

Background

In the spring of 2017, the Washington Student Achievement Council contracted with Western Washington University to conduct focus groups of Washington citizens between the ages of 25-44. The primary goal of this project was to understand the participants' needs and decision making processes regarding postsecondary education.

Motivations and perceived value of education

Desire to increase earnings (economic need, realization more education = more opportunities)

Example to children

Encouraged by family, friends and counselors

Barriers to postsecondary education

Financial

- Paying loans from an earlier attempt returning to school.
- Unqualified due to spousal or family income.
- Debt unrelated to education.

Family/Work-life balance

Discouragement

• High school teachers/counselors interfered with students' pursuits.

Preferred learning format

Face-to-face	Online	Hybrid
Real-time interaction and feedback valued, though impractical due to family and work schedule demands.	Flexibility and opportunity to self- pace valued, though lagged response time is problematic. Ideal model for those described as "self-starters."	Acceptable by all; offers best of both worlds.

Search for answers

Searches begin with awareness.	Social media, community events, and work place presentations valued.
Initial searches for all programs were internet-based.	Participants endorsed internet searches and/or telephone calls followed by visits to geographically convenient schools.
Greater clarity and simplicity of websites are needed.	State-wide website valued and desired. Should include:

• Practice entry exams.

• Financial aid information and loan calculator.

• Guidance regarding previous credits.

•Virtual mentor program (connect prospective returning students w/those currently enrolled or completed).

• Budgeting and financial knowledge workshops (in-person or virtual).

• Simplified scholarship system.

• Available child care options/facilities.