Exploring Experiences of Postsecondary Education for Adult Learners from Communities of Color in Oregon

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PREFACE

In 2018, the State of Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) received funding from Lumina Foundation[1] through a Talent, Innovation, and Equity (TIE) partnership grant to help reduce educational disparities faced by students of color. A key component of this work included focus group research on adult learners – those aged 25 to 64 years old – around the state. Through this research HECC aims to improve the success rates of underrepresented students in postsecondary education and training (specifically African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Oregonians) and make progress toward the State's Adult Attainment goal. Strategies identified to support these goals include: better understand the barriers faced by students of color in seeking postsecondary education or training; note ways to effectively support their retention and re-entry into postsecondary programs; and document practical messages and strategies to engage these learners.

During 2019, HECC contracted with faculty at Portland State University (PSU) and Southern Oregon University (SOU) to conduct focus groups and interviews with adult learners of color across Oregon. This report includes background information about the project, a description of the research methodology, findings on student of color experiences, and key recommendations for improvement. The report should be of interest to faculty and staff at higher education institutions in Oregon, students, and policy makers interested in higher education.

This report was completed by faculty and staff at Portland State University and Southern Oregon University, with support from HECC. More information about HECC can be found at www.oregon.gov/highered. Please direct questions about HECC to info.HECC@state.or.us, and questions about this report to Elizabeth Martinez, Policy and Research Analyst, or Patrick Crane, Director of the Office of Community College and Workforce Development.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project emerged from one of several ongoing initiatives within the Higher Education Coordinating Commission's work on decreasing racial/ethnic disparities in educational attainment and enhancing workforce development among Oregonians. Funded by Lumina Foundation's Talent, Innovation, and Equity (TIE) partnership grant, it was designed to identify barriers to postsecondary completion for students from underrepresented communities of color across the state and to develop messages to facilitate their re-entry into education and workforce training programs.

DATA COLLECTION

Interviews & focus groups were conducted with 111 adult learners of color from across the state of Oregon (focusing on African American, Latinx/Hispanic, Indigenous/Native American, Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiians). Of this total, 72 participated in individual interviews and 39 participated in one of ten focus groups. We focused on better understanding the lived experiences and perspectives of three categories of students: (1) those currently enrolled in college, (2) those who have enrolled at some point and left college, and (3) those who have never enrolled in any kind of postsecondary education. Questions asked during interviews and focus groups centered around experiences in college, reasons for not going to or continuing in college, future goals, messages from family/community about college, motivations for staying in school, and recommendations from participants about what would make it easier for adult learners of color to enroll and stay in college.

DATA ANALYSIS

Throughout data analysis, attention was paid to individual, family, community, institutional and structural factors that impact student experiences and access to higher education. Several broad themes emerged in data analysis, including: barriers in accessing postsecondary education/training, and supports and interventions that facilitate student success.

FINDINGS

Specific types of barriers and supports are summarized below; we then identify overarching lessons learned from the analysis and the related recommendations for action.

Barriers: The most significant barriers facing adult learners were consistent across groups, regardless of enrollment status. Four types of barriers were identified.

- Economic: managing costs of school, meeting basic needs, and navigating employment
- Social and cultural: unhelpful messages before college from family and high school, relational losses (i.e. impacts on family and community relationships)
- Institutional: insufficient mentorship and guidance, difficulty navigating campus and academic life, lack of supports for students with children, and lack of community

- Structural and identity-based: experiences of racism on campus, lack of representation and reflection of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) as peers and faculty/staff, challenges related to immigration and documentation status, and historical and contextual oppression and exclusion.

Supports and interventions: Participants also reflected on what was helpful in supporting them to enroll and stay in school. The supports and interventions identified correspond to the barriers they faced.

- Economic**:** scholarships, veterans' benefits or employer-paid schooling, grants, community college as a less-expensive option, Work Study and tuition support for on-campus work, and free or low-cost textbooks

- Social and cultural**:** access to campus before attending college, family and friend support (practical and informational, as well as the desire to be a role model for children), and alignment between work and school. Individual and community resilience was also critical, comprised of using education as a necessary avenue for being heard and respected as a person of color, the desire to be a role model for one's family and community, and highlighting the importance education played in experiences of immigration

- Institutional**:** institutional accessibility such as satellite campuses or accellerated programs, intentional and culturally-specific recruitment and retention programs, and campus community and relationships, including smaller schools, advisors, relatable faculty (especially in terms of age & race), and finding people from similar backgrounds.

In addition, we have compiled a list of the specific **programs and resources** (see full list on page 24) participants cited as critical to their postsecondary success.

KEY LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several overarching lessons and related recommendations emerged regarding barriers and supports to enrolling and completing postsecondary education for adult learners of color. These are consistent with general research and practitioner literatures and also reflect the specific voices and needs of study participants in Oregon.

Adult learners of color are juggling many commitments: most are managing school in addition to work, parenting, as well as other responsibilities and causes of stress within a challenging socio-political economic environment.

- Recommendation(s): Create structural and institutional supports that address complex student needs, such as childcare, health care, affordable housing, and accessible mental health resources. Colleges should address student needs by making school more accessible; specific issues to address include scheduling of courses, helping students understand links between college and work, building social and professional capital of students of color (i.e. internships), pacing and workload of programs, clarity about credits transferring, and social supports/community-building such as student of color groups/programming.

Costs of education (and fear of costs, loans, and debt) are a central barrier to adult learners enrolling and staying in school.

- Recommendation(s): Make college affordable and economically accessible. Strategies to achieve this include: lower tuition, addressing hidden costs (i.e. books and fees), financial support for housing and other basic needs, access to scholarships, and financial support not linked to immigration status.

Reflection and representation in college (and messages before) that affirm identities and create a sense of belonging are critical to the success of adult learners of color.

- Recommendation(s): Recruit and retain faculty/staff of color and role models that reflect student population; build sustainable community and support systems on campuses for adult students of color; utilize positive, inclusive, and culturally-reflective messaging before and during college; implement systems and supports for addressing oppressive

behaviors on campus.

Students, families, and communities of color need accurate, culturally-responsive information about higher education.

- Recommendation(s): Provide advising, mentorship, and guidance (before and during college) that is holistic, informative, and culturally-responsive/reflective, including support for students who are struggling and support specific to navigating higher education as a person of color; education, outreach, and programming for students, families, and communities about college, including culturally-specific programming and information for undocumented students and families.

BACKGROUND

PROJECT HISTORY

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) is engaged in multiple initiatives to increase educational attainment and workforce development among Oregonians in support of the 40-40-20 goal and the Adult Attainment Goal. The initiative to increase educational attainment for underrepresented people of color, funded by Lumina Foundation's Talent, Innovation, and Equity (TIE) Partnership Grant, is part of this ongoing work. The TIE project focused on decreasing racial disparities in educational attainment between the overall population of students in Oregon and African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American/Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students. In early 2019, HECC issued a request for proposals for focus group research to identify barriers to completion for underrepresented students of color in Oregon and implications for messaging that would facilitate their re-entry in education and workforce training. Two primary groups were sought for engagement in this research: currently enrolled students and those who had enrolled and left. A third group, adults who had never enrolled in postsecondary education, was proposed for possible inclusion. The emphasis in recruitment was on adult learners (over age 24), rather than traditional-aged students.

This project is the result of a collaboration between researchers at Portland State University (PSU) and Southern Oregon University (SOU), which allowed for the inclusion of focus groups and interviews with people of color across Oregon. Participants whose voices are included here live in larger urban areas like Portland and Salem as well as rural regions such as La Grande, Umatilla, Medford, Ashland, and Klamath Falls. Given the proliferation of online programs, a significant number of participants live in one part of the state and attend school in another part. This work has been informed by our Advisory Group, which includes representatives from PSU and SOU, and will be used to develop messaging to support re-entry for adult learners from underrepresented communities of color and inform higher education policy.

PROJECT RELEVANCE: 21ST CENTURY STUDENTS

Lumina Foundation has noted the ways that today's college students differ from postsecondary students in previous generations, dubbing this group "21st Century Students" (Shapiro et al., 2017). On a national level, today's college students tend to be older (37% are 25 or older), people of color (42%), and first-generation college students (46%) (Lumina Foundation, 2019). Almost a quarter of them have children, 40% work full time, and 57% live independently. Their economic situation is one of increasing precarity: over half of these students live in families at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, 68% graduate with student loan debt, and 36% report that they do not know where their next meal is coming from.

These trends in student demographics and experiences are reflected at a state level as well. Across Oregon, one-quarter of all postsecondary students identify as people of color, and 16% identify as first-generation (59% of all students' first-generation status is unknown) (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2019). Among the 445,378 postsecondary students in Oregon, 42% are unable to meet their expenses and 43% of all undergraduates have federal loans. The inability to meet college expenses with expected resources (family contributions, student earnings, and grant aid) was higher among Hispanic/Latinx (47%) and Asian American (53%) students than among Black/African American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or white students (all 40%), or Native American/Alaskan Native students (38%).

The demographics of college students have changed: students are older and more racially diverse than previous generations. Many are first-generation college students, and experiences of economic precarity are becoming more common. These nationwide trends are reflected in Oregon as well. The present research project was undertaken to understand how adult learners (and potential adult learners) from communities of color are experiencing barriers to education, and the supports or interventions that are facilitating their persistence.

METHODOLOGY

METHODS

Interviews and focus groups were the primary methods used for this study in order to make participation as accessible as possible. While both focus groups and interviews yielded useful and comparable data, it is important to note that these methods use different processes.

- **Focus groups** assume that meaning-making can occur collectively and that building community with others who may have a shared experience can emerge as an additional benefit of the research process.
- **Interviews**, on the other hand, offer greater logistical flexibility as well as greater depth of sharing from individuals about their specific personal experiences.

Both methods center lived experiences and capturing the perspectives, meaning-making, and voices of communities and individuals. For this project, both approaches offered rich avenues for better understanding the strengths, barriers and resources needed to best support adult learners of color.

RECRUITMENT

Our recruitment centered three populations of adults from underrepresented and marginalized communities:

- those who **currently attend** a community college or university
- those who **enrolled and had left** postsecondary education for a year or more
- those who have **never enrolled**

The regions selected for focus groups typically contained a community college or university and we collaborated with the institutional research department and relevant student services programs from those schools to reach out to potential participants currently enrolled in these institutions.

Adult learners who had enrolled and left were difficult to access through institutions, and often their contact information had changed from what the colleges had on record. Thus, for those who had enrolled and left higher education and those who had never enrolled, we reached out to employment and community organizations and asked them to share study information with their constituencies. These organizations included: culturally-specific organizations, WorkSource Oregon, Head Start, trade unions, and larger employers. In addition, flyers and information about the project were distributed in unemployment offices, libraries, grocery stores, through informal networks (such as a community-based soccer team) and through word of mouth. If people were interested in participating in the study, they contacted us to determine eligibility and set up an interview.

DATA COLLECTION

Interviews & focus groups were conducted with 111 adult learners of color from across the state of Oregon (focusing on African American, Latinx/Hispanic, Indigenous/Native American, Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiians). Of this total, 72 participated in individual interviews and 39 participated in one of seven focus groups. The interview and focus group guides (Appendix D) for all three groups in the sample were developed by the research team based on the study focus and with substantial input from the project's Advisory Group (given their expertise in issues related to communities of color and higher education). Each participant received a $40 gift card upon completion of the focus group or interview. All focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for this study, and all participants completed informed consent prior to beginning the focus group or interview. In addition, basic demographic information was collected from each participant.

- **Focus groups** were held on college campuses in a quiet, private location and were held at times accessible to the most participants. Focus groups ranged from two to eleven participants and were approximately 1.5-2 hours in length.
- **Interviews** were held in a variety of locations that were most convenient to participants, including: via video or phone, workplaces, or public locations such as coffee shops. Interviews ranged from approximately 25-75 minutes.

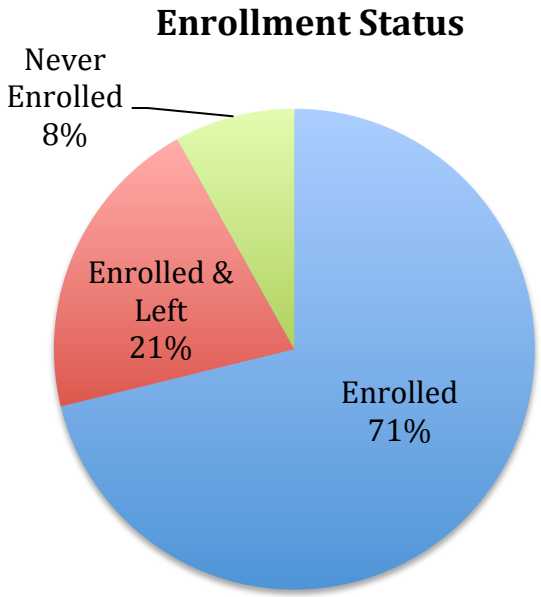
STUDY PARTICIPANTS

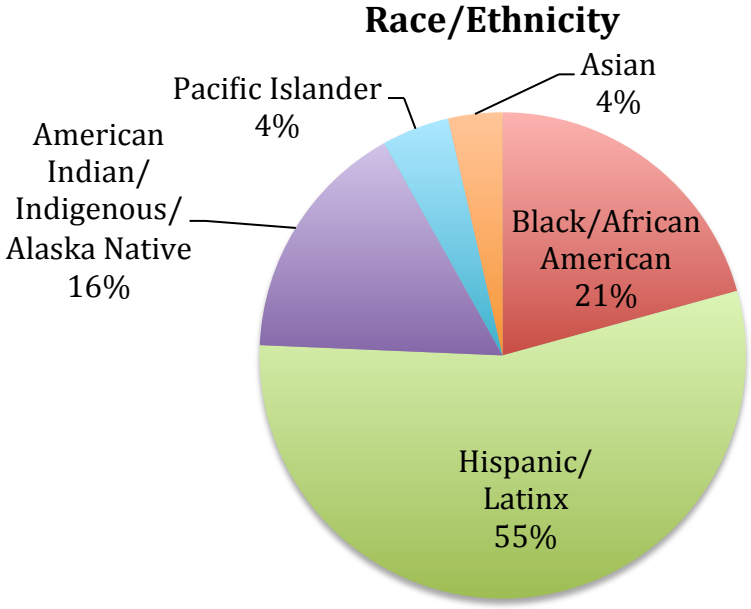
Participants were recruited from across the state of Oregon and included people who were enrolled in postsecondary education, those who had enrolled and left, and those who have never enrolled. Within these groups, targeted recruitment was focused on Adult Learners (age 25-64) who identify as Black/African American, Latinx, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous/Native American. The majority of focus groups and interviews were conducted in English (with one to two interviews conducted in Spanish). PSU and SOU researchers and research assistants also reflected diverse, multiracial identities representing white, Black, Latinx, South Asian, women, LGBTQ, and first-generation college student communities.

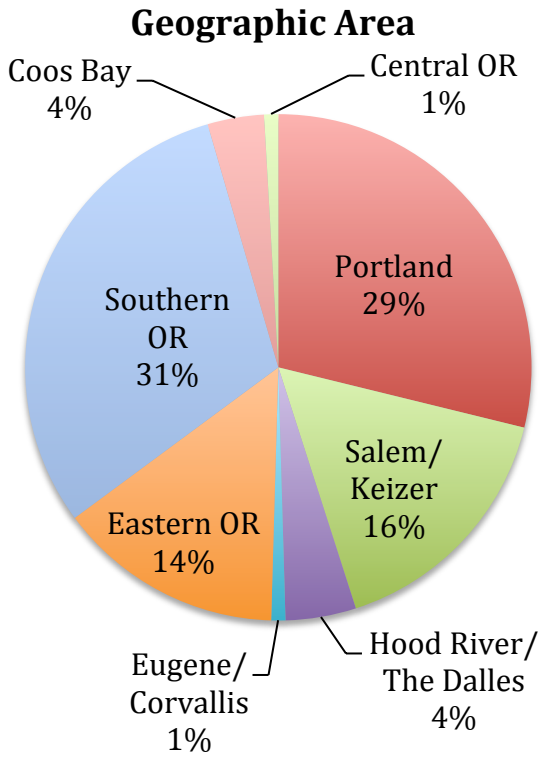
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

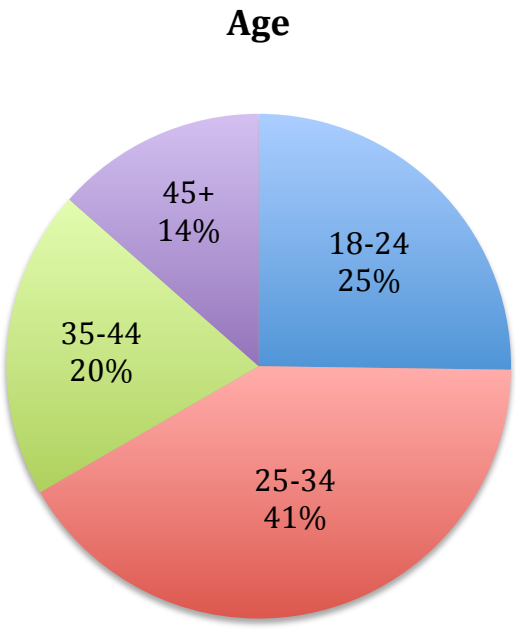
Across focus groups and interviews, there were a total of 111 participants: 39 participants in seven focus groups and 72 individual interviews, all from various regions of the state of Oregon. Of the participants who disclosed gender identity, 74 identified as women, 35 as men, and one as non-binary. Almost exactly half of the participants were parents and approximately 21% of the total sample disclosed living with a disability. The racial/ethnic identification of participants was reflective of the broader demographics of the state; it was also notable that there was fairly substantive representation of multi-racial individuals within the sample, which is also consistent with demographic trends in the Pacific Northwest region. Specific demographic information on racial/ethnic identification, age, geographic region and enrollment status for the entire sample are

illustrated below. Given the salience of enrollment status in the project, we also provide demographic breakdowns by enrollment status; these illustrations are located in Appendix C. Please note that in the geographic information, Eastern Oregon refers to La Grande and Umatilla, Southern Oregon refers to Medford, Ashland and Klamath Falls, and Central Oregon refers to Bend, Redmond, Madras and Warm Springs. Also note that racial/ethnic data was based on participant self-identification; however, those categories have been collapsed for reporting purposes. For example, participants within the Hispanic/Latinx category may identify as Hispanic, Latinx, Mexican, Puerto Rican, etc. When using quotes from individuals we have used their preferred self-identification.









DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis of the data focused on understanding students' experiences and perspectives regarding higher education, specifically: barriers in accessing postsecondary education/training, supports and resources that facilitate student success, and recommendations from participants of things that would make it easier for adult learners of color to enroll and stay in college. Throughout the analysis, attention was paid to individual, family, community, institutional, and structural factors that impact student experiences and access to higher education. Analysis and interpretation was conducted using a systematic, iterative process that allowed for ongoing group discussion about emergent themes. To add to the trustworthiness and rigor of the analysis, preliminary findings were discussed with the project Advisory Group who asked questions and provided input into analysis and implications of the findings.

FINDINGS

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

Consistent with other national research, the participants in our study had complex, busy lives and were juggling multiple commitments, including school, parenting and family responsibilities, and often working multiple jobs. The barriers and challenges that adult learners faced in enrolling and staying in school were quite consistent across groups, regardless of enrollment status: economic/financial barriers, social/cultural factors, institutional (or school-level) barriers and challenges, and structural oppression and identity-based exclusion. The table below shows the complex matrix of barrier types and specific barriers within each type. The remainder of this section describes each barrier narratively.

Economic	Social/Cultural	Institutional	Structural & Identity-based
Managing costs of school	Messages before college from family & high school	Navigating campus & academic life	Experiencing racism on campus
Meeting basic needs	Relational losses	Lack of support for students w/children	Lack of representation of BIPOC on campus
Employment			Documentation status & navigating immigration
			Historical & contextual oppression & exclusion

Economic Barriers & Challenges

Managing Costs of School

The costs of school were one of the most consistent barriers named by all participants. Given how expensive college is, loans and debt (and/or the fear of it) were central in how adult learners thought about their educational choices. One currently enrolled student spoke to the cost of college as "trap":

> *"We've all kind of come to the understanding that we are kind of in this trap...where college is priced as a luxury but treated like it's mandatory."*
> --Black & Taiwanese female, currently enrolled, Portland, age 21

Challenges in accessing scholarships and financial aid were noted by participants in terms of difficulty in knowing where to find scholarships, being unfamiliar with financial aid options and processes, and/or not being eligible due to various life circumstances (including immigration status, legal challenges, family financial situation, etc.). In addition, many participants who were or had been in college talked about hidden costs such as books and fees as unexpectedly adding to the cost of their education. One participant shared about his experiences with hidden costs:

> *"Money just started pouring out and I didn't know where it was going ...there's like hidden payments here and there. Like, I'd be like, oh, this is how much I have to pay for that class. And then when I start the class, I got all the books, then the teacher would be like, "oh, wait, there's other stuff you have to get. And it's not just like, oh, it's a $20 book or something like that. No, it was like a $200 book, a $100 book"*
> --Hispanic (and white) male, currently enrolled, Umatilla, age 24

Meeting Basic Needs

In addition to the costs of school, participants repeatedly shared about the challenges in meeting basic needs and the high cost of living that made it difficult to pay for and stay in school. This included lack of affordable housing, high healthcare costs, food insecurity, and lack of accessible mental health services.

Employment

Given the above mentioned financial challenges, most participants (whether in school or not) worked hard—often in multiple jobs, and working long hours. Many adult learners also struggled to balance their work schedules and employers' expectations with the demands and structure of college.

Social/Cultural Barriers & Challenges

Messages before College from Family & High School

Messages from family, high school, friends, and community all impacted how participants viewed college, their beliefs about going to school, and what educational pathway they pursued. Many participants reflected that they did not get any messages about college from their family or, in some cases, received direct or indirect messages that "we don't need to go" to college or that work is more important than school. Along gender lines, some women in the sample got the message that parenting and becoming a mother was more important than attending college. First-generation students also named that they didn't receive information about college from family members due to their unfamiliarity with college or school-related processes (such as financial aid or applications). A number of Latina participants also shared that they felt they could not go away for school but instead needed to stay geographically close to their families because of cultural expectations, care work, or as connected to the belief that family is more important than school.

In addition to family messages, participants reflected on messages received in high school regarding college. Participants spoke to witnessing certain students (often white students) being tracked into Advanced Placement (AP) courses and college-prep while others were not expected to go to college. In addition, students were sometimes discouraged from seeking postsecondary education as they were told they were not smart enough for college or that college was "too hard". One participant shared about messages from her high school counselor that were particularly disempowering:

> *"...I remember going to visit my advisor, my counselor in high school and I remember sitting in her office and, and her telling me, hey, you know, you just need to graduate high school. And that's it. And that's all you have to do. And I'm like, okay, I'm like, but you know, I want to go to college. And she's like, no, college is not for you. You're not going to be able to afford it. And you're not going to be successful in college. And so, you just need to focus on graduating right now. And that's it...hearing sort of that discouragement from specifically someone who I think should have been part of the number one group supporting me and encouraging me regardless of where my academic standing was and not having that person supporting me, I think really discouraged me."*
> --Mexican woman, currently enrolled, La Grande, age 28

Relational Losses

Many participants shared about how their relationships had been impacted while in school or how they imagined their relationships could be impacted if they went to school. Related to the realities of juggling many responsibilities in addition to school, many shared the challenges of balancing family time expectations and sometimes needing to prioritize either school or family over the other. For first-generation college students, there was sometimes a sense that their family and loved ones don't understand what it is like to be in school, including the expectations and stressors of higher education. Relatedly, some participants reported feeling that they were leaving community or family behind if they sought higher education and others had not.

Institutional Barriers & Challenges

Navigating Campus & Academic Life

For students currently enrolled in college, or who had enrolled and left, a number of challenges to navigating aspects of campus and academic life created barriers for them. Since students are managing complicated and full schedules, sometimes they found the timing of classes and campus resources to be inaccessible if only offered during the day or on weekdays, etc. Some participants also found the coursework itself to be a challenge: high workload, topics that didn't match areas of interest, and fast pacing of classes and programs were specifically named as challenges. Students who were transferring credits also found it challenging to figure out how to do this between systems and didn't always find accurate information.

Relatedly, the lack of advising and mentorship was repeatedly named as a challenge. Adult learners reported feeling that they had a lack of guidance (before and during college) and even had received poor advising or misinformation from staff at the institution. Many also spoke about the lack of guidance prior to enrolling in college. Some participants also shared that they lacked community in their college context that also impacted their sense of belonging and support.

Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian students in particular noted that they came to Oregon from their respective geographic and cultural communities. Coming to college was the first time to mainland United States for many, and they were unable to return home for the academic year. They reported feelings of isolation from their home and academic communities. Students said this isolation coupled with economic strain caused them to go home after a year of study.

Lack of Support for Students with Children

Approximately half of the adult learners we spoke with were parents and had significant family caregiving responsibilities at the same time they were attending college. Overwhelmingly participants talked about the lack of supports for students with children, particularly in regard to accessing affordable childcare (on or off campus). Many reflected on the lived experiences of managing school and parenting in terms of impacts on time they could spend with their child and how hard it is to balance parenting time and school work. Lastly, for many students with children, having children or other parenting factors impacted their higher education pathway. For instance, they may have left school because of becoming pregnant or felt more able to return to school once their children were school-aged.

> *"Juggling work, school, work, homework. Even attending classes and taking care of them at the same time. With my son, I try to do my homework … I don't want to pay a babysitter when I'm doing my homework, much more than I already have to do when I work. I work ten-hour shifts, so that's … the babysitter is with him ten hours. So, I don't want to give him away even more than the time I can't spend with him.*
> *So, I try to do my homework when he's around. But he just like scribbles all over my stuff, and tries to get on my computer and type stuff. He has erased a lot of stuff [laugh] that I've had to re-do. It can be a barrier at times…"*
> --Hispanic/Latina woman, currently enrolled, Salem, age 24

Structural Oppression & Identity-Based Exclusion

Experiencing Racism on Campus

Systems of oppression such as racism, xenophobia, and sexism and identity-based exclusion were significant barriers for adult learners to enrolling and staying in school. Participants shared experiences of racism from peers and/or in their college environment that impacted their sense of belonging and well-being on campus.

> *"I recently had a situation where ... there was a white supremacist sticker, right outside of the dorm I'm staying in. And it was like "being white is okay." Like I scrawled over it and stuff. So, it's like, obviously there's a legacy of white supremacy [in academia]."*
> --Native Hawaiian and white woman, currently enrolled, Portland, age 24

Lack of representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) on campus (including faculty, staff, mentors and peers)

Adult learners of color consistently noted the lack of representation and reflection of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) faculty, staff, mentors, and peers and how that contributed to isolation and feeling excluded in the college context. Some participants also named the reduction in funding for culturally-specific campus programs, which not only decreased their support system on campus but also signaled that culturally-specific spaces were not valued by the institution. A few participants also spoke about feeling tokenized as students of color on their campuses.

Documentation Status and Navigating Immigration

Documentation status and navigating immigration was also a substantial challenge for many adult learners. A number of participants spoke to the ways that their educational pathways and/or access to financial resources were disrupted by dealing with immigration status and barriers. This meant sometimes having to leave school, dealing with the emotional toll of having precarious status, having to pay higher tuition, and/or navigating their immigration status in relationship to campus and community resources.

Historical and Contextual Oppression and Exclusion

In addition to current and campus-based experiences of exclusion, participants also spoke to historical and contextual experiences of oppression that impacted their relationship to college. Prior to enrolling in higher education, participants had sometimes heard and internalized messages about their social group that influenced how they and others saw their college potential; for example, getting messages that people of color don't attend college or that women don't need to go to college. One participant spoke to how the larger economic systems and gentrification had impacted the quality of K-12 education for working class and poor BIPOC who then may have a harder time accessing college. Another participant spoke specifically to historical trauma and the role schooling had played for Native American people historically that impacted how they experience and think about higher education today.

SUPPORTS & INTERVENTIONS

In our analysis of support and interventions, we noted correspondence between barriers and the support, help, or interventions that facilitated access to and retention in postsecondary education. Because participants who had never enrolled didn't have experiences in postsecondary education, our analysis shifted to noting the potential supports or interventions in their pathways. We've also included a list of specific programs and resources participants highlighted during data collection. The table below shows the complex matrix of support types and specific supports within each type. The remainder of this section describes each support narratively.

Economic	Social/Cultural	Institutional
Paying for tuition	Access to college campuses: pre-college experiences	Institutional accessibility
Paying for other costs associated with school	Family and friend support	Campus community and relationships
	Alignment between work and school	
	Individual & community resilience	

Economic Supports & Interventions

Because of the gravity of school-related economic concerns voiced by the majority of participants, supports and interventions that addressed paying for college were paramount. Broadly, these economic supports covered one of two areas: tuition or the array of costs associated with schooling (what one participant called "the hidden costs" above).

Paying for Tuition

Currently enrolled and enrolled and left students were supported by grants, tuition assistance (veterans) or employer-paid schooling, work study, or on-campus jobs that came with tuition reduction or remission.

Paying Other Costs Associated With School

Scholarships were a commonly-mentioned source of paying tuition and costs associated with school, although participants noted that in order for scholarships to be a support, they needed information about how to access them and put together an application. One participant noted the importance of putting together quick applications due to deadlines or simply the business of students' lives. Many students noted that attending community college for all or part of one's educational pathway was a support due to the lower cost of attendance. Low-cost or no-cost textbooks, and classes that didn't require textbooks at all, were another economic support.

Social and Cultural Supports & Interventions

This category of support included several sub-themes: pre-college access to experiences on campus, family and friend support, alignment between work and school, and individual and community resilience.

Access to College Campuses: Pre-college experiences

The majority of access-related supports occurred during high school, including campus tours that sometimes involved practical skill development like learning how to do research or fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or college application. Participants also gained valuable exposure to college through Running Start or Advanced Placement[2]. Participants also gained access to campus in other ways: some participants were employed on a university campus as service workers, which de-mystified postsecondary education. Another participant gained access by helping her own child apply, and in the process realized she could enroll in college, too.

Family and Friend Support

Participants often cited family and friends as an important source of support, including practical supports like providing childcare, housing and basic needs, and paying for school-related costs. Family and friends were also a source of information and encouragement. However, another form of support arose from participants' relationships to family and friends. Participants shared the desire to make a better life for their families or to be a role model for other family members (such as siblings) by completing college.

Other participants who were parents shared that wanting to be a role model for their children or the desire to finish schooling for their families was a significant motivator to stay in school. As one participant voiced:

> *"I want to show my daughter that you can get a higher education, you can finish school and be successful, you can be somebody"*
> --Latinx woman, currently enrolled, Medford, age 47

[2] Running Start is a dual enrollment program where high school juniors and seniors take coursework at a local college; Advanced Placement is a program within high schools that offers college-level curriculum, examinations, and potentially college credit.

Alignment Between Work and School

A powerful source of support for participants was their own meaning-making about college. It was particularly important for them to be able to draw a clear connection between their schooling and the work they were doing or wanted to do. Participants who had specific career goals in mind or believed their degree would lead to meaningful and/or living wage employment saw this as a support in their postsecondary success. Another aspect of this came from students' workplaces, as many participants were working in addition to attending school. Participants with employers that supported their schooling or participants who saw other co-workers getting degrees saw this as a support. While negative employment experiences were a barrier, a few participants noted that it was a "bad job" that motivated them to start or stay in school. A final aspect of this alignment was manifested by their schools or programs: participants who had professional development experiences (resume development, interview practice) or internships that built social capital identified these as supports in their school experience.

> *"For me, I think it was because I was getting really burnt out at work. I had to do medical records and I've been doing it for seven years and was like, 'do I really want to be here for the rest of my life behind the desk answering phones?' And I was like no this is not what I want. So I actually got pulled to go to jury duty for two months and I loved it and said this is what I need to do. I need to get out of records and get back school. So I decided to finally take that step."*
>
> --Hispanic woman, currently enrolled, Klamath Falls, age 30

Individual and Community Resilience

A final category of social and cultural supports seemed to emanate from participants, but was always contextualized within their views of themselves as members of a broader community. As people of color, many participants recognized education as a way of being heard and respected in a society that often discounts the voices and experiences of people of color. A prominent theme for Hispanic/Latinx participants was the role of immigration in their families' stories, and the purpose of immigration: to give them access to education. Hispanic/Latinx participants often shared that "I needed to be the one to break the cycle...go to higher education" or that "families are depending on us…" and that education was "the ticket out of poverty". Community resilience was a strong source of support for participants, and similar to family and friend support, this often flowed from the participant to the community, such as in this quote:

> *"What keeps me in school is, one; as an elder, all of the other people of color around me. If I get disheartened or drop out--chances are, they will too. And when you're an elder in any branch of my culture, you have to live by a higher moral standard. And you have to bring that to the people that surround you, so they can see it."*
>
> --Native American/Hawaiian woman, currently enrolled, Klamath Falls, age 64

Both currently enrolled and enrolled and left students noted the advantages of being non-traditional, adult learners. Many participants noted that they felt better positioned to take advantage of their education; for example, they were more likely to talk to instructors or seek out tutoring.

> *"I've learned more in my second time around going to school."*
> --Latina and South American woman, enrolled and left, The Dalles, age 39

Institutional Supports & Interventions

Institutional Accessibility

Institutional accessibility included physical aspects, such as satellite campuses that were closer to home, or accessibility through online program options. It also included modifications to curriculum or offerings, such as shorter programs with a quicker time to degree, and the ability for students to receive credit for prior experiences, including military service.

Campus Community and Relationships

Faculty, staff, and fellow students were important sources of support for participants, and some cited smaller schools with lower faculty-to-student ratios as a reason for selecting a school and finishing. Participants noted the importance of relatable faculty, especially in terms of age and race, and the significance of seeing faculty of color from their own communities. Advising and mentors were pivotal in supporting participant success as students, and participants who found a community of peers from similar backgrounds fared better in school.

PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

During analysis we created a list of the programs and resources that participants identified as facilitating their enrollment and persistence in postsecondary education. These programs and resources often addressed multiple barriers and included college-based programs, pre-college/high school programs, and community-based programs. For example, the ACCESS program (see below) includes advising, tuition remission, referral to resources, and courses in college success, cutting across economic and institutional barriers. The names and categories of these programs and resources are listed below; a brief description of each is located in Appendix F.

Support Programs Identified by Participants

Postsecondary based programs

- TRiO
- Campus resource centers (culturally-specific, women's, veteran's)
    - Atmos Program
    - ACCESS (Accessing the Cultural Capital Essential to Student Success)
    - New Directions
- Chemeketa Foundation
- STEPS Program (expectant and parenting students)

Pre-college/high school programs

- AVID
- Senior Inquiry
- Fifth-year program

Community-based programs and resources

- Big Brother/Big Sister
- Oregon Human Development Corporation
- Dress for Success

Potential Supports for Those Who Have Never Enrolled in College

As noted above, our approach to analysis differed with participants who were never enrolled in college given their unique relationship to schooling. However, we still noted potential sources of support for postsecondary access in their pathways based on their perspectives and strengths. These included economic and workforce development, including employer-paid training that led to certifications, such as becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) or community health worker. Particularly in rural areas with less access to postsecondary options, employer-paid training provided an avenue for participants to advance in their careers without a degree. Their pathways also included social and cultural support, such as opportunities to build relationships with other people learning English, which was salient because never enrolled participants noted that speaking and writing English was a barrier. Another social and cultural support noted by multiple never enrolled participants was their ideas about how other people's views of them would change if they had a college degree.

Similar to other participants, we saw elements of individual and community resilience in the never enrolled participants, as they spoke about their abilities as readers and students (indeed, at least one never enrolled participant had graduated with a college scholarship, but simply lacked

access to people who could help her know how to use it). Bilingualism, their knowledge of community needs, and ability to advocate for their communities were other potential sources of support. Finally, we noted institutional support in their pathways, including experiences on postsecondary campuses (e.g. in ESL classes), their memories of campus tours in high school, and their ongoing desire to attend college and attention to interesting classes.

> *"...but when I see people, older than I... taking college courses and then I see how they're flexing their schedules, their life, they're all involved in school...it's never too late."*
> --Hispanic woman, never enrolled, The Dalles, age 32

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

All participants (enrolled in college, enrolled and left, and never enrolled) were asked the question: *What would make it easier for students of color to enroll and stay in college?* In response, many key themes emerged that were reflective of and confirmed the barriers and supports outlined above:

- Help with costs/financial supports: school (including hidden costs) and basic needs
- Community and support for BIPOC students
    - Increase diversity and representation of BIPOC faculty/staff
    - Support groups/clubs
- Advising, mentorship, and guidance (before and during school as well as at critical times when students may be struggling)
- Education about college for students and families, including outreach and community-specific programs
- Early messages and recruitment of BIPOC for college (HS and before), including social media and commercials
- Childcare support
- Better access to school-based resources, including longer hours for resource centers, the ability to access writing centers on weekends, etc.
- Non-degree options like certificates, courses, and training

KEY LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In speaking with over 100 participants across the state, several overarching lessons and related recommendations emerged regarding barriers and supports to enrolling and completing postsecondary education for adult learners of color. These lessons and recommendations are consistent with general research and practitioner literatures and also reflect the specific voices and needs of study participants in Oregon.

Adult learners of color are juggling many commitments: most are managing school in addition to work, parenting, as well as other responsibilities and causes of stress within a challenging socio-political economic environment.

- Recommendation(s): Create structural and institutional supports that address complex student needs, such as childcare, health care, affordable housing, and accessible mental health resources. Colleges should address student needs by making school more accessible; specific issues to address include scheduling of courses, helping students understand links between college and work, building social and professional capital of students of color (i.e. internships), pacing and workload of programs, clarity about credit transferring, and social supports/community-building such as student of color groups/programming.

Costs of education (and fear of costs, loans, and debt) are a central barrier to adult learners enrolling and staying in school.

- Recommendation(s): Make college affordable and economically accessible. Strategies to achieve this include: lower tuition, addressing hidden costs (i.e. books and fees), financial support for housing and other basic needs, access to scholarships, and financial support not linked to immigration status.

Reflection and representation in college (and messages before) that affirm identities and create sense of belonging are critical to the success of adult learners of color.

- Recommendation(s): Recruit and retain faculty/staff of color and role models that reflect student population; build sustainable community and support systems on campuses for adult students of color; utilize positive, inclusive, and culturally-reflective messaging before and during college; implement systems and supports for addressing oppressive behaviors on campus.

Students, families, and communities of color need accurate, culturally-responsive information about higher education.

- Recommendation(s): Provide advising, mentorship, and guidance (before and during college) that is holistic, informative, and culturally-responsive/reflective, including support for students who are struggling and support specific to navigating higher education as a person of color; education, outreach, and programming for students, families, and communities about college, including culturally-specific programming and information for undocumented students and families.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MESSAGING

In addition to identifying barriers and supports to continuous enrollment and completion, one of the aims of this project was to consider how messaging might specifically encourage recruitment, reentry, and/or retention of adult students of color into postsecondary education and training. Given our findings, we propose several key themes that are important to highlight in marketing and messaging materials.

- Normalize long and non-linear educational pathways by shifting the narrative away from 4 years of college as the "correct" or successful path. Instead, highlight that it is okay to finish school in longer time, that it is common to take breaks and return, and that completion is valuable regardless of how long it takes.
- Include meaningful representation and reflection of racially diverse communities, including age, gender, and geographic representation in marketing materials. Potential learners need to see themselves and people from their communities represented to feel a connection to the message.
- Shape the narrative around the relationship between school and work. Show how a degree may change earning potential or job options, and/or offer specific examples of how people have shaped their work trajectory through education.
- Given how paramount cost and financial considerations are for students, messaging is needed that addresses the costs of school, speaks to the real fears of loans and debt, and highlights potential financial resources such as scholarships and financial aid options.
- Across all messaging, diversify where and how messages are delivered to ensure they are shared in relevant locations (including social media and high schools) and target not only individuals but also families and communities.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Findings from this exploration point to the need for more focused research to continue to build a deeper understanding of the specific and nuanced experiences of various adult learner groups. Due, in part, to the short timeline of this project, some geographic areas were not as well represented in our sample and the numbers of never enrolled adults were lower than anticipated, resulting in some limitations to the findings. Based on these limitations, we propose the following as suggestions for future research:

- Further examination of specific racial/ethnic groups and/or geographic areas around the state, specifically Native American/Indigenous and Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian communities, Central Oregon, and the Coast; more exploration of labor and economic trends in various regions and impacts on postsecondary enrollment and completion
- More targeted exploration of the experiences of people of color who have never enrolled in higher education, including: consideration of how to frame research questions, diverse

recruitment approaches (including relationship building with community organizations to help with recruitment), and questions focused on the specific experiences of this group

- Gendered analysis of postsecondary educational experiences, messages, and meaning-making about college
- Research with students of color who have graduated to better understand how college impacts their lives, trajectories, and beliefs about college over time
- Examination of campus climate and its impact on adult learners of color who are enrolled in college or enrolled and left (i.e. microaggressions, systems and supports for addressing oppression on campus, etc.)
- Impact of current higher education funding models on institutional options/programs/courses, particularly in offering non-degree options and better understanding the ways that funding models impact student options and experiences
- Research to better understand the role and contemporary impact of historical trauma and different communities of color's historic relationship to higher education

LIST OF APPENDICES

A. Research team: members, affiliations & roles
B. Advisory Group: members & affiliations
C. Participant demographics by enrollment status
D. Data collection instruments: demographic information, interview guide, focus group guide
E. Participant recruitment flyers
F. Support programs identified by participants
G. Literature review: Underrepresented adult learners and barriers to access and retention
H. Literature review: Interventions that support retention of underrepresented adult learners
I. HECC request for project proposals for focus groups on barriers to postsecondary success
J. Grant deliverables

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH TEAM: MEMBERS, AFFILIATIONS AND ROLES

Portland State University

- Dr. Roberta Hunte, PI
- Dr. Miranda Mosier, Co-PI
- Dr. Gita Mehrotra, Co-PI
- Anita Gooding, Research Assistant
- Kahlil Wall-Johnson, Research Assistant
- Patty Romero, Research Assistant
- Hans VanDerShaaf, Project Management Support
- Kylee Sanders, Editorial Support for Final Report
- Kevin Cherry, Editorial Support for Final Report

Southern Oregon University

- Dr. Eva Skuratowicz, Co-PI
- Jennifer Riddick, Research Assistant
- Siena Sassone, Research Assistant

APPENDIX B

ADVISORY GROUP: MEMBERS & AFFILIATIONS

Portland State University

- Dr. Yves Labissiere, faculty in College of Urban and Public Affairs
- Dr. Rowanna Carpenter, faculty in University Studies
- Linda Liu, Program Director, TRiO-Student Support Services (SSS), Diversity and Multicultural Student Services
- Cynthia Gomez, Executive Director, Multicultural Affairs
- Perla Pinedo, Interim Assistant Vice President, Student Access and Success, Diversity and Multicultural Student Services
- Yohlunda Mosley, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management

Southern Oregon University

- Dr. Alma Rosa Alvarez, faculty in English

HECC

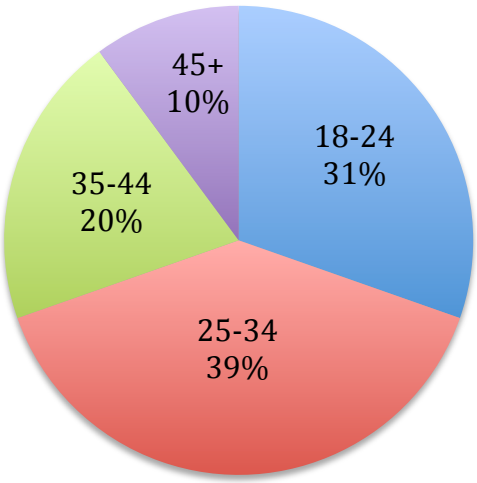
- Elizabeth Martinez - Deputy Director, Office of Research & Data
- Dr. Patrick Crane - Director, Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development

APPENDIX C

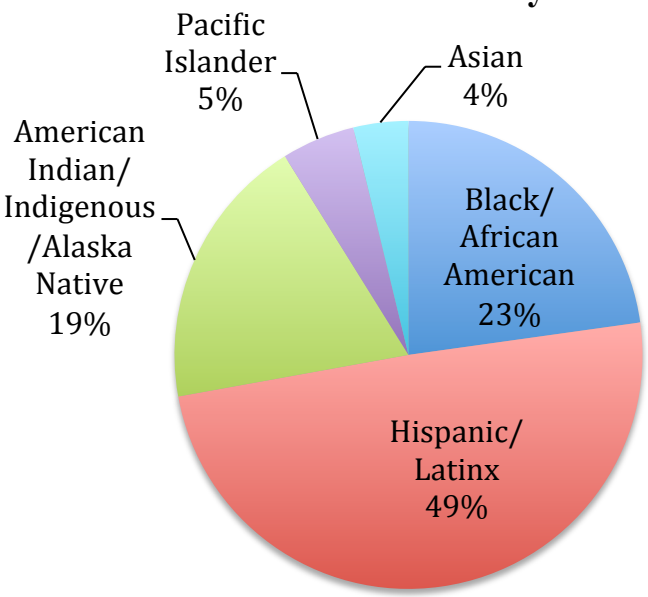
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS BY ENROLLMENT STATUS

ENROLLED, n=79

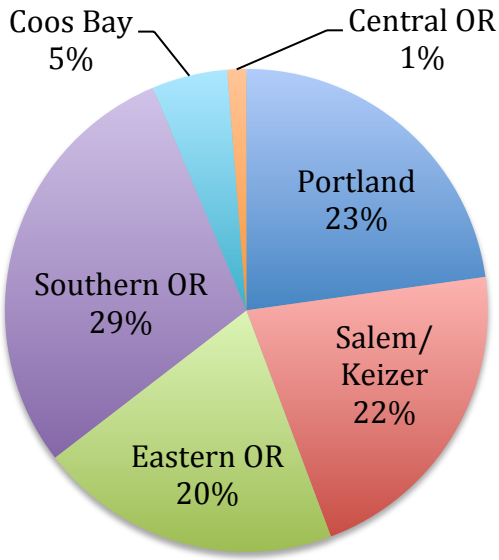
Age



Race/Ethnicity

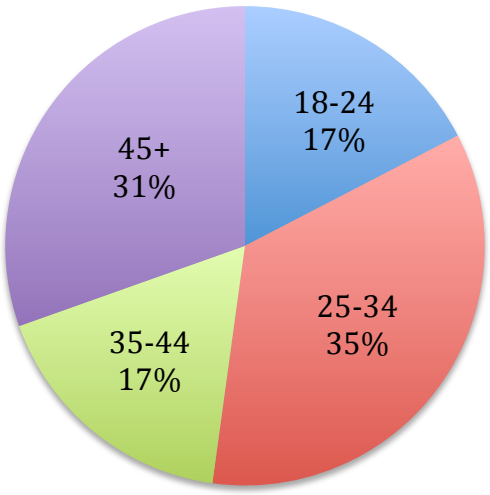


Geographic Area

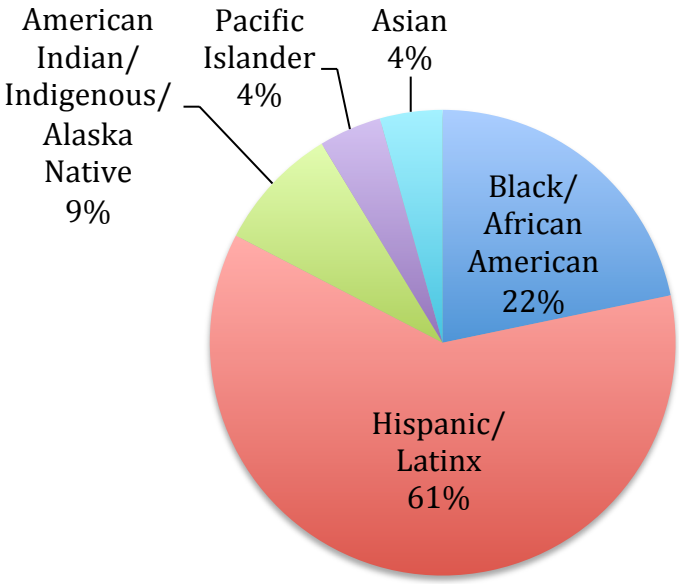


ENROLLED & LEFT, n=23

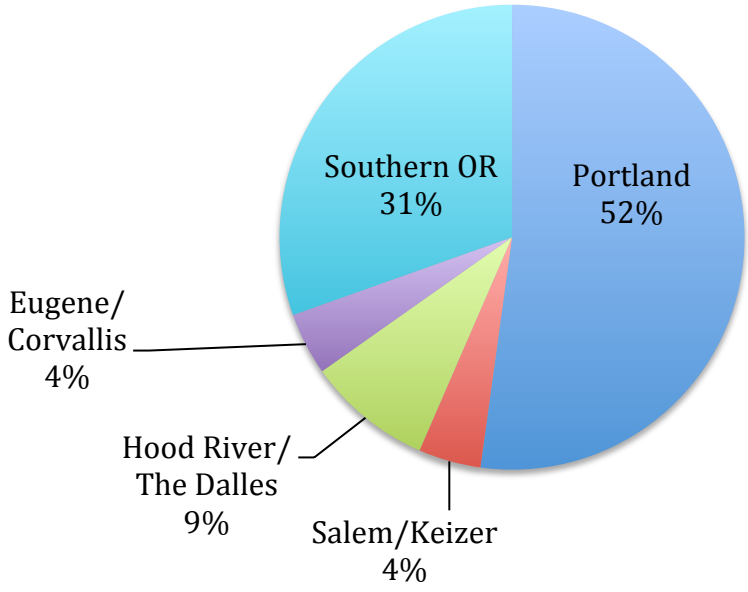
Age



Race/Ethnicity

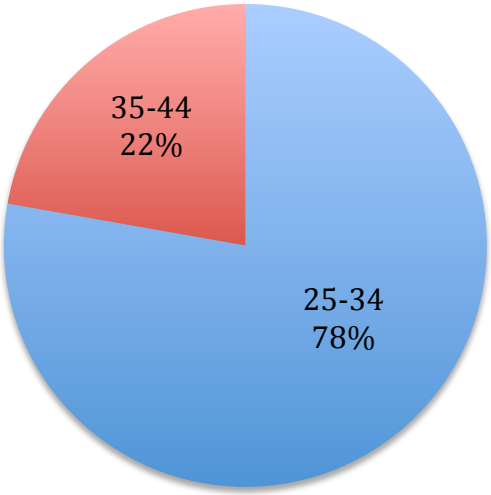


Geographic Area

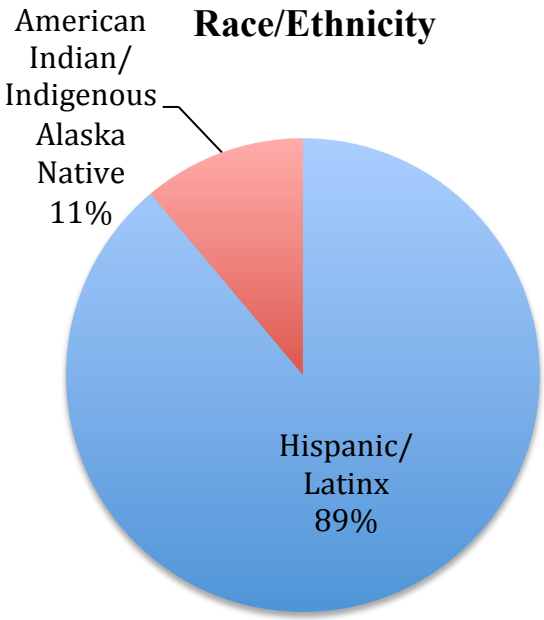


NEVER ENROLLED, n=9

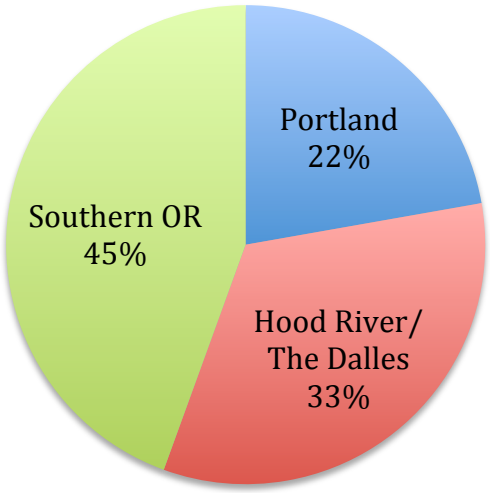
Age



Race/Ethnicity



Geographic Area



APPENDIX D

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION, INTERVIEW GUIDE, FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

HECC Adult Learner Focus Group/Interviews: Demographic Information
Currently Enrolled

Date:	
Interviewer:	
Region where go to school:	
Participant: (first and last name)	
What city/town do you live in?	
What school do you currently attend?	
When did you start attending this school?	
What is your major or subjects of interest?	
Age	
Race/Ethnicity	
Gender Identity	
Sexual Orientation	
Ability Status	
Are you the first person in your family to attend college/post-high school education?	Y N
Do you have children?	Y N
Other identities that are important to you that you would like to share?	

Additional comments/notes:	

HECC Adult Learner Focus Group/Interviews: Demographic Information
Enrolled & Left

Date:	
Interviewer:	
City/Region where went to school:	
Participant name: first and last name:	
What city/town do you live in?	
When you were enrolled in school, where did you attend?	
When did you start attending this school?	
When did you leave school?	
What was your major or subjects of interest?	
What are you doing in your life now? (job, etc.)	
Age	
Race/Ethnicity	
Gender Identity	
Sexual Orientation	
Ability Status	
Are you the first person in your family to attend college/post-high school education?	

Do you have children?	
Other identities that are important to you that you would like to share?	
Additional comments/notes:	

HECC Adult Learner Focus Group/Interviews: Demographic Information
Never Enrolled

Date:	
Interviewer:	
City/Region where they live	
Participant: first and last name	
What city/town do you live in?	
Current place of employment?	
Age	
Race/Ethnicity	
Gender Identity	
Sexual Orientation	
Ability Status	
Do you have children?	
Other identities that are important to you that you would like to share?	
Additional comments/notes:	

Currently enrolled
● Go over informed consent ● Demographic form Introductions: name , what are you doing in your life now? (school, work) Where do you currently go to school, major? What do you hope to do after you finish school? How long have you lived in Oregon? --if not from here: What brought you/your family to OR?
How did you decide to go to college? What were your goals? --What supports and resources helped facilitate this?
How did you learn about college? --What did you learn about college? --What do people in your family think about college ? --What do people in your community think about college?
How do your experiences in school align with (or not) your expectations about school? --How would you describe interactions with faculty, students? --What have been the biggest differences between what you expected and what you are experiencing now?
What is something that could be done to make it (structurally) easier for you to stay in school? (i.e. something your school could do)
What keeps you in school? What do you think keeps students from your community in school?
What is the biggest challenge you have faced while attending college? --What barriers have you experienced in relation to your degree?
How has going to college impacted your relationships outside of school?
Describe the significance of money in your decisions about seeking more education. Do you feel college is worth the cost?
As you think back to earlier schooling, what were your aspirations about school, work? (How) did they change over time, as you grew older?
What are your goals for school and work in the future?

--How do you imagine getting there? --What are the barriers you face in getting there? --What support do you wish existed?
What types of jobs are available in your region? What kind of education or training is needed for them? --do you plan to stay in OR/the region where you live after you finish school?
What do you think would make it easier for students of color to enroll and stay in college? (recommendations for hecc?)
Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Enrolled and left
Introductions: name, what are you doing now? (school, work) How long have you lived in Oregon? --if not from here: What brought you to OR?
Where did go to school? Major?
How did you decide to go to college? What were your goals? --What supports or resources helped facilitate this?
What led to your decision to leave?
Are the kind of jobs that you would like available in your region? What kind of education or training is needed for them? Of your friends that haven't gone to college what kind of jobs are they doing? Of your friends that also left college, what kind of jobs are they doing? (second part optional)
How and what did you learn about college ? What do people in your family think about college? Your community as you define it, what do they think about college?
How do your experiences in school align with (or not) your expectations about school? ● How would you describe interactions with faculty, students? What keeps students in school?, what pushes them out?
What is the biggest challenge you faced while attending college?
How did going to college impact your relationships outside of school?
Describe the significance of money in your decisions about seeking more education. Do you feel college is worth the cost?
Since leaving college, have you thought about going back? What would be the advantages/disadvantages? If you could wave a wand to make it easier for you to go back to college or to attain post secondary training, what would you do? OR If you could advise Oregon on how to help students of color succeed, what would you tell them?
As you think back to earlier schooling, what were your aspirations about school, work?

(How) did they change over time, as you grew older?
What are your goals for school and work in the future? How do you imagine getting there? What are the barriers you face in getting there? What support do you wish existed? Are there professional credentials that would be helpful to you in your career?
Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Never enrolled
Introductions: name, what are you doing now? (school, work) How long have you lived in Oregon? --if not from here: What brought you to OR?)
How did you get into the position you are now? - Trainings? Certification? Other supports or resources?
Are the kind of jobs that you would like available in your region? What kind of education or training is needed for them? Of your friends that haven't gone to college what kind of jobs are they doing? (second part optional)
How and what did you learn about college ? What do people in your family think about college? Your community as you define it, what do they think about college?
(maybe use this?) How many family members or friends have gone to college?
If you enrolled in school, how do you imagine this might impact your relationships outside of school?
Describe the significance of money in your decisions about seeking more education. Do you feel college is worth the cost?
As you think back to earlier schooling, what were your aspirations about school, work? (How) did they change over time, as you grew older?
What are your goals for school and work in the future? How do you imagine getting there? What are the barriers you face in getting there? What support do you wish existed? Are there professional credentials that would be helpful to you in your career?
Is there anything else you'd like to share?

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLYERS

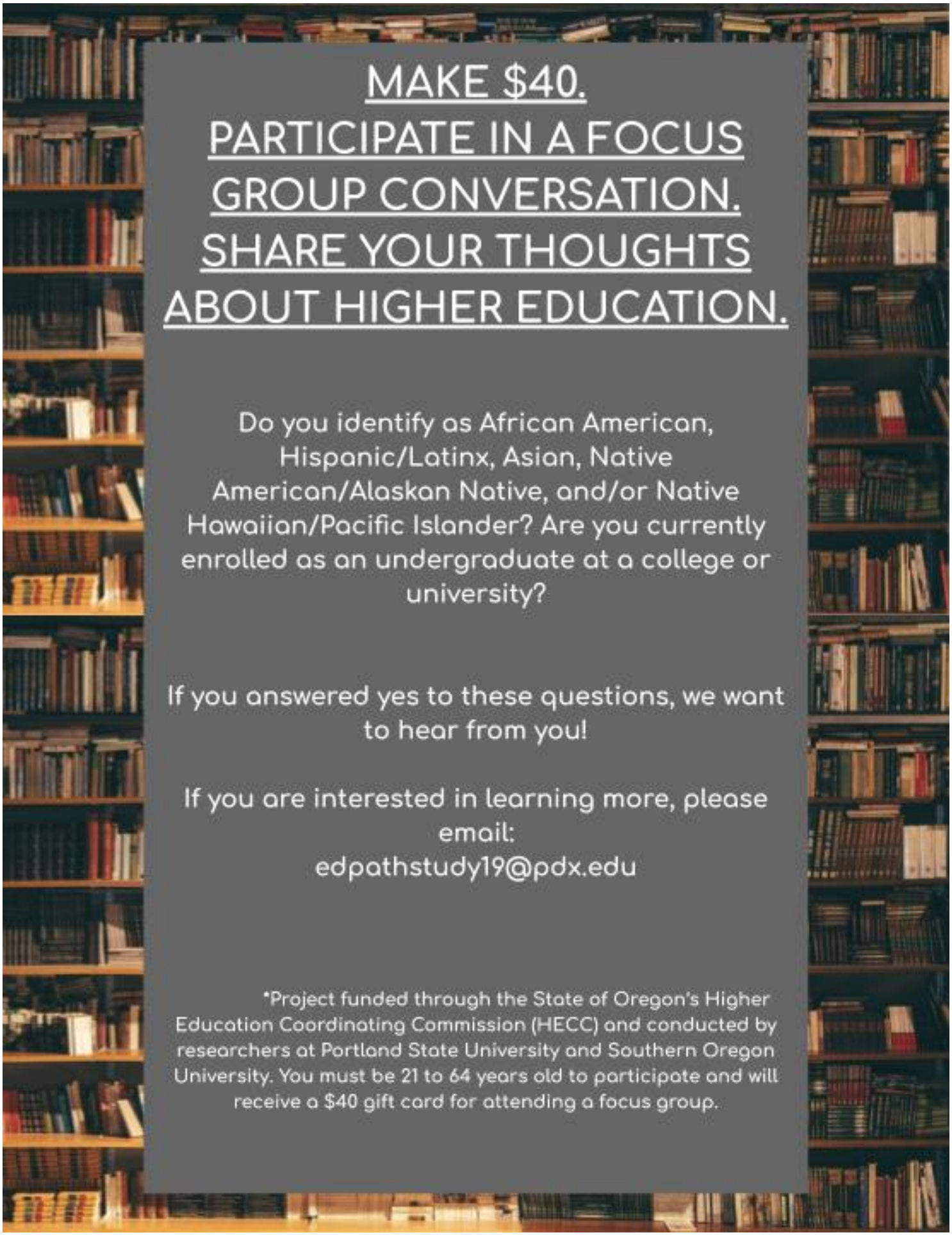
MAKE $40. PARTICIPATE IN A FOCUS GROUP CONVERSATION. SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THE WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION

Do you identify as African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American/Alaskan Native, and/or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander? Have you never attended a college or university?

If you answered yes to these questions, we want to hear from you! We will be having a focus group in Klamath Falls on Saturday, November 16 at 12 noon. For those who cannot make the focus group, we will also be doing some interviews.

If you are interested in participating, please email: source@sou.edu

*Project funded through the State of Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) and conducted by researchers at Portland State University and Southern Oregon University. You must be 21 to 64 years old to participate and will receive a $40 gift card for attending a focus group.


MAKE $40.
PARTICIPATE IN A FOCUS GROUP CONVERSATION.
SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION.
Do you identify as African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, Native American/Alaskan Native, and/or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander? Are you currently enrolled as an undergraduate at a college or university?
If you answered yes to these questions, we want to hear from you!
If you are interested in learning more, please email:
edpathstudy19@pdx.edu
*Project funded through the State of Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) and conducted by researchers at Portland State University and Southern Oregon University. You must be 21 to 64 years old to participate and will receive a $40 gift card for attending a focus group.

APPENDIX F

SUPPORT PROGRAMS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

Postsecondary based programs

- TRiO
  There are currently eight federally-funded TRIO programs that provide outreach and support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including low-income students, students with disabilities, and first-generation college students. The programs vary in target populations and ages of students served, spanning from middle school to post-baccaulaureate. They include Talent Search, Upward Bound, Student Support Services, and the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Acheievement Award.
- Campus resource centers (culturally-specific, women's, veteran's)
  - Atmos Program
    The Atmos Diversity Student Leadership Program supports underrepresented students of color in Portland State University's School of Business with scholarships, mentorship, and professional development.
  - ACCESS (Accessing the Cultural Capital Essential to Student Success)
    The ACCESS Program, sponsored by African American Student Services at Portland State University, provides advising, peer mentorship, partial tuition remission, and support for accessing scholarships to incoming students admitted for the fall term. ACCESS also includes a two-week Connect Program and College Success Course in the summer term prior to fall classes.
  - New Directions
    Portland Community College's Rock Creek campus offers New Directions, a supportive learning community for single mothers and women returning to school. In the past the program provided tuition assistance, transportation, and other material support, but due to funding cuts the program has been redeveloped to focus on identity/career exploration and decision-making skills, in a cohort model.
- Chemeketa Foundation
  Chemeketa Foundation, at Chemeketa Community College, provides scholarships and funding support for an array of student needs, including first-generation college students, support for childcare, emergency student relief funds, and funding the College Inside program for students who are incarcerated.
- STEPS Program (Support To Expectant and Parenting Students)
  Chemeketa Community College's STEPS (Support To Expectant and Parenting Students) program is a parent resource center that provides workshops, a support group, and assistance with referrals to community programs for expectant and parenting students.

Pre-college/high school programs

- AVID
  AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) programs target underachieving students with high academic potential who are from low-income and ethnic or linguistic minority groups, and place them in college preparation academic courses from 7th grade through high school. AVID programs are funded at the district, state, or federal level and operate on a model of "untracking" underrepresented students of color.
- Senior Inquiry
  Senior Inquiry is a partnership between Portland State University's (PSU) University Studies program and local high schools that offers students combined high school and college credit. PSU faculty and high school educators team-teach a year long course that prepares students for college coursework.
- Fifth-year program
  Oregon's Fifth-Year Program provided high school students the opportunity to attend a "fifth" year of high school at a local community college. Following a student's graduation from high school, the local school district would continue to receive a fifth year of funding, and would then use that funding to cover tuition, fees, and books for the first three terms of community college.

Community-based programs and resources

- Big Brother/Big Sister
  Big Brother/Big Sister is a nationwide program that provides support and oversight for matches between adult mentors ("Bigs") and young people ages 5 through young adulthood (the "Littles").
- Oregon Human Development Corporation
  The Oregon Human Development Corporation provides advocacy, referral, assistance, and education for farmworkers and other people who face disadvantages throughout Oregon State.
- Dress for Success
  Dress for Success provides support for women-identifying individuals to access professional attire in addition to professional development and support with employment retention.

APPENDIX G

LITERATURE REVIEW: UNDERREPRESENTED ADULT LEARNERS AND BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND RETENTION

Since 2001, the numbers of African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Pacific Islander, and American Indian and Alaskan Native students enrolled in postsecondary education have increased significantly (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). While the number of degrees awarded to underrepresented adult learners has grown, their departure rates suggest that significant barriers to retention remain. The six-year rates of departure for African American and Hispanic/Latinx students who enter a four-year college immediately after high school are 60.4% and 53.4%, respectively, while the same departure rate for white students is 39.3%. This is a cause for concern. Given the increasing demand for an educated workforce, what can educators, administrators, and policymakers do to increase retention among underrepresented students? What is causing so many underrepresented adult learners to leave higher education before completing a degree? And what is preventing many of these potential students from underrepresented communities of color from accessing and enrolling in higher education in the first place?

This literature review is organized in two sections, with the first focused on barriers to retention for underrepresented adult learners. As Goldrick-Rab and Roksa (2008) noted, policymakers tend to assume that students will finish college once enrolled, but retention remains a challenge, particularly for underrepresented adult learners. The second section is focused on barriers to accessing higher education for potential students from underrepresented communities of color. In this literature review we've chosen to use the framing of retention rather than persistence. Persistence is typically the term used to refer to individual students' experiences and behaviors, while retention describes institutional-level measurements of student persistence or departure. Given the high rates of departure across institutions, we're using the language of retention to denote the role institutions must play in creating conditions that support access and retention for underrepresented adult learners from communities of color in Oregon.

Underrepresented adult learners and barriers to retention

In this literature review we'll touch on three key barriers that emerged from the literature on underrepresented adult learners and retention: financial challenges and the ability to pay for school, conflict between the demands of the student role and outside roles, and experiences of institutionalized racism on campus.

Across the literature, students' ability to pay for college emerges as a consistent barrier to retention (Baker et al., 2018; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Byas, Imaralu, Stark, & West, 2019; Labissiere & Mukerjee, n.d., Xu & Webber, 2016). Given the increasing cost of college and racial and ethnic wealth disparities (for example, in 2016 the average wealth of white families was over $700,000 higher than the average wealth of Black or Hispanic families (McKernan, Ratcliffe, Steurle, Quackenbush, & Kalish, 2017)), it is not surprising that underrepresented students would continue to list the ability to pay as a primary barrier to remaining in college. For too many underrepresented students, the cost of remaining in college becomes untenable.

Another barrier underrepresented students face in persisting in college is the conflict between the demands of the student role and roles outside of school, including their responsibilities as members of families and communities, and as employees (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Jackson & Labissiere, 2017; Terriquez, 2014). Terriquez (2014) conducted surveys with 2,200 young Latino/as, investigating differences in educational attainment and social mobility among 1.5, 2nd, and 3rd generation immigrants. She found few differences in terms of college enrollment or the types of colleges the youth attended, and noted that the strong workplace engagement of these young people while enrolled might lead them to become "trapped in the working class." In a study of Black and African American women who were sophomores at a PWI, Kennedy and Winkle-Wagner (2014) noted the demands of the student role encouraged these women to value autonomy above family ties. While the expectation that students "separate from communities of the past" (Tinto, 1993, p. 95), has been critiqued for the potential to harm students of color (Tierney, 1999) especially those who find themselves in PWIs, it is not uncommon for programs targeting underrepresented students to uphold values of autonomy that may be at odds with their familial or cultural expectations of connection and relationship (for example, see Wildhagen's (2015) study of first-generation students in an elite university who were discouraged from contacting family). In interviews with African American students in a PWI, Guiffrida (2006) noted that the students who tended to persist were those whose families offered them support, including the permission to "break away" (London, 1989) from family in pursuit of their degree.

A final barrier for underrepresented students is institutionalized racism and the negative racial climate they encounter on college campuses. Underrepresented students describe discrimination in the classroom, fewer academic opportunities, and alienation and separation, both from other people of color, and from white students (Fleming, 2012; Izumi & Faaleava, 2017; Jackson & Labissiere, 2017; Xu & Webber, 2016). Fleming (2012) reviewed the experiences of students, faculty, and administrators at a PWI that offered scholarships to African American students to address a legacy of race-based discrimination. She found that 40% of respondents noted that the negative racial climate reduced the performance of Black students, and that faculty were committing one-third of the racist incidents experienced, leading Black students to report a sense

of alienation. Respondents noted that separatism and a lack of open discussion about race were the most troubling parts of the racial climate. In the PSU President's African American, African, and Black Student Success Task Force Report, authors noted the small population of Black students and faculty on campus, and the ensuing lack of connection to other Black groups and individuals, which impacted academic support and advising (Jackson & Labissiere, 2017). Similar concerns were raised by The Portland State University Task Force on Asian-American, Asian and Pacific Islander Student success highlighted the need for a sense of belonging, cultural representation (in curriculum, faculty, and support staff) (Izumi & Faaleava, 2017). Underrepresented students who make it to college risk finding too few faculty, staff, and students who look like them, and the exclusion or distortion of their lives and communities in curriculum.

Underrepresented adult learners and barriers to access

One of the primary barriers to access for underrepresented adult learners from communities of color is the enrollment process itself. Klasik (2012) studied the process of enrolling in a four-year institution after high school and noted the growing gaps between white and Asian students and Black, Hispanic, and Native American students at each stage of the process (aspirations in 10^{th} and 12^{th} grade, completing entrance exams, meeting minimum academic qualifications, and applying to a four-year institution). Because the gap grew at each step of the process, Klasik suggested that these steps, which are often seen as a normal, neutral process by educators and administrators, be seen as a potential barrier to college access. The barriers posed by the enrollment process as it is may be especially challenging for underrepresented students who are potential "first-generation" college students, who are more likely to be female, lower income, married, and caring for dependents (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). Indeed, Klasik (2012) noted that when controlling for income, gender, and academic ability, the racial disparities in the enrollment process disappeared. But because so many underrepresented students are also first-generation, the process of getting in may present an increased barrier.

Related to the barrier of enrollment, and the ability to pay, noted above, is underrepresented students' perceptions of being "priced out" of college. McDonough and Calderone (2006) conducted interviews and focus groups with 63 college high school counselors and found significant differences between the ways that middle class counselors and low-income families perceived college costs. The counselors commonly misinterpreted the priorities and values of the families they worked with and failed to understand the role financial scarcity played in their decision making. This is important because one of the primary barriers to enrollment for low-income students, particularly underrepresented racialized minorities, is a lack of information about the cost of college and resources to pay for college.

Finally, experiences of negative racial climates or institutionalized racism in K-12 schools pose a significant barrier to enrollment for underrepresented students. Students who experience

exclusion from advanced placement or other college preparatory coursework, receive limited information about college, are targeted for the "school to prison pipeline," or face low teacher expectations are understandably reluctant to enroll in postsecondary education (Fleming, 2012; Gaxiola-Serrano, 2017).

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APPENDIX H

LITERATURE REVIEW: INTERVENTIONS THAT SUPPORT RETENTION OF UNDERREPRESENTED ADULT LEARNERS

Given the racial disparities in departure rates and overall challenges with retention in higher education, educators and administrators have responded with various interventions intended to support retention. In this brief review, we describe several interventions aimed at supporting retention, with an emphasis on interventions targeted towards underrepresented students of color. We've separated this review into two sections, distinguishing between interventions in community colleges and four-year institutions.

Interventions that support retention: Community Colleges

Students from underrepresented communities of color, particularly Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx students, are more likely to begin their education in a two-year institution (Shapiro et al., 2017). Braxton and colleagues (2004) identified several exemplary programs aimed at supporting the retention, including a number that serve underrepresented students.

The Puente Project, in place across community college campuses in California, aims to support retention of Latino/a students (Braxton et al., 2004). The Puente Project includes Latino/a counselors with lived experiences that reflect the student body, intensive English instruction with culturally-relevant curriculum, and the pairing of students with Latino/a mentors from the professional community.

A brief intervention designed to support community college students in the process of transition to four-year institutions is the Summer Transfer Enrichment Program (STEP) (Jain, Bernal, Lucero, Herrera, & Solorzano, 2016). STEP is offered in partnership between a community college outreach center and four-year research-intensive institution. Participating students, 90% of whom are people of color, receive scholarship funding for a six-week program which includes enrollment in a general education class at the four-year institution and workshops focused on support and information regarding transfer. Students are also required to meet with a university counselor who supports them in degree planning and major selection and preparing an application for admission. The program is designed from a critical race perspective, and includes a student-of-color campus tour and information on racial disparities and the education pipeline.

Interventions that support retention: Four-year institutions

Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) described several exemplary retention programs at four-year institutions. The Campus Retention Committee (CRC) at UCLA is a student-initiated and student led retention program for African-American, American Indian, Latino, Filippino, and Vietnamese students. The CRC offers peer counseling, study sessions, training, and development. In activities with the CRC, students are encouraged to and supported in maintaining connections to their home communities.

The University of Georgia is a research-intensive, primarily white institution that offers a program specific to African American students, CLASS (Continuing the Legacy of African American Student Success). CLASS is a residentially-based intervention rooted in learning communities and the creation of a peer network. CLASS advocates are paid student positions, and advocates support African American students with leadership opportunities, referrals, and peer support.

The University of Michigan has sought to support students from underrepresented communities of color and female students through its Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP). Students participants complete research with a faculty mentor, and program graduates work with current participants in leading peer research interest groups.

Policy and practices that support retention of underrepresented adult learners

It's important to note the significance of teaching and curriculum, as well as the role campus community plays in supporting the retention of underrepresented adult learners.

Teaching and curriculum

In a series of studies evaluating the impact of multicultural content on mathematic performance among students in remedial mathematics courses at an HBCU, exposure to multicultural content in instruction and testing boosted performance by 105.2% for all students, and 189.9% for women (Fleming & Guo, 2012). Adaptations to existing content were minimal, such as the inclusion of the words "African American," noting a business was Black-owned, or referring to the Civil Rights movement.

Campus community

In an evaluation of the performance of African American and Latino students in STEM programs at 17 institutions, including HBCUs, community colleges, and PWIs, Fleming and Person (2012) found that positive adjustment to college was influenced by comfort level, contact with faculty, satisfaction with program services, and freedom from racial discrimination. Comfort level – composed of overall comfort, comfort in academic situations, comfort in math and science

courses, and comfort level interacting with whites – was most strongly correlated with academic performance (Comfort level was more influential than interactions with faculty, satisfaction with program services, and lack of racial discrimination).

Task force recommendations

Educators also have issued their own recommendations for supporting the retention of students from underrepresented communities of color, based on interviews, focus groups, and other examinations of faculty, staff, and student experiences. In 2017, educators at Portland State published two reports focused on the needs and experiences of members of underrepresented communities of color, *The Portland State University Task Force on Asian-American, Asian, and Pacific Islander Student Success* (Izumi & Faaleava, 2017) and *PSU President's African American, African, and Black Student Success Task Force Report* (Jackson & Labissiere, 2017). Both reports made recommendations for recruiting and retaining faculty and staff that were reflective of the students that were the focus of these reports. The report on Asian-American, Asian, and Pacific Islander student success also highlighted the need for disaggregated data collection, to explore the differences in student success between the many different sub-groups of students who comprise the Asian-American, Asian, and Pacific Islander population. Because of the "model minority" myth, many Asian students' needs were going unseen. When considering the needs of African, African-American, and Black students, Jackson and Labissiere (2017) recommended early outreach, recruitment and retention efforts for students, in addition to community engagement, additional scholarship funding, mentorship, and professional development opportunities.

Policy messages about higher education

Finally, a critical examination of the role that policy messages about higher education is important. Snowden and Lewis (2015) conducted a content analysis of policy messages about higher education in Australia that were intended to support the inclusion of non-traditional learners. They found that policymakers and higher education officials offered messages that reinforced elitist biases about students and different types of employment, including the idea that socioeconomic differences were an insurmountable barrier in access to higher education and that this barrier was rooted in students and their communities themselves, rather than institutional practices. Another message focused on the economic benefits of completing a college degree, although this message was often contradicted by questions about the diminishing value of a degree. Another theme was that of the "matching" of students with either vocational or university pathways based on their socioeconomic background.

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APPENDIX I

HECC REQUEST FOR PROJECT PROPOSALS FOR FOCUS GROUPS ON BARRIERS TO POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

State of Oregon

HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING COMMISSION

Request for Project Proposals for

Focus Groups on Barriers to Postsecondary Success

Opening Date: March 4, 2019

Proposals accepted until April 5, 2019, 1:00 PM

If you have questions concerning this project please contact:

Tom Riel, Procurement Manager
Office of Operations
255 Capitol Street NE, Salem, OR
503-947-2250 | tom.e.riel@hecc.oregon.gov

1. INTRODUCTION

The State of Oregon, acting by and through the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, ("HECC"), is seeking a higher education institution to conduct focus group research with Oregon adults from underrepresented groups. The proposal is intended for higher education institutions operating in Oregon. The goal is to understand their barriers to completing postsecondary education or training, effective strategies to support their retention in and re-entry to postsecondary education or training, and to document the results of the focus groups to identify effective messaging and strategies that will engage these learners.

The estimated budget for this work is between $60,000 and $80,000.

2. BACKGROUND

The HECC has been awarded a Talent, Innovation, and Equity ("TIE") partnership grant from Lumina Foundation to help eliminate disparities in postsecondary success rates between Oregon's overall student population and historically underrepresented students of color. The grant supports a suite of state leadership activities aimed to improve postsecondary success for African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Oregonians, with a particular focus on adult learners of color.

One component of the grant-supported work is to embark on focus group research to determine the barriers to completion facing adults from underrepresented populations in Oregon and to develop the strategies and messages needed to support their re-engagement in education and training. This research should focus primarily on adult Oregonians from the underrepresented communities of color cited above who are currently enrolled in or who have left postsecondary education, with potential additional inclusion of adult Oregonians from the underrepresented communities cited above who have never enrolled in postsecondary education

3. PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK

We anticipate an institution will conduct research with focus groups of Oregon adults from underrepresented groups, with goals to understand:

- barriers to continuous enrollment and completion, and
- the possible impact of messages and strategies to address these barriers and encourage their retention in and/or reentry into postsecondary education and training.

The institution will deliver recommendations on the most effective strategies and messages to re-engage these learners based on the research findings. Project proposals submitted should describe the methods to be used for planning, convening, conducting, and reporting on the results of the focus groups. This should include methods to identify and convene representative groups of adult students as defined in the background above. Proposals should also detail a budget for the services and a schedule for completing the work. The successful institution must obtain institutional review board approval, though this does not need to be obtained prior to submission of the proposal.

4. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Proposals should be submitted no later than April 5, 1:00 PM to tom.e.riel@hecc.oregon.gov

5. PROPOSAL CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

Proposal must address each of the items listed in this section. Total response should be a maximum of five (5) pages, 1" margins, singe spaced, 12 point font. Attachment A must be signed and returned with Proposal.

A. Proposer's Implementation Plan

The Proposer shall describe how they intend to do the work. The description should include:

- Proposer's knowledge and understanding of the Project,
- The methods to be used for planning, convening, conducting, and reporting on the results of the focus groups. This should include methods to identify and convene representative groups of adult students as defined in the background above.
- Proposer's approach to staffing and scheduling needs for the Project,
- Project timeline.

B. Proposer's Relevant Experience

Proposals must contain a discussion that describes the experience Proposer has in conducting similar research on comparable projects. Discussion should contain information that demonstrates Proposer's knowledge and experience with focus group research, qualitative research generally, research with communities of color, and adult attainment and retention.

Proposal should contain a discussion on Proposer's ability to successfully complete the Services on time and within budget.

The Proposer should include the resumes of all key staff to perform the Services.

C. Cost Proposal

Submit a detailed Cost Proposal that includes for each activity described in the Scope of Work, the Cost Proposal must include identifiable costs, time estimates for completing each activity, and a summary of all proposed costs.

6. Evaluation

This proposal is intended for public and private higher education institutions operating in Oregon. Proposals shall be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Is the Proposer able to successfully deliver the Services?
- Does the Proposer's Implementation Plan meet with HECC's expectations for ability, capacity, availability and thoroughness?
- Do the key persons have the ability to successfully perform the work?
- Does the Cost Proposal meet with HECC's expectation and budgetary considerations?

After an initial evaluation, HECC may ask leading proposers for interviews.

ATTACHMENT A — PROPOSAL CERTIFICATION SHEET

Legal Name of Proposer: _____

Address: _____ **City, State, Zip:** _____

Contact Name: _____ **Telephone:** _____ **Email:** _____

Any individual signing below hereby certifies they are an authorized representative of Proposer and that:

1. Proposer understands and accepts the requirements of this RFP.
2. If awarded a Contract, Proposer agrees to perform the scope of work and meet the performance standards set forth in the final negotiated scope of work of the Contract.
3. I have knowledge regarding Proposer's payment of taxes and by signing below I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, Proposer is not in violation of any tax laws of the state or a political subdivision of the state, including, without limitation, ORS 305.620 and ORS chapters 316, 317 and 318.
   Proposer does not discriminate in its employment practices with regard to race, creed, age, religious affiliation, gender, disability, sexual orientation, national origin. When awarding subcontracts, Proposer does not discriminate against any business certified under ORS 200.055 as a disadvantaged business enterprise, a minority-owned business, a woman-owned business, a business that a service-disabled veteran owns or an emerging small business. If applicable, Proposer has, or will have prior to contract execution, a written policy and practice, that meets the requirements described in ORS 279A.112 (formerly HB 3060), of preventing sexual harassment, sexual assault and discrimination against employees who are members of a protected class. Agency may not enter into a contract with an anticipated contract price of $150,000 or more with a Proposer that does not certify it has such a policy and practice. See https://www.oregon.gov/DAS/Procurement/Pages/hb3060.aspx for additional information and sample policy template.
4. Proposer and Proposer's employees, agents, and subcontractors are not included on:
   - **A.** the "Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons" list maintained by the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the United States Department of the Treasury found at: https://www.treasury.gov/ofac/downloads/sdnlist.pdf., or
   - **B.** the government wide exclusions lists in the System for Award Management found at: https://www.sam.gov/portal/
5. Proposer certifies that, to the best of its knowledge, there exists no actual or potential conflict between the business or economic interests of Proposer, its employees, or its agents, on the one hand, and the business or economic interests of the State, on the other hand, arising out of, or relating in any way to, the subject matter of the RFP. If any changes occur with respect to Proposer's status regarding conflict of interest, Proposer shall promptly notify the State in writing.
6. Proposer certifies that all contents of the Proposal (including any other forms or documentation, if required under this RFP) and this Proposal Certification Sheet are truthful and accurate and have been prepared independently from all other Proposers, and without collusion, fraud, or other dishonesty.
7. Proposer understands that any statement or representation it makes, in response to this RFP, if determined to be false or fraudulent, a misrepresentation, or inaccurate because of the omission of material information could result in a "claim" {as defined by the Oregon False Claims Act, ORS 180.750(1)}, made under Contract being a "false claim" {ORS 180.750(2)} subject to the Oregon False Claims Act, ORS 180.750 to 180.785, and to any liabilities or penalties associated with the making of a false claim under that Act.

_____ _____

Authorized Signature Date

APPENDIX J

GRANT DELIVERABLES

Researchers at PSU and SOU were required by HECC to develop a statement of work - a document which reviews the services and deliverables necessary to complete the contract. The key persons listed were: Dr. Roberta Hunte, Dr. Miranda Mosier, Dr. Gita Mehrotra, and Dr. Eva Skurtowicz. A synopsis of the research team's services and deliverables are included below.

A: Convene Advisory Group. This group consisted of PSU and SOU faculty and staff with additional expertise in qualitative research, postsecondary access and attainment, equity-focused research, marketing, and admissions. The Advisory Group provided guidance at the beginning and end of the project, with a particular focus in distilling focus group findings to identify effective messages and strategies to engage underrepresented learners and disseminate findings to relevant stakeholders.

Deliverable 1 – Advisory Group is formed

B. Kick-off Meeting. Facilitated a kick-off meeting with HECC to discuss project objectives, frequency of project updates, ideas around the project plan, schedules, roles and responsibilities.

Deliverable 2 – Delivered to HECC a project plan two weeks after Kick-Off meeting.

C. Design Research Questions and Methods. Worked with Advisory Group, HECC staff, educational institutions around the state and reviewed relevant published literature to draft research questions and methods (research proposal). The research proposal included plans for 15 focus groups of about eight participants from three populations of adults from underrepresented or marginalized communities: currently enrolled students, students who are no longer enrolled and have not completed their program of study, and adults who never enrolled. The proposal also described the interview process to be used when a focus group could not be convened for a particular group in a particular region. Delivered to HECC the draft of the research proposal for review and comment. Finalized the research proposal.

Deliverable 3 – Delivered to HECC the draft of the research proposal.

D. Submit Research Proposal to IRB. Obtained the approval of the Institutional Review Board for the research proposal.

Deliverable 4 – Shared with HECC the IRB approved research proposal.

E. Recruit and Conduct Focus Groups or Interviews. Collaborated with universities, colleges, and community organizations to recruit participants. Participants were offered refreshments and a $40 gift card. Conducted focus groups, and interviews when focus groups planning is unsuccessful.

Deliverable 5 – Focus groups and interviews conducted

F. Analyze Data, Develop Report. Analyzed the results of the focus groups and interviews. Drafted a report and presentation summarizing the findings and detailed effective messaging strategies. Presented draft report to HECC for feedback. Completed the report and presentation.

Deliverable 6 – Delivered report and presentation to HECC and stakeholders by February 2020