



Making Opportunity Affordable- Tennessee

Adult Strategies Group

Final Report and Recommendations

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Making Opportunity Affordable- Tennessee

Making Opportunity Affordable (MOA) is a multi-year grant initiative funded by Lumina Foundation for Education. MOA represents an unprecedented effort to increase the number of graduates within available resources while preserving instructional quality. This effort aims to ensure graduates are ready to contribute to the nation's political and social health and to succeed in a global knowledge economy.

Transformational change is needed. President Obama has called for a restoration of U.S. leadership in degree attainment. To succeed, we must reverse a trend that has put the nation in a four-way tie for 10th for the percentage of its population between ages 25 and 34 with a college degree. Through Making Opportunity Affordable, like-minded organizations work within states to recalibrate higher education spending to graduate many more students than the nation is on track to educate. The initiative relies on three mutually reinforcing pathways to provide greater opportunity and mobility for students: 1) Increase and Reward Completion, 2) Generate and Reinvest Savings, and 3) Educate and Train in Affordable Ways.¹

Making Opportunity Affordable- Tennessee is a partnership of the

Tennessee Higher Education Commission

Tennessee Board of Regents

University of Tennessee

Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association

Tennessee State Board of Education

Office of the Governor

Tennessee Business Roundtable

¹ MakingOpportunityAffordable.org

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Making Opportunity Affordable-Tennessee Adult Strategies Group
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Executive Summary

In 2008, Tennessee was one of 11 states awarded a one-year planning grant from Lumina Foundation for Education with the charge of increasing productivity defined as the number of certificates and degrees produced with available resources. As part of the planning grant, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems conducted a policy audit to identify areas in which policies are not aligned to promote productivity. The policy audit highlighted adult students as an area of high need.

To address these concerns, higher education officials from across the state with expertise in adult learners were convened. The MOA-TN Adult Strategies Group was charged to create a comprehensive statewide policy for adult students. The group identified obstacles for adult students, administrators, and the state; reviewed data on adult students; discussed best practices from across the Southern region; and recommended policies to improve enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of adult learners.

Obstacles for adult learners include finances, extended time to completion, lack of awareness of the need for a college degree or necessary steps in enrolling, type and availability of student services, availability of prior learning assessment, and the lack of value of the adult learner on college campuses.

The policy recommendations consist largely of removing obstacles that hinder accelerated courses, prior learning assessment, and financial aid in addition to creating an Adult Degree Completion Program and providing adult student specific advising and student services.

The next steps are for systems and institutions to implement the recommended policy and program changes and to continue to measure progress and make improvements in serving adult learners.

Making Opportunity Affordable-Tennessee Adult Strategies Group **Final Report and Recommendations**

In 2008, Tennessee was one of 11 states awarded a one-year planning grant from Lumina Foundation for Education with the charge of increasing productivity defined as the number of certificates and degrees produced with available resources. Tennessee will compete for a second phase of MOA grants to be awarded from 2010 to 2014.

As part of the planning grant, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) conducted a policy audit in Tennessee. NCHEMS facilitated discussions with 20 technology centers, community colleges, and universities as well as system and state higher education officials, the Governor's office, legislative leadership, and the Tennessee Business Roundtable. The policy audit identified areas in which policies are not aligned to promote productivity. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) endorsed this policy audit, which will guide the Master Plan for Tennessee higher education from 2010 to 2015.

Adult students were highlighted in the policy audit as an area of high need. The report identified the disconnect between the parties responsible for adult education in the state as the Department of Labor and Workforce Development oversees the Workforce Investment Act and GED services, but contracts with secondary and postsecondary institutions on specific occasions. In terms of higher education, the limitations include a lack of a cohesive body of adult student policy and lack of systematic attention to career and job placement outcomes. In addition, there is limited access to financial aid for adults, assessment of prior learning varies by institution, transfer of credit is unclear, courses are offered primarily during the workday, and there are bureaucratic administrative rules for student enrollment.

To address these concerns, higher education officials from across the state with expertise in adult learners were convened. The MOA-TN Adult Strategies Group was charged to create a comprehensive statewide policy for adult students. The group is composed of 23 members (listed on page three) and met several times during summer 2009. The group meetings identified obstacles for adult students, administrators, and the state; reviewed data on adult students; discussed best practices from across the Southern region; drafted a proposal for a Tennessee statewide Adult Degree Completion Program; and recommended several policies to improve the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of adult learners.

The Adult Student Imperative

Tennessee lags regional and national averages in the educational attainment level of its working age population. Currently, only 29.9 percent of Tennessee's adults aged 25-64 hold an Associate's degree or higher, compared to an average of 34.3 percent for Southern Regional Education Board states and 37.2 percent for the nation.²

² tn.gov/moa/what_goal.shtml

Tennessee produces approximately 35,000 college graduates per year currently. Holding conditions constant, current production indicates that annual degree production will be about 38,000 in 2015. To meet the national average, Tennessee needs to produce a cumulative additional 269,000 degrees (Associates and Bachelors) by 2025. To achieve this goal, Tennessee higher education must produce 44,000 postsecondary degrees per year by 2015 and eventually 59,000 degrees per year by 2025. In the other words, Tennessee needs to increase its degree productivity by 3.5 percent every year from now until 2025.³

Meeting this ambitious goal can only be achieved by increasing productivity with students currently enrolled as well as reaching out to populations previously underserved by Tennessee public higher education, particularly adults. There are nearly two million potential adult college students in Tennessee. According to the 2000 census, of the 1,932,848 Tennesseans age 25 and older with a high school diploma and without a college degree, 39 percent have some college experience. Even though there is a large potential population, the adult participation rates across Tennessee's counties vary considerably, from a high of 27.7 percent in Lewis County to a low of 6.8 percent in Lincoln County.⁴ Increasing the educational attainment of Tennessee's adults is important for a variety of reasons including the following:

- **Adults are today's workforce and will fuel economic development.** Tennessee is progressing from an agricultural and mechanical economy to a technology based knowledge economy, but still lags behind others (ranked 36th) according to the 2008 State New Economy Index.
- **Adults are the majority of the population and most remain without a college credential.** By not tapping into this large potential population, the state misses the positive public and private benefits that college degrees impart. Adult student enrollment has declined steadily in Tennessee public higher education. Despite gains in higher education across the country, Tennessee's adult student undergraduate enrollment peaked in 1993.
- **The supply of traditional age students cannot meet industry demands.** The pipeline of traditional age students cannot meet Tennessee's workforce needs or reach competitiveness with other states. Furthermore, the number of high school graduates is expected to peak in 2008-09, so the state will become more dependent on alternative populations.

Policy Barriers for Adult Students, Service Providers, and the State

The MOA-TN Adult Strategies Group, drawing from their expertise working with adult students, compiled a comprehensive set of barriers for students and service providers who work with this population. These barriers inhibit the ability of institutions to enroll, retain, and graduate adult learners and thus hinder state progress on these measures. The adult student research literature⁵

³ Meeting the Challenge from tn.gov/moa/what_goal

⁴ Adult Participation Rate by County presentation from tn.gov/moa/moa_reports

⁵ MOA-TN Adult Strategies Group Resources from tn.gov/moa/adult_strag_grp

and the MOA policy audit⁶ findings are consistent with the barriers identified by the MOA-TN Adult Strategies Group.

Barriers for Adult Students

Finances

Adult students have limited access to scholarships and loans. Adults often decide to enroll in higher education later than most students do and at which time many sources of financial aid may be depleted or the financial aid deadlines may have passed. This is true of the state's need-based financial aid program, the Tennessee Student Assistance Award, which is awarded on a first-come first-serve basis. Eligibility criteria also limit eligibility on income and number of hours enrolled. For students taking only one class per semester, there are very few sources of financial aid available.

The Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship (TELS) has several eligibility criteria that narrow its applicability to adult students and makes the program's affect small. Students are eligible for the TELS Non-Traditional award if they are age 25 or older, have an adjusted gross income of less than \$36,000 per year, have been out of college for at least two years or have never attended, and enroll for 12 hours earning a 2.75 college GPA or better to earn eligibility. Students must maintain continuous enrollment during all fall and spring semesters, enroll for at least 6 hours each semester, and are eligible for up to five years.

Financial aid does not cover books and other financial expenses that students incur. All students, but particularly adults caring for dependents, have many life expenses. Even for students receiving generous financial aid packages, other costs associated with attending college are left unmet.

The length of the degree program also effects cost. While the tuition and fees at Tennessee public institutions is less than that of private non-profit and for-profit institutions, public degree programs take longer to complete since they are not offer in an accelerated format. In the end, the accumulated tuition and fees may actually end up being higher at public institutions. Taking into account other costs associated with attending college including books, housing, and foregone earnings from employment, public institutions are much more expensive. Offering shorter degree programs is one way of saving money for students and institutions.

An e-rate for online tuition serves several purposes. The e-rate promotes enrollment in online programs by lowering the out-of-state cost down to an e-rate cost. The lower price would be attractive particularly to individuals in the armed forces or living on a Tennessee border. In addition, institutions and the state would increase available funding as the e-rate would be above the in-state tuition rate.

In Tennessee, military tuition policy is inconsistent across institutions. Military students, who are most likely adults, find this policy confusing and it is frustrating to institutions as well.

⁶ NCHEMS Policy Audit Report from tn.gov/moa/moa_reports

Students are typically charged fees every semester. These fees include many campus services that adult students do not take advantage of, such as access to recreational centers and sporting events. Adults have voiced frustration in paying for services they do not need or want.

Time to Completion

The lack of accelerated programs hinders the ability of Tennessee public institutions to compete for adult students. Approximately one-half of the adults contacting Tennessee public institutions to inquire about available programs are not interested because programs are not accelerated. These students instead attend private non-profit and for-profit institutions that offer accelerated online and on campus classes and degree programs. Adult students prefer accelerated classes for a variety of reasons including the ease of committing to fit a class into their busy lives for the next 5 weeks or 7 weeks rather than 15 weeks.

The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) system has a common calendar for the colleges and universities, which prescribes that all TBR institutions will start and end classes at the same time as well as take student holidays simultaneously. The common calendar limits the leeway that institutions have to create accelerated programs. The Tennessee Technology Centers are on a different common calendar with different start and end dates, though the terms are for approximately the same length as that of a college or university.

The Associate of Science and Associate of Applied Science are not compatible with 4-year degrees. Students completing their degree at a 2-year institution and transferring to a 4-year program face obstacles. The AAS was once seen as a terminal degree, but that is no longer true. Faculty and policy obstacles prevent some institutions from accepting the AAS degree in transfer, but some institutions have overcome this. The private and proprietary institutions also do not have obstacles in accepting the AAS degree in transfer. In addition to accepting the degree or hours toward a Bachelor's degree in transfer, there are obstacles in ensuring that students meet all the general education requirements and do not have to re-take any hours at the university so that they can graduate with 120 hours.

Marketing and Awareness

Tennessee does not have a central location for information geared to adult learners. Tennessee has a statewide college access website called www.collegefortn.org, which provides information about choosing colleges and careers and the necessary steps to enroll in higher education. This web page is geared entirely for traditional age students going straight from high school to college. An adult looking to go back to school has no equivalent web portal with which to learn about the process.

Non-traditional students require non-traditional advertising methods. Advertising methods used for other purposes, might also be of use in reaching out to adults in Tennessee who have never attended college or have dropped out. For example, announcements are included in household mailings for special city services. Advertisers are active in online applications such as E-bay and Facebook as well as the traditional advertisements of television and radio.

Community involvement is also important in building a culture that supports higher education, particularly for adults. Local politicians can play a key role in this endeavor. For example, Shelby County Mayor AC Wharton has participated in the CEOs for Cities campaign, which monetizes the value of increased educational attainment for the counties' citizenry to gain support.

Student Services

Adult students are interested in a one-stop shop for student services. These students want to call one individual and have all of their questions answered. Proprietary institutions provide one contact person for all student needs and ensure that no student falls through the cracks.

Advisors who reflect the diversity of the adult students seeking advisement are important. These 'aspirational' advisors provide the support system for each of these at-risk students and link them to services available across the campus.

Other student services specific to adult student needs include non-traditional hours, including late nights and weekends, are necessary for this population of students.

Adult students have voiced a need for safe childcare in the evenings. Many adult students have full-time jobs and children. They may need assistance fitting their lives into the school schedule, which includes finding reliable and safe childcare while they are in class during non-traditional hours.

The campus environment needs to embrace adult learners, including faculty, staff, and students who may be unaccustomed to the adult students on their campus.

Service Delivery

There are currently very few entry points to higher education, these occurring during fall, spring, and two summer sessions. If an adult is interested in re-enrolling or enrolling for the first time in college, a lengthy delay between making this important decision and actually starting the enrollment process decreases the likelihood that the student will make it into the classroom. A rolling admissions process and open enrollment would aid in decreasing this gap. Accelerated classes, as discussed previously, would also increase the number of entry points for interested students.

Institutions operate primarily during the typical workday. Adult students, who may work full-time, require courses at convenient times and locations. This might include evenings or weekends, online, or at off-campus locations.

Prior Learning Assessment

Although all Tennessee public college catalogs have a section on lifelong learning credit, it is not consistently used at all institutions. The use of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) should be

promoted and training opportunities offered for institutions that may be interested in offering PLA, but are not sure how to get started.

For institutions that do award credit for prior learning, there are several different policies in place. Institutions differ in the number of PLA credits accepted, what courses and degrees PLA credit can be used for, and in which evaluation method used. Most institutions use the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) model, while others use American Council on Education (ACE) and supplement with CAEL. The ACE model includes a listing of training programs that have already been evaluated, primarily for the military, and recommends what number and kind of credits that training is worth. In the CAEL model, students prepare a portfolio and faculty members at the institution are trained to evaluate what number and kind of credits the portfolio is worth.

Barriers for Service Providers

Valuing the Adult Learner

It has been difficult to educate faculty and staff members, especially those teaching online, about the particular and significant needs of adult learners.

Incentives for the institution and the student need to be present in any systematic review of adult student policies. The traditional measures of student success may not be relevant to non-traditional students. The Gates Foundation determines success not only by completion, but also by the value in the workforce.

Completion- Oriented Language

Adult oriented college programs have generally not had completion-oriented names. Often including a name like “continuing education,” which does not sound like a student is going to complete the program quickly. In comparison, states have created programs called Adult Degree Completion Program.

The degrees offered to adults either in specific disciplines or in general studies degrees do not address linkages to the workforce. The names of degrees should clearly identify their content area and how they transfer to the workforce. Adult students are looking for clear pathways between college degrees and career pathways, types of jobs, and income levels.

Adult Appropriate Theory of Learning

Adults learning is enhanced by problem-based learning applications. When adults enter college coursework they are often required to begin at the entry level, where courses may not provide challenging or problem-based applications to facilitate the learning methods of adults. These traditionally designed courses do not retain these non-traditional students.

Adult Friendly Services

Making links between the campus and the community could better meet the needs of adult students. For example, in order to staff a daycare center on campus, an institution could create

student jobs working at the day care center. This one initiative could meet the needs of several students and give them the time or money that they need to attend college. Institutions are already overseeing similar projects through graduate assistants.

SACS accreditation standards require schools to offer the same services to all students, but our state policy could require a higher level of services. For example, every school could be required to show that they provide services in meaningful ways to adults.

Expectations for students and staff are not clear. Identification of continuing education students is likely not the same at every institution. The entrance requirements for adults including standardized test scores and high school diploma are not clearly differentiated from the requirements for recent high school graduates.

Policy Areas to Address Barriers for the State

1. Partnerships for funding, marketing, and service delivery
2. Uniform model for recognition of prior work
3. Technology to reach a larger population
4. Clarify expectations
5. Policy must require coordinated services
6. Finance and funding
7. Adult student advocates

Best Practices in Adult Student Service Delivery

There are emerging Adult Degree Completion Program (ADCP) models in Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Louisiana. All of the programs have the same goal; more working age adults with a degree. The Director of the Southern Regional Education Board's Adult Learning Campaign, Dr. Bruce Chaloux, has worked with these three states and others in developing ADCP models. Dr. Chaloux presented these models to the MOA-TN Adult Strategies Group for consideration and provided suggestions for a model unique to Tennessee.

Oklahoma's Reach Higher

Oklahoma's program is for adults with 77 or more credit hours towards their Bachelor's degree, which is around 70,000 students. Students have to pick a "home institution" and the courses are offered on-campus with some on-line options. It offers a single degree program, a Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership. This aspect of the program was problematic for some students who wanted the degree for which they had initially enrolled. The Organizational Leadership degree program was created to provide the best pathway to a degree and the most flexibility in credit hour requirements and was shaped in response to discussions with business and industry about the skills they wanted from college graduates. Seven regional state universities offer the *Reach Higher* degree program and each of the programs had to be approved by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. While the flagship institutions have adult degree completion programs, they are not participating in *Reach Higher*.

Kentucky's Project Graduate

Kentucky's *Project Graduate* is for adults with 90 or more credit hours towards their Bachelor's degree. About 20 institutions participate including both public and private, universities and community colleges. There are incentives for students to return such as waiving the application fee, providing rapid admissions, and expediting the registration process. Institutions offer on-campus, on-line, and blended courses as well as multiple degree options that are institution-based and designed.

Louisiana's Center for Adult Learning in Louisiana (CALL)

Louisiana's *CALL* is open to any student working toward an Associate's or Bachelor's degree with no minimum credits to participate, although students must have attended college. This model differs from those in Kentucky and Oklahoma, where students not meeting minimum hour requirements are not eligible to participate. Louisiana instead gives all potential adult completers a pathway to a degree under the same branded program name.

Louisiana offers multiple degree options with specific institutions offering the *CALL* degree in specific disciplines. Louisiana has not and likely will not create an adult specific degree. There are currently ten degree programs offered from six institutions. Those institutions own the degree program they offer and have to make the entire program available online with an accelerated learning format, which compacts the time to a degree. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a central element of the program and shortens the time to degree. All students are directed to a central *CALL* website. In addition, participants pay the in-state tuition rate and possibly a small additional fee regardless of residency.

These Adult Degree Completion Programs as well as the work of SREB and others in adult learner initiatives highlight the following key program needs:

- Flexible programs that meet adult needs in time, location, length, and delivery format.
- Pathways to degrees that give some hope of completion including flexible programs that provide a pathway that makes sense to adult students.
- Services designed to meet the needs of adult learners (re-designed or new). In current models, institutions have services available like a writing center or a math tutor, but students do not seek out these services. Adults can be treated differently by integrating student services into courses or providing outreach to students in need of the services.
- Efficiently using credits that adult students earn including accepting credits at transfer and counting credits toward a degree.
- More robust use of all forms of PLA to acknowledge the learning outcomes already obtained by experienced adults and prevent unnecessary duplication in the classroom, which in turn decreases time to degree and costs to the student and institution while increasing retention and graduation rates.
- Financial aid for nontraditional learners. Students who have some college and no degree likely have education debt from their previous experience. Students have financial concerns and postsecondary institutions should address these issues directly when students enroll or show interest in enrolling.

Recommendations

The MOA-TN Adult Strategies Group endorses the following recommendations based on the group's combined knowledge and research. While these recommendations represent a comprehensive strategy for meeting the needs of adult learners in Tennessee, each policy or program change can be implemented individually as well.

Expand the flexibility of the TBR common calendar

The Tennessee Board of Regents' common calendar prescribes when each institution will begin, end, and take holidays from courses every semester. While facilitating the timely delivery of data and making it easier for students to navigate between institutions, it also has several hindrances. The common calendar limits the flexibility institutions have in creating accelerated courses that may last five weeks or seven weeks since they would not fit the prescribed calendar dates. Students, particularly adult students, are seeking accelerated courses which institutions are currently unable to provide. Removing or creating more flexibility in the common calendar requirements and instituting accelerated courses would attract many Tennessee residents who have previously been forced to attend higher priced private non-profit and for-profit institutions or to forgo higher education.

Remove the fourteenth day enrollment census date

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission operates a funding formula to create the annual higher education state appropriation request. This formula is based heavily on institutional enrollment figures captured on the fourteenth day of the fall semester. This requirement creates a disincentive for institutions to create innovative or accelerated courses, since any class not meeting by the fourteenth day of the fall semester is not counted and thus is not included in the funding formula. A census date occurring at the end of the semester or the end of the academic year would allow each institution to create the course offerings that serve the needs of its students, including accelerated courses.

Provide accelerated degree options

Adult students are interested in accelerated degree options. This includes the use of accelerated classes, prior learning assessment, and open enrollment. Shortening the overall time to degree makes the program more attractive during advertising and decreases the cost of the degree for both the student and the state. Institutions should provide accelerated degree options for adult students.

Create the Adult Degree Completion Program (ADCP)

The ADCP would market to Tennesseans who have some college but no degree and provide a flexible venue for students to enroll and complete a degree program. The proposal, as listed in the Appendix, includes a centralized program name, marketing, website, and call center for interested students, but advising and courses are at the campus level. The ADCP proposal includes many of the policy recommendations listed here in order to create a comprehensive adult-friendly program that will move adult students with any number of credits quickly towards

a degree. The ADCP includes accelerated courses, adult specific advisors, and prior learning assessment.

Offer a variety of course delivery methods

Adult students are most interested in the convenience of course offerings that fit into their schedule. While this often includes online courses, on-campus and hybrid courses should also be made available at convenient locations and times to meet the needs of adult learners who may not be comfortable with or have access to the needed technology.

Promote the consistent use of Prior Learning Assessment

All public institutions are permitted to use prior learning assessment in awarding credit, but this is done inconsistently across our campuses. The system or state office should facilitate training sessions where institutions can share their procedures for prior learning assessment. The second step is to combine these practices into a state policy that will provide consistency across institutions in prior learning assessment regulations.

Promote the transfer of Prior Learning Assessment

Although current policy permits all institutions to award credit through prior learning assessment, there is no policy for transfer of these credits. Institutions should develop articulation agreements with their feeder-receiver institutions to ensure that their students do not lose credit, including prior learning assessment credit, through the transfer process. The second step is to combine these practices into a state policy that will provide consistency across institutions in prior learning assessment regulations.

Make TSAA available until the published deadline

The Tennessee Student Assistance Award (TSAA) is the state's largest need-based financial aid program. Every year there is not enough funding available to provide aid to all of the students who apply and qualify for the award. Instead, awards are distributed on a first-come first-serve basis. For adults and independent students with work and family obligations, it may be difficult to plan for college enrollment far in advance. Once these students decide they are able to enroll and apply for financial aid, the money may have already been distributed. Making TSAA funds available until the published deadline date would serve the needs of more adult students. This can be accomplished by providing more funding for the program or separating the available money to be distributed to students in targeted populations, such as adults or those in the lowest income category.

Allow students taking one class to qualify for TSAA

Currently students must be enrolled at least half time (six credit hours per semester, typically two courses) to receive a Tennessee Student Assistance Award. This policy affects primarily working adults who may be unable to attend college for more hours due to work and family constraints. It is of great importance to increase the educational attainment of the working adult population, yet this policy makes it difficult for these students to receive financial aid from the state's largest need-based financial aid program.

Increase the TELS-Nontraditional grant income requirement

The Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship (TELS) Non-Traditional grant does not serve adults well. Few students use this grant each year. The income requirement (\$36,000 adjusted gross income or less) is particularly restricting for adults, who are often the financial providers for their families while enrolled in college.

Decrease the TELS-Nontraditional grant age requirement

Students also have to be age 25 at first enrollment or have not been enrolled in the past two years. Research shows that the longer a student waits to enroll in college, the less likely that student is to finish. This eligibility requirement provides a disincentive for adults to enroll and is thus working against their likelihood of college completion.

Allow TELS-Wilder Naifeh students to transfer with TELS

Students of any age may qualify for the Wilder-Naifeh technical skills grant by enrolling in a certificate or diploma program at a Tennessee Technology Center. TTCs educate a large number of adult students, but for those who complete their diploma and transfer their credit to a community college, the lottery scholarship funding is no longer available unless the student was eligible for TELS when graduating from high school. For all other TELS students, the award is transferrable among participating institutions for up to five years. A policy change should allow students who complete a certificate or diploma at a TTC with the Wilder-Naifeh grant to transfer to a community college or a university and receive the HOPE award, as long as they continue to meet the HOPE requirements and have time in their five-year funding window left.

Create articulation agreement for AAS to BAS or equivalent bachelor degrees

Under a current TBR policy review of extra-institutional learning, there has been submitted a proposal that would allow students earning an Associate of Applied Science Degree at a community college to transfer to a TBR university and carry forward 60 hours toward a Bachelor of Applied Science Degree Program. The review of the policy is in its nascent stage. The proposed policy change with detail is listed in the Appendix.

Promote adult specific advisors on each campus

Tennessee institutions have shown success on a limited basis with a staff member specifically assigned to advising adult learners. These advisors guide adults through the entire process from initial questions about the program, admissions, enrollment, financial aid, and finally planning for degree completion. Adults require more guidance in navigating the institutional system since they either have failed in the past or have made a difficult decision to enroll in higher education. These students have shown that they need individual contact over the phone or in person and the consistency of one advisor to meet their needs and at the very least refer them to the specific office and for the specific piece of information they need. Institutions should ensure resources are available for adequate and comprehensive adult student advisors.

Create adult specific web page similar to www.collegefortn.org

THEC in conjunction with the systems and institutions should create a website similar to www.collegefortn.org. While helpful, this state college access website is for traditional age

students. Repackaging a portion of this information would be helpful for adults as well as providing new content that clarifies requirements and expectations for adult students. While some institutions have web pages and offices devoted to adult students, they are difficult to find and not present on every campus. A statewide web presence for adults would facilitate information dissemination, promote interest in higher education among adult learners, and demonstrate the state's commitment to this important group of students.

Institute a TBR e-tuition rate

Currently, the Tennessee Board of Regents charges in-state and out-of-state rates for courses taken online, either through the Regents Online Degree Program or through institutional online offerings. Other states, however, charge an e-tuition rate that is greater than in-state but less than out-of-state tuition rates. This policy would make it economically feasible for out-of-state students to enroll in Tennessee online courses and increase enrollment in an area in which economies of scale are most apt. It would also increase revenue as both in-state and out-of-state students would pay for the convenience of the online course offerings. An e-tuition rate would also equalize residency status policies, which in some cases have made it difficult for adults to demonstrate their status as a Tennessee resident for tuition purposes.

Include adults in marketing

State, system, and institutional higher education marketing should include adult students. The delivery method, content of the message, and depiction of students should be varied and include both traditional age and adult age students. While traditional age students have been the target of both higher education policies and marketing in the past, adults are of increasing importance in increasing degree attainment in the state and compose a substantially larger potential college population.

Adjust TBR military student tuition policy to be consistent across campuses

Make changes to the Tennessee Board of Regents military student tuition policy to be consistent across institutions. Under the new policy, military students should be given the same tuition discounts at all public institutions and conversely all institutions should receive the same funding for educating military students.

Objective evaluation and recognition of adult student and military campuses in Tennessee

The THEC, TBR, UT, and institutions should objectively evaluate their effectiveness in meeting the needs of non-traditional learners and recognize educational institutions that are prepared for the needs of adults. The Council on Adult and Experiential Learning provides one such evaluation called the Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI)⁷. The ALFI school is one that understands and addresses nine principles related to improving learning opportunities for the adult learner. Similarly, the state should promote the certification of institutions as Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC)⁸ to demonstrate the capability to serve members of the military and their unique needs. Institutions should objectively evaluate their effectiveness in meeting the needs of non-traditional learners.

⁷ www.cael.org/alfi

⁸ www.soc.aascu.org

Provide training for institutions to creating adult student policies

In developing adult student policies, institutions will need training from their peers in the state as well as professional organizations, such as CAEL. The system and state offices should ensure that each campus has the resources it needs to develop comprehensive adult student policy to promote enrollment and completion.

Provide campus wide adult student training

While adult specific advisors can facilitate the adult learners' entry into the campus, eventually adults will join the general campus culture. Often faculty, staff, and traditional age students are unaccustomed to having adult learners on campus and may be unaware of their needs. This is particularly true for faculty members who may need to adjust instructional methods to meet the needs of their new students. Institutions should implement a campus wide training seminar on adult students and their learning needs, along with the training provided generally to faculty and staff at the institution.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This report is the first step in improving Tennessee higher education with the goal of enrolling, retaining, and graduating more adult learners. The MOA-TN Adult Strategies Group has accomplished the difficult task of identifying barriers and forming policy recommendations to address those barriers based on research literature, state specific data, and the knowledge from years of experience with adult learners. The next step is for systems and institutions to adopt the recommended policy and program changes. Tennessee is competing for an MOA implementation grant to be awarded from 2010 to 2014, which would provide funding for the recommendations listed which have an associated cost. Regardless of Tennessee's outcome in this competition; however, transformative changes need to occur in higher education in order to meet the goals set forth in national initiatives (President Obama's goals for higher education, Lumina Foundation for Education) and state goals as will be outlined in the Higher Education Master Plan 2010-2015. In addition to implementing these changes, higher education will need to continue to measure progress and make improvements in serving adult learners.

Appendix A

Tennessee Adult Degree Completion Program Model

This proposal describes a structure and format that provides educational opportunities to Tennessee adult learners who have some college credit, but no degree. This format will provide educational opportunities to individuals in the most rural areas of the state as well as those living adjacent to one of our campuses. The proposal is built on the following foundations:

- An accelerated program format leading to general studies baccalaureate degree.
- An e-tuition structure for online courses.
- Individual institutional use of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) transcribed by each individual institution and transferable through institutional articulation agreements. Individual institutional PLA may be based on American Council on Education (ACE), with Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) recommendations where necessary. Use of PLA can benefit students by moving them through the Adult Degree Completion Program (ADCP) more quickly.
- The use of College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and other methods of subject matter examination.
- A user-friendly, easily accessible web portal leading students and potential students to institutional specific help, encouragement, and support.

1. An accelerated program format leading to a general studies type of baccalaureate degree

- The accelerated format utilized in online, hybrid, or face-to-face course content delivery systems would provide for a shortened course schedule. For example in a 7.5-week course schedule, a week break would separate the sessions and allow for two 7.5-week sessions per traditional 15-week semester. This would also allow six program entry points rather than the traditional three, a good marketing tool, which takes advantage of the traditional student's decision making process.
- Each course would be re-developed for the accelerated format by the current instructor/ developer with guidance from a course designer familiar with the above structure. Newly designed courses will be approved for delivery by a designated person/ committee for structure, not content.
- Instructors would be paid a stipend for re-development after the re-structured course receives final approval.
- If a student is continuously enrolled, takes (and passes) two courses per seven-week term, a 120-hour degree program may be completed in twenty terms (3.3 years). Previous college credit and the use of PLA may shorten that time to degree completion significantly.

*Note: problems implementing and maintaining the accelerated program may be minimized or eliminated by changing the current census date system for funding.

2. E-Tuition

- E-Tuition allows one pricing structure for all on-line programs regardless of the student's location. In some states, the e-tuition rate is 40 percent more than the standard in-state rate, but is substantially less than the cost of out-of-state tuition. The obvious benefit is that e-

tuition will allow more students to attend Tennessee institutions, which will increase potential program head count. A less obvious, but very attractive benefit is that an appropriate e-tuition rate will generate substantial additional revenues because all in-state students pay the e-tuition rate.

3. *A program of PLA based primarily on ACE, with CAEL recommendations where necessary.*

- Each participating institution will use various models of prior learning as a part of a 3-hour PLA course. Each individual institution would establish the standards for assessment. Credit awarded would be transcribed by that (the student's home) institution and not necessarily transferrable to other institutions. Institutions may establish articulation agreements for prior learning credit.
- Every institution would have the latitude to use PLA in other programs besides the designated ADCP general studies type of degree.

4. *A user-friendly, easily accessible web portal leading students and potential students to institutional specific help, encouragement, and support.*

- All advertizing would target a specific website and toll free phone number, which would direct the student to an appropriate advisor. A tracking system will be implemented to ensure that all students are contacted by their designated advisor.
- If the student has started a degree at an institution in Tennessee, he or she would be referred to an advisor at that institution.
- If the student desires to study at a particular institution, he or she will be referred to an advisor at that institution.
- If the student does not designate a preference, he or she will be referred to the "home institution" closest to their home.

Examples of potential students for the general studies type of degrees

Potential Student Example 1:

- An administrative employee with the county government and with no college credit earns a certificate from a Tennessee Technology Center (TTC).
- The student then earns an Associates degree from a community college program using an agreement whereby TTC credit is recognized for up to 30 hours toward an AAS degree by that community college.
- The student then completes an accelerated Bachelor's degree online with a selected four-year institution through the ADCP.
- In this example a student with no or very little college credit should be able to earn an Associates and/or Bachelor's degree with a TTC diploma, 30 hours from a community college, and 60 hours from a four-year university in less than 4 years.
- With this system, a TTC student could enroll directly into one of the General Studies type of degrees from a participating 4-year institution although it is assumed that this would be a rare occurrence.

Potential Student Example 2:

- A supervisory employee from a manufacturer has 40 hours of college credit from a four-year university and many hours of quality, safety, and supervisory training.
- The student completes the PLA class earning up to 30 hours of credit.
- The student identifies 9 hours of other credit to be earned via CLEP tests
- The student completes the remaining 41 hours with a combination of online courses from a community college and a four-year university and can earn a Bachelor's degree in one year.

Potential Student Example 3:

- A senior level banking employee is 15 credits from a degree.
- The student completes the PLA class.
- Through a combination of assessed credit and classes, the student earns a degree in two semesters.

Appendix B

AAS to BAS Articulation Agreement Model

Proposed Amendment to TBR Policy 2:01:00:03: Principles for Articulation in Vocational/ Technical Education

Articulation of associate of applied degree programs may occur through the following venues:

III. Articulation of Associate of Applied Science Degree (A.A.S.) Programs in Community Colleges to a Bachelor of Applied Science Degree (B.A.S.) Programs in Universities

Articulation of credits received in A.A.S. programs in community colleges may occur under the following two provisions:

A. Articulation to the Bachelor of Applied Science or equivalent degree program in a University

A student who has completed a degree program consisting of 60 semester hours at a Tennessee community college will receive credit toward the B.A.S. Degree at universities by meeting the following requirements:

- The student must meet all regular admission requirements of the university and program as published in the institutional catalog.
- The student must provide an official transcript from the community college.
- The student who is admitted to degree admission status must meet all applicable requirements of the General Education Core Requirements (41 hrs).
- Deficits in General Education Core Requirements must be completed by the student at either the community college or university.
- The deficit may be completed during the university program of study.
- The university may require up to fifteen hours as transition/gateway courses for validation of the transfer credit. It is recommended that the transition/gateway courses include nine hours of general education courses and six of the university completion concentration.
- Credit previously awarded for a degree from a community college will be posted on the transcript but will not count in the calculation of the student's grade point average. Upon fulfillment of the requirements stated above, the student will receive 60-semester hours credit toward the B.A.S. Degree. Upon successful completion of program requirements, the student will be awarded the B.A.S. Degree.
- Students may complete a concentration consisting of a university minor or as part of an individual program approved by the department, of which 30 hours will be upper division hours.
- In addition to individual programs of study, the university may also offer specific programs of study to complete the B.A.S. university concentration.
- The B.A.S. will be no more than 120 semester hours total [e.g. 41 (15 from the AAS) general education hours; 45 A.A.S. transfer hours; and 34 hour university concentration and electives].

B. Articulation to Specific Majors in the University

Community colleges may enter into agreements with universities for the articulation of specific courses that lead to the award of the bachelor degree in particular majors.

- The institutions involved must agree that the learning outcomes specified in courses offered by the community college satisfy learning outcomes in similar courses offered by the university. Syllabi of the courses from the institutions involved must be maintained and documented.
- Semester hour credit awarded by the university in specific articulated courses will be proportionate to the equivalence of credits attained in the course offered by the community college or technology center. The number of semester hours awarded in specific articulated programs may be up to the maximum allowed by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.
- The student must meet all regular admissions requirement of the university and program as published in the institutional catalog.
- The student must provide official transcript of work completed at the community college.
- The student who is admitted to degree admission status must meet all applicable requirements of the General Education Core Requirements (41 hrs).