history, English Comp. II and College Algebra to graduate with an AA degree?” or “Did you know you only lack Anatomy and Physiology to earn a college degree in Funeral Services Technology?” could be extremely motivating to certain people. Without that data, calls could lack substance and waste time.

Flexibility & Recruitment: Online Learning and Rolling Admissions

Rutgers University research in other states has shown that educational options that include the flexibility of asynchronous online learning can improve recruitment and enrollment of returning students. The project in Mississippi has not emphasized this because of the new federal regulations on online learning that limit the use of programming from across state borders and the delay in the launch of the SREB portal. However, many students are using online learning options available at the local level. In fact, many at EMCC could not have returned to school without this option because of impossible work demands, distance from bricks and mortar schools, or child care obstacles—all of which can impede “fitting in more school.” As the federal regulations on online learning get ironed out, and when the Southern Regional Education Board launches its website adulthoodlearner.org, we will explore these options more fully.

As noted earlier, a strength of the current pilot in Mississippi is the new and strong relationships emerging between the credit-based side of community colleges and the local workforce development areas. Any long-term future for the college completion initiative very much depends on that, and competition from online or out of state universities could be perceived as threatening.

Certainly, greater flexibility in enrollment schedules would aid completion goals. We have learned in Pennsylvania's experience that where administrative obstacles make it difficult to obtain matriculating information and approval in a timely manner, students are unable to meet some college's enrollment deadlines. On the other hand, the rolling admission available at St Francis University in that state may turn out to be pivotal in both getting students in and out and in helping workforce boards spend available funds on time.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The Lumina Adult College Completion project has now shifted into full-fledged implementation in two states with a close eye on exploring the policy context for improving degree completion through the workforce system and on developing partnerships including extending the project to a fourth location.

A positive outcome of this quarter has been the enthusiastic response of both workforce development and higher education partners to the idea of working together to help students near completion to finish degrees. In addition, creative mechanisms have been identified to achieve goals. State partners are becoming adept at adapting the idea of college completion to suit their labor market context and the workforce and higher education systems of their states.

Challenges nonetheless continue. As has been found in other college completion projects, a great deal of time is spent identifying appropriate students to enroll. Success in the future

requires devising mechanisms to reduce this time. There are also difficulties which continue to arise in securing needed funding from states – though, as described above in the report, states have been creative in identifying different funding streams. In Pennsylvania, moreover, implementation has been slowed due to changes in personnel. Going forward, additional states and workforce areas likely will be implemented on a more accelerated timeline than in the pilot project.

The primary challenges going forward will be to identify and bring together different funding streams, which hopefully will be accomplished with recently submitted grant proposals, and in some cases continuing to obtain approval locally to spend available dollars for this purpose. As noted, we will continue working with one-stops to institutionalize new intake and data processes to identify and bring in near-completers, and with partners will continue to expand the workforce development system role in counseling students to help them deal with challenges adult learners face as well as helping with career planning as students graduate. Project staff are thinking long-term about how to sustain the project given the capacity of individual one-stops to handle clients. In addition, as one-stops begin working with multiple schools they may have to adjust their processes.

It is also crucial that in the future both workforce development and higher education systems begin putting in place as quickly as possible better systems to identify near-completers. Current procedures that do not identify near-completers are driven by programs and policies that do not point toward degree completion and make it hard to act on the awareness that employers often see degrees as valuable signs of an employee's ability to achieve regardless of their direct link to immediate employment or approved training areas.

APPENDIX I: PROJECT PARTNERS

Mississippi

Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES)

Workforce Areas

- Mississippi Partnership
- Twin Districts
- Delta
- Southcentral Mississippi Works

WIN Job Centers

- Golden Triangle WIN Job Center
- Greenwood WIN Job Center
- Madison WIN Job Center
- Yazoo City WIN Job Center

Planning and Development District Partners

- Three Rivers
- South Delta
- Central Mississippi
- Southern Mississippi

Higher Education partners

- East Mississippi Community College (EMCC)
- Holmes Community College
- Gulf Coast Community College

Pennsylvania

Bureau of Workforce Development Partnership, Department of Labor and Industry

- Southern Alleghenies Workforce Investment Area/WIB
- Westmoreland/Fayette Workforce Investment Area/WIB
- Central Workforce Investment Area/WIB

CareerLink® Centers

- PA CareerLink® Westmoreland County
- PA CareerLink® Bedford County
- PA CareerLink® Blair County
- PA CareerLink® Cambria County
- PA CareerLink® Huntingdon County
- PA CareerLink® Somerset County

Higher Education partners

- Westmoreland County Community College
- St. Francis University
- Penn Highlands Community College
- Seton Hill University

APPENDIX II: GENERAL PARTICIPATION CRITERIA

1. Individuals with some college and needing 0-12 credits to graduate to an associate degree or bachelor degree; and
2. The individual under consideration has been out of college for at least one semester due to an acceptable reason (such as leaving school to take a job, getting married, difficult family circumstances, temporary academic difficulties, etc.); and
3. The degree is in an occupation of demand and the One Stop and the Institution of Higher Education believes there is a strong chance for a good, family sustaining job (this is considered to be in line with the WIA Performance Measures or WIA Self-Sufficiency standards for the local workforce area); and
4. The individual has a strong likelihood of completing the course(s) within the traditional time frame of a WIA Individual Training Account (ITA) , usually no more than one calendar year; and
5. The maximum funding per person will be based upon local agreement with their respective state and local workforce investment areas and could be an independent amount and/or the amount determined by the local Individual Training Account policy; and
6. The individual meets the eligibilitie(s) and is suitable and appropriate for the funding source(s) considered for the Adult College Completion ITA/funding/ scholarship amount(s) as determined by the Local Workforce Investment Area policies.