WASHINGTON STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL
EDUCATION · OPPORTUNITY · RESULTS

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Technical Team meeting highlights—July 31, 2017

Attendees

In Person

Allan Atienzo, Independent Colleges of Washington; Patricia Bateman, The Evergreen State College; Mary Bold, University of Washington; Kristina Brown, Office of Lieutenant Governor; George Freeman, The Evergreen State College; Nova Gattman, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board; Marina Parr, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board; Saralynn Smith, Pacific Lutheran University; Jerad Sorber, Grays Harbor College; Jodi Strote, Greater Spokane Inc.

Online/Phone

Vi Boyer, Independent Colleges of Washington; Lynn Briggs, Eastern Washington University; Anne Cubilie, Central Washington University; Julie Garver, Council of Presidents; Marc Geisler, Western Washington University; Terese King, Washington State University; Elizabeth Lewis, University of Washington; Gil Mendoza, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Melanie Palm, Central Washington University; Samantha Powers, University of Washington; Caryn Regimbal, Bellingham Tech College; Mary Wack, Washington State University

Vendors

CAEL: Shawn Hulsizer; Five Star Development Inc.: Lou Carmelengo, David Colaizzi, and Alex Gindin; Information Resource Group, Inc.: Melissa Wampler; Invite Education, Jeff; NewEd: Craig Maslowsky; Socrata: Stuart Gano

Welcome and overview

- The overall purpose of this group is to dream.
    - Key question to the group: What is the best tool to reengage the adult student population?
    - This will help shape a procurement (likely an RFP).
    - Can also put forward a set of recommendations.

Key Questions

- What is the timeframe?
    - Spring 2018 pilot and full roll out in fall 2018.
- How iterative will this project be?
    - Roll-out in various phases, limited by funding
    - What do we have to have, and what do we want to have
- How much do we have?
    - About $250,000 as a starting point.

Focus group

- Six focus groups and eleven phone interviews conducted in the spring of 2017 by Western Washington University.

- o Seattle, Spokane and Walla Walla
  - Emphasis on Olympic Peninsula, and Aberdeen/Shelton/Olympic regions.
- Motivation and perceived value of education:
  - o Desire to increase earnings (economic need, realization that more education translates to more opportunity.
  - o Provide a good example for children.
  - o Encouraged by family, friends, and counselor.
- Barriers
  - o Financial
  - o Family/Work-life balance
  - o Discouragement
- Preferred learning format
  - o Face-to-face
    - Real-time interaction and feedback valued, though impractical due to family and work schedule demands.
  - o Online
    - Flexibility and opportunity to self-pace was valued, but logged response time is problematic.
    - Ideal model for those described as "self-starters"
  - o Hybrid accepted by all surveyed because it offers the best of both worlds.
- Information searches
  - o Search begin with awareness
    - Social media, community events, and workplace presentations.
  - o Initial searches were internet-based
    - Respondents endorsed internet searches, and telephone calls followed by campus visits.
  - o Greater clarity and simplicity of websites are needed
    - A statewide website is valued and desired.

Website examples
- Websites/portals in other states offer a range in levels of interactivity.
  - o [Washington DC Adult College Completion Initiative](#)
    - Content-rich but text-heavy.
    - Immediate access to contact information.
  - o [Tennessee Reconnect](#)
    - Home page offers different entry points:
      - i.e. returning student (some existing credit), first time student, veteran and service members.
    - Robust, lots of great information.
  - o [College Completion Consortium](#)
    - Simpler user interface on the front-end:
      - Lots of graphics, less text heavy.
      - Various interactive tools to receive and disseminate information.

Key Questions
- How do we prioritize students within this population?
  1. Some credit – focus of current work

2. No credit
3. Need a GED first
- Where are the handoffs and how do we interact with institutions?
  - Impact on institutional capacity to respond to students.
  - Training for advisors.
  - Both Financial aid and academic advising alignment desired by students.
- Engaged adults, what does that mean?
  - Keep in mind employment, not just attaining a credential.
  - Be cautious not to lead students to a credential, only to leave them with more debt, and no job.

Potential Web Features
- Phased roll out
- Interactivity is desired—"gets you a lot further"
  - Importance of fluidity—the downfall of some sites are too many pages
  - Beneficial to have everything in one place
- Mobile responsiveness is a must
  - All site features should be translate to a mobile version
- Lower bandwidth version should also be a consideration
  - Some areas around the state have low reception and/or limited connectivity (DSL and 56k) making it difficult to connect to graphic intensive features (i.e. sliders).
- Offer a multiple "decision trees" or paths to capture varied motivations in visiting the site.
  - Ex. "I want a better job" vs " I want to finish a degree" vs "I have a have a job and need a promotion"
  - Consider what messages are crafted to attract people to the site.
  - Will we have an experience that will align with different motivations?
  - Offer an in-depth exploration informed by which path the user came in through.
- Provide flexible pathways to complete a degree
  - Show pathways using stackable credentials, upside down degrees, reverse transfer, internship credits, interdisciplinary degrees etc.
  - Also offer flexibility for those who may have different interests than they originally pursued.
- Consideration of privacy
  - Log-in—Want users to input and receive as much information as possible before providing identifying information
  - Cookies—Users may not want to be tracked, though may be necessary to measure portal's success in reengaging adults
- Accessibility is critical
- Common definitions and terminology
  - Using the term "adult"
    - Who is an adult?
      - Vocabulary includes non-traditional student, adult learner, working adult, comebackers, etc. The team recognized the importance of the connotations of the terms as well as the pragmatic matter of consistency of language across many stakeholders.

- At the end of the day we are developing a tool that all students should be able to benefit from—though development is done with returning adults in mind.
    - Programs and academics
        - Site should use common language when discussing programs, or at the very least make the differences clear.
- Paired advising
    - Enable prospective students to connect with staff, faculty, financial aid, and transfer credit advisors.
        - Coordination among financial aid and academic advisors is desired among prospective students.
    - Peer-to-peer model, mentioned during focus groups
        - Prospective students were interested in talking to others who successfully navigated and completed a program/degree.
- Apprenticeships and certificates are also important
    - Not all of the 800k are college-bound students, they are interested in the fastest track to a living wage
        - May not complete a BA degree, but want to know how credits are going to transfer
    - Create a space where employers can be highlighted, introducing new types of credentialing, and integrating apprenticeships and certifications in higher ed settings.
- Empower students to be proactive by prompting them with next steps and key questions to ask the institutions.
- Consider the overall student experience
- Offsite call center operated by third party.
    - Channels prospective student to someone specific at the institution.
        - Challenge would be keeping third part up to date on information.
- Video testimonials
- Filtered search capabilities
    - Time of day programs are offered
    - Services provided i.e. child care.

What are the unintended consequences?
- The information provided may not stay up to date
    - Small amount of bad information will negatively impact credibility.
- Consistency of responses from institutions.
- Too much information may be overwhelming if not delivered effectively.

What happens if the tool is too successful?
- Student load to institutions increase maxing out capacity and resources
- A consistent experience is not offered—a challenge in both engaging returning students, then serving them on campuses is the need for personalized attention.

Vendor insights:
- Important to think about the front end—how are you going to reach your population
- Really critical to have a plan in getting the word out to people
- Currency in content

- Consider who is going to "own" the application from a technical standpoint
    - How will data be gathered/updated and by who.
- Deliver the interactivity but also capture the information to personalize the experience.
- Separate the back end data from what the front end looks like.

Scope of Project
- Affordability question among prospective students larger than financial aid
    - Cost/benefit and ROI of college debt to future earnings
    - Ranged salary information should be provided
        - Decide whether regional, state, or national data is used.
- Need to understand why the student came to site, may not always be about a salary increase (re: flexible paths and varied decision trees).
- How much information does the site offer?
    - Range of information could pose challenges
        - Group will need to decide how much content is on the site, and how much is addressed elsewhere.
        - At some point there will need to be a handoff to specialist at institutions
            - i.e. veterans services
- Graphics on site should reflect demographics of the user.
    - Learned lesson from IN
- Kayak.com analogy may not be the ideal model – but the idea of various filters is of interest.

Key Questions
- What is the "cost of acquisition?"
- Is the TN model too detailed for our purposes?
- Are WA adults any different than the rest of the country?
    - Types of industry available by region.
- Should we look at existing models, or do we need to build something custom for our population?