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FULFILLING OHIO'S ADULT LEARNER PROMISE

Report of the Adult Learner Working Group

Closing Equity Gaps Subgroup Report

September 2020

Problem Statement

If Ohio intends to meet workforce demands, 65% of our working population will have to earn a postsecondary credential by 2025. At this time, approximately 44% of adults in Ohio have attained a certificate or degree since completing high school. Given the anticipated decline in the number of high school graduates alongside the record number of retirees projected, our adult strategy has never been more critical. Fundamental to a strategy designed to lift Ohio by 21% to reach our goal is ensuring postsecondary institutions offer relevant programs, high-quality teaching, and equitable practices. Recognizing the evolving adult demographics can impact how we attract, retain, and credential more students. Our success at helping an increasingly diverse student body accomplish their educational goals translates to financial stability, economic mobility, and a ready workforce.

Beyond using adult student (age 25+) data points such as age and socioeconomic status, disaggregating further to understand race, ethnicity, first generation status, caregiver status, and work status are also important if we want to address barriers to success. Equity requires understanding and providing students with what they need when they need it to be successful, rather than giving everyone the same treatment or tools and expecting the same results. Knowing who is joining the student body can help a postsecondary institution become “student ready”. Acknowledging that increasing numbers of applicants are not likely to approach higher education as what is traditionally labeled “college ready”, leaders are going to have to prioritize new and innovative partnerships and programs that will ready instructors, staff, and systems for the students who most need their help.

Defining Equity

An important part of addressing equity and student success is the discussion within institutions around what “equity” means, what “equity gaps” are, and how institutions will engage in “equity-minded practices” to support improved student outcomes for *all* students. There are a number of organizations that provide education and support for this work. The Lumina Foundation’s Equity Imperative (2017) is a commitment to equity and excellence in higher education. They define equity as “the recognition and analysis of historic, persistent factors that have created an unequal postsecondary education system” and believe that equity means “recognition of the need to eliminate disparities in educational outcomes of students from historically underserved and underrepresented populations” where excellence means offering “clear, flexible and transparent pathways to students in their pursuit of postsecondary credentials”. Achieving the Dream (ATD), a national leader and supporter of community colleges, understands equity to mean that each student will receive what he or she needs to be successful via careful design around the student experience. It is a model founded in fairness to each individual. The Center for Urban Education (CUE) indicates that equity is about reaching parity in outcomes for students irrespective of race or ethnicity and recognizing that underserved populations need additional resources and support to build their success to match that of their white peers.

Disaggregating data is critical to understanding equity gaps. Comparing Ohio to national statistics on postsecondary attainment, African Americans in Ohio lag at 27% compared with the national rate of 30.8% as do Whites with attainment rates at 39.6% compared with the national rate of 47.1%; yet Hispanics in Ohio are outperforming the national average at a rate of 26.7% compared to 23.7% (<http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2019/#state/OH>). ATD

suggests looking at other measures as well, including “first-generation, low-income, students of color; adult students; marginalized orientations, gender identities, and intersex students; students with second-language backgrounds; undocumented students; veterans; students with disabilities; students with dependents; foster care youth; and formerly and currently incarcerated students” is necessary so that gaps can be identified, goals created, and progress checked.

Within Career and Technical Education, Perkins special populations include adults who have disabilities, as well as those who are economically disadvantaged, preparing for non-traditional fields, single parents or single pregnant women, out of work, non-native English speakers, homeless, or former foster care youth (NAPE, https://www.napequity.org/nape-content/uploads/NAPE-Perkins-V-Special-Populations-At-A-Glance_v3_10-15-18_ml.pdf).

Though it may be difficult to collect data on all of these subpopulations, it will not be possible to judge progress across the student spectrum until this accomplished. Data collection, disaggregation, and closing equity gaps must be a priority.

Equity-mindedness refers to how professionals look for inequity in student outcomes and how institutions take responsibility for success gaps among different populations by acknowledging social and historical context. Ultimately an equity-minded approach is one in which institutions and employees accept accountability for students' success and take on the challenges that come with accepting underserved student populations (CUE). CUE's “Equity Minded Indicators” 12-question self-assessment is a tool that can help institutions and practitioners gauge their maturity in this area as well as guide rich discussion on current practices and future goals (See Appendix).

This document does not offer a single definition of “equity” or “equity-mindedness”, but it does include direction to resources that can guide institutional deliberation and self-study about equity, inclusion, and quality. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) clearly calls for institutions of higher education to act, stating that “colleges should gather

representatives from across their institutions – students, faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees – and engage them in self-study and planning” (AACU, 2015, p. 23) because of the importance of supporting students from underserved communities. The college community will have to participate in deep discussions that examine historical context, institutional data, and the meaning of inclusive excellence. From there, conversations about the definition of equity, understanding of equity-mindedness, reviewing policies and practices, engaging in high-impact practices, and developing goals and well-defined strategies must ensue. The Winter 2020 Student Success Leadership Institute (SSLI), sponsored by OACC with ODHE collaborators, included an Ohio Pre-SSLI Equity Workshop in which college teams were encouraged to begin the work of defining equity, identifying populations of focus, discussing what should be explored, as well as profiles and policies designed to support the diverse student body. These conversations must be sustained within campus communities. Lorain County Community College provides an example of their definition in their 2019 Equity Progress Update and follow that with data insights for conversations around their equity agenda:



Lorain County Community College (LCCC) [Student Equity Statement](#)

Lorain County Community College is committed to equity, the idea that students from marginalized and underrepresented populations have access to resources that empower student success and close completion achievement gaps. Equity is based upon the principle of fairness and is distinct from equality. While equality involves treating everyone the same way, equity provides each individual or group what they need to have an equal opportunity to succeed. A commitment to equity also includes identifying and removing structural barriers faced by underserved students. As a campus community, we will adopt practices that promote equity, grow the culture of inclusion, demand social justice and use that power to ensure success for all students.

And an example of a policy review worksheet designed to achieve equity-minded change by assessing policy practices is available in CUE's 2017 Protocol document (p. 29):

 **EXCERPT #5 DISCUSSION:**
USING THE PROMPTS AS A GUIDE, IDENTIFY IN WHAT WAYS THE POLICY EXCERPT REFLECTS AN EQUITY PERSPECTIVE?

Equity-Mindedness as the Guiding Paradigm for Policy:	Disproportionate Impact:
Equity in Language:	Policy Consistency & Ubiquity:
Data Collection and Reporting Strategy:	Equity Framing:

FROM THE PROMPT ON PAGE 28, WHAT IS MISSING IN THE POLICY EXCERPT?

IS IT A STRONG OR WEAK REPRESENTATION OF EQUITY-FOCUSED POLICY? WHY?

RECOMMENDATION 1. Postsecondary institutions should prioritize development of a definition of equity and create a statement of commitment to equity-mindedness as a component of their 2022 Campus Completion Plans including:

- a. definitions,
- b. a list of subpopulations,
- c. performance indicators,
- d. goals,
- e. and a reporting schedule.

RECOMMENDATION 2. State and postsecondary institutions should review and amend policies and practices that perpetuate inequities in order to impact the broad community of new and returning adult learners in alignment with equity-conscious goals.

The Student Experience

Using Completion by Design’s Loss-Momentum Framework, equity-mindedness can be infused into every aspect of the adult learner experience – Connection, Entry, Progress, and Completion. Given the varied experiences adults bring with them, workforce is uniquely braided across this continuum. Though the Loss-Momentum Framework is more generally associated with two-year colleges that are trying to transform themselves by removing barriers to students’ success at each stage of their journey, it can be a lens by which we focus specifically on adult learners and address the barriers they face in postsecondary in general.

Understanding the Student Experience



Connection and recruitment:

Because a significant portion of high school graduates leave postsecondary prior to completion of a credential, stop-outs offer a great population for recruitment. Of the 36 million Americans with some postsecondary education who failed to earn a credential, over 1.3 million are in Ohio (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). In this study, Ohio’s 2018 stop-out population of over 1.3 million adults included 60% last enrolled in a public 2-year, 30% in a public 4-year, and 8% in a private nonprofit 4-year institution. Following up on their report from five years ago, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC) identified the local community college as the first or second most common point of re-entry and the

associate's degree and certificates the most commonly earned credentials. Also, in these findings, Ohio's returning adults pursued their credentials at a rate of 64% at Ohio institutions.

Engaging stop-outs as early as possible is important since earlier enrollment increases the likelihood of completion. In the *Some College, No Degree* 2019 report, the subset of adult learners who stopped out but had made significant progress toward completion were called out as most likely to re-enroll and complete. Some characteristics of this group include having earned at least two years of full-time enrollment over the past decade, being under age 30, stopping out in their 20s, stopping out more than once, and previously attending more than one institution.

The race/ethnicities of these potential completers – adults with significant credits already earned – was majority white with African-American and Hispanic students at 22% and 16%, respectively. The Loss-Momentum Framework identifies failure to apply to college, delayed entry to college, and under enrollment due to poor counseling and failure to obtain financial aid as loss momentum points. Increasing numbers of diverse high school graduates who are not supported with college-going norms are negatively impacted in the short and long-term. Pre-college expectations of attaining a postsecondary credential need to be raised from the current 62% of high school freshmen, especially for Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native men (Nettles, 2017). The better prepared high school graduates are for college, even if they will have to stop out on occasion, the stronger the likelihood they will persist to completion once they re-enroll.

Connecting with and recruiting adults means rethinking practices that fail to honor their prior education and experiences. College stop-outs are a rich population that hold promise for future credential attainment. In fact, 31% of students pursuing an undergraduate degree are between the ages of 25-64, making up 20% full-time and 48% part-time of all enrolled undergraduate students. Colleges and universities used to attracting and educating more

traditionally aged students need to consider credentials and degrees that attract older adults with some college but no degree (Nettles, 2017). Outreach to adult students needs to overcome barriers related to the time and place of educational opportunities and offer market-relevant credentials. Credentials need to meet the adult learners' career planning goals. College recruiters and advisors need to be trained to consider the complexities of the adult learner's world, to give credence to their work/life experiences, and to assist the learner in bridging education to career goals. Further, marketing materials should "reflect adult learners' concerns, respect their ambitions, and recognize their learning goals" (Klein-Collins, 2011, pg 23), as well as help adults see themselves as members of the postsecondary community including website information, pictures, programming, and print materials. According to a recent EAB (2019) report based on their Adult Learner Survey results, savvy adult learners are attracted by marketing materials that clearly explain return on education. Investing in data and systems that help to understand students' motivations and interests in order to craft thoughtful and early messaging will attract adults' interest. Using disaggregated data to monitor where equity gaps appear in terms of recruitment and admission by program will help institutions focus on goal attainment and equity in outcomes.

Adult learners are often re-enrolling in college after some delay, have dependents, are single parents, are employed full-time, attend part-time, are financially independent, and may not have a high school diploma. They consider themselves employees and family members first, students next, and hesitate to enroll due to cost. Previous attempts at college can negatively influence students. Costs due to prior debt incurred could impact something as simple as a transcript request. And delays in transferring credit, forcing them to retake classes or postpone enrollment, can waste students' time and money (von Lehman, 2011). Minorities and women suffer greater amounts of college debt (CAEL). From financial support to flexible scheduling to accommodate life factors like work, childcare and transportation, recruiting adults is not easy,

but to meet our workforce goals it's necessary to increase our numbers across all demographics.

Attaining our goal will require more than a 25% increase in degrees for white students and more than doubling completion rates for African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indian/Alaskan Natives (Nettles, 2017). "Underrepresentation of African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic workers among high-demand occupations is an indication of the urgent need for actions to alter these patterns. It is also an indication of the need for a closer look at the national degree attainment goals, their relationship to these high-demand occupations, and how these particular population groups are faring in pursuit of college degrees" (Nettles, 2017). Institutions ready for adults who ask, "what will it cost?" and "how long will it take?" and "what is my return on investment?", will not have a simple, single response. An equity-minded response is one that incorporates PLA credit into time and cost to completion. It offers flexible schedules with on-ramp and off-ramp options when life happens. It honestly and accurately describes the program, includes course sequences with part-time plans, and accounts for workplace opportunities during and after completion of the program, including salary information and employability outlook. Because affordability is such an important factor, expanding opportunities for financial aid is critical. Expanding the Pell Grant eligibility to support short-term certificates could be helpful, but there is also concern that jobs for which those certificates prepare a student will not offer salaries worth the investment (New America, 2019, <https://insights.digitalmediasolutions.com/news/potential-pell-grant-expansion>). The National Skills Coalition has recommended Pell expansion with guidelines to address inclusivity and relevance including time to completion, quality, demand, and support recommendations (Brown, 2018). Whether moving forward with the proposed FAFSA Simplification Act reform that would use the federal poverty level to determine family income to award maximum grants and phase out lesser sums to students with higher family income, or increasing the maximum award and

tying it to inflation, both expanding eligibility and increasing maximum awards would increase PELL spending. Black and Hispanic students are more likely to benefit from increased maximum awards ([https://www.nasfaa.org/news-item/20284/Lawmakers Views Differ on How to Improve and Expand Pell Grant Program](https://www.nasfaa.org/news-item/20284/Lawmakers-Views-Differ-on-How-to-Improve-and-Expand-Pell-Grant-Program)). The cost and time to completion along with wage potential and job opportunity must be considered with each decision that is made in order to ensure a positive return on investment for all adults who pursue a certificate or degree, and this must include clarity on in-demand jobs that pay a living wage. Institutions can support students by offering more financial literacy regarding PELL so they understand the award and take full advantage of the opportunities it affords.

Recruiters and institutions must look carefully at their recruitment, admission, and participation rates and goals, disaggregating to address any equity gaps. Institutional reporting on admissions applications, acceptance, and yield by race and gender – as well as disaggregated reports on incomplete admissions applications – will offer important data regarding who is attracted to the institution and who is experiencing enough attention and support to experience a positive connection and start or re-start as an adult learner.

Sinclair College's 15-month accelerated program to earn an Associate's Degree utilizes case managers called Navigators, PLA opportunities, block scheduling over 4 terms including summer, and priority registration. Motivated adults interested in one of 13 targeted degree programs can fast track to meet their career goals.



Ursuline College Accelerated Program (UCAP) accelerates adults to completion via 5-week courses, online courses, blended courses with registration occurring as early as 1 year in advance with the help of support through the admission, registration and college process.

RECOMMENDATION 3. State and postsecondary institutions should clearly address learners' expectations and goals by 2021, making transparent the different programs available at each institution including the time to completion, the job outlook, and the associated wages, so that adults can make informed decisions and take full advantage of the variety of postsecondary opportunities offered in Ohio.

RECOMMENDATION 4. State and postsecondary policies and practices must operate in ways that attract and retain adults by validating their life and work experiences via adult-friendly strategies; these include offering Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) and military training credit, accommodating life demands via consistent course offerings, flexible start and stop options, full program package information, part-time options, support services beyond the traditional workday hours, business partnerships for on-site offerings, online options, and workplace opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 5. Postsecondary institutions must offer financial literacy support by Spring 2021 as officials thoughtfully shape the expansion of PELL, loans, and other financial opportunities for adults in response to recognition of longtime structures, policies, and practices that have led to inequitable outcomes for learners.

Entry and Enrollment

The adult learners' entry or re-entry into college is often delayed or temporarily halted due to the struggle to maintain a balance between the academic and social demands on campus and the work and family responsibilities off-campus. Many "part-time students choose

to learn on a part-time basis because they also manage the responsibilities of jobs and careers. These same learners have difficulty keeping up with the demands of learning while working" (<https://www.cael.org/blog/enrollment-is-down-and-it-hurts>). The Lumina Foundation has reported that about 40 percent of students attend school part-time since they work 20 hours or more per week. These adult students often enroll in programs that are easily accessible, that have relatively flexible course schedules, offer alternative approaches for earning credit, and are supportive of adult commitments.

The cost of furthering education is also a concern to adults who may be facing adult education costs while contemplating college for their children. "A recent national survey from Champlain College Online (known for its career-focused adult education) found that 60% of U.S. adults age 23 to 55 without a bachelor's degree have considered returning to school, but costs and student debt were deterrents." (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2018/07/01/going-back-to-college-after-50-the-new-normal/#b1d496831ff9>). Comparing 2018 to 2008 data, state funding for higher education remains well below pre-recession levels, with Ohio coming in at 16.9% less in state spending which amounts to \$1,208 less per student (Mitchell, Leachman & Saenz, 2019). Though Ohio has seen the most conservative tuition increases at public colleges and universities over this period, with an increase of only 5.2% change on average, less state funding combined with increased tuition rates has put more financial burden on students. Ohio's average net price of attendance at a public 4-year university in 2017 as a share of median household income is 31%; however, disaggregating by race, the share is 29% for White, 52% for Black, 41% for Hispanic, and 23% for Asian (Mitchell, Leachman & Saenz, 2019, Table 1 data). Offering financial and other types of support are key to ensuring that the different populations are equitably prepared to start and finish college.

An unfortunate consequence of poverty is the inability of many adult learners to access or purchase digital technologies and afford broadband Internet. In 2018, according to the

American Community Survey (ACS), 15.5% of Ohio households had no home broadband internet subscription of any type, including a mobile data plan. Further, 30.1 % lacked a home "wireline" subscription such as cable Internet, DSL, or fiber to the home. One-fourth of Ohio households, 1.2 million out of 4.7 million, owned neither a desktop nor a laptop computer. Yet one way community colleges have sought to increase accessibility and enrollment is by expanding online and hybrid course offerings and making services like tutoring available online (Hardin, 2008; Salter, 2014). These institutional adaptations illustrate the role technology can play in making education more accessible. Paradoxically, however, this strategy depends on students' ability to engage with digital technology, which cannot be assumed, especially among older cohorts (Cummins, Arbogast, McGrew, & Bahr, 2018). During a time when institutions of higher education are significantly increasing online programming, they should also address digital inclusion.

"Digital inclusion" is a term used by advocates and practitioners to denote, "the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)". This includes 5 elements:

- 1) affordable, robust broadband internet service;
- 2) internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
- 3) access to digital literacy training;
- 4) quality technical support; and
- 5) applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration (National Digital Inclusion Alliance (<https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/>)

Practical steps that "college return" programs and postsecondary institutions can take to identify and assist potential returning adult students who may lack home broadband access, home computing equipment, and/or basic computer and Internet skills:

- Assess returning students for these issues early in the matriculation process. There are very good basic skill assessment tools available at little or no cost, such as the Northstar tool originally developed by the Minnesota State Library. But just as important is a situational assessment: Does the student have home broadband access and an appropriate device like a laptop rather than just a smartphone? If not, is service available? Is it just too expensive? Does the student have a realistic understanding of the importance of digital tools for coursework?
- Anticipate that returning students who don't have the digital access, tools or skills they need will require a variety of supports from resource referrals to "Computer and Internet 101" classroom training to direct assistance. They may also need culture- or language-specific help, or support addressing accessibility barriers. One size will not fit all.
- Look for community partners who can provide help for students who need it. Community digital inclusion programs usually provide personal, individualized training at a nominal cost if any, and are likely to be aware of any affordable Internet and equipment options. There may be no reason for an institution to re-invent this wheel on campus.
- If there's no existing digital inclusion program in a community, there may still be collaborative opportunities to support on-campus assistance for returning students such as a local or regional computer refurbisher. There may also be other institutions that see similar needs for their constituents: schools, housing authorities, senior service organizations, faith-based programs, other postsecondary educators and trainers. Postsecondary institutions in unserved rural areas may be able to add significant weight to local efforts by public officials, nonprofits or rural co-ops to create expanded

broadband access, which would then create access opportunities for their students (Callahan, National Digital Inclusion Alliance, 2020).

Digital poverty is a challenge from the urban to the rural areas of Ohio. It is akin to an entire neighborhood with spotty electricity or unreliable water service. These are places where students struggle to engage with digital coursework and adults can't check online job boards. Digital poverty is a tangible drag on economic prosperity (Fishbane & Tomer, Brookings, 2020). One outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic is a surge of online learning activity and an increased awareness of digital poverty and the need for digital inclusion. Post-secondary institutions are reaching out in creative ways to students who do not have computers and reliable broadband access. Some colleges are lending Chromebooks, iPads, and iPhones that can serve as mobile hotspots. Learning from these emergency measures can help with design thinking for a well-planned, supportive online learning strategy.

One of the greatest barriers facing learners as they begin a college enrollment process is the developmental courses they have to pass before entering courses in their program of study. Generally, colleges use mathematics, reading, and English test scores to determine readiness for college-level courses. Given the stop-out time faced by many adults and how that impacts a single skills assessment for which there is rarely preparation, oftentimes adults face pre-college mathematics, reading or writing courses that are required but will not count toward the credential. With clear purpose and a desire to follow the most efficient path to credential, being forced to enroll in remedial mathematics or English is an immediate deterrent. Success rates in developmental courses are generally not strong, and including these as prerequisites creates a longer timeline to completion. According to Complete College America's (2012) *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere*: too many students are in remediation: it does not work for them; too few complete gateway courses; and very few ever graduate.

Minorities have even lower success rates in developmental classes (AAC&U, 2018, A Vision for Equity, pg 4, Figure 2). Contextual and co-requisite course models are opening opportunities for more students to address basic skills in a just-in-time approach as they earn college credits in their programs. Ohio's commitment in the *Strong Start to Finish* work is one method of addressing the readiness concern.

Traditional, and often rigid, course schedules are not adult-friendly because they often fail to offer clear part-time pathways, consistency in offerings on days/times throughout the program, condensed terms, and evening and weekend options. Because of the less flexible schedules and lack of support for adult issues, adult students are more likely to enroll in distance education than others (Hagedorn, 2005). For optimal engagement, orienting adult students to both postsecondary education and online learning strategies will be critical to their success. Because a number of adult learners choose online classes for their convenience, designing online courses to engage adults and encourage their success is important. Including modules that address technology challenges, incorporating case studies to allow adults to use their personal experiences in their assignments, and standardizing online course formats to minimize navigational challenges are all examples of online course development success strategies that will help adults more quickly acclimate to this learning environment (CAEL, 2018). However, even the flexibility of online classes alone may be insufficient.

Each adult learner subpopulation will gain momentum when strategies are tailored to their circumstances. For example, adult learners who are parents often struggle with childcare, so policies that offer parents greater access to affordable, available child care, as well as including student status as a consideration for qualifying for assistance, would help this group. Educating the incarcerated improves workforce outcomes, decreases the likelihood of recidivism, and increases the probability their children will earn a credential. Yet only 11% of state prisoners and 24% of federal prisoners have earned postsecondary credits, which could

be increased with more access to programs (Vera Institute of Justice, 2019). And veterans can profit from prior learning assessment (PLA) via their military service. Students with PLA credit can decrease remediation requirements, face less debt, and shorten time to completion. A digital strategy designed to “inform adult students of their opportunities to earn credit, standardize the process, and to ensure transferability of credit” like Pennsylvania’s College Credit FastTrack, can streamline the process for busy adults (Le, Pisacreta, Ward & Margolis, 2019).

Connecting learning to employer engagement and clear curricular/career pathway maps can help increase the number of enrolled adult learners in Ohio. Some states use Completion Concierges whose job it is to find students “the clearest, shortest, most efficient path” to a degree. This path includes increased use of alternative methods to credit: Prior Learning Assessments (PLA), CLEP tests, Competency-Based Education credits, condensed terms, and corporate training that earns college credit. Validating adult students’ experiences by offering PLA credit increases rates of persistence and completion (CAEL, 2018). Currently, Ohio offers many of these programs. The Ohio Transfer Module, FastPathOhio for PLA, Guided Pathways, and accelerated semesters are examples of Ohio programs following best practices. Planning for the most efficient and affordable path to a credential should be addressed early and revisited to ensure adults are able to keep up with the academic schedule and the financial demands of postsecondary education.

Making sure education is affordable for all is part of the equity commitment. The cost of tuition and fees can impact students’ budgets including their spending on basic living expenses. Many colleges are implementing emergency aid as well as stations with free grab-and-go food and supplies to help fill gap. But these short-term solutions cannot always fill in the gap. Dashboards should be regularly updated and reviewed, including assessment of access, enrollment, and persistence – broken down by subpopulations. Only by understanding the

success and equity gaps can we have robust conversations and work toward increasing success and closing gaps for diverse and adult populations.

The Ohio State University's Office of Diversity and Inclusion established an ACCESS Collaborative which stand for A Comprehensive College Experience for Single-Parent Students designed to increase retention and graduation rates for low-income, single-parent students. The program is for part-time and full-time students and offers support groups, programming, priority registration, scholarships, professional development, childcare referrals, housing assistance, tutoring and other services.

Columbus State Community College has partnered with the Mid-Ohio Foodbank to open the Mid-Ohio Market at Columbus State on the campus grounds to provide free fresh food for eligible college students and community members as part of the work designed to address non-academic barriers.

Shawnee State University received a grant from Kroger to fund the Bear Necessities Pantry where students can obtain fresh, frozen and non-perishable foods, school supplies, and hygiene products by showing their student ID card.

RECOMMENDATION 6. Postsecondary institutions should establish strategies to support the diverse needs presented by adult learners including building community partnerships to address social service needs including digital inclusion by Spring 2021; offering programs and courses with academic and non-academic support available beyond the hours of the traditional day; regularly asking students about their needs and experiences to promote a culture of care and practice of continuous improvement; and promoting and expanding financial supports.

Progress and Persistence

The adult learner's good start does not guarantee a successful finish. Students need support from start to completion. Because life circumstances that jeopardize attainment for adult and "underserved" populations are seldom resolved after a semester or two, the support services cannot disappear if we want students to persist (Boylan, Calderwood, & Bonham, 2017). Students who successfully complete developmental and first-year courses will likely still need support services because they continue to be first generation or students with dependent children or historically underserved students of color, and they still face circumstances that put them at risk of completion. TRiO's Student Support Services grant is a great holistic student success and completion model that is focused on first generation, low income, or disabled students who have academic needs. Programs and services with maximum impact should be mandatory and have rewards or clear incentives for participation. Also, to make the postsecondary experience as easy to manage as possible, courses should be available during times working adults can participate, and offices such as financial aid and the bursar should be open when adults are available so they don't have to call off work or wait in lines for service during their work hours (Malcolm-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017).

For adults, daily responsibilities can make a commitment to education problematic. According to the Lumina Foundation, about 38% of students with outside financial, work, or family obligations leave within their first year. According to EAB (2019), there are several key barriers to address. About 60% of adults in the U.S. have thought about returning to college, but 70% don't believe they can afford it. Adults' schedules and responsibilities make the traditional academic calendar an insurmountable barrier. And because many adults are parents, the lack of affordable, on-campus childcare only adds to the existing burdens

(<https://eab.com/insights/daily-briefing/adult-learner/adult-learners-who-they-are-what-they-want-from-college>). Finances, scheduling, and childcare are critical areas in which adults need support.

Institutions that want to address concerns need to understand them within their own context. How many adults are leaving? Why are they leaving? What would improve their odds of returning? These are questions that need to be asked and the data disaggregated. “Enacting equity requires a continual process of learning, disaggregating data, and questioning assumptions about relevance and effectiveness” (<https://cue.usc.edu/equity-by-design-five-principles/>). Ohio is a large, diverse state with urban, suburban, and rural communities. Listening to members of Ohio's varied communities will help regions and institutions better understand how to attract and retain the many subpopulations within the community and build our workforce. For example, Internet use and access may negatively impact older adults in rural or less affluent communities (Council of Economic Advisers Issue Brief, 2015). Lack of affordable access to healthcare may impact health and participation in education and work due to illness and disabilities – and these issues are more like to impact Latinx, Black, and Native people (National Skills Coalition, 2019).

Knowing financial concerns are a top issue, some institutions are tackling this specifically. Some states are exploring adult-inclusive free community college policy frameworks (Pingle, Parker, & Sisneros, 2016). Results from one randomized experiment exploring the impact of financial aid on completion “indicate that offering students additional grant aid increases the odds of bachelor's degree attainment over four years, helping to diminish income inequality in higher education”. (Goldrick-Rab, Kelhen, Harris, & Benson, 2016). Institutions are offering constructive solutions to real problems when they offer emergency funds for unexpected issues, completion grants, and payment plans. Low income students can have their plans derailed when the car breaks down, the bus pass expires before the end of the term, and

the need for groceries outweighs the importance of purchasing the textbooks. Planning for the unexpected issues and directing students to resources within and outside the institution are effective ways to encourage persistence.

Beyond having concerns regarding the costs, scheduling challenges, and childcare worries associated with continuing education, adults also struggle with feeling they belong in postsecondary settings. The importance of addressing the affective domain must be understood. Feeling a sense of belonging is critical to persistence, and institutions that intentionally create a climate in which adults feel welcome and capable will help more adults succeed (Strayhorn, 2012). Within the classroom, that means instructors are well trained on classroom and online teaching strategies; curriculum is high-quality and relevant to workforce needs, and learning is engaging with real-world applications (von Lehman, 2011). Faculty training is critical. Educators must be prepared to work with an increasingly diverse student body, and that development plan should include culturally responsive teacher training practices (Prater & Devereaux, 2009; Baumgartner, Bay, Lopez-Reyna, Snowden, & Maiorano, 2015). For example, Ohio State University's Institute for Teaching and Learning offers an Inclusive Teaching endorsement to help practitioners understand how to create an inclusive learning environment so that all students feel valued (<https://uitl.osu.edu/endorsement/inclusive-teaching>). Teaching practices have to support today's learners who vary in age and experience, and instructional techniques must work in different formats and delivery modes (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013).

Also, hiring practices are important. "Studies have indicated that the presence of faculty of color significantly influence the recruitment and retention of students of color" (Robinson, Byrd, Louis, & Bonner, 2013). Faculty are key contributors to students' perceptions of campus climate for diversity due to their role (Lee, 2010). And, though interactions with faculty are strongly related to student satisfaction, ethnically diverse learners have not historically built

strong relationships with their faculty (Barbatis, 2010). Hiring and retaining faculty who reflect a similar diversity as the student and community population will help support a diverse student body. According to the 2007 U.S. Department of Education statistics, African American faculty make up 5.4 percent of all full-time faculty in American higher education while African American students comprise 12 percent of enrollment; further, excluding HBCUs, the percent of African American full-time faculty is closer to 4 percent (retrieved from The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, News & Views, on Jan 16, 2020 from http://www.jbhe.com/news_views/62_blackfaculty.html).

Outside the classroom, strategic work to build peer support can help address “feelings of alienation” that can occur when “significant age differences exist between them and their classmates, as well as between them and some of their instructors” (Klein-Collins, 2011). Institutions help students who are first-generation or low-income by making activities like study abroad, transportation to a field site, and community engagement more feasible by building in flexibility and attending to logistics during planning. It’s important to make sure lack of participation is not misconstrued as lack of interest (Wai-Ling Packard, 2018).

Ohio State University’s Inclusive Teaching certificate offers teachers the opportunity to explore issues and tools for creating inclusive learning environments in order to support an increasingly diverse student body (<https://uitl.osu.edu/endorsement/inclusive-teaching>).

Franklin University has an adult-centered program that clearly advertises the average age and balanced learning strategies including convenient class schedules online or 1 night, multiple start dates and variable course lengths, late-night support, mentors and networks, transfer support, and convenience and flexibility for the adult learner.

Marion Technical College trains all search committee members on implicit bias and uses a blind application review process which removes names and locations of applicants. MTC also

uses NorQuest College's Inclusion at Work online training modules which allows employees to reflect upon the meaning of diversity and inclusion and then follow up with in-person DEI on-campus training on a range of topics offered by local professionals.

RECOMMENDATION 7. State organizations and postsecondary institutions should support full-time and adjunct faculty professional development around classroom best practices that support diverse and adult learners including: quality instruction with timely feedback, effective online learning, honoring of life experiences via class discussion and assignments, active and collaborative learning, culturally responsive andragogy, increased awareness of adult-learner challenges, and the ability to direct diverse and adult learners to resources in an effort to achieve digital inclusion.

RECOMMENDATION 8. Postsecondary institutions should review their recruiting and hiring practices, and implement strategies to employ a more diverse workforce by Spring 2021.

Credential Completion

The workforce demands in Ohio are many and varied. Credential completion in our context includes the array of credentials that will help us meet the demand including 2-year and 4-year degrees, industry-recognized credentials, licensures, certifications, and certificates of value. According to Turk's 2017 report on credential completion predictors among community college students, the importance of a strong academic foundation cannot be underestimated. A strong high school GPA, dual enrollment credit, and college entrance testing while in high school were key predictors, with women and students with higher socioeconomic status more likely to complete. Earning more credits in the first year of college, as well as attending full-time, were also significant predictors (Turk, 2017). Momentum matters, be it in number of credit

hours earned early and by semester as well as strategically using summer opportunities. Also of importance are stackable credentials which allow students to see their steady progress as well as clear connections between credentials and jobs.

Because many recent high school graduates are not entering and earning credentials right away, a significant portion of undergraduates are adults. Around 16% of total undergraduate students are in the 25–34 years of age range, and another 10% are ages 35–64 (NCES, 2018, Table 303.34). Further, the 25- to 34-year-olds represent 11% of full-time students and about one quarter (24%) of part-time students, although 35- to 64-year-olds represent 5% of full-time and approximately 19% of part-time undergraduate students. The adult population of 25- to 64-year-olds is much larger than that of the traditional college-age entering students, “and it includes 36 million people who at some point in their lives attended college but dropped out without earning a degree” (Nettles, 2017).

Reaching our attainment goals will take completion across demographics – “a little over a 25% increase in degrees among the White population is required for that group to reach degree attainment goals, but a much greater increase is required for African American, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native segments of the population (over 100% each)” (Nettles, 2017). Further, regarding certificates, we are still not on track to reach our goals nationally. “In 2025, 49% of 25- to 64-year-olds are expected to have earned an associate's or bachelor's degree or a high-quality certificate (Table 8, Column 6). Not until 2048 will an estimated 60% of the adult population of 25- to 64-year-olds have attained a high-quality certificate, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree.” (Nettles, 2017).

According to Nettles (2017), the “some college, no degree” population is 23% of 25- to 34-year olds and 22% of 25- to 64-year olds. If institutions could graduate 5% of these adults for each of the next 6 years, we would reduce the projected degrees needed by 32% to meet the national goal by 2025. Ohio is one of the top 9 states that account for half of the nation's total

"some college, no degree" population. Ohio's 2019 postsecondary enrollment was 590,723, and Ohio's "some college, no degree" 2018 population was 1,318,364. "Community colleges serve as the major routes of initial entry, re-entry, and completion on the postsecondary education pathways for Some College, No Degree students" since about 2/3 of the students started at a community college or last enrolled at one before stopping out. This number is closer to 20% for public 4-year institutions of higher education. Community colleges are the first or second most common IHE choice for returning adults, regardless of previous institutional choice, and must be prepared to recruit and retain if we want to meet our completion goals. (Nat'l Student Clearinghouse, Some College No Degree, 2019).

Partnerships are key to advancing racial equity and workforce goals. The National Skills Coalition's Roadmap for Racial Equity (2019) proposes regional collaboratives comprised of area employers along with colleges, schools, workforce and associated agencies work together to align training and required skills for the industry. These teams can bring together diversity within the membership, engage in equity and inclusion training, modify recruiting practices, and disaggregate data to understand impact across demographics (p. 36). Also, using pre-employment and apprenticeship programs as part of the educational process will help neglected populations learn the necessary skills and offer access to employment that may traditionally occur based on social and professional networks.

The Ohio Manufacturer's Association 2020 Workforce Roadmap is an example of a publication that documents the collaboration that can help a region build a workforce solution (<https://www.ohiomfg.com/wp-content/uploads/2020WorkforceRoadmap.pdf>).

Educators, administrators, business leaders, and state leaders should participate in activities designed to build partnerships that will transform learning by integrating work-based, project-based, and service learning experiences. Examples include AIM HIRE Workforce and Education Conference sponsored by the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation; PBL Ohio

Institute hosted by PBLMatters; and online career exploration developed by INFOhio; and the Workforce Summit at Wright Patterson Air Force Base to address military-education collaboration.

RECOMMENDATION 9. Postsecondary institutions should expand workforce consortiums to increase partnerships that support apprenticeships for all adult students, building the pipeline of new workers and upskilling current employees, using strategies like those in apprenticeship programs that have clear diversity and equity goals as part of their 2022 Completion Plans.

Transition and Workforce

Transition and workforce are called out because of the importance of attention to these aspects of the student experience; however, transitional moments and workforce experiences are best braided into every phase of the student experience. This will build job readiness and workforce relevance across the curriculum. These opportunities must be designed in partnership with postsecondary faculty and industry leaders, and supported by college departments and businesses, to ensure all students have opportunity to participate and feel equipped to manage the work. One component to the argument for racial equity is the correlation to negative economic impact. Field experiences cannot be for a privileged subset of students if we are going to meet our goals.

Equity goals should be created and tracked to ensure plans are made to look for equity gaps and address them in postsecondary, career and technical, and workforce development plans, including access and success measures. Working with partners to bridge employment gaps and support equitable hiring practices is necessary to advance racial equity (National Skills Coalition, 2019). According to McKinsey & Company (2019) in their analysis of 13 community archetypes, African Americans may have higher rates of job displacement than

others in the United States because of rising automation and gaining a smaller share of the anticipated job growth through 2030. Within this group, young men without a degree will likely be affected the most, impacting stability of families. It will take greater preparation, financing, and inclusion to better retain and graduate more students. Georgia State University (GSU), for example, supports African American students by offering more introductory courses, individualized student advising, and average microgrants of \$900 to help students cover gaps in tuition and fees that could prevent them from graduating (p. 12).

According to Childers (2019), many older black women who have low-skilled jobs. Because of automation and other technologies, older African American women in low wage, middle skill jobs that require a degree are in jeopardy. Automation can increase economic inequality by disproportionately impacting older Black women who may not have the digital skills to keep up with the future of work or who lack the resources to seek further education. Given the expected impact of automation, new types of jobs continue to appear, and education is the key to that transition. For example, though the manufacturing industry is a top provider of good jobs in 35 states for workers lacking a Bachelor's Degree, the number of jobs in this field is declining and those that remain are for workers with more education (Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, June, 2019). "Futurists estimate that up to 85 percent of the jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been invented yet" (Weisse, Hanson, Sentz, & Saleh, 2018). With the number of older workers anticipated in the workforce of the future, workforce training and credential attainment will have to be made available to meet employer demand. There "will not be enough younger workers for all the positions an organization needs to fill, particularly those requiring advanced manufacturing skills or advanced education in science, technology, engineering and math" (Paullin, 2014), so advancing skills and knowledge of older workers is necessary.

In Ohio, WIOA programs funded about \$21.5 million in academic year 2018-2019 with about 42% going to proprietary schools, 23% to community colleges, 22% to Ohio Technical Centers; and about \$2 million was set aside for special populations like re-entry, veterans, migrant workers, and former foster youth. Though employers are required to include numbers of people of color and women in apprenticeship programs, some requested a waiver due to lack of interested female participants. National diversity data for apprenticeships indicates over 16 percent of those completing apprenticeship programs were Hispanic or Latino which was less than the share of Hispanic/Latinos in the U.S. labor force, 63.4 percent were white, 10.7 percent were Black or African American, and 20.5 percent declined to share their race; nationally in the U.S. labor force in 2017, the white population was 77% and black/African American population was 13.4 percent

<https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2018/07/10122156/ApprenticeshipWageGap-brief1.pdf>) In 2016, the U.S. Department of Labor released updated equal employment opportunity regulations for Registered Apprenticeship programs to encourage employers reach a more diverse pool of workers. The rules requires that apprenticeship sponsors (i.e., employers) maintain an affirmative action plan that sets race and gender goals, and they must engage in targeted outreach, recruitment, and retention activities (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016).

Ohio has many workforce opportunities for students including the following:
apprenticeship grants from the Department of Labor were granted to Columbus State Community College and 25 colleges and universities with 10 Information Technology firms; Lorain County Community College with Manufacturing Institute of the National Association of Manufacturers, Ohio and the Manufacturers Association and National Institute of Metalworking Skills (Advanced Manufacturing); University of Cincinnati and 4 colleges with Northrup Grumman, IBM, GE Aviation and 4 firms in Information Technology; Ohio Apprenticeship

Programs in the construction industry: <https://www.ibuildamerica-ohio.com/training/apprenticeships/>; Ohio construction related apprenticeship programs: <https://www.ibuildamerica-ohio.com/training/apprenticeships/>; incumbent worker training: <http://emanuals.jfs.ohio.gov/Workforce/WIOA/WIOAPL/WIOAPL-15-23.stm>; and Mobile Training Units including Cuyahoga Community College.

Making workforce opportunities available to all students is one part of an equity strategy. Other issues that must be addressed to improve employment and income equity include hiring biases and unemployment, geographic challenges, internet access, and wage stagnation (National Skills Coalition, 2019). Because of historical and systemic advantages, white workers have an advantage in the workforce. Race and gender gaps remain as well. To close equity gaps there needs to be additional funding for institutions like community colleges, investment in retraining for displaced workers, and greater work and incentives to build diversity in education and the workforce (Georgetown University Center on Education and Workforce, 2019).

The Exact Track 3+1 dual degree business program was launched in 2019 through a collaboration among Huntington Bank, Columbus State and Franklin University. The first cohort includes a diverse group of 25 Huntington Bank employees with online or one night per week classes at Huntington Gateway Center held over eight semesters of Columbus State curriculum and six semesters of Franklin University Curriculum. Participants are part of pre-imbursement program and will earn two certificates and two degrees, an associate's of Applied Sciences in Business Management from Columbus State and a bachelor's in Business Administration with a minor in Management and Leadership from Franklin University, all in a 5-year period.

In 2016, Cuyahoga Community College received a \$1.4 million award from the KeyBank Foundation to expand public safety training programs, which are occupations in high demand. The initiative includes funding for scholarship opportunities and a campaign to recruit minority and female candidates for first-responder jobs. (<https://www.tri-c.edu/workforce/public->

[safety/keybank-public-safety-scholarship.html](https://www.keybank.com/public-safety-scholarship.html); there is a PDF about this program with more information).

In 2019, Columbus State Community College received a \$1 million grant to prepare students for high demand technology jobs. As part of the announcement, a JP Morgan Chase executive stated: “As one of the largest employers in Central Ohio, we recognize our role in creating and supporting workforce solutions that keep our region growing and thriving for everyone, ***particularly those most at risk of falling behind.***”

(<https://www.csccl.edu/about/news/2019/JPMorganDonation2019.shtml>)

RECOMMENDATION 10. Postsecondary institutions should work in partnership with business and community to ensure workplace experiences are part of the education process and provide optimal hiring opportunities for graduates which include attention to equitable hiring practices and conversations around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to support students and graduates.

Recommendations in Summary

Defining Equity. (Timeline 2020-2022)

1. Postsecondary institutions should prioritize development of a definition of equity and create a statement of commitment to equity-mindedness as a component of their 2022 Campus Completion Plans including:
 - a. definitions,
 - b. a list of subpopulations,
 - c. performance indicators,
 - d. goals,
 - e. and a reporting schedule.
2. State and postsecondary institutions should review and amend policies and practices that perpetuate inequities in order to impact the broad community of new and returning adult learners in alignment with equity-conscious goals.

Connection & Recruitment. (Timeline 2020-2021)

3. State and postsecondary institutions should clearly address learners' expectations and goals by 2021, making transparent the different programs available at each institution including the time to completion, the job outlook, and the associated wages, so that adults can make informed decisions and take full advantage of the variety of postsecondary opportunities offered in Ohio.
4. State and postsecondary policies and practices must operate in ways that attract and retain adults by validating their life and work experiences via adult-friendly strategies; these include offering Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) and military training credit, accommodating life demands via consistent course offerings, flexible start and stop options, full program package information, part-time options, support services beyond the traditional workday hours, business partnerships for on-site offerings, online options, and workplace opportunities.
5. Postsecondary institutions must offer financial literacy support by Spring 2021 as officials thoughtfully shape the expansion of PELL, loans, and other financial opportunities for adults in response to recognition of longtime structures, policies, and practices that have led to inequitable outcomes for learners.

Entry & Enrollment. (Timeline 2020-2021)

6. Postsecondary institutions should establish strategies to support the diverse needs presented by adult learners including building community partnerships to address social service needs including digital inclusion by Spring 2021; offering programs and courses with academic and non-academic support available beyond the hours of the traditional day; regularly asking students about their needs and experiences to promote a culture of

care and practice of continuous improvement; and promoting and expanding financial supports.

Progress & Persistence. (Timeline 2020-2021)

7. State organizations and postsecondary institutions should support full-time and adjunct faculty professional development around classroom best practices that support diverse and adult learners including: quality instruction with timely feedback, effective online learning, honoring of life experiences via class discussion and assignments, active and collaborative learning, culturally responsive andragogy, increased awareness of adult-learner challenges, and the ability to direct diverse and adult learners to resources in an effort to achieve digital inclusion.
8. Postsecondary institutions should review their recruiting and hiring practices, and implement strategies to employ a more diverse workforce by Spring 2021.

Credential Completion. (Timeline 2020-2022)

9. Postsecondary institutions should expand workforce consortiums to increase partnerships that support apprenticeships for all adult students, building the pipeline of new workers and upskilling current employees, using strategies like those in apprenticeship programs that have clear diversity and equity goals as part of their 2022 Completion Plans.

Transition & Workforce. (Timeline 2020-2022)

10. Postsecondary institutions should work in partnership with business and community to ensure workplace experiences are part of the education process and provide optimal hiring opportunities for graduates which include attention to equitable hiring practices and conversations around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to support students and graduates.

APPENDIX ITEMS

Center for Urban Education’s & AACU’s Five Principles for Equity by Design:

Principle 1: Clarity in language, goals, and measures is vital to effective equitable practices.

Principle 2: “Equity-mindedness” should be the guiding paradigm for language and action.

Principle 3: Equitable practice and policies are designed to accommodate differences in the contexts of students’ learning—not to treat all students the same.

Principle 4: Enacting equity requires a continual process of learning, disaggregating data, and questioning assumptions about relevance and effectiveness.

Principle 5: Equity must be enacted as a pervasive institution- and system-wide principle.

CUE's Equity-Minded Indicators

1. Do you routinely examine and report racial/ethnic participation in:
 - Honors program
 - Institutional scholarships
 - Participation in undergraduate research
 - Study abroad
 - Transfer from community college to four-year college
 - Transfer from community college to highly selective four-year colleges
 - Internships and other forms of high-value experiences
 - Student surveys
 - Fields of study
 - Graduation with honors
2. Do you have a set of racial equity indicators that you monitor annually?

_ No _ Yes (describe)
3. Does your campus have goals that are explicitly stated by race and ethnicity to improve retention, graduation, STEM participation, and [Name other indicators that are important at your own institution]
4. Does your campus recruit community college transfer students and report on transfer access by race and ethnicity?
5. Does your campus publish an annual report on the state of racial equity? If it does not, who would need to make it happen?
6. Does your campus report on admissions applications, acceptance, and yield by race and ethnicity? Does your campus report on incomplete admissions applications by race and ethnicity?
7. Are you familiar with your campus recruitment and admissions practices? Is there a racial/ethnic map of the high schools where recruitment takes place?
8. Are faculty, administrators, and staff evaluated on meeting racial equity goals?
9. Does your campus report on faculty, administrator, and staff hiring outcomes by race/ethnicity for faculty, e.g., number of applicants, number interviewed, and number hired? Has your campus (or you) conducted a study of faculty search procedures to identify implicit bias in standard search procedures?
10. Would your campus leadership be open to routinely examine practices, policies, new initiatives, reports, etc., to determine if they meet criteria of equity-mindedness?¹
11. Would your vice president of academic affairs, deans, and department chairs be open to engaging faculty in the examination of course level data disaggregated by race and ethnicity? To examine their syllabi? To conduct classroom observations to understand interracial relations between instructors and students?
12. How much support would you get from your president to do items 1-11? The academic senate? Trustees?

The Center for Urban Education created the concept of "equity-mindedness" to describe actions that demonstrate individuals' capacity to recognize and address racialized structures, policies, and practices that produce and sustain racial inequities.

(Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015).

¹ Criteria of equity-mindedness are available in CUE's website <http://cue.usc.edu>

Contact Us: cue.usc.edu - 213.740.5202

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