Project Win-Win: Going to Scale

Basic Description

Project Win-Win involves 35 colleges in six states (Louisiana, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Virginia, and Wisconsin) in finding former students, no longer enrolled anywhere and never awarded any degree, whose records qualify them for associate's degrees, and get those degrees awarded retroactively. Simultaneously, this effort will identify former students who are "academically short" of an associate's degree by no more than 9 credits, find them, and seek to bring them back to complete the degree.

"Win-Win," undertaken in a partnership of the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), and funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education, is a major expansion of a Pilot conducted in the fall and spring terms of 2009-2010 in nine of the 35 institutions and under the sponsorship of the Education Trust. The pilot schools (six community colleges in New York, Ohio, and Louisiana, and three four-year colleges in Louisiana that award associate's degrees) discovered that finding the students and awarding these degrees is neither a simple nor an instant matter. But by the end of their 7-month pilot, these institutions had already awarded or certified for award, 592 associates degrees, and had lined up 1,596 students who were short by 9 or fewer credits, hence "potential" degree recipients. The Pilot schools will continue in the expanded version of Win-Win for one year, by the end of which IHEP expects to see them award about 1,000 associate's degrees, and have at least 2,000 students in line to complete the degree in a timely manner.

If one projects those numbers out across both U.S. community colleges and four-year colleges that award associate's degrees, one is looking at at least a 12 percent increase—and possibly more—in the number of associate's degrees awarded. If one adds in four-year colleges that do not award associate's degrees themselves but can target students who transfer in from community colleges without the degree, and work with the originating institutions for those students to get the degrees awarded, the total number of new associate's degrees conferred could reach 250,000. This is an enormous down-payment on the "big goals" of increased degree completion set by the Lumina Foundation, the Nation's governors, and President Obama. These students are comparatively easy candidates for credentials.

The new institutions participating in Win-Win include six community colleges in Virginia, three four-year colleges of the University of Wisconsin System as well as the System's UW Colleges (which comprises 13 two-year liberal arts campuses), two major community college districts and two private institutions in Missouri, two community colleges in Ohio plus three branch campuses of Kent State University, two technical colleges and two community colleges in New York, and one four-year college and two community colleges in Louisiana (all are listed in Appendix A). All participating institutions were selected and recruited by the central state or system higher education authority. Each participating institution receives a small grant to support its efforts,

administered—with other support—by its state system central office. All participating institutions are contributing a significant amount of staff time to this effort because they realize the potential of its impact on local graduation rates.

Scenarios for Finding Qualifying Students

There are seven (7) distinct procedural scenarios reflected in the plans and commitments of participating institutions. What Win-Win calls the "Full Cycle" is the default model, and is being pursued by a majority of the 35 institutions. The other scenarios are products of either local institutional design or variations on procedures followed by institutions in the Pilot phase of Win-Win. All of these employ elements of the "Full Cycle."

1) Full-Cycle.

The basic scenario for all participating institutions is involves seven steps:

(1) identifying students in their data systems who had entered the institutions at any time *after* 2001, earned at least 60 credits and the minimum grade point average required for graduation, but who never received the associate's degree and had not been enrolled at the institution for at least a year;

(2) matching that initial list against state system records to determine who is either currently enrolled elsewhere in the state or earned a degree from another state institution, and removing them from the population under consideration;

(3) taking the reduced list after step 2 and sending it to the National Student Clearinghouse to determine if anyone on the list is currently enrolled in another state or received a degree in another state, and removing them from the group under consideration;

(4) taking the residual list of students after step 3, and subjecting each student to a "degree audit" to reach a final determination on degree eligibility;

(5) for all degree "eligibles," determine whether there are any administrative "holds" on degrees and resolve as many of these as possible;

(6) for all those for whom the Degree Audit determined "academic shortfall" by 9 or fewer credits, find these "potential" degree earners, and

(7) contact as many of #6 as can be found with templates for finishing degrees that include formal class work, credit-by-examination, and/or development and review of a dossier that documents and validates experiential learning.

This process takes two years to complete, with the largest portions of time spent on Degree Audits and locating the potential degree-completers.

2) Full-Cycle interstate. Win-Win was fortunate when the Missouri Department of Higher Education recruited two large community college districts—St. Louis and Metropolitan (Kansas City, MO)—whose students often flow back and forth across state lines (Illinois and Kansas, respectively), earning credits from schools on both sides of the state line. This scenario presents distinct challenges is matching data from more than one state system.

3) Feeder. In this case, the community college initiates a follow-up of students who transferred to a specific four-year college, one for which the community college is a high-volume "feeder." Both Monroe Community College and Suffolk Community College in New York (participants in the Pilot project) are following this process with The State University of New York at Brockport and the State University of New York at Stony Brook, respectively. Based on analysis of combined records at the feeder community college and the specific institution "fed," the two community colleges will seek to award associates degrees to those either still enrolled or no longer enrolled (and without any degree).

4) Reverse feeder. This case is a mirror image of the process in which Monroe and Suffolk community colleges are the instigators. Here, the four-year college, the University of Louisiana/Lafayette, identifies students from a specific feeder community college (Southern Louisiana CC) who, by its analysis, have met requirements for an associate's degree, and negotiates with the community college to get those students credentialed. This process is appropriate—and replicable—to four-year colleges that do not themselves award associate's degrees.

5) Resident four-year. This model applies to any four-year college authorized to award associate's degrees itself, and without negotiation with its feeder community colleges. The institution looks at all its currently resident students in terms of associate's degree eligibility, and moves through the seven steps of the Full Cycle with that group. The three participating Louisiana universities in the Pilot phase of the program fall in this group, as do the two technical colleges in the State University of New York system (Alfred and Cobbleskill).

6) Branch campus cycle. This scenario is unique to those state universities with associate's-degree granting branch campuses, and in which students sometimes attend both the "home" university and a branch campus. For the Win-Win expansion, the case will be illustrated by three branch campuses of Kent State University in Ohio: Stark, Trumbull, and Tuscarawas.

7) Four-year resident, retroactive. This approach in Wisconsin is modeled on that originally developed by the Univ. of Wisconsin/Oshkosh. It focuses on four-year college students who left the institution in good academic standing, never earned any degree, and who are no longer enrolled anywhere. It seeks to confer associate's degrees on these "drop-outs," retroactively. Current resident students are not at issue.

Problems Revealed on the Road to Documentation

Among the bumps on these roads discovered during the course of the Pilot project:

- local data systems may be hampered by prior changes in or upgrades to software, e.g. a software change in 2005 may isolate all students who entered before that date hence exclude them from the universe under investigation;
- local and state data may not be wholly compatible, e.g. they may use different identification systems for which cross-walks must be developed;
- not every institution possesses a membership level in the National Student Clearinghouse that allows them to find degree awards;
- degree audit software is, to put it kindly, immature, e.g. it is often not populated with courses that no longer are offered and for which equivalents are not programmed, or it sets degree fulfillment criteria to those in force in 2009 when the student in question entered under different criteria in 2003; most institutions had to turn to hand-and-eye review of transcript records for the degree audit, and this task is very time-consuming;
- nearly half of the 9500 students in the Pilot phase of Win-Win who passed through step 1 of the default process were transfers in (see Appendix B for data on this feature of the population), and ultimately, the most frequent "hold" on degrees lay in the fact that transcripts from other institutions attended by the student had never been received (and, by most state system policies, without a full transcript record, degrees cannot be awarded);
- the default associate's degree offered or awarded to the student is the A.A., A.S. or A.G.S., i.e. standard transfer degrees, whereas some students will be on the institution's record books as candidates for an Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) in a particular occupational field, and may resist the offer of a standard transfer degree (even though they have been out of school for at least a year) on the false assumption that once the A.A. or A.S. is awarded they cannot return to

school to finish requirements for the A.A.S.; participating institutions will be testing strategies for dealing with this problem;

- locating students who are "academically short" and hence potential degree completers is a major undertaking.

All of these lessons from the 9 institutions in the Pilot phase of Win-Win will help the expanded group of institutions negotiate the complex process of awarding degrees retroactively. The result will be far fewer qualified students walking around empty-handed and much improved degree completion rates at the associate's level for community colleges and colleges, i.e. Win-Win.

Evaluation and State Policy Issues

The State Higher Education Executive Officers will be bringing the lessons of these efforts to their members, highlighting areas in which state system policies and regulations need to be reexamined in light of the Win-Win experience. The SHEEO formative evaluation of all institutional efforts will include in its consideration such issues as cost-benefits, comparative demographics (i.e. aggregate portraits of the student populations to whom degrees are awarded and those placed in the line of "potential" completers compared with degree recipients under regular progression), types of "holds" on degrees that are products of institutional and state policies, and degree audit procedures and problems. The SHEEO presence, activities, and advocacies will have considerable multiplier effects.

Appendix A

Project Win-Win, Phase 2:
Who is Participating—and How?

State	Institution	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Model
Louisiana	Bossier Parish CC	X			Full-cycle, completing
	Delgado CC	X			Full-cycle, completing
	McNeese State University	X			Resident and transfer 4-year, completing
	Northwestern State University	X			Resident and transfer 4-year, completing
	Southeastern State University	X			Resident and transfer 4-year, completing
	Univ. of La./Lafayette	X			Transfer students from Southern La. CC, new (Reverse feeder)
	Nunez Community College		X	X	Full-cycle, new
	Baton Rouge Community College		X	X	Full-cycle, new
Missouri	St. Louis CC District	X	X		Full-cycle, interstate (IL), new
	Metropolitan CC District		X	X	Full-cycle, interstate (KS), new
	DeVry University, Kansas City	X	X		Full-cycle, new
	Columbia College		X	X	Full-cycle, new
New York	Monroe Community College, #1	X			Full-cycle, completing
	Monroe Community College, #2	X			Transfer students to SUNY/Brockport (feeder)
	Suffolk Community College, #1	X			Full-cycle, completing
	Suffolk Community College, #2	X			Transfer student to SUNY/Stony Brook (feeder)
	Orange Community College	X	X		Full-cycle, new
	Clinton Community College		X	X	Full-cycle, new
	Alfred State Technical College		X	X	Resident 4-year, new
	SUNY at Cobbleskill		X	X	Resident 4-year, new

Ohio	Clark State Community College	X			Full-cycle, completing
	Lakeland Community College	X			Full-cycle, completing
	Kent State Univ/Trumbull	X	X		Branch campus cycle, new
	Kent State Univ/Stark	X	X		Branch campus cycle, new
	Kent State Univ/Tuscarawas	X	X		Branch campus cycle, new
	Northwest State Community Coll		X	X	Full-cycle, new
	Sinclair Community College		X	X	Full-cycle, new
Virginia	Tidewater Community College	X	X		Full-cycle, new
	Virginia Western CC	X	X		Full-cycle, new
	Germana Community Coll		X	X	Full-cycle, new
	New River Community Coll		X	X	Full-cycle, new
	Northern Va. Community Coll		X	X	Full-cycle, new
	Thomas Nelson Comm Coll		X	X	Full-cycle, new
Wisconsin	Univ. of Wisc., Green Bay	X	X		4-year resident retroactive, new
	Univ. of Wisc., Platteville	X	X		4-year resident retroactive, new
	Univ. of Wisc., Stevens Point	X	X		4-year resident retroactive, new
	Univ. of Wisc 2-year Colleges	X	X	X	Full-cycle across all campuses

Appendix B **Project Win-Win, Phase I**

Transfers-in and Subsequent Population Who Earned Degrees Elsewhere

School	Of initial Win-Win universe, percent transfers-in	Average credits transferred-in	Percent transferring-in more than 20 credits	Number of initial Win-Win universe earning degrees elsewhere	Percent of original universe
Delgado CC (LA)	49.9%	35.9	43.8%	219	48.3%*
Bossier Parish CC (LA)	55.4	44.0	67.3	374	32.4
Monroe CC (NY)	47.9	29.4	61.4	404	30.4
Suffolk CC (NY)	34.6	16.5	32.9	143	3.3
Clark State CC (OH)	41.0	25.6	11.5	NA	NA
Lakeland CC (OH)	8.2	NA	NA	NA	NA
McNeese State (LA)	45.4	60.0	91.7	118	20.7
Northwestern State (LA)	54.3	60.0	90.4	185	18.9
Southeastern State (LA)	50.2	75.0	95.9	468	26.3